

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Pastoral Prose and Civic Engagement: Crafting the Call to the Public Square

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the relationship between creative writing techniques employed by pastors and congregational engagement in the public square. The central thesis posits that if pastors incorporate creative writing methods in extended weekly communications with congregants, then the necessary factors for engagement in the public square will be fostered, leading to attitudinal shifts demonstrated by increased congregational interest or participation in civil affairs. Through an extensive literature review, the thesis fairly examines historical and contemporary views of church and state, the Two Kingdoms doctrine, concepts relative to public square participation, Christianity's waning cultural influence, communication science, developmental theory, literature familiarity, theological foundations for creative communication, and the potential benefits and challenges of employing such writing techniques within a religious context. Built on best practices in research, the thesis then presents an intervention in which nine pastors from nine different congregations employed a uniquely crafted writing rubric once a week for twelve weeks. Prior to the writing effort, the congregations were surveyed to detect initial perceptions relative to public square engagement. The same survey was administered and synthesized at the study's conclusion to detect attitudinal shifts. Prior to and throughout the intervention, participating pastors joined in four seminars designed to cultivate, enhance, and maintain their participation toward the effort's goal. Overall, this study resulted in an attitudinal shift while simultaneously contributing to a deeper understanding of the importance of Christian engagement in the public square and the role of pastors in fostering such engagement. Residually, and practically, it provides insight for engendering trust between pastor and parishioner.

Keywords: activism, attitudinal shift, Christianity, church, communication, creative writing, culture, engagement, influence, newsletter, pastor, public square, state, trust, Two Kingdoms

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Meister Eckhart once noted, “If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough.” This is likely true, but only in the sense that a prayer is directed to God. To thank Him is to be grateful for all He has done, is doing, and will continue to do to rescue one from well-deserved predicaments, namely, sin and eternal condemnation.

However, God is not stingy. Even as He receives His due gratitude for all things, He shares the spoils. In this cascading, Saint Paul can look to others and say, “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:14, English Standard Version), or “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (Eph 1:16, ESV). Glad for God’s ever-present mercies, it becomes nearly impossible, nay unthinkable, to dismiss those people God employed for one’s betterment according to those mercies (Rom 8:28; Gal 6:2; 2 Tim 3:14-15). And so, names emerge, each marking someone who was far more than a landscape adornment for life. He or she was intimately connected and instrumental in God’s plan to set and then establish one’s heading and eventual future.

For me to list and then describe the contributions of so many—most seeking my good while some hardening my resolve by the not-so-good (Eccl 4:9-12; Prov 27:17)—I would need an additional fifty pages to what has already become a lengthy document. That said, prioritization is essential. Of foremost importance, I must acknowledge my wife, Jennifer, and my four children, Joshua, Madeline, Harrison, and Evelyn. Apart from Christ, they are and remain my greatest treasures. When I become shaky, a moment with them is powerfully rejuvenating. As wonderful gifts of God, they are the energy cells of my joy.

Beyond my family, I am grateful to the saints at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School. While no one can fully imagine the depths of the Lord's desire noted by the words, "Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end" (John 13:1, ESV), I can admit to a subtle sense of what the Gospel-writer witnessed. Looking out over the congregation Jesus has placed into my care, I know I love them and that I will continue to love them to the best of my ability and the extremity of my eventual end. It is to these acknowledged few that I humbly devote the labor and pages that follow.

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Abbreviations

BOCPS	<i>The Body of Christ and the Public Square</i>
CRT	<i>Critical Race Theory</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
ELCA	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</i>
eNews	<i>Electronic Newsletter</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
LCMS	<i>The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod</i>
LGBTQ	<i>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer</i>
OSELCS	<i>Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There are plentiful perspectives concerned with religion's role in the public square. Mining these viewpoints, historical influences are observed, similarities are discovered, distinctions are made, and headings are plotted. Regardless of each perspective's eventual conclusion, the mining exercise not only lends credence to the topic's generational tenacity but also winks toward its continued consequence. Plainly, the Church and State discussion has proven itself perpetually ripe for debate.

This DMIN project seeks to participate in the ongoing dialogue, ultimately providing access to yet-undiscovered vistas that reveal and address a unique ministry gap. Chapter 1 begins this process. Its principal goals are to present the problem's contours, establish the effort's essential terrain, consider previous expositions recorded in literature, surmise theological and theoretical routes, and then set out in hopeful expectation with the thesis in hand. The thesis promises an undiscovered country in which more of its Christian citizens are zealous for engagement in the public square, having become better equipped by their pastors for understanding the Church and State relationship and its relevance for life in this world.

Ministry Context

Only a few steps into Acts chapter 6, the Twelve Apostles identified an emerging problem. The Grecian Jewish widows were overlooked during food distributions (Acts 6:1). Handling the challenge swiftly (to avoid its festering), the Twelve established a specific diaconal ministry in extension to their holy office. Since then, other extensions have been established

throughout the church's history. The ministry context considered by this thesis, the 501(c)(3) organization entitled "The Body of Christ and the Public Square" (BOCPS), while not in place to distribute food, is in place to do what the first diaconal¹ establishment intended: to preserve preaching the Word of God (Acts 6:2, English Standard Version) and to do so in a way that safeguards Word and sacrament ministry.

To begin, BOCPS was stirred to life following an exchange between its relatively disengaged founder (and author of this thesis) and two men who eventually identified as political lobbyists. The conversation occurred in the spring of 2014 at the First Street Northeast crosswalk connecting the U.S. Supreme Court Building and the U.S. Capitol Building. There, the easily identifiable Lutheran clergyman in a clerical collar preparing to cross the street toward the Capitol was interpreted as one likely belonging to a sphere apart from the culture. Taking notice, one of the two men addressed the clergyman, saying rather forthrightly, "You are what's wrong with America."

Startled by the comment, a somewhat lengthy discussion ensued, one revealing a handful of assumptions born from a relatively familiar view of the Church and State relationship. First, for these men, the clergyman's presence in the nation's capital established him as a spokesperson for the church and subsequently presumed a deliberate effort to influence America's political landscape. Second, the clergyman's traditional attire implied he was a staunch defender of historic Christianity and, with that, traditional biblical values. Third, assuming the clergyman's subscription to historic Christianity and its doctrines, it was also assumed he sought to impose ancient practices judged by the two men as "incompatible with human dignity" and "in conflict

¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1944), 242.

with the fundamental rights of others.”² Fourth, these men understood the Church and State doctrine as practical protection against all religious influence and the possibility that its potentially harmful doctrines might be imposed through governmental means. They communicated their desire for absolute separation of Church and State. From this position, they assumed a zealous duty of working alongside legislators to oppose and prevent the church’s reach into the public square. Last, they believed that if they could achieve absolute separation, the United States of America would finally discover unhindered freedom to pursue its truest destiny.

Following the exchange, the clergyman returned home to his congregation, intent on more thoroughly investigating the Church and State topic. Doing so, it became clear that many in his congregation held similar beliefs, as did many pastors and parishioners throughout his denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). This realization enticed deeper study, resulting in specific catechetical practices within his congregation, more participation in public square events, friendships with political figures and national speakers, and the eventual establishment of BOCPS.

BOCPS began as an educational conference on Saturday, September 29, 2014. Its goal was to teach pastors and lay leaders the cruciality of religious liberty as described by the Scriptures. Since then, BOCPS’s designation as a conference has expanded. Relative to its original goal of providing educational events, BOCPS has orchestrated fourteen large-scale annual conferences and seven smaller mid-year conferences, all of which have served thousands of attendees worldwide. Even further, BOCPS has since garnered status as a conference in the

² These are essential quotations that occurred during the conversation.

formal organizational sense, having established itself as politically influential at the local, state, and national levels, thus the eventual 501(c)(3) designation.

As a formal organization, BOCPS has three essential goals. The first is to be an educational and cultural resource relative to religious liberty, biblical values, natural law, traditional marriage, freedom of religious conscience, life, and other relevant social and cultural issues. The second goal is to develop citizens with a biblical understanding of Church and State engagement, resulting in faithful and effective Christian activism. The third is to promote engagement with local, state, and federal leaders so that Christians

may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 Tim 2:2-6, ESV).

Much of what has been described above happens primarily through the previously mentioned conference events. Each event occurs at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Hartland, Michigan, and typically receives 350 to 450 participants. The attendees are pastors, teachers, students (elementary school, high school, university, and seminary), church members, lay leaders, community leaders, elected officials from every level of government, and others. While primarily white, various ethnicities are represented. The speakers characterize multiple areas of influence from various levels of celebrity status. For example, while a local school board representative may speak, the event's keynote speaker might be Ben Shapiro, Matt Walsh, Candace Owens, or another such figure.

BOCPS's future is still unfolding. At the time of this writing, BOCPS is working on expanding nationwide and transplanting its educational effort into various regions throughout the United States. To continue doing this, sponsoring pastors with supportive congregations must be

cultivated. Investigating these opportunities, what was realized in 2014 is continually reaffirmed, ultimately portraying a larger-scale problem of Christian disengagement. With this in mind, this project's ministry context must include LCMS pastors associated with BOCPS's efforts and willing to participate in the proposed research with the intent of addressing general disengagement.

Problem Presented

The Christian church in America is in decline. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is no exception.³ Conversely, the secular sphere continues to expand and occupy the church's former fields of influence. Levels of dogmatic abidance indicate the shift. For example, the LCMS is by its official doctrine an unreservedly pro-life denomination. As a result, one might estimate only a splinter of its members to be pro-choice. And yet, this is not the case. In a recent Pew Research poll, while 51 percent of LCMS members were accounted as pro-life, 46 percent held pro-choice ideologies.⁴ These statistics are telling, and as researcher and sociologist Steve Bruce has long since established, are relative to secularism's encroachment, namely, the gradual society-level blending of life's various endeavors that eventually neuter religion's lens-like usefulness.⁵

As Christianity's basic theologies erode, becoming for its members more so extra-curricular than essential, other topics are equally threatened and gradually redefined. Religious liberty is one such topic. In part, the innards of this thesis will reveal these trajectories.

³ Paula Schlueter Ross, "Reversing the LCMS Membership Decline: Not Just by Having More Children," *Reporter*, last modified February 28, 2017, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://reporter.lcms.org/2017/reversing-lcms-membership-decline/>.

⁴ "Religious Landscape Study," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>.

⁵ Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 13.

Furthermore, it will surmise the American church's clergy and church members (parishioners) as blameworthy.

Concerning parishioners, the converse movements are often imperceptible, a relatively undetectable slow-boil confusing their role as Christians in the public square. For the church, the public square is a crucial temporal arena for maintaining religious liberty protections. However, because parishioners often lack doctrinal content while being uninformed and desensitized to the dangers, the primary responsibility for combatting the erosion rests with the clergy (Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11–13). The problem is that many LCMS Christians do not engage in the public square because LCMS pastors fail to demonstrate and clearly communicate the engagement's importance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to equip BOCPS pastors with writing methods that improve their members' public square engagement within twelve weeks. Acknowledging the need for such training, it is neither to be expected nor necessary for every human being to have the abilities of the masters. In other words, while most may be able to paint their living room, few, if any, can do what Michelangelo did to the Sistine Chapel. Likewise, one should not expect every pastor to have the skills of the scribbling rhetoricians of old. Not everyone can write like Augustine, Luther, or Churchill. However, if one embraces a profession with the arms of devotion, it is assumed that one will strive for betterment. An artist will continue to strengthen his technique. He will not be content to draw stick figures. A musician seeks to master his instrument. He will not be content to play "Three Blind Mice" for long. It must be the same for pastors, especially as it meets with their office's fundamental underpinning: communication.

Naturally, a pastor disinterested in becoming a better communicator, whether it be from the pulpit, in the classroom, or even general epistle-writing to those in his care, is missing out on the benefits to be had by such efforts. One of the most important benefits is influential leadership. Apart from the pastor's formal preaching and teaching roles, pastors can employ various tools that serve written communication to influence members' lives in ways that preaching and teaching do not.

Basic Assumptions

While away in France during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Thomas Jefferson sent a letter of concern to James Madison. In the correspondence, Jefferson wrote that the document being birthed did not have “a bill of rights providing clearly, without the aid of sophism, for freedom of religion....”⁶ Madison should have expected nothing less from his friend. Jefferson long considered religious liberty “the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights.”⁷

A few basic assumptions have been made concerning this action research project. The first bears Jefferson's gest, which is that religious liberty is sacred and salutary and, therefore, worth preserving. This is true because its security benefits all citizens despite their religious affiliation or spiritual devotion. In tandem, this assumption understands the opposing ideology, which warns of potential Church and State cross-contamination.

Writing for the American Bar Association, April S. Love iterates an element of the opposing concern, implying that such liberty establishes a platform for using “religious beliefs to justify creating laws that may infringe on the rights of others...granting some the right to violate

⁶ Saul K. Padover, ed., *The Complete Jefferson* (New York, NY: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, Inc., 1943), 120.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 958.

others' rights to protect their own."⁸ In a guest essay for *New York Times*, Lindsay F. Wiley writes similarly, arguing that religious liberty provisions pose nothing short of an existential threat to public wellbeing, especially as certain faith groups refuse vaccinations considered essential to community health.⁹ Unfortunately, these perspectives, and others like them, remain largely undercooked, missing religious liberty's primary thrust.

To assume religious liberty's societal benefit and then to pursue its preservation is to acknowledge its two-way labors to protect religious and non-religious alike. In other words, this project assumes religious liberty protects the citizen's conscience, sheltering it from religious imposition. In a practical sense, and by example, this means that a Christian juggler cannot be compelled to perform at a homosexual wedding just as a homosexual juggler cannot be compelled to perform at a Christian carnival celebrating biblical marriage. Religious liberty provides equal footing to both ideologies, preventing either belief system from claiming an intrinsic dominance that would require those beyond its borders to conform.

A second assumption is that racial anti-discrimination laws are far different from religious liberty laws, and therefore, no comparative work will be pursued concerning them. In short, anti-discrimination laws were established to protect against legislated racial inequity, with late 19th and early 20th-century Jim Crow laws being the prime examples. Jim Crow laws sought to establish preference based on supposed racial supremacy.¹⁰ Even as the Bible stands in

⁸ April S. Love, "Losing My Religion: The Dangers of Broadening and Politicizing Religious Exemptions," accessed April 5, 2023, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/intersection-of-lgbtq-rights-and-religious-freedom/losing-my-religion/.

⁹ Lindsay F. Wiley, "Extreme Religious Liberty Is Undermining Public Health," *New York Times*, September 15, 2022, sec. Opinion, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/15/opinion/religious-liberty-public-health.html>.

¹⁰ "Constitutional Rights Foundation," accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/a-brief-history-of-jim-crow>.

opposition to racism (John 7:24; 13:34; Acts 10:34–35; Rev 7:9–10), race itself remains physiological rather than ideological. Religion is ideological. It is a belief system distinct from one’s genetic material.

A third assumption expects that the efforts already exacted by this project’s researcher in his congregation will be reproducible in others, namely that by applying uniquely creative methods of communication at regular intervals, parishioners will be carried from inactivity and disinterest to deliberate engagement in the public square. Additionally, and beyond this project’s immediate vicinity, the effort’s results are expected to benefit other Christian pastors and congregations regardless of their denominational affiliation. This assumption presumes collegial adherence to the *sedes doctrinae*, that is, the “clear passages of Scripture that treat individual doctrines”¹¹ accessible to all denominations, and often demarking them as distinct from cults and sects.

Definitions

To navigate the forthcoming conversation concerned with fostering better engagement in the public square, readers must have certain words or phrases well in hand. The following definitions will aid in this grasping.

Accommodationism. A cooperative view of Church and State, which understands both spheres as distinct and yet interdependent. McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence Emeritus at Princeton University, Alphaeus Mason, described accommodationism as “government acknowledgment of and sometimes support for religion.”¹²

¹¹ Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia: A Concise In-Home Reference for the Christian Family* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 710.

¹² Alphaeus Thomas Mason and Donald Grier Stephenson Jr, *American Constitutional Law: Introductory Essays and Selected Cases*, 16th edition. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2011), 530–31.

Andragogy. A term used to describe adult educational processes. First used by Alexander Kapp in 1833 to enunciate Plato's educational framework, researcher Malcolm Knowles later standardized it to mean all forms of adult education.¹³

Cancel culture or Cancellation. A societal phenomenon in which a person or group aligns resources against an opponent in order to publicly shame in ways resulting in permanent damage to the opponent's reputation, livelihood, and the like.¹⁴

Church and State. A general phrase relative to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. It refers to the relationship between religious entities and civil authorities.¹⁵

Classical conditioning. The process of pairing a neutral stimulus with an unconditional stimulus to induce a natural response.¹⁶ A definitive example of this is Ivan Pavlov's experiment in which he rang a bell before feeding a dog. In short, the dog eventually began salivating every time the bell was rung, even without feeding.

Cognitive dissonance. The uneasiness a person experiences when he becomes aware that his beliefs and behaviors are misaligned.¹⁷ Leon Festinger first proposed the concept in his book *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.¹⁸

¹³ "Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy) - Educational Learning Theories," accessed March 29, 2023, <https://sites.google.com/a/nau.edu/educationallearningtheories/adult-learning-theory-andragogy-by-barbara-miroballi>.

¹⁴ "Is Cancel Culture Effective? How Public Shaming Has Changed," *Pegasus Magazine*, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://www.ucf.edu/pegasus/is-cancel-culture-effective/>.

¹⁵ "Separation of Church and State," *LII / Legal Information Institute*, accessed March 29, 2023, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/separation_of_church_and_state.

¹⁶ Jason G. Goldman, "What Is Classical Conditioning? (And Why Does It Matter?)," *Scientific American Blog Network*, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/thoughtful-animal/what-is-classical-conditioning-and-why-does-it-matter/>.

¹⁷ "Cognitive Dissonance: Definition, Effects, and Examples," last modified October 21, 2019, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/326738>.

¹⁸ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 3–4.

Constitutionalism. A general term used to describe a system of governance ruled by an established set of “highest” laws that configure and define the government’s responsibilities and powers.¹⁹ It should be noted that any given collective’s possession of a constitution does not make it constitutionalist. Dictatorships often have constitutions. However, the dictator holds the highest seat of authority rather than the established rule of law.

Counterconditioning. The process of altering behaviors by introducing a new association with a stimulus of an opposite reaction. For example, a student’s negative behavior might be assuaged through positive commendation intent on distraction toward an activity producing positive benefits.²⁰

Critical Race Theory. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic define Critical Race Theory and its movement as “a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power.” They continue:

The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.²¹

Culture. Often used in a general way to describe accepted societal beliefs and practices that influence the individual. A more precise (and thorough) definition was iterated by Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn in 1952. They wrote:

¹⁹ Wil Waluchow and Dimitrios Kyritsis, “Constitutionalism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2022. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), accessed March 29, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/constitutionalism/>.

²⁰ Nicole E. Keller, Augustin C. Hennings, and Joseph E. Dunsmoor, “Behavioral and Neural Processes in Counterconditioning: Past and Future Directions,” *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 125 (February 1, 2020): 103532.

²¹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 3rd edition. (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2017), 3.

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning influences upon further action.²²

Deism. A religious system that believes God established the universe as a self-preserving machine and, after creation, largely withdrew from it. Deism believes God does not engage through supernatural means, preferring instead to engage through natural law.²³

Disagreement fatigue. A condition born from continued subjection to conflict, resulting in a tired willingness to agree to anything to avoid contentious disagreement.²⁴

Dominionism. A political ideology that believes only Christians are qualified to serve in governing roles in society, and once they do, Christ will return.²⁵

Establishment Clause. The following phrase within the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: “Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion.” The clause affirms that the legislative branch of the federal government cannot establish an official religion.²⁶

Free Exercise Clause. The following phrase immediately following the Establishment Clause within the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: “or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Akin to the Establishment Clause, the Free Exercise Clause affirms that as the

²² Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Iola, WI: Kraus Reprint Company, 1978), 35.

²³ Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 227.

²⁴ Natasha Crain, “Disagreement Fatigue and 2020: How the Events of the Year Will Shape Christian Interactions in 2021 and Beyond,” December 29, 2020, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://natashacrain.com/disagreement-fatigue-and-2020-how-the-events-of-the-year-will-shape-christian-interactions-in-2021-and-beyond/>.

²⁵ Keri Ladner, “The Quiet Rise of Christian Dominionism,” *The Christian Century*, 2022, 48–50.

²⁶ “Establishment Clause,” *LII / Legal Information Institute*, accessed March 30, 2023, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/establishment_clause.

government may not establish an official religion, it may not prohibit an individual citizen's right to practice (believe and act) according to the tenets of a particular faith.²⁷

Homiletics. The preparation and practice of a species of public oration typically in service to religious assemblies. Written and preached sermons (or homilies) are the typical fruits of homiletics.²⁸

Johnson Amendment. An addition to the Internal Revenue Code adopted in 1954 prohibiting tax-exempt organizations from participating in political campaigns.²⁹ Concerning the Amendment, a summary seems necessary. This thesis' author commends an explanation he previously wrote and shared on social media in 2020. It reads:

Firstly, the Amendment states that a non-profit religious organization may not endorse or oppose a particular candidate in a way that results in the imposition of punitive action against members of the organization who endorse or oppose a different candidate, contribute to or use a church's resources for the benefit of one candidate over another. This typically happens when one particular candidate or party is granted open access to a church's membership roster. Secondly, a non-profit religious organization may perform such activities as register their members as voters, distribute non-partisan voting guides, invite candidates to speak, directly address issues and legislation (abortion, marriage, and the like), and even employ the church's resources to move for or against these issues. Preaching is not excluded. Thirdly, as an individual, the pastor or religious leader of a non-profit religious organization may do whatever he or she feels led to do within his or her station—which includes but is not limited to publicly endorsing a candidate, supporting (or encouraging support toward) a party or campaign, and the like, as long as the efforts are not done using the church's material resources. There are no limitations on the pastors as individuals serving in their offices. The few limitations above that do exist are only for the religious entity as a whole and only if the religious entity is a non-profit organization.³⁰

²⁷ "Free Exercise of Religion," *Justia Law*, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://law.justia.com/constitution/us/amendment-01/03-free-exercise-of-religion.html>.

²⁸ O. C. Edwards, Jr, *Elements Of Homiletic: A Method for Preparing to Preach* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982), 1–16.

²⁹ John R. Vile, "Johnson Amendment," accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1744/johnson-amendment>.

³⁰ Christopher I. Thoma, "Johnson Amendment Summary," accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/RevChristopherThoma/posts/151839393222108>.

Natural Law. A concept first established in Stoicism to define the unchanging laws of nature. Over time, it has gained the legal connotation of “natural justice.” Relative to many Christian denominations, it is understood as the post-fall remnant knowledge of God visible in and through nature.³¹ For example, it can be known by the revealed knowledge of God in the Bible that He made humans either male or female. Natural law reveals this not only through biological gender but also by the functions and necessities relative to each. This is to say a child cannot be created without the coupling of both genders’ functions.

Original genius. The idea that an exceptionally higher level of intelligence or skill could be inherent to an individual, thereby exempting that individual from the regular rules of education, even rubrics applied to those with demonstrated talent.³²

Pedagogy. A field of study relative to instruction. Specifically, pedagogy includes the science and methodology of imputing knowledge to developing children.³³

Public square. A term used to define publicly accessible locations and means for ideological presentation and conversation. Typically, the public square refers to government bodies, mass media, and the like.³⁴

Radical individualism. The extreme premise supposing that individuals are free to do, say, be, and act as they desire apart from communal contexts and without consequence.³⁵ In short, the individual is most important. Radical individualism stands in contrast to general

³¹ Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 567–68.

³² Robert J. Sternberg, *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 21.

³³ Philip M. Anderson, *Pedagogy Primer* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009), 41.

³⁴ James Mildred, “What Is the ‘Public Square’?,” *CARE*, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://care.org.uk/news/2022/04/what-is-the-public-square>.

³⁵ Paul D. Bush, “‘Radical Individualism’ vs. Institutionalism, II: Philosophical Dualisms as Apologetic Constructs Based on Obsolete Psychological Preconceptions,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 40, no. 3 (1981): 292–94.

individualism, which understands that even as every individual has inherent rights, he or she remains obligated to the welfare of the community.³⁶

Secularism. A term often considered synonymous with “separation of Church and State.” In a formal sense, the term is more precisely dissected into three subcategories relative to the aforementioned phrase. The first is the absolute division between religious and state institutions. In other words, a secularist society’s government must not allow religion to influence its structure. The second is the freedom of conscience maintained by the rule of law. The third is equal treatment for all amid the absence of discriminatory practices for any reason.³⁷

Separationism. The fundamental opposite of accommodationism. Separationism is the absolute division between religion and government, with neither being allowed to cooperate with or accommodate the other.³⁸

Two Kingdoms Doctrine. A theological interpretation of Church and State. In an elementary sense, the Two Kingdoms doctrine refers to the absolute rule of Christ exercised in unique ways in two distinct spheres. The kingdom of the left is the civil government’s sphere, while the kingdom of the right is the church’s sphere.³⁹

³⁶ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2013), 116, 228–29.

³⁷ Andrew Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2–6.

³⁸ “Accommodationist and Separationist Theories of the Establishment Clause: Constitution Annotated, Library of Congress,” accessed March 30, 2023, https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/amdt1-3-2/ALDE_00013072/.

³⁹ W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Two Kingdoms: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Landrum, SC: The Davenant Press, 2017), 8.

Woke. A slang term used to mean one’s awareness of past and present social injustice, inequality, and inherent system inequities. In other words, it means that “one is ‘awake’ to the true nature of the world when so many are asleep.”⁴⁰

World. A term often used in the New Testament to mean secular culture. This handling emerges from its biblical usage, which refers to sinful creation and its inhabitants’ inherent hostility to God.⁴¹ Examples of such usage occur in texts like Hebrews 11:38 and 1 John 3:1. Jesus uses the term in this way in John 14:17, 15:18–19, and 16:8–9.

Limitations

As with any effort aimed at discovery, there will be challenges that may or may not affect the outcome. Some will be beyond the journeyer’s control, while others will be completely harnessable. Concerning those beyond control, the following (and others of each species) must be acknowledged.

A first limitation may be the amount of time allotted for the research to occur. As with any research project, there must be a beginning and an end. The interval between those two points must provide experimental time to produce reasonably usable data from a sufficiently exacted project. This action research project involves a steady diet of unique communication leading to action. Founder and CEO of the Grossman Group, David Grossman, notes that, on average, a recipient must receive a marketing effort’s message multiple times before minimal action occurs.⁴² Since the messaging cadence for this project is weekly, it will likely take several

⁴⁰ Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel - and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 8.

⁴¹ James Swanson, “Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)” (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 3180: 3–4.

⁴² David Grossman, “Don’t Just Say Something Important Once,” n.d., accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/dont-just-say-something-important-once>.

months before measurable results are detected, thereby requiring an adjustment of time allotments to individual pastoral participants. Chapter 3 of this thesis proposes and establishes the appropriate cadence.

A second limitation concerns expectations relative to the congregation members' abilities to receive and understand the participating pastors' messages. This limitation can be understood according to three basic presumptions. These presumptions deserve consideration.

The first presumption concerns an understanding of the pastoral and parishioner roles. It asks if the message's recipients actually consider their pastor to be an authority called by God to distribute objectively true information that expects a holistic change in alignment. It is also concerned with the parishioner's subjective disposition. In other words, is the recipient indeed able to ask, "What is God saying to me through His servant by way of His holy Word?" as opposed to asking, "How will I assimilate what God is saying to me through His pastor into what I already believe to be true so that I can continue to do what I am doing and believe what I believe?" The resulting data may be much harder to mine if the congregation's relationship with the pastor is more so the latter than the former.

The second presumption supposes recipients are biblically conservative because they are active churchgoers in an LCMS congregation. This assumption often presumes relative alignment with the public confession of the church body in which the recipient holds membership. For example, the LCMS holds a very different public confession on paper than the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Nevertheless, to assume that the members of any particular LCMS congregation align systematically with LCMS doctrine as opposed to ELCA could be a dangerous assumption. In many ways, multiple factors (such as radical individualism) appear to be blurring these distinctions. As a result, the biblical "givens" that

shape the LCMS's positions on topics like abortion or homosexuality are not only unknown by the recipient but already muddied by a secular ethos that interprets these topics as out-of-bounds to the church, having been relegated to the individual believer's opinions. Being associated with a particular synod or fellowship may not necessarily be a reliable determiner.⁴³

A third presumption relative to the second limitation imagines that beyond the countless opportunities for corporate study offered in a congregation, a recipient also reads the Bible and holds enough familiarity with its contents that certain topics, no matter how controversial they may be, are relatively easy to navigate. It should be noted that research shows that both corporate and individual Bible study are in steep decline, making it entirely possible that many message recipients will be unfamiliar with the Scriptures, understanding God and the means of His revealed will, the Bible, through the predominating culture's lens rather than the Bible's self-description.⁴⁴

A third and final limitation concerns unforeseen congregational dynamics. For example, many congregations experience conflict from time to time. When such things occur, the pastor plays a vital role in seeing the congregation through the skirmish. This will require his full attention coupled with ample time. With that, when messages are being sent, they will likely be aimed toward producing peace among the recipients rather than encouraging engagement in the public square.

⁴³ "Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion," *Pew Research Center*, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>.

⁴⁴ "26 Million Americans Stopped Reading the Bible Regularly During COVID-19," *News & Reporting*, last modified April 20, 2022, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/april/state-of-bible-reading-decline-report-26-million.html>.

Delimitations

Several delimitations exist for this action research project. First, only LCMS pastors serving LCMS congregations associated with BOCPS will be included in the effort. Ten pastors will be included in the project. All other denominational clergy, congregations, and organizations have been excluded from the effort. Concerning the participating pastors, the researcher enjoys friendships with each. Furthermore, the researcher knows and enjoys friendships with leaders and laypersons in each congregation. There is little doubt that the participating clergy and their congregations will receive the effort warmly, assuring the project's unhindered implementation.

A second delimitation is the participating clergy's expressed commitment to the project's fundamental undertow. Each has embraced (and often demonstrated) the need to preserve religious liberty in America and, as such, desire to lead congregations toward doing the same. As with the first delimitation, the second inspires hope concerning participant intentionality, leading to successful implementation.

A third delimitation is the LCMS's doctrinal and governance structures. For example, while all LCMS congregations pledge to walk in unity with the larger synod, each maintains its autonomous nature. This means that the researcher and the participating clergy and congregations are free from synodical oversight, doctrinal review, or other governances that might inhibit the project's labors or success. On the other hand, doctrinal fidelity beneath the umbrella of synodical subscription prevents the researcher and the participating clergy and congregations from being accosted for faithful expositions of standard biblical positions already communicated through synodical materials or devices. In other words, the project's enactors cannot reasonably be accused of introducing false teaching. According to synodical polity, to do so would require synodical intervention at various levels.

A fourth delimitation is the anticipated model itself, which was minimally described in the Ministry Context section above. In short, the participant churches will recreate what was (and is) practiced at the researcher's own congregation (catechesis through specific communicative forms). This is to say that the researcher has already engaged in the effort and has done so for many years. Using what has been learned, the researcher will put the practices to the test in a much more comprehensive and controlled way, one that establishes a reasonable roadmap for others to consider.

A final delimitation consists of the materials and training given to and used by the participating clergy. This delimitation will include such things as a consent form providing a detailed description of the study; a rubric for writing, which will provide steps for writing twelve weekly eNews messages; a minimum of three eNews writing samples; a short booklet to be written by the researcher and entitled "Literary Devices: Writing Help for the Participating Pastor;" two online surveys to be administered, one at the beginning of the project and one at the end; and an organizational calendar of possible meeting dates, due dates, and topic/theme planning. Concerning the rubric, the researcher created and defined each of its steps, ensuring a consistent communication framework is maintained throughout the action research project.

Thesis Statement

Relative to this project author's role as the Executive Director of "The Body of Christ and the Public Square" conference, the thesis problem will be addressed by refining the extra-liturgical content transmission style of a small group of Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod pastors associated with the conference. In summary, this will involve writing to their parishioners in specific ways about particular topics at regular intervals.

As already mentioned, a pragmatic, multi-point rubric will be provided to guide participating pastors in the writing exercise. The rubric will be a multi-step process that each of the ten pastors will employ weekly. Its practice will prepare and assist the pastors in writing a message of reasonable length designed to establish and enhance devotion to a topic by the reader, inspire trust through demonstrated competence, and ultimately persuade the reader toward Christianity's deeper concerns relative to the public square. If pastors employ the proposed writing methods, then the factors required for engagement will be engendered, leading to improved congregational participation in the public square.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Plentiful sweat has been shed studying what many researchers would call Christianity's "Great Decline."¹ Craig A. Carter,² David Fowler, along with Jon and Jill Musgrave,³ and Michael Levitt⁴ are a few notable commenters.⁵ The fact that Christianity is receding into the public square's shadows in America is by no means new information. Although, the resultant pace and its products remain in flux; suggesting to the hopeful that a turn-around is entirely possible.⁶ To that end, Christianity's various branches continue to extend themselves into this program and that model, all led by "experts" intending to halt the decline and return to health, which, for many, is often only concerned with local congregational growth rather than engagement with culture.⁷ Within these grand measures, communication is often heralded as key.

¹ Daniel Silliman, "Decline of Christianity Shows No Signs of Stopping," *News & Reporting*, last modified September 13, 2022, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/september/christian-decline-inexorable-nones-rise-pew-study.html>.

² Craig A. Carter, "The Decline of Nicene Orthodoxy: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life," *First Things* (January 2022): 1–7.

³ David Fowler, Jon Musgrave, and Jill Musgrave, "A Traditional Protestant Church Experiencing Substantial Membership Decline: An Organizational Strength Analysis and Observations to Attend or Leave the Institution," *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior* 23, no. 3 (2020): 207–223.

⁴ Michael Levitt, "America's Christian Majority Is on Track to End," *NPR*, September 17, 2022, sec. Religion, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/17/1123508069/religion-christianity-muslim-atheist-agnostic-church-lds-pew>.

⁵ David Bradshaw and Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity: Confronting Our Moral Crisis*, ed. David C. Ford, Alfred Kentigern Siewers, and Alexander F. C. Webster (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2020), 132. Chad Hatfield affirms, "The 'taming' of religion has now become an attack from the inside. The drift and decline of mainline Protestantism is, of course, well documented."

⁶ Reem Nadeem, "Modeling the Future of Religion in America," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, September 13, 2022, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/>.

⁷ Consider such volumes as Aubrey Malphurs' *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2013), Peter Greer's and Chris Horst's *Mission*

Indeed, there is the insistence that the church's identity and mission must be articulated before its members can go forth equipped with the eternal message that saves.⁸ In part, it is there this thesis takes aim, proposing benefits from creative writing styles and methods employed by pastors for influencing Christian faithfulness in the communities beyond their own church's borders.

Literature Review

As with the Great Decline's study, much labor has been afforded to careful wordsmithing among the clergy. However, its sweat is typically spent in service to homiletics. Roland J. Allen,⁹ O. C. Edwards, Jr.,¹⁰ John Killinger,¹¹ and Al Fasol¹² are a few cultivator examples. But even beyond them, the horizon of preaching volumes is vast. Some of these resources will be pitched against this thesis. In tandem, no small number of studies have been performed relative to creative communication's influential muscle flexed among communities. Apart from deliberate investigations into propaganda conducted following World Wars I and II,¹³ Rebecca Manery and

Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2014), and Tim Suttle's *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

⁸ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 3rd edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 196. Malphurs's book, a standard for many church leaders, is an exemplary demonstration of corporate methodology superseding traditional pastoral care methods.

⁹ Ronald J. Allen, ed., *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler*, Annotated edition. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Edwards, Jr., *Elements Of Homiletic*.

¹¹ John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985).

¹² Al Fasol, *A Complete Guide to Sermon Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 1996).

¹³ Paola Pascual-Ferrá, "The Measurement of Trust in Communication Research," *Communication Research Trends* 39, no. 4 (2020): 5. Pascual-Ferrá notes that "most of this initial research was in large part a legacy of early 20th century wartime propaganda matter in order for us to understand the forces that shaped our discipline's approach to the study of trust."

Stephanie Vanderslice,¹⁴ Terry Ann Thaxton,¹⁵ Graeme Harper,¹⁶ and Paul Dawson¹⁷ serve as exemplary contemporary examiners of creative writing's general accessibility and broader capability.¹⁸ In particular, and yet like the others mentioned, Paul Dawson steps from those who believed such writing was a skill not only accessible to all but insisted it was *necessary* for all. For example, Dawson relays Samuel Taylor Coleridge's position that while creative imagination differs from one's primary imagination, it still extends from it. With primary imagination being a chief instrument of human perception, Coleridge contended for creative imagination's common availability through training.¹⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson went further. Not only did he deflate the doctrine of original genius, but he attacked the American colleges for embracing it, thereby becoming little more than literary machine-builders educating "by drills rather than to create by setting 'the hearts of their youth on flame.'"²⁰ He blamed this on European pedagogy's influence, arguing it held a low view of reading destined to produce shallow writing styles. For Emerson, true scholars engaged with books as more than information receptacles. No matter the content, they were meant to inspire. And so, genuine scholarship would always be a much deeper

¹⁴ Stephanie Vanderslice and Rebecca Manery, eds., *Can Creative Writing Really Be Taught?: Resisting Lore in Creative Writing Pedagogy*, 2nd edition. (London, England: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

¹⁵ Terry Ann Thaxton, *Creative Writing in the Community: A Guide* (London, England: A&C Black, 2013).

¹⁶ Graeme Harper, *The Future for Creative Writing* (New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

¹⁷ Paul Dawson, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁸ A relatively concise and broadly used definition for creative writing is: "Creative writing is any writing that goes outside the bounds of normal professional, journalistic, academic, or technical forms of literature, typically identified by an emphasis on narrative craft, character development, and the use of literary tropes or with various traditions of poetry and poetics." See Latifa Omar, "LibGuides: Creative and Professional Writing in English: Home," accessed February 18, 2023, <https://uaeu.libguides.com/c.php>.

¹⁹ Dawson, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*, 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

personal engagement with nature and experience, one that must occur throughout the process of information reception and its subsequent relay to others.²¹

Beyond the homiletical task, there appear to be no studies concerned with creative writing as an influential device available to pastors. There certainly is an available universe of resources relative to communication in general. The following literature review will investigate that universe while bringing into orbit multiple themes concerned with what is necessary for addressing the thesis's stated problem.

Early America's Influences

In his volume, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde makes an intuitive remark through the character of Lord Henry Wotton. Responding to Gray's insistence that he stay while Basil Hallward paints his portrait, Wotton replies that "to influence a person is to give him one's own soul."²² His words not only tease the forthcoming narrative, but with incredible brevity, they establish influence's potency and reach. Indeed, influence involves transferring one's innermost to another in ways that shape his or her being. The following sections will consider principal perspectives concerning early America's fundamental influences.

Enlightenment, Christianity, or Both?

To be perplexed by Christianity's declining influence in America is to accept the possibility that it existed muscularly before. Erwin Chemerinsky, a progressive constitutionalist, argues against the premise's verity entirely, noting not only that America is not a Christian nation and "should never be considered one" but that the Enlightenment, bolstered by human

²¹ Dawson, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*, 33–34.

²² Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Leipzig, Germany: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1908), 28.

reason and combined with the desire to avoid theocratic governance, was and continues to be America's chief influence.²³ Montverde Academy's Tiffany E. Piland surmises similarly in her master's thesis: "Overall, the American founders were molded by the period of Enlightenment. Influenced by the lives of Enlightenment writers and their works, the founders were encouraged to question authority figures and traditional institutions. This led to the invocation of reason and rationality, both of which had a profound impact on the formation of an independent America."²⁴

Distinguished professor of British History at the University of Kansas, J. C. D. Clark, appears to agree, insisting that the Enlightenment's powerful grip influenced the theological positions that made both the American and French Revolutions possible. Surveying the influence of Richard Price, a Welsh Nonconformist minister and someone well-connected to the likes of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, and Benjamin Rush,²⁵ Clark shows Price's repeated insistence that the church was emerging from an age of darkness trapped in tradition. For Price, the emergence would result in a distinct separation between Church and State. Although, Price never fully described or understood the separation's eventual parameters.²⁶

Provost of Concordia University in Mequon, Wisconsin, William R. Cario, would say little has changed. As with Clark's more recent determination and Price's historical one, Cario defined the Enlightenment's relationship with the church in two ways back in 1999. First, Cario noted its inherent distrust of tradition, citing such examples as Isaac Newton, who insisted that things be empirically tested rather than simply trusting the church's longstanding explanations.

²³ Erwin Chemerinsky, "No, It Is Not a Christian Nation, and It Never Has Been and Should Not Be One," *Roger Williams University Law Review* 26, no. 2. Article 5 (Spring 2021): 406–7.

²⁴ Tiffany E. Piland, "The Influence and Legacy of Deism in Eighteenth-Century America" (Master of Liberal Studies, Rollins College, 2011), 117.

²⁵ J. C. D. Clark, "How Did the American Revolution Relate to the French? Richard Price, the Age of Revolutions, and the Enlightenment," *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 1 (2022): 118–19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116–17, 120, 123.

Secondly, Cario pointed to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. As early American influencers (likely familiar with Richard Price's writings), Hobbes and Locke sought to disregard the common religious mandates for government and instead locate its authority in a citizenry comprised of individuals bearing free will.²⁷ Like Clark and Cario, Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary, David L. Holmes likewise believes the nation's founders were enlightened men of reason and distrustful of Christianity, actively laboring against its influence in public affairs.²⁸ In his volume, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac*, Steven D. Smith presents a derivative of Holmes's, Clark's, and Cario's cases. Smith admits that Christianity had a strong influence. However, the Founders deliberately avoided any significant recognition of it, choosing instead an agnostic path that avoided both the Christian and secular labels.²⁹

Geoffrey Stone, a University of Chicago law professor, insists that Deism is America's essential framework.³⁰ Christopher Grasso, author of *Skepticism and American Faith: from the Revolution to the Civil War*, believes this only in part, choosing to steer back toward the Enlightenment. Admitting that Deism was influential, Grasso claims Christianity's influence outweighed it by far, nearly labeling it anathema. Grasso does tip his hat to Deism for cementing free speech and debate as central to American life. Nevertheless, Grasso builds as Clark does,

²⁷ Angus J. L. Menuge, *Christ and Culture in Dialogue: Constructive Themes and Practical Applications*, ed. William R. Cario, Alberto L. Garcia, and Dale E. Griffin (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 191.

²⁸ David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163–64.

²⁹ Steven D. Smith, *Christians and Pagans in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 295–96.

³⁰ Geoffrey R. Stone, "The World of the Framers: A Christian Nation?," *University of California Law Review* 56 (October 2008): 7–8.

asserting that early American Christianity was overtly shaped by the Enlightenment, pointing to instances that betray contention between established religious practices and individual liberties.³¹

Much closer to the Great Decline's beginning in the 1960s, Paul F. Boller's seminal volume *George Washington & Religion* (which presented a relatively radical perspective by comparison to what came before) contended alongside Stone, writing that America's first president was more so influenced by the principles of Deism (and its connection to reason) than his Christian affiliations.³² Perhaps circumstantially, researcher Shun-hing Chan notes it was during the civil rights movement in America in the 1960s that initial attempts at critical research concerning clergy and politics were stirred. The relatively new perspective's goal was to understand the relationship between theology and the clergy's personal political convictions. Chan notes this research has continued in America, only within the past twenty years becoming more concerned with religion's over-arching civic influence, implying that before the 1960s, the church's influence in the public square was assumed, expected, and largely unchallenged.³³

By contrast, plenty of respected observers differ from those previously mentioned. For example, Gary DeMar makes a case for America's distinctly Christian roots, noting that the faith communities of the first colonies held the greatest sway for unifying the new nation."³⁴ Writer and historian William J. Federer spends 845 pages on direct quotations from early American sources highlighting Christianity's direct impact on the nation. Within, he recommends reading from notable figures such as Jedediah Morse, the author of *Annals of the American Revolution*

³¹ Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 72, 84, 124, 155, 326.

³² Paul F. Boller, *George Washington & Religion* (University Park, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 89–90, 100.

³³ Shun-hing Chan, "The Political Influence of Mainline Protestant Churches in Hong Kong," *China Review* 21, no. 4 (2021): 229.

³⁴ Gary DeMar, *America's Christian History* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2005), 51.

(originally published in 1824), who wrote a few short years after the Revolutionary War, “To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe the degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoys.”³⁵ Tracing Federer’s plentiful citations to their sources, one can engage with original documents and discover broader examinations by those who were present when America was founded. For example, after a visit to and an extensive study of America, Alexis de Tocqueville, the French historian and philosopher, produced the monumental work *Democracy in America*. Within, he concluded that America’s highest authority was unarguably the Christian religion, noting it as the truest reason for the new nation’s enlightenment.³⁶ Perhaps just as convincing, John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States, recalled poetically that America’s birth “is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior. The Declaration of Independence laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity....”³⁷

The Heritage Foundation’s Mark David Hall resides between the two perspectives, offering critically that those who wholly deny the possibility of Christianity’s influence and those who embrace it without pause skew the Founders’ intentions. Hall insists that neither of these absolutist positions accommodates historical context, which, from his perspective, includes precise doctrinal positions capable of disqualifying membership in certain branches of Christianity, thereby negating their technical influence. In other words, a Calvinist might claim one who denies the doctrine of double predestination is not a Christian, just as a Lutheran might

³⁵ William J. Federer, *America’s God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations* (Fort Myers, FL: Amerisearch, Inc., 1994), 456.

³⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Volume I* (New York, NY: Scratcherd and Adams, 1839), 303.

³⁷ Samuel Adams, *Samuel Adams, Volume III: Life & Public Services of Samuel Adams*, ed. William V. Wells (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1865), 379.

claim one who denies Christ's vicarious atonement is outside the faith. Only a splinter of America might be considered Christian by those oft-iterated denominational metrics. Reasonably, then, Hall prefers to conclude that the Founders were likely influenced by Christian ideologies in a subjective sense, that is, in the same way that nominal and orthodox Christians might be considered influenced by their religion's doctrines.³⁸ Hall's conclusion assists if only to clarify. The concern is not for proving national Christian conception but for measures of legitimate influence. On the other hand, author and historian Eric Metaxas insists that everything that made America, including its essential role in the world, "had everything to do with our churches, or with the American church...."³⁹ By this, Metaxas claims the church has a rightful place at the civic table.

Clergy Influence

Applying the prospects of American research to churches in Hong Kong, Shun-hing Chan acknowledges that "researchers need to understand both the religious contexts and the broader non-ecclesiastical contexts that shape clergy's political participation."⁴⁰ This is to ask: When clergy appear to engage or disengage, is either dimension fully understood? Are they being theological, political, or cross-platforming in ways considered faithful to their understanding of Church and State? No matter the answer, Executive Director of the Washington Theological Consortium, Larry A. Golemon, asserts history's proofs, noting that the early "theological schools knew how important the office of clergy was—as a religious and public profession."⁴¹

³⁸ Mark David Hall, "Did America Have a Christian Founding?," *The Heritage Foundation*, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/did-america-have-christian-founding>.

³⁹ Eric Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2022), x.

⁴⁰ Chan, "The Political Influence of Mainline Protestant Churches in Hong Kong," 230.

⁴¹ Larry Golemon, "Educating Clergy as Culture-Builders: Can This Long Tradition Be Reclaimed?," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 24, no. 2 (2021): 72.

Golemon compares the early schools to the modern ones emerging in the late 20th century, showing how the later models are strictly concerned with theology and its technique, while the earlier schools were broader in scope, often training their students as public servants geared toward serving in their communities. Earlier schools delivered crisp familiarity with and engagement in various fields such as medicine, law, and educational pedagogy. In other words, the clergy were indeed cross-platforming, understanding themselves to be just as much a part of society's structural landscape as lawyers, doctors, and teachers, together considered essential threads within the societal fabric. Concerning clergy influence, Golemon adds that it happened by way of inspirational rhetoric and oration. Here, Golemon acknowledges the clergy's monumental impact rooted in the use of language and its social transmissibility. He later clarifies that the influence was primarily flexed through public media outlets such as journals and magazines, also noting abundant participation in public addresses, organizations with national scope, and other activities that directly influenced public life.⁴²

Eric Metaxas posits likewise, referencing the all but practical importance of clergy involvement throughout history, calling attention to the need for the church's voice in contexts ruled by the likes of Adolph Hitler and Mao Zedong.⁴³ He goes further, naming prominent pastors who engaged directly with the public square for change, that is, countless pastors who spoke against King George III's colonial abuses in the eighteenth century, as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer's stance against Nazism in 1930s Germany, and William Wilberforce's nineteenth-century work to abolish the slave trade.⁴⁴

⁴² Golemon, "Educating Clergy as Culture-Builders," 77.

⁴³ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, xii–xiii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 5, 9, 85.

Christianity's Waning Influence

Professor of Faith and Culture at St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, Ireland, Michael A. Conway, concedes the interweaving of Christianity as influential in the social fabric, writing, "I cannot speak about the church as a reality in our culture in any real way if I do so as a place apart, a special group, or a privileged instance in history."⁴⁵ Paradoxically, he affirms this historically even as he admits to the Great Decline, concluding Christianity no longer holds the stabilizing position it once did.⁴⁶ Dean of the School of Divinity at African Christian University, Voddie T. Baucham Jr., appears to agree that Christianity is waning, and yet, its historical footprint forever proves its value, having "produced the highest levels of freedom and prosperity and the lowest levels of corruption and oppression in the world...."⁴⁷

Editor for the *Washington Examiner* and a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Timothy P. Carney, believes as Conway and Baucham, noting the church, even as she wanes, is no insignificant force in society.⁴⁸ Considering Robert Putnam's work, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*,⁴⁹ Carney discovers further agreement. Carney summarizes Putnam's premise, saying he reaffirms the church as a civil society's most vital institution because its stabilizing effects reach beyond its own membership.⁵⁰ A respected authority on Christian worldview, in his volume, *Truth Changes Everything: How People of*

⁴⁵ Michael A. Conway, "Changing Foundations: Identity, Church and Culture," *The Furrow* 69, no. 2 (2018): 90–91.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴⁷ Voddie T. Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2022), 38.

⁴⁸ Timothy P. Carney, *Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse* (New York, NY: Harper, 2019), 119–20, 287.

⁴⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

⁵⁰ Carney, *Alienated America*, 136.

Faith Can Transform the World in Times of Crisis, Jeff Myers helps to further establish Putnam’s premise, digging deeper into the soil of world history to name several Christian figures who influenced the world’s view of human value in ways that still resonate today. Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Sienna, and Boethius are a few.⁵¹

Considering the typical pastor’s skill set, such as hermeneutics, homiletics, pedagogy and andragogy, counseling, administration, and the like, all of which are tools accumulated at the seminary for service to the gospel and the subsequent demonstration of that gospel in and through real people (Matt 5:13–16), it becomes perplexing, then, that waning Christian influence (or engagement) in the public square could hardly be plausible.⁵² And yet, it is. The Pew Research Center reported in September of 2022 that while 63 percent of U.S. adults identify as Christian (representing a slight change from 2021 but a significant decrease since the decline became noticeable in the 1960s),⁵³ just one year earlier, more than 55 percent of all U.S. adults expressed strong support for the separation of Church and State,⁵⁴ with “separation” implying a much stricter majority opposing religious voices in the public square.⁵⁵ Michael Conway observes the change, writing, “Over the last thirty years or so there has been an enormous shift in our culture, where religion has gone from being centre stage to being a marginal or at least a

⁵¹ Jeff Myers, *Truth Changes Everything: How People of Faith Can Transform the World in Times of Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2022), 57–74.

⁵² Tobin Grant, “The Great Decline: 60 Years of Religion in One Graph,” *Religion News Service*, January 28, 2014, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://religionnews.com/2014/01/27/great-decline-religion-united-states-one-graph/>.

⁵³ Gregory A. Smith, *Modeling the Future of Religion in America* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022), 7, 21.

⁵⁴ Gregory A. Smith, *In U.S., Far More Support Than Oppose Separation of Church and State* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 28, 2021), 13. The survey’s methodology explanation notes on page 12 that “because [the separationist category] is so large, the ‘church-state separationist’ category is sometimes divided into two groups in this report.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18. The majority ranged “from 58% who say religious displays should be kept off public property to 95% who say the federal government should never declare any official religion.”

limited player in terms of society at large.”⁵⁶ He goes on to say that “church leadership can no longer dictate political, educational, or social policy, as would have been the case, say, fifty years ago.”⁵⁷ Put simply, with the decline in Christianity’s population and influence, there is a natural inverse of opposition to Christianity’s voice in local, state, and national affairs. Pew Research’s numbers suggest this is due, in part, to Christians themselves. In tandem, the Cultural Research Center’s *American Worldview Inventory 2022* posited a dreadfully low biblical worldview among key demographics served by Christian churches. The inventory shows: “men (2%), women (4%), whites (4%), blacks (2%), Hispanics (less than one-half of one percent), and less than one-half of 1 percent among those who identify as LGBTQ.”⁵⁸

Coincidentally, the American Culture & Faith Institute performed a study in 2015 effectively showing that while 90 percent of conservative pastors believe the Bible speaks to cultural issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, religious freedom, and the like, approximately 6 percent of the agreeable pastors confessed to preaching sermons or teaching lessons on the topics.⁵⁹ In the same survey, 65 percent of congregation respondents wanted “more information from their church about what the Bible teaches in relation to current social and political issues.”⁶⁰ In short, the report reveals a crucial dissonance: “Pastors agreed that most of the issues tested were critical or very important to America; yet, they had chosen not to

⁵⁶ Conway, “Changing Foundations,” 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁸ George Barna, *American Worldview Inventory 2022: Release #5: Shocking Results Concerning the Worldview of Christian Pastors* (Glendale, AZ: Cultural Research Center, 2022), 1–2.

⁵⁹ George Barna, *God’s People Want to Know* (Woodside, CA: American Culture & Faith Institute, 2015), 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

address what the Bible teaches about those issues, despite congregations eager to receive such wisdom.”⁶¹

Apart from any notable concerns for dominionistic activism, at a minimum, the points above suggest a discord between belief and action in American Christianity occurring both inside and outside the church’s walls. Pastors unwilling to demonstrate and communicate the importance of public square engagement appear to be part of the problem, thereby fostering church members who function in the public square at levels well below America’s historical demonstration.

A Dissonance Between Faith and Deeds

In his book *Church of Cowards: A Wake-Up Call to Complacent Christians*, nationally recognized columnist Matt Walsh imagines heathen invaders landing in America, a nation they believed was overwhelmingly Christian, only to discover a startling disconnect between the nation’s actual culture and their expectations. Walsh writes, “They had pictured an America filled with pious, modest, prayerful believers, but instead they find silly, shallow, oversexed, nihilistic zombies....”⁶² He describes further examples, such as the merciless invaders’ shock at doctors removing healthy unborn children in pieces from mothers’ wombs.⁶³ Walsh’s point is simple. The distance between what American Christianity believes and does is considerable, and he believes “the church in America is not being killed from outside. The secular, the non-Christian, even the Christian-haters are not destroying us.... Rather the church is collapsing

⁶¹ Barna, *God’s People Want to Know*, 3.

⁶² Matt Walsh, *Church of Cowards: A Wake-Up Call to Complacent Christians* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2020), 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

because of exactly the kinds of Christians who want Christmas but not Christianity.”⁶⁴ In other words, American Christianity has lost its substance and become conformed to the world. Voddie T. Baucham Jr. asserts the same, writing that far too many popular theologians have embraced dangerously suicidal social agendas that disrupt the flow of genuine Christian doctrine, ultimately parting their beliefs from their deeds. For Baucham, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one such agenda.⁶⁵

A former Vice President of Marketing and Business Development and an adjunct marketing professor at California State University, in her book *Faithfully Different: Regaining Biblical Clarity in a Secular Culture*, Natasha Crain assures that a church conformed to the world is not anything new. Saint Paul warned against this (Rom 12:2).⁶⁶ But while she logically admits relative to Christianity’s current decline that “many of those who are abandoning Christianity are now also abandoning Christian values,”⁶⁷ like Walsh, she affirms the need for the remaining Christians’ faith and deeds to make sense collectively. She insists that for “Christians who seek to have a biblical worldview...an a la carte belief system...is not an option.”⁶⁸ In her contribution to *Healing Humanity: Confronting Our Moral Crisis*, Doctor of Letters bearer Frederica Mathewes-Green describes living up to one’s beliefs through demonstrable deeds as the actual test of conviction.⁶⁹ Within the same volume, Dean and Emeritus Professor of Moral Theology at Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, New York, Alexander F. C. Webster, moves

⁶⁴ Walsh, *Church of Cowards*, 23–24.

⁶⁵ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 2.

⁶⁶ Natasha Crain, *Faithfully Different: Regaining Biblical Clarity in a Secular Culture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022), 20–21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁹ Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 18.

the reticule of conviction toward the public square’s encroachment, making plain the need for Christians to act according to faith simply by saying “‘No!’ to those in positions of power over us who would harass, oppress, or even persecute us for our Orthodox Christian fidelity.”⁷⁰ In his article for *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, pastor and commenter Joshua Steely adds to Webster’s insistence, writing that while the church may seem defeated by the public square’s secular forces, having lost its religious liberty, nevertheless, there are Christians who continue to act in ways that prove faith’s unwillingness to let the ship sink.⁷¹

Christological Emptiness

The previous section’s examination creates an additional mindfulness: To stand firm first requires something substantial to stand upon. Many would say the contemporary church is its worst enemy in this regard, lacking any real substance, ultimately rendering itself a rudderless vessel. Matt Walsh considers contemporary Christianity to be little more than self-help inspirational platitudes devoid of sacredness and reverence, entirely intent on selling the gospel apart from distinguishable doctrinal or biblical boundaries.⁷² This is to say that Christianity is currently embracing what Luther referred to as the theology of glory, as opposed to the better theology of the cross. Commenting on these spheres, Gerhard O. Forde insists that a theologian of glory can only end “by calling evil good and good evil,” while a theologian of the cross can “say what a thing is.”⁷³ Forde lifts these words directly from Martin Luther’s *Heidelberg Theses*,

⁷⁰ Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 156.

⁷¹ Joshua Steely, “Must Say No,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php>.

⁷² Walsh, *Church of Cowards*, 4–7.

⁷³ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 12–13.

namely, thesis 21.⁷⁴ Walsh argues that without the theology of the cross, the church will continue to perpetuate its own impotence. Moreover, a faith tradition lacking cruciform theology while failing to catechize its children according to the gospel's doctrinal boundaries will lose its forthcoming generations. Walsh believes such catechesis will equip children for transmitting truth's torch to those who follow.⁷⁵ Indeed, substance is required for this. If a child does not learn the doctrines of faith, he or she will not be able to stand firm against external forces seeking to undermine them, and truth's flame will be extinguished.

Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at Grove City College, Carl R. Trueman, agrees with Walsh, adding additional concern for maintaining Christianity's historical rites and ceremonies. For Trueman, a disconnect from the religious lives of those who came before disrespects the past, considering them an unworthy source of significant wisdom for the present.⁷⁶ This can only lead "to the rampant fragmentation and crass worldliness of the church herself."⁷⁷ Trueman blames postmodern Protestantism's desire to reflect the culture rather than the church's innate character demonstrated through longstanding liturgy and practice. He points to ever-sought megachurch aesthetics as proof "of the penetration of the anticulture."⁷⁸ Eric Metaxas agrees, considering such behaviors as little more than a demonstration of "religionless" Christianity.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer, I*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H.C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, American Edition., vol. 31, Luther's Works (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), 40.

⁷⁵ Walsh, *Church of Cowards*, 76, 142.

⁷⁶ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 93.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁷⁹ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, 125–29.

Neither Walsh's, Truman's, nor Metaxas's concerns are lonely ones. In his book *No Reason to Hide: Standing for Christ in a Collapsing Culture*, award-winning author Erwin W. Lutzer considers the vital question: Is contemporary Christianity interpreting the culture through the Bible, or is the Bible being interpreted through the culture?⁸⁰ He argues that the latter lens is employed for the most part.⁸¹ Professor of Political Science at Seton Hall University, Jo Renee Formicola, believes that even though such a process is dreadfully foolish, it is likely intentional. Formicola is convinced that Vatican II deliberately attempted to dismiss the church's substance to become more palatable to the culture.⁸² For her, the evidence is the Roman Catholic Church's steady loss of "civil and moral influence, especially in the West, due to demographic changes, increasingly secular shifts in public policy,"⁸³ and the ready embrace of more secularist agendas.⁸⁴ She measures the loss honestly, noting that abortion, gay marriage, and so many other practices contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine are flourishing in places in Europe where Catholicism still retains authority or direct influence.⁸⁵

Larry Golemon takes a somewhat nuanced view of the previous concerns, electing to include shallow intellectualism trends among pastors who prefer that clergy be seen as filling a corporate role rather than a form of moral authority. He offers that many prefer to compartmentalize pastoral ministry according to function (senior pastor, youth pastor, administrative pastor, and the like) rather than its symbolic or iconic identity. Golemon considers

⁸⁰ Erwin W. Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide: Standing for Christ in a Collapsing Culture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022), 30.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 166, 169.

⁸² Jo Renee Formicola, "The Catholic Religious Presence in Civil Society: A Waning Influence," *Religions* 12, no. 4 (2021): 260.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 254.

this “both ahistorical and unwise...as clergy inadvertently symbolize a community’s ideals of spirituality, morality, and sacred knowledge; so they bear a distinct responsibility to live in that role.”⁸⁶ Provost and Research Professor of Theology at Grace Bible Theological Seminary, Owen Strachan, speaks in a parallel vein. In his volume *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel - and the Way to Stop It*, Strachan suggests that “the church has not thought deeply” about the issues facing it.⁸⁷ Strachan announces almost emphatically, “Christianity is not hostile to deep thinking; Christianity is grounded in it.”⁸⁸

In her volume *How the West Really Lost God*, well-respected intellectualist Mary Eberstadt seems somewhat disinterested in the more acute notions mentioned above. Eberstadt elects to paint a wide-sweeping image less inclined toward indicting individuals based on substance but instead more so as entire societies turn away from religion for a multitude of interconnected reasons. Still, she admits that the process is a tragic trading away of the Christian ethos for one that rejects Christian thinking entirely.⁸⁹

Lack of Conviction

Concerned with culture’s ever-imposing materialism, popular writer Jen Hatmaker poses insightfully, “In a culture that elevates beauty and style, the Christian community is at genuine risk for distraction, even deception. What do we truly admire in our leaders? Are we no different from the secular population, drawn to charisma and style above substance and integrity?”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Golemon, “Educating Clergy as Culture-Builders,” 73.

⁸⁷ Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 47–49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁹ Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014), 39.

⁹⁰ Jen Hatmaker, *Simple and Free: 7 Experiments Against Excess* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2022), 78.

Again, Hatmaker's self-interrogation is perceptive, hinting at the connection between belief's foundation and its pliability. Matt Walsh insists that substantive religion inherently produces more than superficial introspection or the nonchalant handling of challenges. Instead, "reverent faith is militant, aggressive,"⁹¹ and the exhortation by its leaders must include demands for action, often resulting in personal sacrifice.⁹²

Walsh's point is important. Describing Christianity using historical terms, noting the distinction between the church militant and the church triumphant,⁹³ Walsh reminds readers that the church on Earth is called militant for a reason. It is mindful of its substance and deliberate in its action. Simply put, its goal is the extension of Christ's kingdom amid a world trapped in sin.⁹⁴ As the church moves, it meets with the world, administering the gospel antidote for despair and fear. In this effort, a struggle ensues, and suffering is endured, but these hardships are worth the reward.⁹⁵

Michael Conway reflects a similar premeditation, writing that the church must carry itself in two directions. The first concerns substance, or "the church's tradition and self-understanding...."⁹⁶ The second he calls crucial, namely, "outwards to the ambient world and culture."⁹⁷ For Conway, the church's substance is necessary for salvation and cultural alteration. Frederica Mathewes-Green wonders if Christianity has already passed the point of no return relative to cultural influence. And yet, she wonders aloud if what happened in ages past might

⁹¹ Walsh, *Church of Cowards*, 54.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁹³ For clarification, the Church Militant is the worldwide collective of believers on Earth, while the Church Triumphant describes the gathered believers in heaven.

⁹⁴ Walsh, *Church of Cowards*, 154–56.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 171, 174–75.

⁹⁶ Conway, "Changing Foundations," 91.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

happen again. She writes, “We can practice our convictions and support each other, but that’s a long way from changing the culture. Are we fated to live in a time when Christians are becoming more and more irrelevant in the public arena? All the early Christians could do was die. But they did that with such grace that they gradually drew the whole world to Jesus Christ.”⁹⁸

Erwin Lutzer carries the banner of suffering further, contending that suffering “communicates the gospel in a new language....”⁹⁹ In Lutzer’s mind, not only are faith’s fruits born from immovable conviction a demonstration of substance, but so is the resulting suffering itself. Moments requiring Christian courage and endurance to be demonstrated through suffering are powerfully influential for onlookers. Of course, Christ more than infers this by His words in Matthew’s Gospel:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt 5:11–16, ESV).

Saint James believes the same as what his brother and Lord preached in the Sermon on the Mount. He further describes Christian suffering not as detrimental to a believer’s faith but as something capable of making an indwelling faith even sturdier. James writes: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:2–4, ESV).

⁹⁸ Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 20.

⁹⁹ Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide*, 261.

Relative to the Lord's words in Matthew 5:11–16, David P. Scaer, a foremost scholar on the Gospel of Matthew, upholds Walsh's juxtaposition of cost and reward, writing, "The persecution that the believers are undergoing is diametrically opposed in its outward appearance to what God will eventually do for them."¹⁰⁰ Further along, Scaer concludes plainly that a gospel-built church is a persecuted church.¹⁰¹ Processing this same information, while attempting to wrangle ungodly zealousness leading to Christianity's misrepresentation, Lutzer offers helpfully that even the persecuted church embraces its persecutors in love. It does not shrink from engagement but understands humility and love as truth's best vehicle. "Truth and love," he writes, "are not enemies."¹⁰² This point will be examined further in the section entitled "Engagement in the Public Square as Mission."

Radical Individualism and the Breakdown of Community

Attentive to secularism's effects, Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon offer clues relative to its influence on the church as a community:

The church need not feel caught between the false Niebuhrian dilemma of whether to be in or out of the world.... The church is not out of the world. There is no other place for the church to be than here. In the sixties, it became fashionable to speak of the need for the church to be "in" the world, serving the world. We think that we could argue that being in the world, serving the world, has never been a great problem for the church. Alas, our greatest tragedies occurred because the church was all too willing to serve the world. The church need not worry about whether to be in the world. The church's only concern is how to be in the world, in what form, for what purpose.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ David P. Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Church's First Statement of the Gospel* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 91.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide*, 211.

¹⁰³ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 43.

Their point is that as practical as it might seem for survival's sake to accommodate secularism, the church cannot allow itself to be shaped by the culture. Doing so opens the church and its people to identity and doctrinal confusion, leading to tragedies already demonstrated in history. They further place Nazi Germany as the definitive test for this theological mispositioning, describing the German church as theologically ill-equipped against Hitler's forward momentum. For Hauerwas and Willimon, churches choosing secular acceptance above doctrinal faithfulness were found defenseless against Nazi assimilation. In other words, the church was by no means the influencer but, instead, the influenced.¹⁰⁴

Hauerwas writes separately of secularism's attempt to influence Christianity's communal identity by developing "arrangements without memory,"¹⁰⁵ which is to establish extreme individualism or the standard that no one in the community bears the same narrative, but rather is free to choose his or her own story.¹⁰⁶ Willimon speaks similarly, acknowledging secularism's drive toward this community-exploding premise:

[A]ll our talk of "freedom" is but the rattling of the chains binding us to the authoritarianism of a liberal, democratic culture, a culture that, whether it is intended to do so or not, destroys human community by fragmenting us into a herd of isolated units, each detached from tradition, community, history, and one another, all the while telling us that we are free. Ironically, in such a condition, detached from sources of true meaning, we have not gained our individuality but have lost it, for true individualism comes only from someone who knows and can name who she is. Of course, the democratic Empire now knows what the monarchs of old did not: detached, rootless, historyless individuals are more easily managed than people in groups, people who have names, stories, histories, and a home.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 24–25.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 148.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 53.

Both Hauerwas and Willimon appear inclined to preserve the church as a community built upon a common theological identity rooted in Christ for the purpose of navigating the world in which it lives. Timothy P. Carney agrees, describing America as “a land of opportunity because America is the land of civil society...to the extent that the American Dream of robust local community is alive.”¹⁰⁸ Carney contends that social networks born from community create a crucial sense of belonging that forms personal identities and a strong sense of purpose.¹⁰⁹ He comments that “the only way to maintain real and sincere closeness with a person is to entangle ourselves with that person through the bonds of institution—to live in community and to work toward common ends with that person.”¹¹⁰ He emphasizes that the largest segment of American society, the middle class, needs a strong community for the sake of long-term stability, and when it comes to arenas beyond work and home, the church is the community’s most accessible form.¹¹¹ Carl R. Trueman completely agrees with Carney, adding concern for the church community relative to identity preservation, stating that the church must “be a community. If the struggle for Christianity is the struggle for the nature of selfhood, then it is worth noting...that selves are socially constructed and only come to full self-consciousness in dialogue with other self-consciousnesses....”¹¹²

By comparison, secularism interprets American ideals micro-cosmically, insisting that individuals must be strictly divided from community standards to take full advantage of American freedom. Perhaps this was already being observed in early America. An eighteenth-

¹⁰⁸ Carney, *Alienated America*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 248, 254–55, 298–99.

¹¹² Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 404.

century observer, Frenchman J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, described his fellow Americans as no longer pressed by religious belief systems but instead self-interested and moving far from their monistic communal beginnings into social and religious pluralism.¹¹³ He predicted the transformation would result in religion's complete disappearance.¹¹⁴ In *Healing Humanity: Confronting Our Moral Crisis*, Alfred Kentigern Siewers admits to this paradox, noting that constitutionally, current legal trends lean toward "each individual's ability to pursue his or her identity...."¹¹⁵ In the same volume, Gaelan Gilbert clarifies that "anything perceived as an attempt to keep someone from pursuing his or her choices is understood as an evil that must be opposed...."¹¹⁶ Alongside Siewers and Gilbert, Bruce Seraphim Foltz considers these things to be little more than expressions of modern Gnosticism and its demands that "to ensure autonomy from an oppressive world of sinister origin, the individual must be self-defined...."¹¹⁷ Natasha Crain vocalizes radical individualism as secularism's bridge to humankind, stating that a "major reason secularism is so influential is that it appeals directly to the desires of our fallen nature—it reinforces the desired authority of the self.... Your happiness is of utmost importance, and only you can decide what will make you happy—you're the boss."¹¹⁸

David Seckler defines radical individualism, clarifying that it "asserts that all significant human behavior is choosing, purposive behavior. It is individualistic because it contends that all institutions or 'social collectives' can be explained in terms of the behavior of individuals

¹¹³ Here, pluralism means diverse views within a singular context or community.

¹¹⁴ J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Susan Manning (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45–46, 48–51.

¹¹⁵ Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 96.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁸ Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 52, 55.

alone.”¹¹⁹ Paul D. Bush observes Seckler’s definition, adding, “The ‘alone’ in the last sentence is absolutely definitive and demarks what appears to be an unbridgeable chasm....”¹²⁰ Carl R. Trueman shows concern for radical individualism “as the specific and perhaps most obvious social manifestation of a much deeper and wider revolution in the understanding of what it means to be a self.”¹²¹ Speaking to the principle’s *praxis* and *telos*, Roderick T. Long explains:

[R]adical individualists tend *inter alia* to be motivational individualists, both in the “methodologically subjectivist” sense of explaining people’s actions in terms of their beliefs, desires, and preferences, and in the “ethically internalist” sense of denying that there could be moral duties that did not somehow engage the agent’s preferences. Indeed, most of these thinkers go beyond mere internalism to ethical eudaimonism, insisting that all moral duties must be in the agent’s self-interest.¹²²

Trueman nods to this compartmentalization, noting that Thomas Aquinas demonstrated a similar separation of teleological understanding within human nature.¹²³ Perhaps humorously, like Siewers, Erwin Lutzer observes another paradox: radical individualists collectively demonize community. In other words, radical individualism is self-indicting as an ideological community pit against the ideologies of another community. Frederica Mathewes-Green would have her readers remember the converse problem inherent to this verity: when one becomes free from obligation to others, those same others are free from obligation to you.¹²⁴

In short, many cultural observers see radical individualism as unfettered narcissism that sees no need for community. As such, it provides a destructive platform for individuals to do,

¹¹⁹ David Seckler, *Thorstein Veblen and the Institutionalists: A Study in the Social Philosophy of Economics* (Boulder, CO: Colorado Associated University Press, 1975), 79.

¹²⁰ Bush, “‘Radical Individualism’ vs. Institutionalism, II,” 288.

¹²¹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 35.

¹²² Roderick T. Long, “The Classical Roots of Radical Individualism,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 24, no. 2 (2007): 278.

¹²³ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 39–40.

¹²⁴ Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 19.

say, and be whatever they want beneath freedom's banner and without any definitive consequence shaped by stabilizing communal standards. Michael Mascolo appears to agree with this position. Drawing attention to the narrowing of moral frameworks, Mascolo associates the constricting with "insufficient communal accountability."¹²⁵ Daniel Cox does the same, pointing to the church's demonstrable disconnect from the public square as a fruit of community dissolution. Cox considers the church an essential conduit into the civil sphere, noting that when its community declines, so goes its levels of social and political engagement.¹²⁶

These voices are not lonely. Timothy P. Carney uses a wide-angle lens to observe, showing how increased secularization resulting in radically individualized behavior creates hyper-individualized relationships in every aspect of society.¹²⁷ For example, he cites the "Gig Economy,"¹²⁸ framing it as a capitalist system in which "no entangling alliances or permanent commitments"¹²⁹ are made, resulting in a world where corporate communities no longer exist and "where workers are available when needed."¹³⁰ Michael Conway counts radical individualism as the societal standard becoming most comfortable for many, saying plainly, "Individual persons now freely choose and construct the norm that will guide life, relationship, and religiosity."¹³¹ This happens apart from communal bindings.

¹²⁵ Michael Mascolo, "Is Radical Individualism Destroying Our Moral Compass? | Psychology Today," accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/values-matter/201612/is-radical-individualism-destroying-our-moral-compass>. Also see Jonathan Haidt, "Morality," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 65–72.

¹²⁶ Daniel A. Cox, "Generation Z and the Future of Faith in America," *The Survey Center on American Life*, n.d., accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/generation-z-future-of-faith/>.

¹²⁷ Carney, *Alienated America*, 192–93.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Conway, "Changing Foundations," 94.

For Conway, radical individualism’s theological implications are devastating. His point: radical individualism convinces that as long as one is true to self, the divine will approve, guaranteeing one’s blissful afterlife.¹³² Describing the tendency to believe that “what matters is that I speak my truth,” Jeff Myers acknowledges that the “‘no-judgment-allowed’ mindset is growing in popularity among Christians.”¹³³ As a result, churches are exchanging their Christological identities for the truthless philosophies of Sophism, Deflationism, Pluralism, and Pragmatism.¹³⁴ However, Myers continues insisting that for Christians, objective truth is sourced in Christ and can be known. And yet, those “who believe Truth can be known do not claim to know all of what is true. Rather, they argue that what we can know may be truly known.”¹³⁵ He adds that no matter a person’s acceptance or rejection of objectively true things, truth itself will always rise to the surface. This is demonstrated simply by things and ideas having knowable meanings, words being communicative, humans making rational arguments, and the discernible difference between facts and opinions demonstrated throughout human history.¹³⁶

Clergy Disengagement

Relative to radical individualism’s effect on clergy, Eric Metaxas has much to say. In particular, he shows concern for American pastors’ marginal familiarity with Two Kingdoms theology combined with an unnecessary fear of the Johnson Amendment.¹³⁷ Concerning the Two Kingdoms doctrine (which will be extrapolated in a later section), they do not know how and

¹³² Conway, “Changing Foundations,” 97.

¹³³ Myers, *Truth Changes Everything*, 29.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35–38.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 42–48.

¹³⁷ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, 8, 11.

why the right-hand kingdom might meet with or be necessary to the left-hand kingdom. About the Johnson Amendment, they fear being labeled too political by government entities, often suppressing fears with the “it will never happen” mentality while simultaneously using church polity to stay comfortably protected from the demand for engagement.¹³⁸ Metaxas speaks of a spiral into silence that keeps the pastor and his congregation apart from their place in civic engagement and its subsequent realities.¹³⁹ He also notes one of the pastors’ grandest fears: congregations divided. He does this by comparing the same anxieties demonstrated among the churches in 1930s Germany.¹⁴⁰

Carl R. Trueman, Michael A. Conway, and Timothy P. Carney, much like Metaxas, prove mindful of the secular world’s hostility toward churches. Trueman writes, “It is...increasingly clear that the idea of religious freedom is coming under hostile pressure in Western society and no longer enjoys the status of an unequivocal good in the broader social imaginary.”¹⁴¹ Michael Conway adds, “there has been an enormous shift in our culture, where religion has gone from being centre stage to being marginal or at least a limited player in terms of society at large.”¹⁴² Considered from the current angle, there is the fear of using one’s religious liberty to preach about issues that, in today’s society, will now be interpreted secularly and, as a result, be counted as bigotry. This is to say that what once was is now a distant and alien land, and they do things differently there than they do in postmodern America. If a pastor wants to protect his church, he will tread lightly, necessarily keeping quiet. Carney expounds that

¹³⁸ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, 19, 65, 95–105.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴¹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 399.

¹⁴² Conway, “Changing Foundations,” 93.

secularly-minded institutions are actively partnering with an increasingly agreeable government to drive “religion into solely the private sphere—out of the civic square, out of the marketplace, out of politics....”¹⁴³ Pastoral fearfulness is, therefore, not surprising.

Barna Group observed similar pastoral worries in a 2022 study that included responses such as “feeling constrained by the ideological differences between congregants,” “fear that portions of my sermon may be used against me or taken out of context,” and “feeling pressured to address issues in society.”¹⁴⁴ In a similar 2022 study testing pastoral burnout, “current political divisions” ranked third among the causes, with “the immense stress of the job” being first.¹⁴⁵ In short, pastors appear fearful of negative reputational branding leading to social or governmental reprisal. Additionally, they fear general congregational disapproval, which is demonstrated through direct and inter-congregational conflict, which leads to shrinking attendance and tighter financial constraints.

Parishioner Disengagement

As with pastors, radical individualism has had its way with churchgoers, and as a result, they feel inclined, if not obligated, to remain disengaged from the public square. In a broad sense, Michael Conway points toward postmodern America’s compartmentalization of life, writing that society has normalized keeping “apart our work lives, medical practice from church control, politics from religion, and so on.... There is a clear separation and differentiation of domains.”¹⁴⁶ Conway supposes that, as normal, the individual has the freedom to “choose and

¹⁴³ Carney, *Alienated America*, 287.

¹⁴⁴ “Pastors Share Confidence, Struggles & Concerns Around Preaching,” *Barna Group*, accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/preaching-confidence/>.

¹⁴⁵ “Pastors Share Top Reasons They’ve Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year,” *Barna Group*, accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/>.

¹⁴⁶ Conway, “Changing Foundations,” 94.

construct the norm that will guide life, relationship, and religiosity.”¹⁴⁷ Paola Pascual-Ferrá agrees, commenting that Christians are, by nature, “living more as an extension of the secular world today than as a distinct light to it.”¹⁴⁸ Jeff Myers considers a Barna Group study proof of secularism’s muscular grip. He writes that “only 19 percent of churchgoing born-again Christians hold a biblical worldview.... The other eighty-one percent either are not aware of or disagree with core Christian doctrines about God, Jesus, the Bible, sin....”¹⁴⁹ He brings more disconcerting news, adding, “Fifty-one percent of Americans now say that the First Amendment...is outdated and should be rewritten to prevent hate speech....”¹⁵⁰ He references Carl R. Trueman, who observed, “Once harm and oppression are regarded as being primarily psychological categories, freedom of speech then becomes part of the problem, not the solution, because words become potential weapons.”¹⁵¹

Two things are worthy of attention. Firstly, by way of the Barna Group, Myers mentions the issue of ignorance as a factor. In other words, Christians can only navigate the issues as they understand them. If pastors are not teaching their people Christianity’s relevance to public square issues, those same people will be incapable of navigating them authentically or successfully. Secondly, by Trueman’s First Amendment example, Myers highlights secularism’s psychological influence on Christianity as a truth-proclaimer, resulting in self-sequestering and further compartmentalization. In this light, an important facet is revealed: the preservation and subsequent extension of the gospel into the world.

¹⁴⁷ Conway, “Changing Foundations,” 94.

¹⁴⁸ Pascual-Ferrá, “The Measurement of Trust in Communication Research,” 17.

¹⁴⁹ Myers, *Truth Changes Everything*, 54–55.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Luther's Two Kingdoms doctrine has been mentioned superficially so far. Before a more thorough extrapolation in a forthcoming section, let it be known that at its center rests the preservation of religious liberty. Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, Daniel Philpott, insists that the church's efforts to preserve religious liberty are a consolidated demonstration of a universal human right, one that is well-cemented throughout history in court proceedings, political conventions, and national documents of governance. For Philpott, if it is a human right, then it is also a fundamental right located within natural law.¹⁵² Subsequently, the freedom to preach and teach the gospel apart from interference or fear becomes something far more than doctrinal. It becomes materially human. Still, even apart from natural law, doctrinal consistency remains. Consider Saint Paul's words to Timothy:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 Tim 2:1–6, ESV).

Here, Saint Paul instructs Christians to pray, intercede, and give thanks “for kings and all who are in high positions” of authority. These pleas concern the left-hand kingdom of civil rule. Paul explains the trajectory. His desire is born from God's Two Kingdoms framework, which maintains order so Christians “may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Paul adds that such maintenance (also given prescriptively in Rom 13:1–5) “is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,” noting its innermost purpose: God's desire for “all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” And what is this truth? The

¹⁵² Heather J. Sharkey and Jeffrey Edward Green, eds., *The Changing Terrain of Religious Freedom* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 37–39.

gospel, which Paul defines: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all....” Therefore, the goal of Christian engagement in the public square is to preserve religious liberty, which is the freedom to live in peace and quietness among one’s neighbors while simultaneously enjoying the unhindered freedom to communicate the gospel truth to all.

Erwin Lutzer agrees, eloquently describing Christianity’s need to engage in cultural battles, not necessarily for the maintenance of natural rights, but for the sake of “Christ, His gospel, and His cross.... The ultimate goal is to be a nation of Christians, and this can only take place through a faithful and courageous church sharing the gospel.”¹⁵³ As a side, Lutzer emphasizes the need for an individual’s facts and ideologies to align.¹⁵⁴ A confused or disembodied gospel is no gospel. Metaxas agrees with Lutzer, except he does so by identifying the gospel’s incarnational nature. From Christianity’s vantage, truth is a person, namely, Jesus Christ. To engage for truth is to preserve Christ’s saving message.¹⁵⁵ Natasha Crain shows great concern for protecting the gospel in this sense, saying that to do so is to establish the only real ramparts that protect against deconversion, an increasingly popular method for communicating secular enlightenment designed to undermine faith. Crain posits examples of high-profile Christians falling away, only to use their platforms to draw others into the same skepticism.¹⁵⁶ Crain insists on crisply grasping the gospel “for the sake of our own relationship with the Lord and for our ability to be a witness to others.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁵⁵ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, 88.

¹⁵⁶ Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 115–18.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

Voddie T. Baucham Jr. argues for gospel clarity relative to discerning falsehood. For example, he argues that Critical Race Theory uses gospel-familiar language yet completely opposes the gospel's proclamation of forgiveness. Instead, CRT doles out forgiveness according to race, and it does so not considering salvation as freedom from sin through the real person and work of Jesus Christ but from imaginary oppressors conquered through social activism.¹⁵⁸

Owen Strachan believes as Baucham, except he prefers to launch an all-out assault on social activism, considering it more than merely influential, but a complete commandeering of the gospel. He writes, “wokeness tweaks the doctrine of humanity, losing sight of the *imago Dei* as our constituent identity.” He claims the social justice movement, as an extension of woke¹⁵⁹ ideologies, is inherently counter-Christian because it “foments the very sin it presumes to critique,” cementing generational cycles of anger and victimhood. It approves evil actions as solutions to evil and destabilizes truth, making it narrative-driven rather than all-encompassing and absolute.¹⁶⁰ Adjunct Professor of History at Concordia University in Chicago, Adam Francisco, agrees with Strachan's analysis that wokeness stands apart as incompatible with Christianity, except he adds the imperative for deliberate dialogue with the converse worldview. Dissecting wokeness' historical and current efforts, he believes it offers ample opportunities to Christians to confess Christ.¹⁶¹

Considering both the imposing magnitude and confusing nature of Christianity's opposition in America, it is no wonder Christianity is waning and its people remain disengaged. Having performed an informal survey among thousands of social media followers, Natasha Crain

¹⁵⁸ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 8, 22, 28.

¹⁵⁹ “Definition of Woke,” accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/woke>.

¹⁶⁰ Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 59, 66–70, 73, 79, 105.

¹⁶¹ Adam S. Francisco, “Awake or Woke: The Outline of a Lutheran View,” *Lutheran Witness*, April 2023, 22.

reports that many Christians keep from sharing their faith in public because they fear rejection and retaliation for expressing culturally unacceptable positions. Fearful of the same, others confess feeling isolated by secular culture's high praise for strict individualism.¹⁶² Further along, she observes other reasons, such as disagreement fatigue and the fear of cancellation. In summary, congregation members appear disengaged from the public square due primarily to theological ignorance, compartmentalized lives, ideological confusion, and fear of personal or reputational harm.

Theological Foundations

In the preface to his volume *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis reminds wisely, "A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on."¹⁶³ His point is well-taken. As the problem has now been extrapolated, things cannot continue as they are. Therefore, the problem is to be precisely addressed in the following portions.

Engagement in the Public Square as Mission

For some, the urgent concern and subsequent call for Christian engagement in the public square are not apart from Christianity's persona as a truth-bearer. As was implied at the conclusion of the previous subsection entitled "Lack of Conviction," to speak the truth is to demonstrate love.¹⁶⁴ Saint Paul wrote, "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known..." (Eph 3:10, ESV). In other words, Paul names the church as truth's dispensary to

¹⁶² Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 19–20.

¹⁶³ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996), 10.

¹⁶⁴ See content above: "[The church] does not shrink from engagement but understands humility and love as truth's best vehicle."

the world. Inversely, Owen Strachan comments, “This means, among other duties, exposing and confronting the false teaching...”¹⁶⁵ Still, and as the Nietzschean adage says, sometimes the truth hurts.¹⁶⁶ But the pain it may cause is apart from lovelessness. While bringing stinging reprimand to the Galatians for embracing false theology leading to harmful practices, Paul asks rhetorically, “Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Gal 4:16, ESV). Of course, the answer must be no. Again, Strachan argues, “Paul and his peers had no choice between ‘preach Christ’ or ‘deconstruct falsehood.’ They had to do both.”¹⁶⁷ Indeed, by deconstructing falsehood, Paul proves himself a friend who loves the Galatian church. He is loving by not shrinking from delivering the truth. The Apostle John echoes Paul, associating the demonstration of truth with the communication of genuine love: “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18, ESV).

Gaelan Gilbert might call such love a “dying to self—the death of self-love—for love of God and neighbor.”¹⁶⁸ Natasha Crain calls for Christians to see what is happening in the world as an opportunity for mission.¹⁶⁹ Eric Metaxas shares Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s call for love’s demonstration in mission through action. He relays a portion from one of Bonhoeffer’s addresses:

If we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ’s large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian

¹⁶⁵ Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 50.

¹⁶⁶ Robert C. Solomon, *The Joy of Philosophy: Thinking Thin Versus the Passionate Life* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003), 200.

¹⁶⁷ Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 53.

¹⁶⁸ Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 44.

¹⁶⁹ Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 22.

behaviour. The Christian is called to sympathy and action, not in the first place by his own sufferings, but by the sufferings of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered.¹⁷⁰

Understanding the public square as a social and political centrifuge, Erwin Lutzer has much to say concerning Christian love's demonstration. For him, disengagement from the public square is not an option for multiple reasons. Firstly, he notes, "Politics cannot be separated from morality, and morality cannot be separated from Christianity."¹⁷¹ He continues insisting that anyone claiming allegiance to Christ cannot be quiet. Next, he caps the dramatic discussion by saying, "Let those who think it's okay to be indifferent about politics ask the Christians who lived under Nero or Nazi Germany...."¹⁷² This is to say that genuine Christian love's vocalization and demonstration of truth affect entire societal constructs.

Regarding CRT, Lutzer considers ignoring its dangers unloving. He proposes that CRT hurts the people it claims to help by demeaning minorities and perpetuating stereotypes.¹⁷³ On the other hand, Lutzer believes the Bible deals truthfully against it, confronting racism by emphasizing verities shared by all while simultaneously considering unique cultural distinctions.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, in summary, equipped with God's Word, Christianity has the only real truth that can rightly engage in the public square ("go into the enemy territory")¹⁷⁵ in loving ways that rightly "distinguish between accepting a person and approving of their conduct."¹⁷⁶ Again, Lutzer understands love as truth's best vehicle, tenderly encouraging toward truth's expression wrapped in gentleness, respectful dialogue, and courtesy.

¹⁷⁰ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 447.

¹⁷¹ Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide*, 18.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

As Christians reach into the public square, sometimes to their demise, Eric Metaxas wonders hopefully that their kindly efforts will be what the listeners' deeper selves are longing to hear. Like Paul, he asks rhetorically, "Is it not possible that those whom we wish to evangelize are looking to us...to speak boldly on these things and fight for the truth....?"¹⁷⁷ Mindful of natural law, Metaxas assumes objective truth's place within each human being, which includes a receptivity to love. When the truth is iterated, a part of the listener's self is eager for it to become dominant, knowing its dominance is necessary.

The further removed Christianity is from the public square, the more devastating the effects of its absence become. And so, Michael Conway calls for the church to "see itself in and with the world in which it finds itself,"¹⁷⁸ emphasizing the church's natural place within culture. This is to say Christianity belongs in the public square. Pondering Nietzsche's transvaluation of values, Carl Trueman suggests that without the church's direct influence, good eventually becomes evil, and that which was healthy becomes sick.¹⁷⁹ In his view, the sacred must inform the culture because "the abandonment of a sacred order leaves cultures without any foundation."¹⁸⁰ Richard John Neuhaus went so far as to refer to a public square absent Christianity as "the naked public square."¹⁸¹

Larry Golemon is only slightly concerned with the possible dangers of Christianity in the public square, reminding his reader that extreme piety imposed upon culture has resulted in long-lasting and unfortunate consequences. Apart from vivid examples like the Salem witch trials,

¹⁷⁷ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, 84.

¹⁷⁸ Conway, "Changing Foundations," 91.

¹⁷⁹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 54–55.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

¹⁸¹ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986).

which were acute manifestations of piety amok, Golemon points to more encompassing results, such as the 18th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, inferring the tragic nationwide criminal enterprises born from Prohibition that remain today.¹⁸² Jo Renee Formicola is similarly mindful, highlighting the modern Roman Catholic Church’s “approach to the role of religion in civil society” as little more than social activism leading to uncertainty.¹⁸³ President of the Davenant Institute and Senior Fellow of the Edmund Burke Foundation, W. Bradford Littlejohn, highlights Luther’s Two Kingdoms doctrine as noticeably balancing. He acknowledges war’s extreme prevalence leading up to the sixteenth century. However, following the Reformation, he concludes that war lost a significant measure of its church-imbued sacredness, reducing its frequency. Littlejohn attributes this to the Two Kingdoms doctrine’s associating war with temporal rule rather than spiritual.¹⁸⁴

Two Kingdoms Doctrinal Summary

Before going any further, it becomes necessary to provide contour to the Two Kingdoms doctrine. In summary, the doctrine specifies two spheres relative to God’s governance. The doctrine’s nomenclature speaks in terms of God’s hands. The kingdom of the left hand is the kingdom of earthly rule. It is in this kingdom that God establishes civil governance for the sake of maintaining order and quelling chaos.¹⁸⁵ Erwin Lutzer rightly comments that God “delegates His authority to human beings in this kingdom.”¹⁸⁶ The kingdom of the right hand is spiritual. In

¹⁸² Golemon, “Educating Clergy as Culture-Builders,” 77.

¹⁸³ Formicola, “The Catholic Religious Presence in Civil Society,” 250.

¹⁸⁴ Littlejohn, *The Two Kingdoms*, 51–52.

¹⁸⁵ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 37–38.

¹⁸⁶ Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide*, 33.

this kingdom, the gospel rules for the salvation of humanity.¹⁸⁷ The government does not rule in the right-hand kingdom. The gospel does. Therefore, and as Eric Metaxas notes superbly, the government has no say in what is preached from Christian pulpits.¹⁸⁸ Equally, the church does not rule in the left-hand kingdom. Although, it does have the freedom to engage in it as citizens, and perhaps more importantly, the responsibility to resist it when it forsakes its ordination by establishing and practicing evil. Concerning such things consider again the Lutherans, firstly, the *Magdeburg Confession* of 1550, which historian G. R. Elton referred to as “the first full-blooded Protestant justification for rebellion and resistance.”¹⁸⁹

The Magdeburg Confessors prefaced their foundational document with three essential purposes. Their first goal was to restate what they considered unconquerable Lutheran doctrines.¹⁹⁰ Secondly, they intended to prove religious liberty’s essentiality and benefit while also justifying dissension when governments compel defection from truth.¹⁹¹ Thirdly, they would warn against persecuting the church lest terrible trouble for both body and soul ensue.¹⁹²

Of course, even as the text of Romans 13:1–5 is well-worn (and poorly handled) today, the Magdeburg Confessors experienced the same. In particular, Rome weaponized the text used following Luther’s death to bring Germany into submission, and so the Confessors clarified:

If God wanted superior magistrates who have become tyrants to be inviolable because of his ordinance [Romans 13] and commandment [The Fourth Commandment], how many impious and absurd things would follow from this? Chiefly it would follow that God, by

¹⁸⁷ Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 81–94. For a slightly more thorough but still relatively succinct explanation, please see Christopher I. Thoma, “Two Kingdoms: Is There a Line between Christ and Caesar?,” *The Lutheran Witness*, January 2015, 18–19.

¹⁸⁸ Metaxas, *Letter to the American Church*, 9.

¹⁸⁹ G. R. Elton, *The New Cambridge Modern History: Volume 2, The Reformation, 1520–1559* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 191.

¹⁹⁰ Matthew Colvin, trans., *The Magdeburg Confession: 13th of April 1550 A.D.* (Milwaukee, WI: Matthew Trewhella, 2012), 6.

¹⁹¹ Colvin, *The Magdeburg Confession*, 7.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

his own ordinance and command, is strengthening, nay, honoring and abetting evil works, and is hindering, nay, destroying good works; that there are contraries in the nature of God Himself, and in this ordinance by which He has instituted the magistrate; that God is no less against his own ordinance than he is for the human race. All these things are most plain, nor can they be denied by anyone: If God has granted such great impunity to the greatest tyrant by His own ordinance and commandment, who will prevent him from laying waste all of nature, even if he could, and being innocent before God? Who will not provide his substance, his body, and even his life itself to the one who demands them for the occasions, ends, and nourishment of tyranny, because of the commandment of God? Who will do what is right contrary to the will of a tyrant, and be a survivor? Who will be left of all men as the only one doing right?¹⁹³

An expert on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, historian Eric Metaxas observes similar handling of Romans 13 in 1930s Nazi Germany, writing, “The willingness of [German] Lutherans to keep the church out of the world reflected an unbiblical overemphasis on Romans 13:1–5....”¹⁹⁴ In America, Lutherans were insisting quite the opposite. One such confessional Lutheran, Theodore Graebner, spoke candidly before the convention of the English District, Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, insisting that the American Christian voter, as a “citizen in whom all political power ultimately resides...ought to consider himself an agency of God for righteousness....”¹⁹⁵ Graebner insisted that America’s form of government made each citizen a ruler in the left-hand kingdom. Therefore, as both Christians and citizens, the church held an organic role in civil affairs.

Eberhard Bethge, a close friend to Bonhoeffer, would discover an apparent gray area within a Two Kingdoms doctrine kept strictly divided by Romans 13. He writes:

The levels of confession and of resistance could no longer be kept neatly apart. The escalating persecution of the Jews generated an increasingly intolerable situation.... We now realized that mere confession, no matter how courageous, inescapably meant complicity with the murders, even though there would always be new acts of refusing to

¹⁹³ Colvin, *The Magdeburg Confession*, 67.

¹⁹⁴ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 281.

¹⁹⁵ Theodore Graebner, “Christian Citizenship: An Essay” (Presented at the Convention of the English District, Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, River Forest, IL: Concordia Publishing House, 1937), 5.

be co-opted and even though we preach ‘Christ alone’ Sunday after Sunday. During the whole time the Nazi state never considered it necessary to prohibit such preaching. Why should it? Thus we were approaching the borderline between confession and resistance; and if we did not cross this border, our confession was going to be no better than cooperation with criminals. And so it became clear where the problem lay for the Confessing church: we were resisting by way of confession, but we were not confessing by way of resistance.¹⁹⁶

Bonhoeffer would prove his grasp of the Two Kingdoms doctrine, insisting that all earthly powers are by God’s divine hand. Metaxas explains that “governments are established by God for the preservation of order. The church had no fundamental quarrel with the state being the state....”¹⁹⁷ Metaxas adds to this interpretation Bonhoeffer’s position that the church must continually examine the state to test its legitimacy. Is it holding to its ordination and maintaining order for the good of the governed, or is its work leading to ungodly disorder and mayhem? Bonhoeffer’s point was that while the state has no right to dabble in the church’s affairs, the church has every right to assist the state in preserving a godly heading. Therefore, the church must engage that it might also intervene and maintain.

Samuel Deressa observes Luther’s agreement with Bonhoeffer: “For Luther, obedience does not always mean complete submission of the church to government authorities and/or a total withdrawal from politics, but rather a critical participation in politics.”¹⁹⁸ He adds, “For Luther, the authority of temporal governments should be challenged when ‘it cannot be obeyed without sin’ (Acts 5:29), and when their actions contradict the purpose for which they are instituted.”¹⁹⁹ Deressa understands Luther’s words as broad-sweeping, necessarily avoiding the assertion that Acts 5:29 relates only to the gospel’s preservation. The Magdeburg Confessors

¹⁹⁶ Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 360–61.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹⁸ Samuel Deressa, “Luther on Two Kingdoms Theology and Christian Education,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 55, no. 3 (December 2021): 155.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

understood Luther similarly, offering multiple biblical and early church examples of justifiable resistance throughout *The Magdeburg Confession*.²⁰⁰

Observing Luther's treatise entitled *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, Volker Leppin affirms that "Luther is primarily concerned to set limits to temporal authority. That is already clear from the title given to the treatise.... This was a brave title for a text that had its origins in sermons that Luther preached in the presence of Duke John in October 1522 at Weimar."²⁰¹ Leppin adds firmly, "Only an extremely superficial reading of Luther can see him advocating a crass obedience to the authorities."²⁰²

In his book *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality*, Franky Schaeffer considers the sixteenth-century theologian William Perkins's words: "If it should fall out that men's laws be made of things evil, and forbidden by God, there is no bond at all: but contrariwise, men are bound in conscience not to obey."²⁰³ Schaeffer continues by referring to the concepts found in the Bible as the standard measurement for judging a government's laws, thereby counting the church as the government's divinely appointed overseer. Having already referred to America's forefathers as principally Christian, interestingly, Schaeffer feels inclined to assert this once more, noting they committed acts of civil disobedience relative to laws they considered abusive and counter to religious liberty. The events leading up to the Boston Tea Party, which sounded echoes of governmental homage, serve as his example. Relevant, but admittedly dated, Schaeffer's view remains crisp to this day. In his study of church taxation, Assistant Professor of

²⁰⁰ Colvin, *The Magdeburg Confession: 13th of April 1550 A.D.*, 54, 59, 63–65, 71, 79–80, 83.

²⁰¹ Volker Leppin, "The Scope and Limits of Secular Authority: On the Origins and Context of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 48, no. 2 (August 2014): 91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁰³ Franky Schaeffer, *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality* (Winchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), 62.

Law at Penn State University, Mark Storslee, reaches similar conclusions, referencing the Boston Tea Party while referring to James Madison's concern for even the slightest measure of governmental mandate concerning worship practice.²⁰⁴

Biblical Precedents for Creative Communication

While some premises require vast matrix-like formulations to establish their contours, the biblical underpinnings for this project's thesis are by no means as complicated. Simply put, through regular epistle-writing, pastors will encourage their congregation members toward public square engagement. These epistles will employ creative writing techniques, ones leaning toward colloquial ease but also remaining very close in spirit to the bits of advice given by writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote instructively: "I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is, prose—words in their best order; poetry—the best words in their best order."²⁰⁵

Broadly, this project thesis has two theological foundations. The first concerns the Bible's handling of Christian engagement in the public square. The second concerns (at least, in part) the Bible's perspective relative to creative communication through epistle writing. Examining these foundations, their order will be reversed, the second concern being extrapolated first, as it requires less discussion.

While discussing King David's Psalms with friends in the spring of 1543, Martin Luther remarked, "How is it that in matters concerning the flesh we have so many fine poems and

²⁰⁴ Mark Storslee, "Church Taxes and the Original Understanding of the Establishment Clause," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, December 2020, 127.

²⁰⁵ Thomas Ashe, ed., *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, England: George Bell and Sons, 1884), 54.

hymns but that in those concerning the spirit we have such sluggish, cold affairs?”²⁰⁶ Admittedly, Luther’s comment was a complaint aimed at his contemporaries’ less-than-vigorous attempts to preach, teach, and write in ways that engaged the message’s recipients. Like Luther, Saint Augustine had previously remarked, “That those, to move and force the minds of their hearers into error, should be able by their style to terrify them, move them to tears, make them laugh, give them rousing encouragement, while these on behalf of truth stumble along slow, cold and half asleep.”²⁰⁷

Interestingly, Luther’s and Augustine’s comments emerged from visits to the Scriptures, betraying something often overlooked: as literature, the Bible is ornately adorned in rich and fantastical language. Relative to epistle writing, it seems sensible to visit Saint Paul, an inspired resident within the holy writ who has already modeled creative communication’s skill and value in this form.

Throughout the New Testament, Saint Paul uses rich language partnered with personable tones to steer his readers through complicated issues often gripped tightly by resistant hands. To loosen the grip, Paul employed various tools such as humor, poetry, sarcasm, rhetorical questioning, reprimand, romance, and others. Each tool, a carefully packaged effort using precise words, was sometimes gentle and, at other times, extreme. However, no matter the spectrum, Paul’s creativity (as opposed to the dryly authoritative option, that is, the opportunity to render automatic summations by divine mandate) helped frame divine truths in ways that made them graspable to human faculty. In other words, even inspired by God, Paul wrote as a human to other humans.

²⁰⁶ Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 2 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 981.

²⁰⁷ Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, 278.

Considering one of Paul's more extreme instances, Galatians 5:7–12 demonstrates the apostle's potential for darker humor. Angry with the Judaizers for insisting that salvation required circumcision, Paul goes below the belt, saying, "I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves" (Gal 5:12, ESV). In other words, if the Judaizers claim that circumcision makes one more of a Christian, they should prove their superiority even more so by cutting their reproductive organs entirely off. Such writing is unarguably stark and incredibly attention-getting, ultimately making the point in a memorable way. Indeed, pastors will be encouraged to write similarly, namely, communicating the truth while revealing the various dimensions of personality typically undemonstrated.

Biblical Precedents for Christian Engagement in the Public Square

Returning to the thesis's first part, it should be mentioned that Christ said rather plainly to His Christians, "You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles" (Matt 10:18, ESV). This is to say, the Two Kingdoms will meet, and as they do, Christians will necessarily respond. Acknowledging this concurrently, the Lord later prays for His people: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:15–17, ESV). Petitioning in this way, Jesus acknowledges the Two Kingdoms doctrine. Relative to this doctrine, He implies that Christians will be sanctified carriers of divine truth into the kingdom of the left. This carrying will be according to the same source that establishes the kingdom of the right: the Word. Regardless of the sphere, God's Word of truth, the gospel, must prevail. The gospel is God's gracious care for both. Martin H. Scharlemann comments on Jesus's words in John 17, noting that Christians exist in both

kingdoms simultaneously, and as they do, they maneuver mindful that both kingdoms are in place to “serve [God’s] larger purposes of grace.”²⁰⁸

At this point, it should also be mentioned somewhat preemptively that far too many religious liberty resources muddy the subject of public square engagement by forcing unrelated biblical texts into predetermined ideologies. Galatians 5:13 is an oft-patriotically used example. It reads: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (ESV). Unfortunately, handling the verse and its context with a sliver of honesty renders it unusable in religious liberty’s first sphere of influence. By “freedom” (ἐλευθερία),²⁰⁹ it is easily determined that Saint Paul indeed means Christian liberty but in the sense of freedom from the law’s burden for salvation. R. C. H. Lenski notes the sentence’s beginning (Ὑμεῖς),²¹⁰ arguing that the apostle deliberately “places ‘you’ emphatically against the Judaizers,”²¹¹ which is to say, those who were insisting that the Galatian Christians bind themselves to former laws as necessary to salvation’s equation. Therefore, this text is not applicable because Paul does not describe a Christian’s duty relative to civil government.

Once again, apart from such examples, this project’s thesis is not cloudy. It does not require eisegetical gymnastics. For the most part, the Lord’s mandate that His church engage with the world for the sake of the gospel is its theological foundation. The Scriptures are laden with this universally accepted instruction. This mission-minded engagement is the primary thrust

²⁰⁸ Martin H. Scharlemann, “Scriptural Concepts of the Church and State,” in *Church and State Under God*, Concordia Heritage Series (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 23.

²⁰⁹ Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd Edition (Corrected). (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1983), 660.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), 273.

for persuading Christians to labor in the public square. Of course, to do so is to preserve religious liberty, which, as was partially extrapolated in the literature review above, maintains the church's missiological heart: the freedom to preach and teach the gospel for the extension of Christ's kingdom.²¹²

Like all other missiological efforts in the church, public square engagement is both centrifugal and centripetal in motion. It moves outward so that it might draw inward (Matt 5:13–16; 24:14; 28:16–20; Mark 13:10; 16:15–16; Luke 24:46–49; John 20:19–23; Rom 10:14–17; 1 Thess 1:2–10; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15). As people are met, and the gospel is given, hearts and minds are persuaded, and they join the believing community. Public square engagement not only participates in this divine arrangement but, more importantly, labors to preserve it, labeling it crucial to the church's missiological identity.²¹³ Stepping forth from this essential premise, more appropriate texts come to mind, two of which may be sufficient for this project's case.

In 2 Corinthians, Saint Paul establishes a two-part assertion when he writes: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience” (2 Cor 5:10–11, ESV). First, Saint Paul crisply notes that Christians are accountable to God in all things, or as R. C. H. Lenski comments concerning both verses, “Our feeling toward the Lord controls all that we do in regard to men.”²¹⁴ Phillip Edgcumbe Hughes explains further, acknowledging that Paul “has a deep consciousness of the awe which should be inspired

²¹² See the section entitled “Parishioner Disengagement” and the commentary concerning 1 Tim 2:1–6.

²¹³ See the section entitled “Engagement in the Public Square as Mission.”

²¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 1018.

in the heart of every servant who will be required to give an account of his stewardship to his master.”²¹⁵ Both Lenski and Hughes understand that whatever a Christian does or does not do as he meets with the world must align with God’s will.

According to this will, and secondly, Paul encourages a specific behavior born from the previously mentioned accountability: deliberate dialogue fashioned to persuade (πείθομεν).²¹⁶ Receptive to the word’s durative sense, Lenski interprets it to mean “we are busy persuading,” which is to say, such dialogue is an ongoing and regular activity for Christians as they interact with one another and the surrounding world.²¹⁷ It is no surprise, then, that Lenski would also admit that persuasive dialogue “is still the great task of the Gospel ministry.”²¹⁸

Having cemented a relatively simple proposition, Saint Paul employs a unique blend of theological and diplomatic terms further along in the same chapter. He writes later in chapter 5: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us...” (2 Cor 5:20, ESV). To use the phrase “we are ambassadors of God” (πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ) is for Paul to paint a unique image, one portraying official dignitaries living in a foreign land and pressing for the interests of their homeland and its ruler. Indeed, this speaks to Paul’s point. Christians represent God’s interests in the mortal sphere. Hughes agrees, noting that Paul means for his reader to recall that an “ambassador acts and speaks not only on behalf of but also in the place of the sovereign from whom he has received his commission. It is his duty to proclaim faithfully

²¹⁵ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 186.

²¹⁶ Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 630.

²¹⁷ This thesis insists that pastors must work to persuade their parishioners in order that they would labor to persuade in the public square.

²¹⁸ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1018.

and precisely the message entrusted to him by the sovereign.”²¹⁹ David E. Garland addresses the natural flavor of Paul’s words, reminding readers that “surviving documents and inscriptions that provide us with some record of ancient diplomacy make it quite clear that envoys were usually sent to others as a sign of friendship and goodwill, to establish a relationship, to renew friendly relations, or to make an alliance.”²²⁰ Garland’s point caps one of this project’s noted assumptions, which is that engagement in the public square for the preservation of religious liberty is good, namely, beneficial for all involved.

Admittedly, the previously mentioned texts do not speak directly to public square engagement. Few texts do. They merely determine an arena for its legitimacy already understood by the church’s missiology. Beyond this, its enactment is just as available to the Bible’s reader throughout the Old and New Testaments. However, Saint Paul’s necessary demonstrations in the book of Acts seem most appropriate. Nevertheless, before visiting with Paul’s circumstances, the usual suspects of Matthew 22:15–22 and Romans 13:1–7 should at least be considered, even if only briefly.

Concerning Matthew 22, two warring factions confront the Lord: the Pharisees and the Herodians. In verse 17, the Pharisees ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (Matt 22:17, ESV). The question is a trap designed to enable charges from either of the enjoining parties. The Pharisees’ words are meant to force Jesus to take a public stand on a volatile issue.²²¹ Contextually, the Pharisees despised Caesar and believed paying him taxes was to disavow God.

²¹⁹ Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 210.

²²⁰ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 295.

²²¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary ed. David S. Dockery, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 330.

The Herodians were devout supporters of King Herod Antipas and, as such, were willing subscribers to Caesar’s rule. For Jesus to side with one party would be to alienate the other. Nevertheless, the Lord proves by His answer His divine brilliance, electing instead to define what C. L. Blomberg noted as “the Reformation doctrine of differing spheres of authority for government and religion and proved foundational for the American constitutional separation of church and state.”²²² Blomberg means what has already been established: the Two Kingdoms doctrine.

For Christ to say in verse 21, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:21, ESV), the Two Kingdoms are divinely admitted. Conversely, for the church to deny its duty to the state is to fracture the doctrine. Likewise, for the state to demand that its citizens worship Caesar as a god fractured it, too.²²³ Succinctly, the kingdom of the right hand owns worship, while the kingdom of the left hand owns civic duty. However, as will be shown from Paul’s words in Romans 13, both reside beneath God’s supreme rule and must bend to His will.

Concerning Romans 13:1–7, it is generally accepted within conservative Christianity that the mandate given is done so prescriptively, not descriptively.²²⁴ In other words, Paul is describing what Christians owe a government that holds to its divine ordination. Having called the civil rulers “God’s servant for your good” (Rom 13:4, ESV), the text that follows in verses 8 through 10 must necessarily affirm that any law acting contrary to the law of love and ultimately leading to harm is beyond the government’s scope. Accordingly, theologian and philosopher

²²² Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 331.

²²³ Henry Fairfield Burton, “The Worship of Roman Emperors,” *The Biblical World* 40, no. 2 (August 1912): 83.

²²⁴ Michael Morrison, “Romans 13 and Christian Submission to Civil Authority,” accessed April 6, 2023, <https://learn.gcs.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=4267>.

Francis A. Schaeffer insists: “The civil government, as all of life, stands under the law of God. In this fallen world God has given us certain offices to protect us from the chaos which is the natural result of that fallenness. But when any office commands what is contrary to the Word of God, those who hold that office abrogate their authority and they are not to be obeyed and that includes the state.”²²⁵

For Schaeffer, an ungodly government required a Christian’s disobedience, similar to that which Peter and the apostles demonstrated in Acts 5:29. Even more so, for governing authorities to hinder the gospel, that is, to suppress religious liberty, would be to engage in the citizenry’s cruelest harm, thereby requiring the Apostles to disobey men in order to remain faithful to God. Like Schaeffer, C. K. Barrett joins a Christian’s respect for the civil government only to the nature of its ordination, noting honor is due “not because they are powerful and influential men, but because they have been appointed by God.”²²⁶

As was previously mentioned, the Scriptures are well-supplied with relative examples concerning believers engaging in the public square, whether for or in opposition to the established rulers.²²⁷ Among these, 1 Timothy 2:1–6 has already been mentioned. It should be noted that in this text, Saint Paul employs a unique word that potentially adds dimension to a Christian’s civic concerns.

In the text’s first verse, Saint Paul teaches Christians to offer “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings” (1 Tim 2:1, ESV) concerning the state and its citizens.

Interestingly, amid the steady cadence of recognizable terms, Paul employs ἐντεύξεις

²²⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 90–91.

²²⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 248.

²²⁷ Exod 1:15–21; Josh 2; 1 Kgs 18:4; Ps 94:20; Isa 10:1–2; Jer 22:13; Dan 3:1–12, 6:4–12; Matt 2; Rev 13:14; and the like.

(intercessions) often synonymously with intervention. However, James Strong further interprets ἐντεύξεις to mean appeal through formal conversation or interview.²²⁸ In other words, to intercede requires reciprocating dialogue. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes a similar usage throughout history. For example, ἐντεύξεις is used in Plato's *Politicus* to describe general dealings, and in particular, negotiations with pirates. Aristotle's *Rhetorica* employs it to mean interpersonal dialogue. Flavius Josephus uses it in his *Antiquitates* to describe the claims of Queen Cleopatra VII Philopator to Judaea,²²⁹ likely including Cleopatra's intercessions with Antony concerning Herod the Great.²³⁰

While speculative, it certainly seems possible that by using ἐντεύξεις, Paul does not mean for all Christians to expect back-and-forth conversations with God. Few in history (Paul being one) were elected for such experiences. Instead, a Christian's civic concern rises vertically through supplication and prayer while also engaging horizontally relative to the ones in earthly authority. This is to say that Christians plead with God in the kingdom of the right hand while not neglecting their civic duty to plead also with authorities in the kingdom of the left. Logically, a prescriptive thanksgiving concludes Paul's catechesis, revealing his hopeful outcome: Christians would do this and, subsequently, enjoy peacefully led, godly, and dignified lives free to share the gospel (1 Tim 2:2–4, ESV). Insinuation or not, Paul embodied this dual-directional activity throughout his ministry. A tour through the Book of Acts reveals this.

²²⁸ James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Electronic Edition. (Ontario, CA: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), G1783.

²²⁹ Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 244.

²³⁰ Jan Willem Henten, "Cleopatra in Josephus: From Herod's Rival to the Wise Ruler's Opposite," in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*, vol. 59, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2005), 115–6.

The tour arrives first at Acts 16:16–40, where Paul is arrested, beaten, and jailed by town magistrates for exorcising a demon-possessed slave girl whose fortune-telling abilities had proven profitable for her owners. The following day, the magistrates gave orders to release Paul (and Silas, who was with him). However, Paul invoked his rights as a Roman citizen, reminding the officers he was beaten and jailed without a trial, eventually making a demand of his offenders that was awarded in course.²³¹ Paul’s demand was an unquestioned claim requiring that the magistrates escort him to the city gates, thereby serving punishment through embarrassment to the unjust rulers before the entire community.

Paul behaves similarly in Acts 22:22–29. Having once again been unjustly arrested, before the commander could have him flogged, Paul invoked his rights, asking rhetorically, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?” (Acts 22:25, ESV). Fearful of his disregard for Paul’s right to a fair trial, the commander released him. However, Paul remained under his jurisdiction, which Paul freely obeyed, even though it extended Paul’s troubles, eventually leading him to stand before Governor Felix. Having already established his case in Acts 22:6–10 as religious discrimination, Paul established the same premise before Felix in Acts 24:14–21. Imprisoned but not executed, Paul stayed the course for two more years, pleading similarly before King Herod Agrippa and Governor Festus.

In conclusion, even as Saint Paul was no stranger to pursuing legal means, his efforts served the goal he enunciated in 1 Timothy 2:1–6 and hoped for in Romans 13:1–7. Simply put, Christians labor in the public square because, firstly, they know God desires all to be saved. Secondly, by holding the government to its divine mandate and by maintaining religious liberty,

²³¹ “Rights of Roman Citizens,” accessed April 7, 2023, <http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/roman-life/rights-of-roman-citizens.htm>. Paul’s actions are tantamount to a first-century lawsuit.

a peaceful and quiet life lived in all godliness is a citizen's sunlit upland of possibility. Thirdly, religious liberty allows for the extension of the kingdom through the free preaching and teaching of the gospel, which Paul heralds as the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16, ESV).

Theoretical Foundations

While the phrase "the separation of Church and State" is by no means a recent construction, it becomes necessary to scan its versions by various interpretive schools, namely, separationism and accommodationism. Visiting history, John Witte Jr. reveals the phrase's traceability to first-century Christianity, eventually being "captured in the Christian clergy's perennial call of subsequent centuries for 'freedom of the church'—or what the Edict of Milan of 313 had called the 'free exercise and practice of religious groups.'"²³² He continues by describing five deliberate reasons behind the Founders' employment of the ideology in early America. The first is "to protect church affairs from state intrusion, the clergy from the magistracy, church properties from state interference, ecclesiastical rules and rites from political coercion and control."²³³ The second was to protect the state from the church, noting that much abuse has come among societies where religion and government have been wholly united.²³⁴ The third was to defend individual liberty against intrusion from the church or state or their collaboration.²³⁵ The fourth intended to protect "individual states from interference by the federal government in

²³² John Witte Jr, "Facts and Fictions About the History of Separation of Church and State," *Journal of Church and State* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 28.

²³³ Witte Jr, "Facts and Fictions," 29.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

governing local religious affairs.”²³⁶ The fifth sought “to protect society and its members from unwelcome participation in and support for religion.”²³⁷

Separationism

None of the previously mentioned premises establish absolute separation. Witte says as much throughout his article, noting that it was not until “the turn of the nineteenth century, the language of separation of church and state also began to fuel broader campaigns to remove traditional forms and forums of religion in law, politics, and society altogether....”²³⁸ He first points to the less-than-congenial debates between Thomas Jefferson’s Republican party and John Adams’s Federalist party. In short, each attacked the other’s political positions theologically, one calling the other the anti-Christ and the other retorting likewise. Witte describes the ever-increasing blast radius that resulted as “the opening shots in a century-long American battle over the meaning and means of separating church and state,” adding that the conflict’s campaign was “fought in Congress and in the courts, in states and on the frontier, in churches and in the schools, in clubs and at the ballot box.”²³⁹

The 1947 Supreme Court decision in *Everson v. Board of Education* would dramatically cap a centuries-long battle. It was there “the Court applied the First Amendment Establishment Clause to the states: ‘Congress shall make no law....’, now became, in effect, ‘Governments of any kind shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion’—a rejection of the original federalist understanding of church and state.”²⁴⁰ Witte adds that Justice Hugo Black, a central

²³⁶ Witte Jr, “Facts and Fictions,” 32.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

figure for pure separationism, heavy-handedly applied a strict separationist view to the Establishment Clause, an ideology he learned as a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

Black's legacy appears to be apart from America's history, which was an intentional attempt to "strike a balance between coercion and freedom."²⁴¹ Professor of American Intellectual and Cultural History at Georgia State University, David Sehat, would call such a balance utopian, arguing that without strict separation, the truest goals of a democratic government set toward equality is all but disemboweled.²⁴² Others believe as Sehat, some going so far as to forbid the influence of religious conscience in the public square entirely. Former European Court of Human Rights judge András Sajó is one, insisting that for as stabilizing as religion might be, America's current form of government, constitutionalism, does not permit religious influence, and the only reason it continues to occur is because of government benevolence. Sajó continues, "The logic of contemporary liberalism compels the state, even in constitutionally secular countries such as France or Turkey, to adopt a positive, benevolent attitude toward religions, mostly for good reasons. Such attitudes flow not only from the political necessity of respecting powerful groups but from the obligations of tolerance."²⁴³

For Sajó, a constitutional framework is purposely designed to prevent religious infiltration and influence. It is purely and fundamentally secular. Although, secularism "as a social fact and as a feature of constitutionalism, is vulnerable to the challenges of strong religion because of its uncertainty as a legal concept,"²⁴⁴ which is to say secularism operates "at a social

²⁴¹ Witte Jr, "Facts and Fictions," 43.

²⁴² David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 298–99.

²⁴³ András Sajó, "Preliminaries to a Concept of Constitutional Secularism," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 6, no. 3–4 (July 2008): 615.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 609.

or cultural level,” making it susceptible to religious influence. For those pursuing the so-called balance intended by the Founders, this becomes the regular in-road for continued pressure from religious groups. Sajó believes “‘secularism’... as an accepted concept having constitutional value”²⁴⁵ will inevitably be weakened by religion’s participation in the public square, becoming “subject to the unprincipled wishy-washiness of balancing—or disregarded in the name of proportionality—for the sake of free exercise of religion.”²⁴⁶

Accommodationism

The alternate view, accommodationism, sees the relationship between church and state far differently. In short, accommodationism “rests on the belief that government and religion are compatible and necessary to a well-ordered society.”²⁴⁷ It further contends that the First Amendment cultivates Church and State cooperation rather than disinterest or enmity. Therefore, it allows the government to promote religion, but it does not allow the official establishment of religious institutions.

It was Abraham Kuyper, the late nineteenth-century Reformed pastor and Prime Minister of the Netherlands, who so famously said that “there is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign, does not cry ‘Mine!’”²⁴⁸ But that is not all he said. He prefaced his words by insisting that no part of humanity’s mental frame can be wholly divided from its other parts. By this, he intended to show Christ’s role as ruler over both

²⁴⁵ Sajó, “Preliminaries to a Concept of Constitutional Secularism,” 617.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ John R. Vile and Michael P. Bobic, “Accommodationism and Religion,” *The First Amendment Encyclopedia: Presented by the John Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment Studies*, last modified 2017, accessed February 5, 2023, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/825/accommodationism-and-religion>.

²⁴⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 468.

spheres, commonly referred to in theology as the Two Kingdoms doctrine. Perhaps more interesting are the words sent by James Madison, the fourth President of the United States, to Frederick Schaeffer in New York in December of 1821. Schaeffer, a Lutheran pastor (and, as such, an inheritor of Luther's world-shaping examination of the relationship between Church and State), had presided over the cornerstone ceremony for St. Matthew Lutheran Church in New York City. Doing so, he wrote and preached a sermon in which Luther's Two Kingdoms theology was crisply spoken.²⁴⁹ Schaeffer sent the sermon to Madison, who later replied:

It is a pleasing and persuasive example of pious zeal, united with pure benevolence and of a cordial attachment to a particular creed, untinged with sectarian illiberality. It illustrates the excellence of a system which, by a due distinction, to which the genius and courage of Luther led the way, between what is due to Caesar and what is due God, best promotes the discharge of both obligations. The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error so long rooted in the unenlightened minds of well-meaning Christians, as well as in the corrupt hearts of persecuting usurpers, that without a legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity.²⁵⁰

Madison describes the doctrine as best iterating what is due to God and what is owed to Caesar. As with Luther, who forbade Christians from trying to establish “the authority of worldly legal order,”²⁵¹ Madison denounces with capable eloquence dominionistic doctrines as well-meaning but false. He does the same with those who press for absolute separation of Church and State. In other words, for Madison, one of the nation's founders, drafters of its constitution, and first presidents, the Two Kingdoms doctrine delineates the best meaning of the phrase “the separation

²⁴⁹ Witte, “Facts and Fictions,” 23. Here, Witte notes that Luther's Two Kingdoms theology is a returning “to a variation on Augustine's two-cities theory,” which, on page 18, he sees iterated in Augustine's work *City of God*. There, “Augustine contrasted the City of God with the City of Man.” The City of God dealt with salvation and the Christian life. The City of Man “consisted of...the political and social institutions that God had commanded to maintain a modicum of order and peace.”

²⁵⁰ Robert S. Alley, *James Madison on Religious Liberty* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1985), 82.

²⁵¹ Martin Luther, *Christians and Government*, trans. Holger Sonntag (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran Press, 2024), 35. Luther argued that “Christians do not need” a Christianized earthly government by virtue of their residence in the kingdom of Christ.

of Church and State.” Additionally, the doctrine has the best grip on how and where the separation begins and ends.

Communication

H.L. Mencken said, “There is always an easy solution to every problem—neat, plausible, and wrong.”²⁵² Mencken’s point is that no single solution is perfect for each predicament. All require multiple steps relevant to various mechanisms. It is the same concerning Christian disengagement from the public square.

Voddie T. Baucham Jr. insists that false narratives must be destroyed. Calling for Christians to rise to the challenge, he provides plenty of helpful information to accomplish this.²⁵³ Owen Strachan comments similarly, asserting that “strongholds and false ideologies must be destroyed, not ignored or treated with a soft-shoe approach.”²⁵⁴ Calling for Christians to be salt and light and showing concern for compromised churches, Strachan encourages readers to make the difficult decision to leave such faltering fellowships.²⁵⁵ Natasha Crain promises to help her readers put their collective finger on what is happening in the world to respond when and where appropriate; to speak truth to falsehood, knowing that the gospel must be shared.²⁵⁶ Carl R. Trueman insists that complaining, while often therapeutic, accomplishes little. Instead, action is needed. Like Strachan, Trueman sees the need for faith consistency, questioning one’s denominational affiliation based on its handling of critical issues.²⁵⁷ For example, he writes, “We

²⁵² H. A. Staley, *The Tongue and Quill: Communicating to Manage in Tomorrow’s Air Force* (Montgomery, AL: Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, 1977), 252.

²⁵³ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 214–15, 230–33.

²⁵⁴ Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 206.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 204–5.

²⁵⁶ Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 21, 222, 228–233, 253.

²⁵⁷ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 383–85, 388–90.

cannot blithely accept no-fault divorce...and then complain that Obergefell redefined marriage.”²⁵⁸ Jeff Myers proposes keeping the government accountable and active opposition to evil. Of course, he offers plentiful material for establishing one’s arguments.

Reviewing the previously mentioned litany of advice, a common thread of encouragement is woven, and it is simply to “do.” In other words, the only way to hold the line and push back against cultural invasion is to take up one’s rifle and go to war. But as Mencken intuitively mused, there must be more to it. This thesis argues that to “do,” one must overcome the hurdles between the doer and the doing, many of which can be traced to basic unfamiliarity surrounded by fearful things. For the most part, pastors must understand the doctrines they confess while mastering their fear of the people they serve.

Conversely, congregation members must conquer fears bred by doctrinal ignorance and cultural isolation. But between the two, as leaders, the pastors bear the heaviest burden of responsibility. Under-shepherds of Christ, that is, those who stand in the stead and by the command of Christ (Jer 3:15; Matt 10:40), bear the yoke of authoritative biblical catechesis, which is “taking the initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the extension of God’s kingdom in the world.”²⁵⁹ This is only true because, like the people they lead, pastors are also followers. Timothy S. Laniak reminds contemporaries, “Appointment by God implies calling, stewardship and accountability.”²⁶⁰ In summary, pastors lead the people given into their care. These people were given into their care by the Author of the Two Kingdoms doctrine.

²⁵⁸ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 389.

²⁵⁹ Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 3.

²⁶⁰ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22.

In Romans 10:14–15, Saint Paul draws attention to the pastor’s epicentral task: preaching and teaching. These tasks are encased in communication in various forms. Human language comprises each of its parts, and in an elementary sense, pastors are both required and trained to handle it. In its essential nature, the handling concerns the careful transmission of God’s law and gospel message revealed through the Scriptures to people. The carefulness reflects what is true, which Jacob A. O. Preus calls the unbreakable “connection between the Word incarnate—the God-man, Jesus Christ—and the Word about the Word Incarnate....”²⁶¹ To carry the Bible’s message from its pages to the people is to give them Christ and His fullest counsel by both His law and His gospel; the law revealing in a three-fold manner the inescapability of humanity’s sinful predicament, the need to be curbed, and the way of holiness; the gospel revealing the solution to the sin problem through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Preus explains that to take great care with this message, that is, to communicate it creatively, is to acknowledge the Holy Spirit’s creative laboring in people’s hearts. John T. Pless also observes the same carefulness, retelling,

This is no easy task. Like any art, it is not learned quickly or without ongoing practice. Luther calls it the highest art: ‘Distinguishing between the Law and Gospel is the highest art in Christendom, one that every person who values the name Christian ought to recognize, know, and possess. Where this is lacking, it is not possible to tell who is Christian and who is pagan or Jew. That much is at stake in this distinction.’²⁶²

For Luther (and Pless), to mishandle the Word is to confuse its substance and, ultimately, be found indistinguishable from the world’s messages. For Preus, pastors (as theological influencers) must be willing to communicate the Word imaginatively. But it must be

²⁶¹ Jacob A.O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 19.

²⁶² John T. Pless, *Handling the Word of Truth: Law and Gospel in the Church Today* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 22.

remembered that the exercise is not a laboring toward dazzlement. Instead, as has been inferred, it has a goal. Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of London and authority in applied linguistics, H. G. Widdowsen, describes the goal as a transference of “common assumptions, beliefs, and values” or a “shared culture.”²⁶³ The language used is not *of* its style but rather *for* its purpose, being in complete service to its goal.²⁶⁴

This review’s remaining portion will consider written communication as a pastor’s practical opportunity for leading himself and others from fear’s lands through steady communiqués using vibrant language carefully cultivated to record, reflect, and clearly express things that must be understood, employed, and remembered.

Communication’s Natural Potency

Speaking to a group of surgeons in 1923, Rudyard Kipling lectured concerning language communication, saying:

I am, by calling, a dealer in words; and words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind. Not only do words infect, ergotise, narcotise, and paralyse, but they enter into and colour the minutest cells of the brain, very much as madder mixed with a stag’s food at the zoo colours the growth of the animal’s antlers. Moreover, in the case of the human animal, that acquired tint, or taint, is transmissible.²⁶⁵

Kipling’s point was to describe language’s innate power to influence humankind, asserting an effectual potency capable of reaching beyond the boundaries of the natural world. Two of Kipling’s expert observers, Lisa Lewis and Sandra Kemp, affirm his insistence, describing his

²⁶³ H. G. Widdowson, “Communication and Community: The Pragmatics of ESP,” *60th Birthdays of Ann Johns and John Swales* 17, no. 1 (1998): 13.

²⁶⁴ Tangentially, this presupposes self-absorption’s exclusion from communication’s tool chest. This is to say that a genuine communicator will employ vibrant language to benefit the message and its recipient, not for skillfully distracting exhibitionism.

²⁶⁵ William B. Dillingham, *Rudyard Kipling: Hell and Heroism* (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 171–72.

literary skill as an “almost spiritual sense.”²⁶⁶ Their description understands and embraces Kipling’s deeper inclination, which he shared with the Canadian Authors’ Association, saying that “after all the men who do things have done them, and the men who say things about their doings have said them, it is only words—nothing but words—that live to show the present how, and in what moods, men lived and worked in the past.”²⁶⁷

Like others before him and his contemporaries, Kipling accepted the premise that written words are far more than “the mere dress of thought. Such a definition degrades them below their sphere. They are, as Wordsworth has happily said, the incarnation of thought. They bear the same relation to ideas that the body bears to the soul.”²⁶⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a poet of the English romantic genre, commented similarly while observing Dante, referring specifically to his *De la volgere Eloquenza*: “Dante was very sensible in his own excellence, and speaks of poets as guardians of the vast armory of language, which is the intermediate something between matter and spirit....”²⁶⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in the same vein: “Language!—the blood of the soul, sir!—into which our thoughts run and out of which they grow.”²⁷⁰ Mark Twain highlighted the importance of word choice relative to its potential influence, remarking that the “difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—’tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”²⁷¹ Edward F. Markquart encourages “greater skill

²⁶⁶ Rudyard Kipling, *Writings on Writing*, ed. Sandra Kemp and Lisa Lewis (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xxi.

²⁶⁷ Kipling, *Writings on Writing*, xxi.

²⁶⁸ George Hooker Colton and James Davenport Whelpley, *The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art, and Science - Volume I* (New York, NY: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 182.

²⁶⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume IV*, ed. William Greenough Thayer Shedd (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1858), 386–87.

²⁷⁰ Michael A. Weinstein, *The Imaginative Prose of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 52.

²⁷¹ George Bainton, *The Art of Authorship* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1890), 88.

in using vivid language and concrete images; we do this by reading well and writing well. Almost all the authors encourage us...to develop greater skill in using pictorial language, words which you can see, smell, touch, taste, hear, and feel.”²⁷² Stanley Hauerwas echoes Markquart’s concern, writing that “[we] can only act in the world we can see—but we can only see by learning to say. We cannot see the truth about ourselves or the world just by looking. Seeing requires a training through words that transforms our very being.”²⁷³

As Kipling claimed, and other writers continue to affirm, doing and saying occur. Still, only the written word has the potential to capture what was said and done in ways that influence indefinitely beyond a moment’s initial audience. With written communication’s potent transmission, the complexity, gravity, and importance of history’s moments, as well as the thoughts and passions of the people involved, are delivered through the current generation to future generations. Ali Alsaawi agrees, asserting written communication’s durability, namely, that it can be examined and debated long after its initial scribing. By comparison, oral communication is fleeting and misinterpretable.²⁷⁴ Moreover, Alsaawi contends that colloquial communication is community-binding, noting that language communications “with social priority are superior” because they transmit culture.²⁷⁵

The continuance conduit has underpinnings. In other words, communication involves rules. Thomas G. Long wisely notes: “Speakers and hearers, writers and readers meet on common ground defined in art by the mutual agreement that certain forms will govern the

²⁷² Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 184.

²⁷³ Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church*, 22.

²⁷⁴ Ali Alsaawi, “Spoken and Written Language as Medium of Communication: A Self-Reflection,” *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature* 8, no. 2 (2019): 196.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

communication between them. These forms are not static; they are dynamic. They have parts, but moving parts.... If the speaker is playing one game and the listener another, communication breaks down.”²⁷⁶ Long provides a practical example:

When we watch the evening news we expect the newscaster to operate by the rules of informational communication, and our listening is governed by the rules of that game. If the newscaster uses two “because” in a row, we wince at the error and mentally erase one. If, on the other hand, we are hearing a poem, we have different expectations. We are listening according to another set of rules, and “because” twice in a row does not make us wince; it makes us ponder.²⁷⁷

Robert P. Holley is equally mindful, requiring careful consideration of the rules before undertaking the effort, with clarity being the writer’s ultimate aim. Writing for public consumption in the Internet age requires deliberate concern for audience, goal, and tone measurements.²⁷⁸ Edward C. Brewer and Terence L. Holmes write, “Misunderstanding...is commonplace and miscommunication is a frequent contributor....”²⁷⁹ They trace misunderstanding to miscommunicated worldviews relayed through ambiguous and equivocating communication. Researchers John De Nobile and Ayse Aysin Bilgin add concern for the recipient’s information threshold, writing that overload “means having to deal with too much information or complexity,” leading to similar miscommunication and misunderstanding.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 14–15.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷⁸ Robert P. Holley, “Effective Written Communication for Successful Management,” *Journal of Library Administration* 63, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 112–13.

²⁷⁹ Edward C. Brewer and Terence L. Holmes, “Better Communication = Better Teams: A Communication Exercise to Improve Team Performance,” *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* 59, no. 3 (September 2016): 290.

²⁸⁰ John De Nobile and Ayse Aysin Bilgin, “A Structural Model to Explain Influences of Organisational Communication on the Organisational Commitment of Primary School Staff,” *Education Sciences* 12, no. 6 (2022): 5.

The consensus is then to harness written communication in service to a precise aim. Again, Holley insists the writer “should have clear reasons for writing the document and identify its intended goal.”²⁸¹ But no matter the goal, other requisites are required in the exchange, lest its content and purpose remain apart from its recipient.

Communication Among Community

Pastors lead communities. Accordingly, they influence. Influence requires trust. Furthermore, pastoral influence reaches beyond the community’s boundaries, representing “not merely their own opinions, but their community’s consensus.”²⁸² In other words, pastors lead and represent their communities before the on-looking world in official capacities. However, a challenge emerges from within this framework. While a pastor may embody the community he leads, he may not enjoy the community’s trust to do so. As a result, a breakdown occurs.

When a pastor is trusted to represent his community to the surrounding world, the community members become inextricably linked to their community’s identity, becoming representatives themselves. Consequently, the possibility arises in the public square for questions like, “Are you a member of that pastor’s church who wrote the editorial about abortion being murder?” In such circumstances, Jeff Myers encourages Christians to speak up and be personal, having anticipated the possibility through practice.²⁸³ But as was noted early on in this review, doctrinal content is required to do this. As the worshipping community’s leader, it is the pastor’s job to provide it. And so, a conduit of trust must exist between pastor and parishioner, one capable of transmitting content without restriction. In most organizations, this conduit is formed

²⁸¹ Holley, “Effective Written Communication for Successful Management,” 113.

²⁸² Bradshaw and Mathewes-Green, *Healing Humanity*, 20.

²⁸³ Myers, *Truth Changes Everything*, 199–201.

and maintained through organizational communication. Studying the relationship between school principals and their staff, De Nobile and Bilgin describe organizational communication's matrix:

Organisational communication has been defined broadly as the communication processes that typify the human element of organisations and as the interactions that facilitate organisational sense making. Other definitions are more specific, referring to the sharing of information among people and the relational and informational interactions that help organisations get things done.²⁸⁴

De Nobile and Bilgin remind us that organizational communication's components include several factors determining its success or failure. The assumption is that trust is one.

Trust

Research concerning successful communication's inherent need for trust appears vast. Nevertheless, gaps in the study remain. For example, very little research has been done to address risk's connection to trust in communication. Among the various models demonstrating trust's arrangement between trustee and trustor, Bernd Blöbaum is the exception, recently visiting with risk relative to journalism and binding it to the trustor's propensity for trust and risk tolerance.²⁸⁵

Before much more distant models, such as the Mean World Index²⁸⁶ and the Perceived Realism Scales,²⁸⁷ Paola Pascual-Ferrá reveals trust's initial investigation relative to persuasive communication appearing in early research concerning public opinion and persuasion. He writes:

²⁸⁴ De Nobile and Bilgin, "A Structural Model to Explain Influences of Organisational Communication on the Organisational Commitment of Primary School Staff," 3.

²⁸⁵ Bernd Blöbaum, ed., *Trust and Communication: Findings and Implications of Trust Research* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 15–16.

²⁸⁶ Nancy Signorielli and Michael Morgan, *Cultivation Analysis: New Directions in Media Effects Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990), 99. The Mean World Index measures the effects of violent images on people.

²⁸⁷ Robin L. Nabi and Mary Beth Oliver, *The SAGE Handbook of Media Processes and Effects* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 425.

“The first measures of trust in communication emerged in the shadow of two world wars. The fact that most of this initial research was in large part a legacy of early 20th-century wartime propaganda matter in order for us to understand the forces that shaped our discipline’s approach to the study of trust.”²⁸⁸ Pascual-Ferrá references the need to manufacture public consent through emotional manipulation during wartime to help protect citizens against enemy messaging.²⁸⁹ Erwin Lutzer acknowledges the potential dangers when communication’s method is to steer emotion, ultimately setting aside facts as secondary.²⁹⁰ For Lutzer, there is no such thing as good propaganda. However, great care with language, an instrument capable of stirring emotional responses, must be employed in service to the truth.²⁹¹ Interestingly, history has already resonated similarly, setting Saint Augustine’s concerns before us:

Rhetoric, after all, being the art of persuading people to accept something, whether it is true or false, would anyone dare to maintain that truth should stand there without any weapons in the hands of its defenders against falsehood; that those speakers, that is to say, who are trying to convince their hearers of what is untrue, should know how to get them on their side, to gain their attention and have them eating out of their hands by their opening remarks, while those who are defending the truth should not? That those should utter their lies briefly, clearly, plausibly, and these should state their truths in a manner too boring to listen to, too obscure to understand, and finally, too repellant to believe? That those should attack the truth with specious arguments, and assert falsehoods, while these should be incapable of either defending the truth or refuting falsehood? That those, to move and force the minds of their hearers into error, should be able by their style to terrify them, move them to tears, make them laugh, give them rousing encouragement, while these on behalf of truth stumble along slow, cold and half asleep.²⁹²

Well-credentialed as an executive marketer, Natasha Crain weighs in, first encouraging, “People are most influenced when (1) a message directly speaks to strongly felt needs, and (2)

²⁸⁸ Pascual-Ferrá, “The Measurement of Trust in Communication Research,” 5.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 4–5.

²⁹⁰ Lutzer, *No Reason to Hide*, 140–41.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 145–46.

²⁹² Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 278.

that message is prominent in their life.”²⁹³ However, like Lutzer and Augustine, Crain warns of the church’s enemies weaponizing these touchpoints, reminding that secular activists “clearly understand that language is a key stepping-stone toward changing public perceptions of morality and...framing the discussion....”²⁹⁴

Concerning trust’s gravity in communication, Pascual-Ferrá continues the discussion, noting that communication research has unquestionably established trust’s connection to more than just public opinion. It is also indissoluble from source interpretation, leading to accepted or rejected credibility.²⁹⁵ In other words, trust has multiple substructures contributing to its stability, each dealing “with expectations and perceived motivations, or intentions, of the other.”²⁹⁶ Blöbaum agrees, citing the motivations as an interpretation of competence, reliability, and professionalism.²⁹⁷ Perceived wobbliness among any risks distrust for the whole, which Pascual-Ferrá admits “could, in turn, lead to withdrawal”²⁹⁸ of a communicator’s target audience. For De Nobile and Bilgin, withdrawal equals a waning commitment to the organization.²⁹⁹ Observing this, they write that individuals with higher commitment dedicate more muscle and demonstrate the desire to be “involved in the life of the organization...and are generally more productive as a result.”³⁰⁰ They add that lower levels of organizational commitment reflect people who “are less

²⁹³ Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 51.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁹⁵ Pascual-Ferrá, “The Measurement of Trust in Communication Research,” 4.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁹⁷ Blöbaum, *Trust and Communication: Findings and Implications of Trust Research*, 19.

²⁹⁸ Pascual-Ferrá, “The Measurement of Trust in Communication Research,” 5.

²⁹⁹ De Nobile and Bilgin, “A Structural Model to Explain Influences of Organisational Communication on the Organisational Commitment of Primary School Staff,” 2. “Organisational commitment has been defined as the strength of an individual’s identification and involvement with an organisation, evidenced by a desire to stay with, exert effort for, and believe in the goals of the organization.”

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

likely to do these things and more likely to engage in withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism and turnover....³⁰¹ Relative to trust, they continue:

Openness of communication refers to the extent to which interactions are allowed to be honest and candid.... Crowther observed that openness of leadership to critique and staff member involvement in leadership roles are drivers of commitment. From an in-depth case study, Cherkowski noted openness behaviours to be associated with committed staff members but also that trust was an important factor and that downward supportive communication behaviours fostered openness and trust.³⁰²

De Nobile and Bilgin make another crucial association: staff trust in the school's principal produces positive warmth between staff and school clientele, resulting in enhanced effectiveness.³⁰³ This matters to the organization's broader identity communication to the extended community. In other words, and as Bettina Distel, Holger Koelmann, Florian Schmolke, and Jörg Becker also show, trust leads to acceptance of the leadership and its message, resulting in demonstrations of the approval beyond the respective trustee and trustor relationship.³⁰⁴

The *Harvard Business Review* editors agree with the above sentiments and, as a result, count careful communication leading to trust as any organization's most important tool. For the editors, such communication overcomes employee resistance, aids motivation, and invites individual investment in the communal identity and purpose.³⁰⁵ However, the editors encourage another measure of mindfulness. They note that individuals are naturally attuned to

³⁰¹ De Nobile and Bilgin, "A Structural Model to Explain Influences of Organisational Communication on the Organisational Commitment of Primary School Staff," 2.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰⁴ Blöbaum, *Trust and Communication: Findings and Implications of Trust Research*, 163.

³⁰⁵ Harvard Business Review, ed., *Strategy: Create and Implement the Best Strategy for Your Business*, 1st edition. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 117.

inconsistencies, citing that trust-eroding discrepancies will be discovered through such determiners as tone, message consistency, and perceived sincerity.³⁰⁶

Trust's Framework: Warmth, Repetition, and Devotion

Similar to pastor-parishioner relationships, physician-patient associations engage in crucial information exchanges. Physician-patient relationships enjoy over three decades of research proving that information received warmly, regardless of its amount or content, enhances trust's bond. In other words, when doctors communicate in ways reflecting a sense of personality and one-to-one humanness, patients invest trust, seeing physicians as genuinely knowing and understanding their innermost concerns.³⁰⁷ In a study of patient expectations, researchers Xiaoyu He, Qinhua Sun, and Cinnamon Stetler conclude that a “warm and friendly communication style” contributes to improvement.³⁰⁸ Writing for *Harvard Business Review*, researchers Amy J. C. Cuddy, Matthew Kohut, and John Neffinger refer to previous research by social psychologist Alex Todorov, showing that communication recipients sense warmth more quickly than competence. However, they further claim that when both are communicated, such leaders become the trusted sources in the most perilous times.³⁰⁹ They are considered both caring and competent.

Described by researchers Xingyao Ren, Lan Xia, and Fiangan Du as “an important factor for impression and relationship formation in the practice of services marketing,” the

³⁰⁶ Harvard Business Review, ed., *Strategy*, 119.

³⁰⁷ Howard S. Friedman and Roxane C. Silver, eds., *Foundations of Health Psychology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 327.

³⁰⁸ Xiaoyu He, Qinhua Sun, and Cinnamon Stetler, “Warm Communication Style Strengthens Expectations and Increases Perceived Improvement,” *Health Communication* 33, no. 8 (August 3, 2018): 944.

³⁰⁹ Amy J. C. Cuddy, Matthew Kohut, and John Neffinger, “Connect, Then Lead,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 1, 2013, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://hbr.org/2013/07/connect-then-lead>.

feeling of warmth as relational communication appears “crucial for encouraging loyalty and building long-term relationships.”³¹⁰ Their findings insist that warmth is “an important variable”³¹¹ because the “warmth dimension captures traits related to perceived intent, including friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness, and morality.”³¹² For them, warmth is essential to trust, and trust leans into psychological closeness, which they describe as “the feelings of attachment and perceived connection with another entity.”³¹³ They explain that psychological closeness is powerful, shaping both feelings and decision-making. And still, its influence reaches further, interpreting the relationship as truthful and benevolent. Bernd Blöbaum points to research by Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman³¹⁴ as sufficient proof for these interpretations.³¹⁵

Ren’s, Xia’s, and Du’s findings also communicate warmth’s relation to perceived effort as a measurement of integrity and sincerity. They clarify that services are considered trustworthy and sincere when partnered with the perception of greater effort. Conversely, the perception of less effort interprets service as insincere. This is to say that a person who demonstrates devotion to the work and the one being served by the work is more likely to be considered warmly sincere and trustworthy.

Referencing a dissertation by James Loomis, Pascual-Ferrá acknowledges that people who steadily demonstrate their devotion through regular communication enjoy increased trust

³¹⁰ Xingyao Ren, Lan Xia, and Jiangang Du, “Delivering Warmth by Hand: Customer Responses to Different Formats of Written Communication,” *The Journal of Services Marketing* 32, no. 2 (2018): 223.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 225.

³¹⁴ Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman, “An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust,” *The Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 709–734.

³¹⁵ Blöbaum, *Trust and Communication: Findings and Implications of Trust Research*, 17.

from their messaging recipients. Loomis noted that “the probability [of trust] increased as the level of communication increased....”³¹⁶ For Pascual-Ferrá, this also sheds light on trust’s interlinkage to accepted expertise. A person is considered credible not only by communicating content competence but by communicating character, sociability, composure, and the like.³¹⁷ The more they communicate warmly, the more trust increases. Ren, Xia, and Du also hint at the muscle of communicative repetition, writing, “People habitually form evaluative impressions of others, often without effort of intention.” This leans into Blöbaum’s model in that trust “is understood as a process and therefore has a time dimension.”³¹⁸

Contributing to the same volume, Bernadette Uth, Laura Badura, and Blöbaum admit a lag in research relative to the development of trust over time while asserting that as situational as trust may so often be, time remains crucial to its growth or decline.³¹⁹ President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Albert Mohler, crisply consolidates repetition’s place in the time equation:

Finally, the effective leader understands that the message has to be communicated again and again and again. If you listen to the most influential leaders, you will see that they repeat themselves over and over. This is not the monotonous repetition of a single-track mind, but the intentional, symphonic, and strategic repetition of central truths, cherished beliefs, common strategies, and shared principles.³²⁰

Turning back to devotion’s essentiality demonstrated over time, William H. Willimon writes intuitively, “Whatever we say, it must take the form of witness.... We can only testify to

³¹⁶ Pascual-Ferrá, “The Measurement of Trust in Communication Research,” 9.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12–14.

³¹⁸ Blöbaum, *Trust and Communication: Findings and Implications of Trust Research*, 15.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³²⁰ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 94–95.

what we have seen and heard.”³²¹ Willimon’s point is that a speaker or writer (in this case, a preacher) must believe what he is preaching or forfeit his credibility. He must communicate in ways revealing an otherwise unseen personal relationship with the material. George Washington Ivey Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, Richard B. Hays, portrays steady devotion similarly. However, he does so from the student’s perspective. Describing his disinterest in Shakespeare, Hays’s attention was kindled over time by a former Professor, Alvin Kernan. Hays insists Kernan was by no means a showman lecturer but instead consistently demonstrated a genuine love for Shakespeare’s texts. Hays relays Kernan’s demonstration of devotion:

[Kernan’s] teaching method, as I remember it, was simply to engage in reflective close readings...delineating their rich texture of image and metaphor and opening up their complex themes—moral, philosophical, and religious. Often, Kernan would devote a significant part of his lecture time to reading the text aloud, not in a highly dramatic manner, but with sensitivity to the texts’ rhythms and semantic nuances. I would often sit in class thinking, “Oh, I hadn’t heard that in the text before.” And I would leave the class pondering the problems that Shakespeare addressed: love, betrayal, fidelity, sacrifice, death, and hope.³²²

Kernan demonstrated a relationship with the texts, one that showed expertise, devotion, and careful expression. This devotion, carefully communicated to his students, stirred a similar affection. In his long-standing volume *Power Beyond Words: Communication Systems of the Spirit and Ways of Teaching Religion*, Allan Hart Jahsmann proves little has changed concerning this point. Concerned with communicating ethereal things, Jahsmann juxtaposes knowledge and personal knowledge, showing the former as essential content and the latter as so much more. Knowledge made personal (or thoughtful knowledge) involves experience and passion. Thoughtful knowledge carries the content across the chasms of ostentatiousness and shallow

³²¹ Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*, 91.

³²² Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, 273.

sentimentality in ways that make it graspable for its recipient.³²³ Helmut Thielicke handles the same premise in his seminal volume, *The Trouble with the Church*. There, he describes a communicator who immerses his message in creative expression, revealing personal devotion as one who lives in the house of his faith and its doctrines.³²⁴

Creative Writing

Most literature streams relative to creative writing (and this project in general) appear to move in one direction. This is to say; when encouraging creative writing styles among pastors, most experts take aim at the sermon. Of course, a pastor's day includes content transmission opportunities beyond what the pulpit offers. Whether email, newsletters, parochial reporting, or any of the routinely communicative endeavors a day might bring, it is in these moments that the theological implications of basic human-to-human communication enliven, becoming an avenue for genuine connections that strengthen the pastor and parishioner relationship. Examining Immanuel Kant's aesthetical theories, Jonathan Culler considers works of literature as powerful conduits capable of bridging the divide between the physical (material) and conceptual (spiritual) worlds.³²⁵ No matter what the literary work might be, additional potential is unleashed when language creativity is added.

In *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, Jane Piirto leans into humorism, highlighting Calvin Trilling, Woody Allen, and Garrison Keillor. Piirto describes their efforts' double-edged sword, noting that each communicates in ways that stir laughter. However, there is "a serious purpose in their work [as they] demonstrate that humor is used by writers to make points about

³²³ Allan Hart Jahsmann, *Power Beyond Words: Communication Systems of the Spirit and Ways of Teaching Religion* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), 100–101.

³²⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *The Trouble with the Church* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965), 5.

³²⁵ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Brief Insight* (New York, NY: Sterling Publishing Co., 2009), 43.

the follies and foibles of all of us.”³²⁶ Piirto’s point is that creative writing styles can carry what might otherwise be considered the “hard news” to a reader or listener in ways that stir willing receptivity relative to the “self.”

Perhaps in the spirit of Kant, Nick Jowett suggests that creative writing builds bridges, effectually negating a message’s possible triteness because it can “put away the doctrinal clichés and create stories that move and excite people towards fresh apprehensions of God’s love.”³²⁷

Although more concerned with preaching, Fleming Rutledge observes in ways that suggest creativity’s broader applications in communication between pastor and parishioner. Referring to a lesson learned from her homiletics professor, Edmund Steimle, Rutledge explains that while one can talk dryly about any topic and assume one has communicated its content, a carefully crafted message, one imbued with human personality, establishes a measure of intimacy more likely to result in the reader or listener forming a relationship with the communicator’s message.³²⁸

Concerning creative writing’s benefits as a practice, Kenneth O. Gangel notes that “the most significant value of creative writing is the exploration into self which it provides. When we articulate our feelings or ideas about a certain matter on paper, we tend to discipline our minds into orderly thinking about that subject.”³²⁹ Gangel’s point is multi-faceted. Not only does creative writing dig deeper into a subject’s strata, but as the subject is mined, what is removed is

³²⁶ Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman, eds., *The Psychology of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

³²⁷ Nick Jowett, “The Priest as a Creative Writer,” accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/4-october/faith/faith-features/the-priest-as-a-creative-writer>.

³²⁸ Fleming Rutledge, *Help My Unbelief* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 4.

³²⁹ Kenneth O. Gangel, “Creative Writing as a Teaching Technique,” accessed April 10, 2023, <https://bible.org/seriespage/23-creative-writing-teaching-technique>.

inherently cataloged through the lens of “self,” resulting in more muscular personal attachments to the subject that produce greater understanding.

Theoretically, as one practices creative writing relative to a subject, one becomes better acquainted and more agile with the various dimensions of that subject’s fundamental elements. Equally, the communication’s recipients are less likely to resist the message or the one bringing it. However, the message’s purpose must be strictly maintained. In other words, while creative language might lend itself to entertainment, in this case, its most authentic goal is to influence the recipient in ways that produce new perspectives leading to lifestyle changes. Therefore, a theoretical foundation for this thesis’ effort becomes the following perspective, namely, that just as a poet takes great care to establish a literary framework designed to engage readers in ways that move them, so also should the pastor labor in the same way concerning crucial issues requiring parishioner engagement.

As with the theological foundations, the above theoretical foundation is not complicated. A somewhat simplified example of the premise would be first to say, “The boy looked at the blue sky.” Such a statement shares essential information. However, its somnolent commonality assures its forgettability. Applying creative writing to the essential information draws the reader more intimately into the message. For example, a much more fertile image is painted when the writer scribes, “More than captivating, the sky tempted the boy’s gaze toward its sapphire endlessness.” With this rendition, the reader meets the boy and learns something about him. He is intrigued by the sky’s loveliness, enough to contemplate its particulars. Even further, another character is introduced by using the literary device of personification: the sky. Between the two, a relationship is presented, one the reader is more likely to investigate. With this recrafting of a commonly worded sentence, there is more for the listener to grasp, investigate, and retain,

leaving the impression long after uninteresting particulars have faded. Roslyn Petelin says this is true because creative language lends itself toward reality's creation. She writes, "Language is epistemic, not merely communicative; that is, it is part of the process by which we create knowledge."³³⁰ In theory, recipients are less likely to forget what they have experienced in reality's realm. Reality requires participants and observers. Creative writing provides for these in literary forms, establishing memories of having seen the drifting waves, smelled the springtime air, heard the lowing cattle, and met the narrative's characters.

To accomplish what has been described above, there are relatively simple disciplines to consider and employ. The researcher will teach these disciplines to participating pastors and foster them with a specialized rubric. Theoretically, if the participating pastors follow the rubric, they will communicate in ways that impact, influence, and ultimately change the reader. Various behaviors will demonstrate these changes in the reader. Relative to this project, the rubric will aim to increase interest in public square engagement as a significant demonstrable behavior.

Conclusion

In conclusion, having scanned the applicable literature's horizon while also probing the theological and theoretical foundations, there is a noticeable chasm between the research's prodding and the problem's testing. In other words, plenty of studies herald the desperate need for pastors to communicate Christian identity to the people in their care to bolster public square engagement. Still, there remains a gap concerning practical methods for trying. Pausing there, five conclusions appear most prominent thus far.

³³⁰ Roslyn Petelin, *How Writing Works: A Field Guide to Effective Writing* (Oxfordshire, England: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 84.

First, the Christian church in America is indeed in decline. Second, the decline is by no means apart from pastor and parishioner inhibitions leading to waning influence and cultural disengagement. Third, language has been and remains a powerful means of persuasion. Fourth, leaders who employ carefully crafted forms of communication creatively and steadily enjoy increased trust and a more substantial commitment to communal identity and its peripheral efforts. Last, the recipients of the communication tend to accept and demonstrate their commitment through activity. This action research project hopes to capitalize on these conclusions, venturing to fashion a writing regimen for a group of BOCPS-associated LCMS pastors designed to foster better communication, leading toward more robust engagement in the public square.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Before hoisting the methodological sails, the reader is reminded that the primary challenge this action research project sought to address has two relevant mechanisms. First, Christians are largely disengaged from the public square. This is to say, the ship's quartermaster, cook, gunners, boatswains, and other crew members are not fulfilling their duties to the expedition's benefactor, Christ, nor are they laboring to preserve their fellow crewmates' safety concerns. Second, the crew's disengagement is due, in part, to a lack of pastoral communication, namely, explicit leadership from the ship's captain concerning engagement's cruciality for the vessel and its gospel-preserving goals.

The inspirational wind available to the project's sails is BOCPS's years-long desire to reverse these unfortunate tendencies. A select few BOCPS-associated pastors stood ready at the helms of their individual ships. The research effort (the individual ships joined together as a fleet, all bearing the same heading) labored toward the hopeful harbors anticipated. The following intervention design details the nautical orders, contouring the adventure.

Intervention Design

Simplified Mechanics

Plenty of studies have concluded that keeping research simple leads to better outcomes. Harvard University chemist George Whitesides argued that researchers frequently focus too intently on irrelevant complexities, often to the detriment of simpler solutions that may be more effective. Having analyzed several of the most cited scientific papers within a few years of his

research efforts, Whitesides found that many focused on solving complicated problems. Still, few were easy to understand or resulted in practical or ready applications. He concluded that researchers should focus more on simpler practices geared toward simpler outcomes. In his mind, collectively, these have a higher impact on society by comparison to more complicated ones that result in little, if any, sensible value.¹ The National Science Foundation offers similar advice, noting that simpler research projects have a higher success rate than more complex projects. The study found that research projects that were well-defined and focused on a single objective were more likely to be completed successfully than those that were more complex and multi-faceted.²

Whether simple or complicated, no investigative approach is flawless. Nevertheless, it seemed best to pitch simplicity against this project's relatively simple thesis. To do this was to embrace the cardinal rule of uncomplicatedness among researchers. Of course, such simplicity did not mean superficiality or carelessness. It meant designing a five-point scale instead of a ten-point one. It meant precision through survey minimization rather than survey lengthening. It meant using neutral language. It meant restricting the number of criteria, applying them systematically, and only making changes if the research required.³

Development Theory Relative to Theological Perspective

Often misattributed to Mark Twain, there is the insightfully anonymous saying that the two most important days in a person's life are the day he is born and the day he discovers why.

¹ G. M. Whitesides, "The Frugal Way," *Angewandte Chemie* 54, no. 11 (2015): 3196–3209.

² National Science Foundation, *National Science Foundation Awards and Outcomes: Results of the FY 2014 Portfolio Review*, n.d., accessed April 24, 2023, <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2015/nsf15311/>.

³ Jan Jonker and Bartjan Pennink, *The Essence of Research Methodology: A Concise Guide for Master and PhD Students in Management Science* (Berlin, Germany: Springer Science & Business Media, 2010), 108.

In a simple sense, the adage is intuitive because it assumes a human developmental process born from experiences that, together, lead to one's unique purpose being realized. For Christians, however, the saying owns deeper strata relative to purpose. Digging into its soil, Jesus's words to Nicodemus in John 3:16 are discovered: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (ESV). In other words, and relative to the original saying, the two most important days in a person's life are the day he is born and the day he is born again, the latter being the most significant.

Saint Paul's well-kept words in Romans 8:28 carry the Christian further into the layers, reminding "that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose" (ESV). In John 6:40, Jesus plainly explains the purpose, announcing, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (ESV). The combined implication is that the days following one's birth are an experiential collage of good and bad necessities. Along the way, the believer navigates these needs, each moment bearing a promise relative to the second birth: God is employing all things in service to the believer's faith. With that, the believer need not feel compelled to search for and discover a uniquely superior purpose. The Christian's consequence was established by Christ on the cross and given by the power of the Holy Spirit through the gospel for faith (Rom 1:16) to live in this world as a citizen of the next. From this vantage, the Christian continues his mortal journey, ever developing the determination not to fulfill his own purposes but to embrace his calling by aligning faithfully with God's will in all circumstances. God's Word is neither silent nor inhibited in its concern for this process (2 Pet 3:18; Phil 1:6; Col 1:9–10; Heb 5:12–14; and the like). This action research project understands the described course and concern. It does so bearing in mind the following

observation of natural man by the well-known educational theorist Malcolm Knowles: “As the core principles of andragogy state, adults are most ready to learn when the learning meets an immediate life need....”⁴

Knowles’s comment arises from the third and fourth of his six andragogical assumptions.⁵ His first and second notions clarify that although adult learners are self-directed, they have developmental potential due to experience. His fifth and sixth tenets show that adults calibrate their learning relative to their experiences, ultimately being stirred by genuine internal motivations. Between these four principles are two that combine to serve as learning’s crucial ignitor: a readiness to learn prompted by a real-world obstacle that must be overcome.⁶

Knowles’s six assumptions are valuable to this action research project if only to clarify that such efforts are less about teaching and more about facilitating learning.⁷ Stepping from this clarity, Knowles’s thoughts are particularly worthwhile, especially as the project meets with identifying and solving a real-world challenge. Of course, Knowles’s other assumptions intersect with the project, too. For example, Knowles measures the self-directed nature of adult learning against the need to learn induced by personal experience. This project strides with Knowles’s premises as it facilitates opportunities for pastors to embrace and employ creative writing techniques designed to recall familiar contexts and promote thoughtful engagement in them. By doing this, pastors empower their parishioners to receive information, identify a crucial need,

⁴ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2011), 220.

⁵ Chris Kenyon and Stewart Hase, “Moving from Andragogy to Heutagogy,” *Vocational Education* 18, no. 1 (March 2001): 21–32.

⁶ James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, Illustrated edition. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 213–14.

⁷ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (Chicago, IL: Association Press, 1980), 131.

synthesize the need relative to their own experiences, and then act on it in uniquely individual ways.

Theological Growth

Of course, viewing this action research project through Knowles's lenses reveals far more than teleological ripples. It also reveals practical depths, that is, opportunities for fulfilling one's calling relative to God's deeper purpose. In other words, as Knowles's andragogical principles are, for the most part, given room to swirl, spiritual growth is indeed possible and also quite measurable.

Perhaps a more practical example would be to say that by emphasizing problem-solving while at the same time encouraging message recipients to apply biblical principles to currently unavoidable real-world challenges demonstrated in the public square, this action research project facilitates a deeper understanding of how the kingdom of the right intersects with the kingdom of the left. In other words, believers will learn why and how the Christian faith must be applied in the public square to fulfill its calling to align with God's holy will in all things. Furthermore, by encouraging self-directed learning and reflection in this process, the participating pastors and their message recipients will be nurtured in a thought process that allows a better view of the broader landscape of biblical theology's relevance to other facets of life, some of which could be intellect, vocation, communication, financial, and others.

Measuring the Theological Growth

Traditional Likert Scale surveys were employed to track theological growth. Conducting these surveys at the beginning and end of the research phase provided a way to observe and measure attitudinal movement from one point of theological understanding to another. Of course, observation and measurement potential depend upon thoughtfully designed survey questions

bound inextricably to the project's thesis. Mindful of this, specific areas for theological application pertaining to the stated need were woven into the survey designs. Some of these areas were Christian activism, levels of participation, and the like. Additionally, the questions in the first survey met with alternately worded questions in the second. The researcher placed these counterpart questions in the second survey to determine movement.⁸

Along with the Likert Scale surveys, the seminars aided the participating pastors in their communicative roles, allowed a forum to discuss the project's progress, and provided room to adjust for reliable outcomes. The researcher maintained notes (see Appendices H, I, and J) detailing the seminar proceedings. Doing so provided crucial narrative information necessary for meaningful data synthesis.

Online Surveys 1 and 2

As noted above, two surveys were conducted during the study. The first was administered at the beginning. The second was administered at its conclusion. The Likert Scale model was used for both. The Likert Scale model was selected for two reasons.

First, the Likert Scale model bears an inherent ability to measure directional attitudes relative to the specific subject matter being surveyed. The traditional Likert model, one allowing five responses, establishes a neutral reaction with two response degrees of positivity and two response degrees of negativity. In keeping with the goal of simplicity, the researcher used the traditional model primarily because more than five responses added a measure of degree subtlety considered unnecessary to the study.

⁸ It was ultimately determined that the same survey would be sent twice. This is discussed and presented in this chapter in Step 2 of the Study Progression.

Second, repeated conductions of similarly worded Likert surveys (using neutral language) to the same initial survey participants have the potential for showing attitudinal shifts. Because the available responses were weighted (see Appendix R), these shifts can be detected, isolated, examined, and concluded.

Project Participants

While various factors determine any project's eventual verity, its participants and their total number play an unarguably crucial role. At its inception, this project petitioned eleven pastors, hoping that at least five would participate. Ultimately, nine were enlisted from three states, each serving congregations with rosters of various sizes. As a result, the project's combined reach was potentially quite sizeable. This was beneficial because, typical to statistical theory, the larger the sampling size, the less likely the study will produce faulty outcomes or sampling errors.⁹

Project Congregations

With nine pastors come nine unique LCMS congregations. As stated, the pastors, and therefore their congregations, were first approached for their relationship with BOCPS. However, their average attendance numbers mattered, too. Lifeway Research reported that in 2022, 68 percent of Christian churches in America averaged 100 or fewer regular attendees. Almost half of this same group of churches had 50 or less. Only 24 percent of churches had 100 or more.¹⁰ The researcher believed these ratios were important snapshots demonstrating

⁹ Paul J. Lavrakas, *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008), 839.

¹⁰ Aaron Earls, "Churches Are Open but Still Recovering From Pandemic Attendance Losses - Lifeway Research," last modified November 8, 2022, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/11/08/churches-are-open-but-still-recovering-from-pandemic-attendance-losses/>.

conditions in America that appear to be anything but irregular, and he wanted to maintain this landscape in his research.¹¹ As it would go, the hoped-for ratios were relatively preserved. Of the nine congregations, six (66.7%) had 100 or fewer average attendees, and three (33.3%) were just shy of or over 100. The researcher investigated the congregations, and the pertinent statistics for each follows.

Congregation 1

Congregation 1 is centrally located in its state. It is a small rural community comprised of primarily blue-collar citizens. The congregation is one of two churches in the village. The other is Roman Catholic. Both are considered longstanding underpinnings for the community. Congregation 1 receives a portion of its members from other nearby towns. Overall, the congregation is evenly divided between those with a high school diploma and those with a college degree.

Community Designation:¹² Village, Rural

Total Population:¹³ 1,226

Total Membership:¹⁴ 133

Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 72

Avg. Attendance Ratio: 54.1%

Email Distribution List Size: 66

Total Membership Email Ratio: 49%

¹¹ Aaron Earls, “Small Churches Continue Growing—but in Number, Not Size - Lifeway Research,” last modified October 20, 2021, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/10/20/small-churches-continue-growing-but-in-number-not-size/>.

¹² Generally, a community designation (settlement hierarchy title) communicates a community’s size, location, geography, services, and the like. However, over time, these designations have become more traditional than informative. For example, a small city with its own government might designate itself a village, which would normally share a government with a neighboring community. This type of communal interpretation appears to be the case with some of the communities in this study. Still, the researcher preferred to utilize each community’s official designation as the identifier while sometimes adding an additional clarifier (rural, suburban, etc.).

¹³ US Census Bureau, “Census.Gov,” *Census.Gov*, accessed February 7, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/en.html>. Population totals for all nine communities were retrieved using this online tool.

¹⁴ “Find A Church, School, Worker,” *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, accessed February 6, 2024, <https://locator.lcms.org>. Statistical information and included demographic images for all nine congregations were retrieved using this LCMS locator tool.

Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 91.7%
 Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 18
 Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.1)

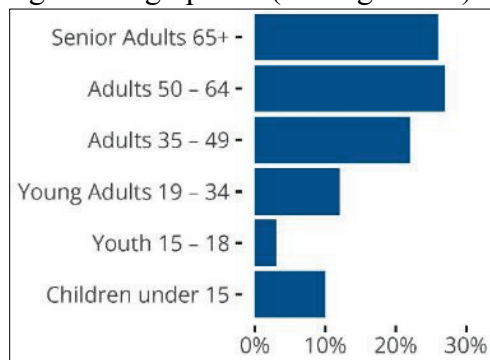


Figure 3.1. Congregation 1 Statistics

Congregation 2

Congregation 2 is located in a Great Lakes shore community that experiences population growth during summer. The increase occurs due to tourism and the return of seasonal residents. The congregation has a preschool through eighth-grade school. The city's primary employment forms include farming, agricultural science companies, and public works. The congregation is one of several in the community. Comparatively, it is the largest.

Community Designation: City
 Total Population: 1,596
 Total Membership: 546
 Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 93
 Avg. Attendance Ratio: 17%
 Email Distribution List Size: 104
 Total Membership Email Ratio: 18%
 Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 107%
 Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 15
 Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.2)

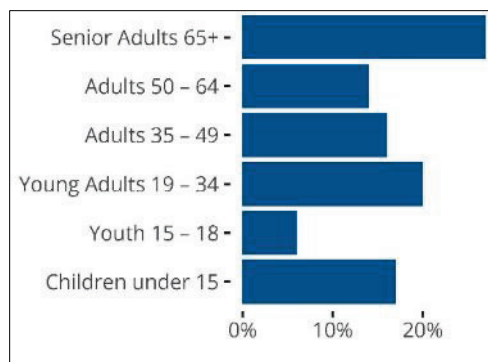


Figure 3.2. Congregation 2 Statistics

Congregation 3

Congregation 3 sits on a state university campus and serves a variety of demographics, including seasonal students and longstanding members and their families. According to the pastor, a higher than usual percentage of the church's current population is computer or software engineers and engineering students.

Community Designation: City

Total Population: 20,648

Total Membership: 82

Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 62

Avg. Attendance Ratio: 75.6%

Email Distribution List Size: 59

Total Membership Email Ratio: 72%

Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 95.2%

Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 180

Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.3)

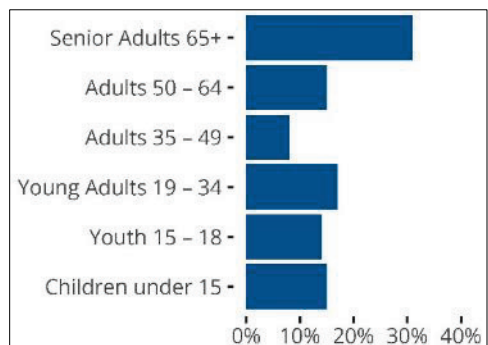


Figure 3.3. Congregation 3 Statistics

Congregation 4

Congregation 4 is situated in a rural city that is relatively centralized in its state.

Geographically, it resides 24 miles southwest of the state's capital and, as such, serves members from several other capital suburbs. The city's primary employment forms include farming, RV chassis production, small business restaurants, retail stores, and private firms.

Designation: City, Rural

Total Population: 9,074

Total Membership: 317

Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 101

Avg. Attendance Ratio: 31.9%

Email Distribution List Size: 111

Total Membership Email Ratio: 35%

Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 110%

Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 55

Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.4)

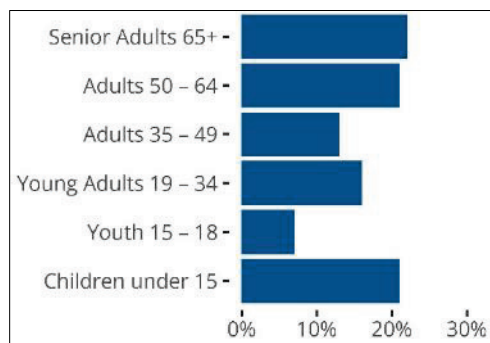


Figure 3.4. Congregation 4 Statistics

Congregation 5

Congregation 5 dwells in a small rural borough approximately 12 miles south of Lake Erie's shore. The congregation is well known in the community, participating regularly in the annual town fair. It offers a community garden and a preschool and serves the public alongside other churches, namely Methodist, Nazarene, and Non-denominational. The city's primary employment form is a nearby state correctional facility.

Community Designation: Borough, Rural

Total Population: 1,516
 Total Membership: 46
 Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 28
 Avg. Attendance Ratio: 43.5%
 Email Distribution List Size: 22
 Total Membership Email Ratio: 40.3%
 Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 92.6%
 Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 8
 Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.5)

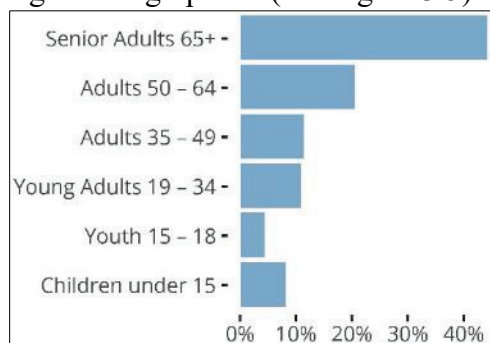


Figure 3.5. Congregation 5 Statistics

Congregation 6

Congregation 6 is situated in a rural community. It is primarily and equally comprised of white- and blue-collar retirees from two of the state's largest cities. A notable portion of its members are retired educators who worked in the local public school district. The congregation has very few families with young children.

Community Designation: Village, Rural
 Total Population: 1,047
 Total Membership: 123
 Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 48
 Avg. Attendance Ratio: 39%
 Email Distribution List Size: 32
 Total Membership Email Ratio: 26%
 Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 66.7%
 Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 24
 Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.6)

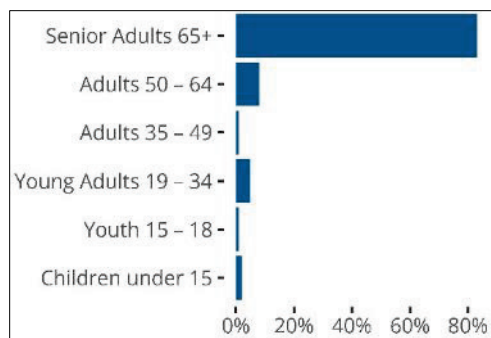


Figure 3.6. Congregation 6 Statistics

Congregation 7

Originally founded as a mission congregation, Congregation 7 is in a state-central suburb 10 miles north of its capital. The church community is predominantly white-collar (teachers, engineers, accountants, actuaries, nurses, and other medical professionals). Members are relatively well educated. Most have earned college degrees. Some have advanced degrees.

Community Designation: City, Capital Suburban

Total Population: 4,776

Total Membership: 240

Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 95

Avg. Attendance Ratio: 39.6%

Email Distribution List Size: 68

Total Membership Email Ratio: 28.3%

Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 71.6%

Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 35

Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.7)

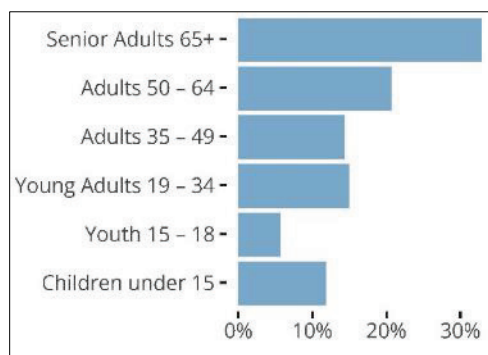


Figure 3.7. Congregation 7 Statistics

Congregation 8

Congregation 8 is located in a small city equidistant to Yellowstone National Park and Mount Rushmore. The city's economy relies on agriculture, methane extraction, and tourism. While many of the congregation's members are post-retirement age, there are younger families with young children. The pastor estimates that more than half of Congregation 8 is college-educated, which includes graduate and post-graduate degrees. Two-thirds are blue-collar, laboring as builders, firefighters, coal miners, and bus drivers. Some work for the United States Forest Service. The white-collar workers represent corporate finance, real estate, and education. Interestingly, the pastor noted that many congregants are atypical regarding digital communication. This is to say that compared to most other American communities, congregation 8's core membership appears less reliant on mobile phones, email communication, and social media avenues.

Community Designation: City

Total Population: 4,415

Total Membership: 77

Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 35

Avg. Attendance Ratio: 45.5%

Email Distribution List Size: 25

Total Membership Email Ratio: 32.5%

Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 71.4%

Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 11

Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.8)

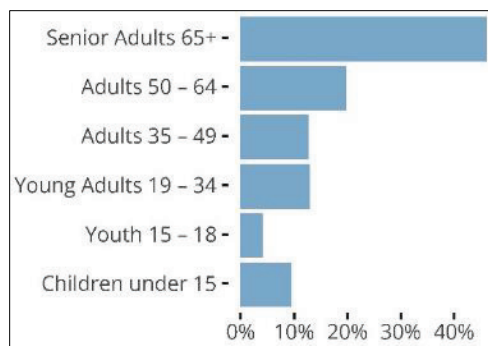


Figure 3.8. Congregation 8 Statistics

Congregation 9

Congregation 9 resides in a suburb 27 miles west of its state's largest city. It represents an equal division of blue- and white-collar workers among a relatively diverse membership. While the congregation is 60 percent white, its remaining 40 percent comprises an even dispersion of Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and African American members. For the most part, the congregation's pastor is already quite active in the public square, hosting various events and speaking openly concerning the Church's role in the civil realm.

Community Designation: City, Suburban
 Total Population: 9,370
 Total Membership: 190
 Avg. Weekly Worship Attendance: 70
 Avg. Attendance Ratio: 36.8%
 Email Distribution List Size: 94
 Total Membership Email Ratio: 49%
 Avg. Attendance Email Ratio: 134%
 Avg. Annual Non-LCMS Visitors: 100
 Age Demographics: (see Figure 3.9)

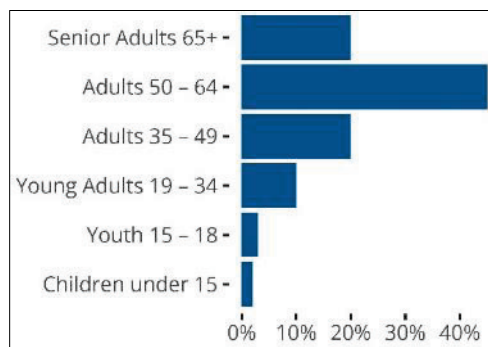


Figure 3.9. Congregation 9 Statistics

Length of Intervention

Among other things, the time required for a research study depends on the nature and scope of the research question, the methods being used, and the available resources. While twelve (12) weeks may be sufficient for some research studies, it may not be enough time for

others. Relative to this study, twelve (12) weeks was more than appropriate. This is true for two reasons.

At the outset, the forthcoming effort was intended to be a small-scale, survey-encapsulated intervention study that was limited in scope, in part because the researcher imagined the study as a pilot effort gauging the feasibility and effectiveness of a unique research protocol that would be made available to more extensive subsequent studies seeking similar outcomes. Contrariwise, for studies with more complex designs, such as longitudinal studies or randomized controlled trials, twelve (12) weeks may not be sufficient to capture meaningful changes in the variables being studied. In these cases, a more extended study period may be necessary.

Even though the previously mentioned rationales are sensible, they were not arbitrary. Plenty of studies in various fields provide insights into the appropriate study duration for specific types of research. For example, Rhiannon E. Evans explored various intervention intervals to determine which achieved meaningful behavioral changes.¹⁵ Evans discovered that eight (8) weeks or less of mediative efforts were generally not very helpful. However, efforts lasting twelve (12) weeks or more produced meaningful behavior modifications.¹⁶ Similarly, Carol E. Golin determined the same while investigating the effectiveness of HIV prevention. Golin found that interventive efforts delivered for more than twelve (12) weeks showed a reduction in risky

¹⁵ Note that Evans and this researcher are kindred spirits.

¹⁶ Rhiannon E. Evans et al., “When and How Do ‘Effective’ Interventions Need to Be Adapted and/or Re-Evaluated in New Contexts? The Need for Guidance,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 73, no. 6 (June 1, 2019): 481.

sexual behavior among the study's participants.¹⁷ Considering the studies mentioned, and as has been stated, twelve (12) weeks seemed sufficient for this research effort.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The following intervention design, while described as a five-step process in the narrative below, was, in its essential enterprise, a three-phase effort aimed at teleological and data triangulation simplicity. Teleologically, it intended to observe two points, and with as little friction between as few mechanisms as possible, to discern if movement from the first to the second point occurred. Concerning data triangulation, the design's methodological mechanics embodied the same simplicity, employing surveys, a specific time frame, multiple community contexts, and a reasonably extensive sampling of people.¹⁸

¹⁷ Carol E. Golin et al., "SafeTalk, A Multicomponent, Motivational Interviewing-Based, Safer Sex Counseling Program for People Living with HIV/AIDS: A Qualitative Assessment of Patients' Views," *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 24, no. 4 (2010): 237–45.

¹⁸ N. K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 301.

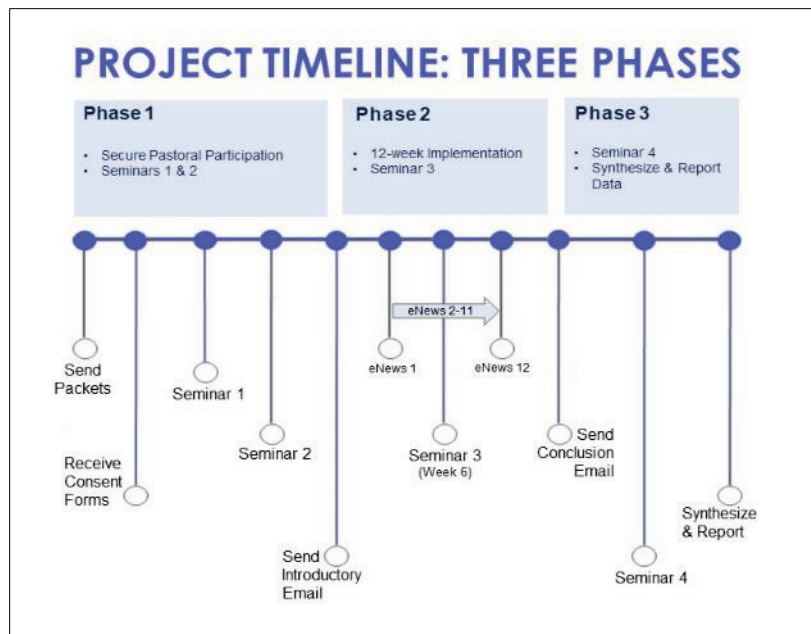


Figure 3.10. Project Timeline: Three Phases

As was noted, eleven pastors were identified and invited to assist in the study. Nine pastors accepted. The participating pastors were men serving LCMS congregations and associated with BOCPS. Immediately after receiving IRB approval, the preliminary recruitment letter (see Appendix A) was sent by post as part of the initial participant packet. The packet included the following:

- An index page
- A consent form providing a detailed description of the study's contours (Appendix E)
- A research permission request letter (Appendix C)
- A research permission response letter template (Appendix D)
- A rubric for writing, which provides the ten steps for writing the weekly eNews message (see Appendix F)
- A project introduction email template (see Appendix K)
- A project conclusion email template (see Appendix L)
- A short booklet written by the researcher entitled "Literary Devices: Writing Help for the Participating Pastor" (see Appendix P)
- Paper copies of Online Surveys 1 and 2, provided as information only (see Appendices Q and S)
- An organizational calendar of due dates and topic/theme planning (see Appendix T)

- A self-addressed stamped envelope for returning the signed consent and permission response materials.

To corral participant assistance, the packet explained the study's essentials while briefly describing the prospective participant's duties. Participation was further encouraged by extending complimentary "VIP" admission to a future BOCPS event (\$400 value) for the pastor and one other of his choosing.

To accommodate the newly induced schedule, digital versions of the recruitment letter and packets were sent to the pastors by email. Within 48 hours, all participants had returned signed PDF copies of the consent and permission forms. Their swiftness made the follow-up email (see Appendix B) unnecessary and allowed Seminar 1 to be scheduled three days later. After receiving the signed digital forms by email, instructions were given in a reply email to sign and return the hard copies once they were received by post. Each participating pastor did so.

Accomplishing these initial startup procedures made it possible to maintain the important goal of a collective starting date for all project participants. This occurred. Once digital consent forms were received, the study unfolded according to the following steps, which were also detailed fully in the consent form.

Study Progression: Three Phases in Five Steps

Step 1: Seminar 1

Each participating pastor attended four seminars led by the researcher, either in person or via video conference, beginning with an introductory seminar. The introductory seminar (see Appendix G) occurred by video conference and provided an overview of the project, explained the packet materials, answered initial questions, and facilitated a lesson on creative writing. The seminar took approximately 57 minutes to complete. Plentiful questions were asked throughout. The creative writing portion required sharing five PowerPoint slides (as indicated in Appendix

G). Four tasks were assigned at the seminar's end, and a follow-up email was sent affirming the tasks. It included a link to a list of available Seminar 2 appointment dates and times with the researcher and three eNews samples written by the researcher (see Appendices J, K, and L). One week was given to accomplish all four tasks. All nine participating pastors were successful.

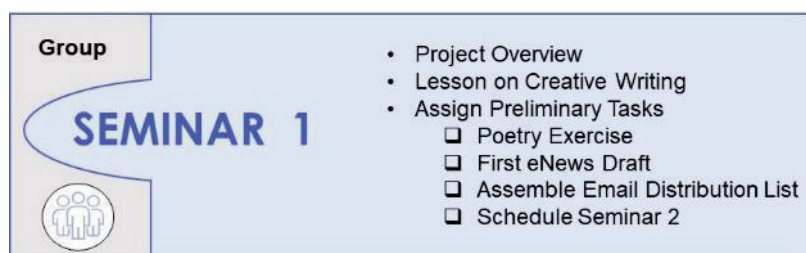


Figure 3.11. Seminar 1 Overview

The first task required participating pastors to complete a brief poetry exercise designed to enhance their creative writing skills. The second assignment required them to draft their first eNews message using the writing rubric (see Appendix F). The third expected them to assemble an email distribution list consisting of as many members of their congregation as possible, ideally, and at a minimum, 25 percent of their congregation's membership roster and 50 percent of core membership. As previously mentioned, Seminar 1's fourth and final task (schedule Seminar 2 with the researcher) was accomplished only after receiving the researcher's follow-up email containing the scheduling link. That email was sent within minutes of Seminar 1's conclusion.

Before proceeding (and relative to Seminar 1's third task), it is essential to note that a congregation's membership roster equated to the total number of baptized members reported to and available from LCMS statistics. Additionally, because research shows that 30 percent of a congregation's total membership typically encases its core members, the researcher was

comfortable associating core member status with the overall weekly attendance averages.¹⁹ Core members are active, financially supportive, and more likely to receive, read, and synthesize an eNews message from their pastor. All but one of the congregations enjoyed a weekly attendance average well above the 30 percent standard, one reaching as high as 76 percent.²⁰ The assumption is that the core membership was well-represented. As a result, even as the hoped-for distribution list of 25 percent of total membership was relatively achieved, it would seem that the goal of 50 percent of core membership (average weekly attendance) was also achieved.

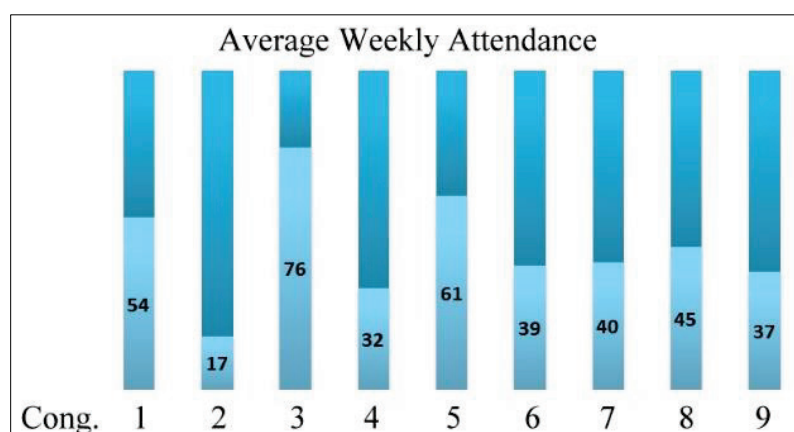


Figure 3.12. Average Weekly Attendance

¹⁹ Aleksandra Sandstrom, “Church Involvement Varies Widely Among U.S. Christians,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified November 16, 2015, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/16/church-involvement-varies-widely-among-u-s-christians/>.

²⁰ Thom S. Rainer, “4 Types of Church Members Based on Their Frequency of Attendance,” last modified March 19, 2023, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/four-types-of-church-members-based-on-frequency-of-attendance.html>. Qualification for “core” membership varies by congregation. In other words, to be considered a core member of one congregation, weekly attendance may be the expectation, while in another congregation, it may be every three weeks. With that, Thom Rainer’s four categories of Core, Marginal, Fading, and Cultural provide a benchmark. Still, the categories’ usefulness appears eclipsed by smaller congregations with high weekly attendance percentages relative to their total roster. Many of these numbers are far beyond Rainer’s 30% core membership expectation. The assumption is that within these higher weekly attendance percentages exist the ones most devoted to the congregation through giving and service.

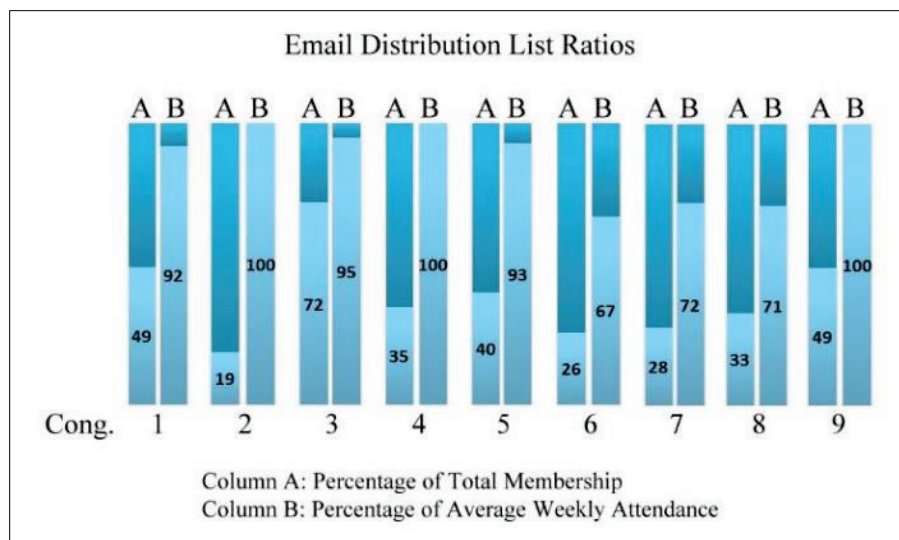


Figure 3.13. Email Distribution List Ratios

It is equally important to note that the pastors alone maintained the email distribution lists throughout the project. The researcher had no access to the lists. Moreover, in writing, the participating pastors assured their congregation members that all messages sent would occur as “blind copy” (BCC) messages only.

Step 2: Seminars 2 and 3

Upon completion of Seminar 1’s four assignments, and before beginning the study, a second individual seminar occurred between the participating pastors and the researcher. The researcher collected information using a generalized reporting form (see Appendix H). The goals were to discuss the poetry exercise, evaluate and give recommendations concerning the participating pastor’s first eNews message draft, choose a regularly scheduled day and time each week to send future eNews messages, and prepare to send the introductory email message (see Appendix K). Within days of each seminar, introductory messages were sent. Because the survey response was somewhat slow initially, the researcher sent an additional message to the

participating pastors to consider sending a second one, strongly encouraging their church members toward survey participation. All nine pastors sent a second message.

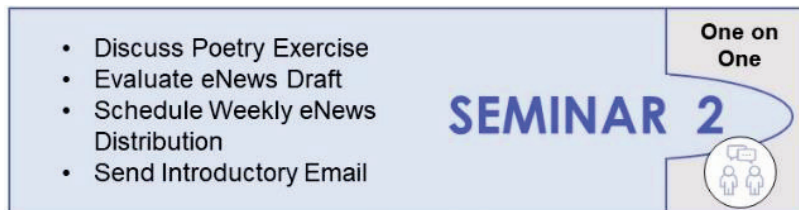


Figure 3.14. Seminar 2 Overview

Overall, the individual seminars proved the participating pastors diligently skillful. Each was prepared, having completed all of Seminar 1's requirements promptly. Admittedly, while some needed little help crafting and editing their initial eNews message, some required additional assistance, ultimately requiring Seminar 2 to be less of an editing exercise and more of a piloting opportunity. For example, during one seminar, the researcher and participating pastor discussed typical keywords and phrases used among LCMS pastors. The pastor preferred to avoid straying too far from using these longstanding and familiar terms. The researcher agreed to the danger, commending the pastor's desire to communicate objectively true things through theologically precise words familiar to the eNews recipients. Nevertheless, openness to language was encouraged, suggesting that doctrinal terms need not be altered. Instead, and as was thoroughly discussed in Seminar 1, the eNews writing process would require a keen and discriminating eye relative to language's basics (nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and the like). These basics bolster the carriage for precision in thought, which the pastor desired. The terms he desired to keep would be the carriage's passengers. Everything else invited investigation, ultimately allowing him to unpack what is typical to enhance precision. During the discussion, the researcher shared the following example from David Mills, which highlights the intricacies of word choice:

In the same way, “permissiveness” is a very different thing from “licentiousness.” The first means relaxing the rules too much, the other means actions characterized by license and lawlessness, and usually in a lewd, lustful, and dissolute way. They are not even close to the same thing.... The ideas are related but they are not the same. One cannot do the work of the other. You might as well, in a professional baseball game, send in Barry Manilow to replace Barry Bonds, because they are both rich, famous, talented men named Barry.²¹

The third seminar occurred mid-project (near to or after the sixth eNews message had been sent) and was group-oriented. One pastor was unable to attend as scheduled. The researcher accommodated him, providing a separate session. Seminar 3 aimed to discuss the study’s progress, provide an opportunity for participant pastor and eNews recipient feedback, afford supplementary writing help relative to topics and inspiration, and facilitate any additional collegial assistance necessary for continuing the intervention’s course. To accomplish these things, the researcher engaged with each pastor individually, each being given ample time to converse. The researcher concluded the hour-long seminar by reviewing the project’s forthcoming timeline. He explained the concluding sequence of events before sharing his intention to re-administer Survey 1 instead of Survey 2 at the project’s conclusion. He asked the pastors to adjust the conclusion email (see Appendix L) to reflect the course correction. He also provided a possible rewording in a follow-up email.



Figure 3.15. Seminar 3 Overview

²¹ David Mills, “Preaching Without Reaching: The Irrelevance of Relevant Preaching,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 20, no. 6 (July/August 2007): 26.

Initially, the researcher designed the second survey so that its fifteen questions, while slightly altered by comparison to the first survey's questions, were written in a way that a participant's answers would provide the necessary data without leaving the impression that he or she was taking the same survey twice. In theory, this is sensible. Practically, this becomes unnecessarily complicated. Prior to Seminar 3, the researcher determined that the best way to discern attitudinal shifts (and, perhaps, to replicate the results in future endeavors) would be to repeat the same survey, thereby providing a more stable benchmark while also reducing the possibility of phraseological misinterpretation or reinterpretation.²² (Survey 2's original form was kept in the Appendices for future research considerations.)

Step 3: eNews Messaging Campaign

Following the second seminar, and using the researcher's provided "Rubric for Writing" (see Appendix F), each participating pastor wrote and sent an eNews message of no less than five paragraphs on the same day and at the same time each week for twelve (12) weeks. Participating pastors included the researcher in their eNews distribution. Throughout the twelve (12) weeks, the researcher monitored eNews messages, occasionally contacting various participating pastors with content-specific questions or recommendations. The researcher was accessible to all participating pastors as necessary to help as needed relative to crafting their eNews messages. This side-by-side laboring occurred via email, phone, and online video service. During the twelve (12) weeks, the participating pastors were encouraged to collect and send replies from eNews recipients to the researcher, having first redacted all identifiable information. It should be noted that pastoral discretion was the standard for sharing with the researcher.

²² "Running Surveys: Repeat Value from Deploying the Same Survey Multiple Times," *SmartSurvey*, last modified September 4, 2019, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.smartsurvey.com/blog/running-surveys-getting-repeat-value-from-deploying-the-same-survey-multiple-times>.

Participating pastors were free to withhold any messages collected during the study for any reason.

“Rubric for Writing” in Brief

The “Rubric for Writing” had ten steps comprised of two primary concerns: logistics and content. Steps 1, 7, 9, and 10 were concerned with the effort’s logistics, which included topic selection, editing, and distribution. Steps 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 fostered the eNews message’s content, often referred to by the researcher among the participating pastors as the “carriage.”

Logistics

Step 1 required the participating pastors to select a topic. Parenthetically, the researcher provided appropriate examples. Step 7 obliged the participants to use grammar-checking software. Because the eNews messaging campaign applied mindfulness for poetic articulacy, it was necessary to remember that a “prose style may be eloquent, lyrical, witty, rhythmical, and fresh as Colorado air, but if it lacks clarity, few readers will stay with it for long.”²³ Step 9 mandated email distribution and the researcher’s inclusion. Step 10 required eNews hard copy availability for each community’s broader readership.

Content

Step 2 had two parts. The first was concerned with literary devices, and the second insisted that the participating pastors share personal information. Examples were provided, such as a childhood memory, a closely held personal opinion, a strange daily routine, and others. The first part’s deliberate inclusion and proposed benefit have already been thoroughly discussed in

²³ John Trimble, *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*, 3rd edition. (Boston, MA: Prentice Hall, 2011), 7.

Chapter 2. However, the second part's consequence deserves brief commentary lest its value be unmeritedly assumed.

Mindful of education and communication research, Richard Rhodes notes that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.”²⁴ He adds that personal storytelling communicates one's interpreted meaning behind life's details. Learning environments where this is fostered promote “conversations that help build peer to peer and teacher to student relationships.”²⁵

As this meets with written communication, Jack Maguire, the author of *The Power of Personal Storytelling*, would agree. He insists that personal storytelling not only communicates life's meaning but it makes the writer vulnerable, thereby connecting him “more vitally with others.”²⁶ In his chapter “Mythic Structures in Narrative,” Victor Neil investigates the vitality's conduit, supposing storytelling's truest variables are *knowing* and *feeling*. He describes narratives as powerful “mechanistic underpinnings” that serve much like a hypnotic trance, inevitably carrying one into “a cognitive world in which the reader, listener, or the person in the hypnotic trance may believe—which is a cognitive state, a form of knowing.”²⁷ Other volumes speak similarly, namely *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story* by

²⁴ Richard Rhodes, “Personal Story Sharing as an Engagement Strategy to Promote Student Learning,” *The University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education's Online Urban Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jack Maguire, *The Power of Personal Storytelling: Spinning Tales to Connect with Others* (London, England: Penguin Publishing Group, 1998), 13–14.

²⁷ Melanie C. Green et al., “Mythic Structures in Narrative,” in *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations* (Oxfordshire, England: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 19.

Kendall Haven²⁸ and *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* by Jonathan Gottschall.²⁹

Steps 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the writing rubric provided the central topic's necessary overview, biblical perspective, pastoral encouragement toward faithfulness to the biblical perspective, and practical locales for exacting faithfulness in the public square. Step 8 required an image be included with each eNews message. By no means arbitrary, the chosen image would reflect the writing's primary emphasis. While primarily concerned with multimedia learning, Richard Mayer and Roxana Moreno offer interesting insight, noting how adding images to writing can enhance comprehension and engagement by moving some of learning's weight from the verbal to the visible channel.³⁰ Moreover, they imply throughout that meaningful learning capable of avoiding cognitive overload requires both channels to be in synchronicity, whether spatially or in essential summary. Long before Mayer and Moreno's efforts, Allan Paivio posited the Dual-Coding Theory in which he assumed two cognitive subsystems, one concerned with imagery and the other with language. Paivio noted:

Human cognition is unique in that it has become specialized for dealing simultaneously with language and with nonverbal objects and events. Moreover, the language system is peculiar in that it deals directly with linguistic input and output (in the form of speech or writing) while at the same time serving a symbolic function with respect to nonverbal objects, events, and behaviors. Any representational theory must accommodate this dual functionality.³¹

²⁸ Kendall Haven, *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story* (London, England: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007).

²⁹ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, 1st edition. (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2013).

³⁰ Richard E. Mayer and Roxana Moreno, "Nine Ways to Reduce Cognitive Load in Multimedia Learning," *Educational Psychologist* 38, no. 1 (2003): 46–47.

³¹ Allan Paivio, *Mental Representations: A Dual Coding Approach*, Oxford Psychology Series (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1986), 53.

Step 4: Concluding eNews Message and Seminar 4

After distributing twelve (12) eNews messages, a final message was sent by participating pastors (see Appendix L). The final message communicated each pastor's intention to conclude or continue the effort. A second online Likert Scale survey was shared in that same message, and the message recipients were encouraged to participate. As with the first survey, the researcher provided the online link, and a participant consent form preceded each survey. Two weeks were allotted for survey data collection. Like the first survey effort, the researcher requested that another email request for survey participation be sent to congregation members.

The same week that the concluding eNews message was sent, the participating pastors attended a fourth and final seminar by video conference. The seminar aimed to discuss preliminary results, perspectives concerning the study (its perceived benefits, limitations, and the like), and any other concerns relative to the effort. Each of the nine participating pastors expressed gladness for participating in the project. The researcher shared his gratefulness for their participation and commended each for his exceptional demonstration of pastoral care throughout.



Figure 3.16. Seminar 4 Overview

Step 5: Data Analysis

While the project's three-phase design was deliberately uncomplicated, data analysis was anything but thin. After allowing two weeks to receive the first and second Likert survey results, the researcher examined and synthesized the data, the results of which are presented in Chapter

4. However, before treading those waters, the following investigative approaches were employed.

Gathering the Data

To begin, and as mentioned above, the way toward analysis was first stabilized by employing the same Likert survey at the beginning and end of the eNews messaging effort. After much contemplation, it became clear that simplicity's heading would be blurred by even the slightest adjustments to the voyage's coordinates. Therefore, the survey questions remained the same at the beginning and the end, allowing for the clearest sight of attitudinal shifts throughout the 12-week journey.

Statistical Observation and Visual Presentation

Before employing the Likert survey, the researcher summarized each question's innermost intention and then added numerical values to the question's possible answers (see Appendix R). Using these values, the researcher determined mean, median, and standard deviation measurements, ultimately shedding light on the project's central tendencies. Additionally, a paired t-test was performed. The paired t-test helped detect and calculate resonant shifts that occurred among the survey participants throughout the project. Google Colaboratory was used for the calculations. Next, Cohen's d was used to quantify the attitudinal shifts

observed. An online social science calculator was used to perform this measurement.³² Finally, visual aids were created to help the reader understand the significance of the collected data.

Qualitative Observations

Throughout the 12-week eNews campaign, participating pastors were free to share correspondence from message recipients, but only after redacting all identifying information. Plentiful messages (both in conversation between the researcher and pastors and in print) were forwarded to the researcher, each providing insight into individual eNews recipients' perceptions relative to the overall effort. Likewise, all four of the seminars provided verdant pastures of rich discussion between the researcher and the participating pastors. In a qualitative sense, the shared correspondences and the seminar dialogues helped encapsulate the project's benefits and limitations in ways that the Likert surveys could not. That said, much of what was gathered was worthy of analysis and occasional reporting with commentary if only to gain greater insight or to provide inspiration for future studies with different parameters.

Reflective Confirmation

The researcher indulged himself in available conversation with participating pastors as needed, particularly after interpreting seminar results and messages shared. When appropriate and as needed, the researcher provided written material to various participant pastors for reflective reading and confirmation of the researcher's conclusions. Where differing interpretations were discovered, changes were made, and triangulation's grip was strengthened.

³² "Effect Size Calculator (Cohen's D) for T-Test," *Social Science Statistics*, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.socscistatistics.com/effectsize/default3.aspx>.

Conclusion

Just as any conferred academic degree first requires a multitude of classes, each revealing a field's capacity from various vantages, so also is it necessary to take hold of a problem, lift it, turn it upside down and around, being sure to examine as much of its details as possible. The above analysis efforts, a combination of quantitative study, statistical analysis, and qualitative insights, ultimately yielded abundant information relative to the intervention's intended goal. Moreover, the overall investigation provided fertile prompts for additional studies and a useable framework for future researchers interested in orchestrating and analyzing community-wide attitudinal shifts.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

So eloquently, and also quite proverbially, Miguel de Cervantes remarks to Don Quixote through an accompanying Sancho, “It will be seen in the frying of the eggs.”¹ Relative to an egg’s usefulness being known only after it is cracked and fried, Sancho means that the good or bad results of Quixote’s efforts will almost certainly be seen after he performs them. The same is true of this project. The eggs of this research project have been cracked, fried, and delivered for tasting. Now, the meal begins, and the results are discerned.

Collective Results

In its mineral sense, this research project intended to share and employ an already beloved family recipe with extended families born from the same parentage. The recipe, a three-phase effort consisting of five steps carried out over multiple weeks, would produce a uniquely seasoned dish designed to enliven the Two Kingdoms taste buds of politically detached Christians, eventually stirring a craving for faithful engagement in the public square. To manage this flavorful exercise, chefs and kitchens (LCMS pastors and their churches), culinary tools and carefully measured ingredients (eNews messages, literary devices, and the like), appropriate utensils and subsequent diners (email, Likert surveys, and congregation members) would all play a role in the meal’s production, delivery, consumption, and eventual review, ultimately determining the concoction’s broader embraceability and subsequent usefulness beyond the researcher’s own galley.

¹ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Life and Exploits of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de La Mancha* (London, England: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, and R. Dodsley, 1749), 290.

The first step toward gauging the recipe's success or failure required gathering quantitative and qualitative findings from every conceivable cranny of the effort's three phases. The collected outcomes are displayed for review in this chapter. The collection's initial examination occurs according to three essential categories: Seminars, Surveys, and Additional Qualitative Observations.

Seminars

Seminar 1

The first of the four seminars hardly needs reporting except to share descriptive particulars related to each of its portions. Seminar 1 occurred only after securing a commitment from prospective participating pastors. Once achieved, Seminar 1 was scheduled and conducted. As described in Chapter 3, Seminar 1's purpose was to provide a project overview, transact a creative writing lesson, and assign preliminary tasks essential to Seminar 2, namely, that the participants would complete a quatrain exercise, provide the researcher with a rough draft of their first eNews message, assemble an email distribution list, and schedule Seminar 2.

Seminar 1 took place on Monday, January 29, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. by video conference. The seminar was accomplished in 57 minutes. The first twenty-five minutes were relatively mundane, producing predictable outcomes from a basic project overview. In short, after sharing greetings, the researcher explained the project's inceptive premise, which was described as follows.

The researcher began writing and sending weekly eNews messages in February 2015. Each message began with a greeting followed by a Bible verse and a short portion of personal commentary, usually comprising little more than a few sentences. After the commentary, forthcoming congregation news items were shared. Within six months, the weekly message's introductory content grew, becoming what it is today (see Appendices K, L, and M). As such, it

proved a valuable means for open pastoral reflection concerning culture and politics. Coupled with the researcher's innate tendency toward creatively worded narratives, the weekly messages gradually became a favorite part of the congregation's week, becoming something they shared with friends and family while providing endearing content that strengthened the pastor-congregant relationship. The effort also fostered an unexpected potential. Along the way, the researcher experienced less resistance to his public square initiatives while, conversely, fielding an equally increased congregation-wide desire to positively influence the public square dialogue. The researcher wondered if his eNews efforts were partly responsible and, if so, could the results be exacted in other LCMS communities. Next, the researcher explained the participant's packet documents. Participating pastors listened attentively, took notes, and asked appropriate questions relative to scheduling (see Appendix T) that amplified the project's purpose and overall procedural clarity.

The next twenty-five minutes were spent completing a creative writing lesson (see Appendix G) designed to examine and enhance plain communication. Beginning with a simple sentence, the researcher posed questions relative to it while detailing various literary devices that could be used to answer them. The researcher showed how the sentence could be rewritten to enhance a reader's interest, drawing them further into its narrative. The researcher continued the exercise, demonstrating how the newly expanded sentence could be transformed into a poem. The seminar participants took notes. None asked questions. However, the researcher noticed nodding heads and enlivened expressions, leaving him to believe the lesson was well received. The suspected success was later affirmed during Seminar 2's conversations.

The researcher concluded Seminar 1 by explaining the assignments and promising a follow-up email with a link to register for Seminar 2. The email was sent. Replies were received,

some thanking the researcher for the invitation to join the effort and expressing appreciation for Seminar 1.

In conclusion, Seminar 1's assumed outcomes were project lucidity, expectation clarity, collegial support, and enhancement of writing skills. For those participating pastors without a congregant email list, establishing the communication platform was an additional result.

Seminar 2

Each of the participating pastors met privately with the researcher. Eight did so by videoconference on various dates between Thursday, February 1, 2024, and Tuesday, February 5, 2024. One did so in person on Saturday, February 3, 2024. Before the session, each participant had submitted his quatrain assignment and initial eNews rough draft to the researcher. Each video session took between 30 and 35 minutes to complete. The face-to-face session was completed in 45 minutes, primarily due to basic cordiality factors.

Using a predetermined agenda (see Appendix H), the researcher noted the participant's name and recorded the session's start and end times. Using the agenda, he investigated the participant's literary preferences, discussed the quatrain exercise, and offered commentary concerning the eNews draft. The general results from the discussion follow.

Literary Preferences

Among the nine participating pastors, literary preferences were vast. The following authors were explicitly mentioned: Longfellow, Keats, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Churchill, Christie, King, Herbert, Klavan, Lewis, Sasse, Stevenson, Metaxas, Clancy, Brown, Dickens, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Tolkien. Only one among the nine did not share a favorite author. Two enjoyed murder mysteries. One valued biographies and speeches. Two offered appreciation for poetry. Two were fond of science fiction. Four admitted little to no leisure

reading. One preferred audiobooks to printed material. Of the nine, eight confessed to reading a lot as a child, while one admitted to only reading what was required in school. Four stated that because of the project, they intended to revisit the classics. The researcher commended Frost and Dickinson as valuable poets and Austen, Twain, Dickens, and Fitzgerald concerning narrative.

Quatrain Exercise

The participating pastors were tasked with choosing from two simple sentences provided by the researcher. The first option was “My office has books.” The second option was “The sun is shining.” Reflecting on Seminar 1’s instruction and discussion, participants were to construct a quatrain inspired by the selected sentence. All participants completed the assignment with a lesser or greater degree of difficulty. However, all completed the assignment in 45 minutes or less, eventually producing a quatrain of varying rhyme schemes and meter. The following examples, the first completed in 10 minutes and the second in 30 minutes, are samples of the exercise’s typical products.

My office is lined with shelves of knowledge.
Some are for fun, and others for college.
From theology and the classic tales,
Including dad jokes with true epic fails.

Along a myriad of shelves,
A vast array of knowledge dwells,
That I may teach the Word of truth,
And guide the old and precious youth.

Relative to the quatrain exercise, let it first be known that the researcher did not instruct the participating pastors to complete their quatrain and eNews draft in the same sitting, nor did he precisely imply that the quatrain exercise would produce an immediate response relative to the eNews draft’s construction. Admittedly, he intended for the quatrain exercise to influence the eNews construction, but only insofar as it invited, taught, and affirmed each participant’s ability

to write in ways yet untapped. The researcher also hoped the exercise would provide a concise way to explore their potential, thereby revealing comfortable, creative writing options available to their eNews writing effort. That said, the following results emerged from the exercise.

Seven of the nine participants admitted to beginning their eNews draft immediately after completing the quatrain. A common phrase among six of the seven was that the exercise “stirred the creative juices” as it invigorated “a mindset” for writing in uniquely creative ways. One of the seven specifically said he felt the urge to start the eNews draft before completing his quatrain, having only finished three lines before returning to it again later. Two of the seven admitted to deliberately avoiding sermonic or academic tones in their eNews drafts, electing to be more conversational while employing less familiar devices like alliteration and occasional rhyme. Another expressed appreciation for the quatrain’s focused nature, adding that it helped maintain conciseness with what might otherwise have been a much lengthier eNews draft. Still, another reported that while listening to the researcher explain the poetry exercise during Seminar 1, he “took in the importance of choosing other words than what he might usually consider or are typical to his vocabulary.” He fore-wondered at his message recipients’ possible responses since what he would be sending would be far different than what was typical.

Overall, most participants reported the quatrain exercise as expressly valuable. It should be noted that for the two participants who could not iterate any particular value, one constructed his quatrain before teaching a small group Bible study, implying the midday task interrupted his concentration. Nevertheless, he began his eNews draft after the Bible study. The other participant reported experiencing enjoyment as he “wrestled with the exercise” but could not pinpoint the exercise’s precise value for his eNews construction. Although, like many of the others, he felt compelled to begin writing his eNews draft immediately after completing the quatrain.

Preliminary Draft of eNews 1

Seminar 2's eNews draft discussion comprised five steps. The first step contemplated the time to write the draft and why. The second step examined the participant's rationale for the day and time he would send the weekly message. The third was a general discussion of the draft's content relative to the researcher's observations, commendations, and recommendations. The fourth established the day and time for sending the project's introductory message (see Appendix K). The fifth provided relevant reminders.

Concerning the first step, five of the nine participants completed their initial eNews draft in 60 minutes or less. Three estimated 90 minutes for the task. One estimated 120 minutes. Interestingly, three of the four requiring more than 60 minutes had confessed to little or no leisure reading and a general disinterest in classical literature.

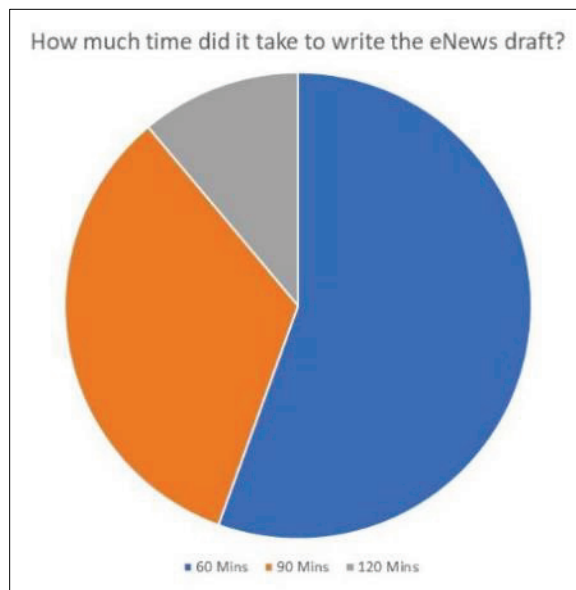


Figure 4.1. eNews Construction Time

The second step revealed a variety of days and times that the weekly eNews message would be sent. All participants noted personal schedules as critical to their individual message's construction and delivery. Initially, one intended to send the message on Sunday morning. One

chose Monday at noon. Another chose Tuesday morning. One chose Wednesday morning. Two elected for Thursday morning. Three decided on Saturday morning.

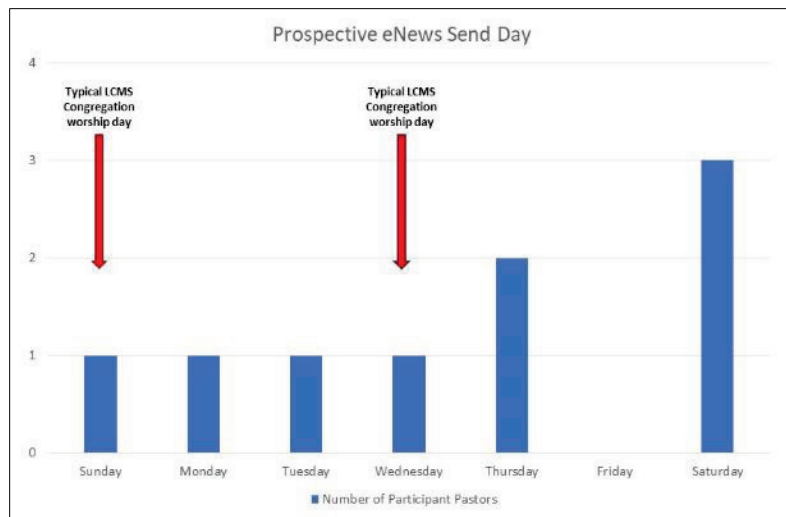


Figure 4.2. Prospective eNews Send Day

For those participants choosing days 48 hours or more from the next possible opportunity for face-to-face recipient feedback, the researcher encouraged reconsideration but did not insist upon it. He first noted that concept transfer between communicators and message recipients improves with shorter feedback dialogue timing. This is to say that in most learning environments, the sooner a recipient interacts with the message sender, the more likely learning will occur.² Anecdotally, the researcher capped this point by describing an aspect of his initial effort’s evolution.

When the researcher began sending eNews messages in 2015, he did so on Monday mornings. Less than a year into the venture, early one Sunday morning, he decided to write and send the message a day early to free his forthcoming Monday morning schedule. To his surprise,

² Daniel Corral, Shana K Carpenter, and Sam Clingan-Siverly, “The Effects of Immediate versus Delayed Feedback on Complex Concept Learning,” *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 74, no. 4 (April 1, 2021): 796–97.

before and after Sunday morning worship, as well as before, during, and after the subsequent adult Bible study hour, the contents of that morning's eNews message were regularly conjured for discussion with the researcher by his congregants. This had never happened before, even considering the calendar proximity of his congregation's midweek Wednesday service. The assumption is that Monday morning was too far from Wednesday and Sunday activities. Consequently, the researcher elected to maintain the Sunday morning delivery. He encouraged the participating pastors to measure their timing against this point and to consider sharing any eNews-related dialogue that may occur, no matter the timing they choose.

The third step required consideration of the participating pastors' individual eNews draft content juxtaposed with the "Rubric for Writing." The researcher noted that all participants employed each of the rubric's "carriage" elements (see Appendix F, points 2 through 6 and 8). Notably, the most commonly used literary devices were point-of-view, imagery, metaphor, and simile. Each included a personal story, spoke to a specific cultural issue, shared the Bible's perspectives, offered encouragement to embrace the Bible's perspective, and encouraged the reader to engage with the issue in the public square. However, the researcher noticed two deficiencies common to all but one of the eNews drafts.

The first deficiency was the absence of practical application relative to public square involvement. In short, the pastors encouraged engagement but did not provide tangible opportunities for it. For example, one participant's topic was, in essence, the blessing and preservation of the traditional family. His original draft encouraged faithfulness to God's biblical design. However, no direction was given for involvement in or with the public square concerning this topic. The researcher suggested that he consider adding a short portion detailing the 2023 rewrite of his state's civil rights act, which redefined the term "sex" to include sexual orientation,

gender identity, and other factors. This change affected traditional marriage in numerous ways. To direct his readers' attention to this document would be to heighten their awareness while giving them a tangible resource to investigate. The pastor agreed. A subsequent draft included this.

A second deficiency common to most was the lack of parenthetically noted proofs to biblically rooted statements that could be interpreted as opinions. In other words, while the participating pastors were sure to provide textual references for direct biblical quotations, they did not provide references for other statements clearly lifted from the Scriptures. For example, consider the following sentence from one participant's draft: "We have been called into being salt and light—His kingdom emissaries sent into this temporary nation in this temporary world with God's unchanging truth." The statement was brimming with opportunity. The researcher insisted that statements like this be enhanced parenthetically, ultimately becoming: "We have been called into being salt and light (Matt 5:14–16)—His kingdom emissaries sent into this temporary nation in this temporary world (Matt 24:35) with God's unchanging truth (Isa 40:8)." The reason for this is relatively simple.

In a spiritual sense, the participating pastors provide critical care. Concerned with modes of communication in patient critical care, Alex Dubov noted that persuasive rhetoric "is not deception but rather the art of making the truth apparent."³ Emotional assets are purposely employed when speaking or writing to persuade (as was the case with this project). Indeed, literary devices carrying personal stories endear the participants and recipients. While this emotional connection is deliberately fostered, the message's composer cannot necessarily

³ Alex Dubov, "Ethical Persuasion: The Rhetoric of Communication in Critical Care," *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice* 21, no. 3 (2015): 497.

determine what will or will not be received as an opinion and, therefore, possibly considered deceptive, especially when presenting religious perspectives, which are often regarded as subjective. Pondering the chief examination of logic, emotion, and communication, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Dubov reminds readers that "the goal of rhetoric is not so much in finding truth about an issue, but rather in convincing an audience to make the best decision about that issue."⁴

Detectable attitudinal shifts (people being persuaded) were this project's hope. Dubov continues that unethical emotional appeals tend to cloud or discount facts, thereby blurring factual understanding.⁵ Objective proof uncovers. In persuasive communication, facts unite emotions and logic. In ethically persuasive dialogue applied among biblically founded readers, truth's veil is continually lifted when the Bible's voice is included, especially during casual conversation or commentary.

Seminar 2's fourth and fifth steps produced the expected results. The researcher and participants chose a suitable day for sending the introductory email. The researcher reminded the participants to include a royalty-free image. Suzan Last comments: "Visual elements capture your readers' attention and help them to understand your ideas more fully. Like the illustrations used to help tell a story, visuals augment your written ideas and simplify complicated textual content."⁶

The researcher reminded participants to use grammar-checking software before sending any messages. Joe Flanagan, the Senior Résumé Consultant at Velvet Jobs, argues that bad grammar and poor punctuation make a professional appear uneducated and disinterested,

⁴ Alex Dubov, "Ethical Persuasion: The Rhetoric of Communication in Critical Care," 496.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 498.

⁶ Suzan Last, "When and Why to Use Graphics and Visuals" (January 12, 2022), accessed February 9, 2024, <https://pressbooks.library.tamu.edu/howdyorhello/chapter/when-and-why-to-use-graphics-and-visuals/>.

ultimately lessening credibility.⁷ The anecdotal story was told concerning a friend and local activist who constructs and shares meme-like graphics meant to persuade. His products are poorly worded and dreadfully punctuated. Interestingly, the activist's primary targets are the local school board and the school district's liberal educators. The irony has not been lost on school board members, teachers, or local news outlets. With that, the researcher strongly encouraged care with grammar and punctuation.

Finally, while studies show that one reminder is typically helpful for increasing email and web-based survey response rates, two have nominal effects, but three or more harm response rates.⁸ Therefore, the researcher asked participants to send one reminder in addition to the introductory email message encouraging message recipients' participation in Survey 1. He highlighted the importance of collecting as much survey data as possible, even though researchers are discovering that low to moderate survey response rates in developed countries are not necessarily producing the skewed results once believed.⁹ Still, the researcher preferred more responses than less. The participating pastors were at liberty to construct and send the additional messages as they deemed most suitable to their individual contexts.

⁷ Joe Flanagan, "The Power of Punctuation — Why It Might Be Costing You Your Next Job," accessed February 9, 2024, <https://www.yoh.com/blog/career-advice-resume-what-punctuation-in-your-resume-says-about-you-professionally>.

⁸ Brooks Holtom et al., "Survey Response Rates: Trends and a Validity Assessment Framework," *Human Relations* 75, no. 8 (August 1, 2022): 1565.

⁹ Ronald R. Rindfuss et al., "Do Low Survey Response Rates Bias Results? Evidence from Japan," *Demographic Research* 32 (June 2015): 816.

Seminar 3

Linear Regression Test

Seminar 3 occurred on Monday, March 18, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. Because one of the participating pastors was unable to participate in the evening seminar, the researcher arranged for an additional opportunity at an earlier day and time (Friday, March 15, 2024, at 1:00 p.m.). The contents and general conversation for both seminar sessions were identical, as the researcher followed a predetermined agenda (see Appendix I). Principally qualitative in nature, Seminar 3's results are discussed in greater detail in the forthcoming section entitled "Phase 2: Week 5 to Week 7."

Prior to Seminar 3's discussion, the researcher conducted Linear Regression tests using individual word counts from each of the participating pastors' eNews messages sent as the dependent variable and the number of weeks as the independent variable. The test's purpose was to detect significant writing patterns that might be investigated during Seminar 3. The test results were as follows:

Document 1: Slope=136.63, p-value=0.0471
 Document 2: Slope=124.90, p-value=0.0105
 Document 3: Slope=390.10, p-value=0.2341
 Document 4: Slope=440.60, p-value=0.0219
 Document 5: Slope=-53.90, p-value=0.3489
 Document 6: Slope=-20.00, p-value=0.6745
 Document 7: Slope=275.50, p-value=0.1423
 Document 8: Slope=147.14, p-value=0.1055
 Document 9: Slope=30.20, p-value=0.5377

Significant Documents:
 ['Document 1', 'Document 2', 'Document 4']¹⁰

¹⁰ Google Colaboratory was used to perform the test.

In Linear Regression testing, a p-value less than 0.05 indicates a rejected null hypothesis (no relationship between the dependent and independent variables), thereby indicating statistical significance. The test ultimately revealed a statistically significant increase in word count among three of the participating pastors. While all pastors were asked the same questions and given equal opportunity to discuss during Seminar 3, considering the test's results, the researcher was exceptionally attuned to anything offered by the three pastors that might be of interest. As previously noted, the results are thoroughly considered in the section entitled "Phase 2: Week 5 to Week 7."

Seminar 4

Seminar 4 took place on Monday, April 28, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. As with Seminar 3, one of the participating pastors was unable to participate in the evening seminar. Therefore, the researcher arranged for a time earlier on the same day at 2:00 p.m. Both seminar sessions were identically conducted (see Appendix J). During each, the researcher probed according to three perspectives: reflective assessment, personal growth and development, and sustainability. All three categories pondered multiple questions. Of all four seminars orchestrated throughout the intervention, Seminar 4 uncovered a surfeit of qualitative material. Appropriately, and similar to the placement of Seminar 3's examination in this chapter's qualitative section entitled "Phase 2: Week 5 to Week 7," Seminar 4's trove is discussed in the section entitled "Phase 3: Week 8 to Week 12."

Survey Reliability

The survey aimed at two unique concerns. It sought to assess individual engagement levels and explore attitudes toward Christian involvement in the public square. These two aims

were dispersed throughout the survey. The first concern is evident in Questions 1, 4, 6, 8, and 12.

The second concern resonates in Questions 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15.

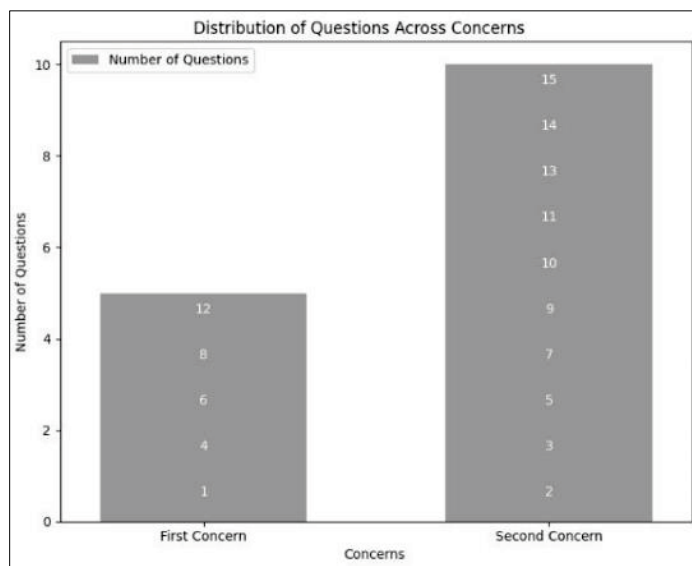


Figure 4.3. Distribution of Question Across Concerns

To ensure that the survey maintained internal consistency, reliably measuring the same fundamental construct served by the two aims, Cronbach’s Alpha tests were performed.¹¹

Cronbach’s Alpha results exist between 0 and 1. The higher the value, the more reliable the survey.¹² A Cronbach’s Alpha value “should not be less than 0.6. Values above 0.7 are considered acceptable.”¹³

Survey data was required to accomplish the reliability test. Therefore, the researcher asked twelve random Facebook friends to take the survey, hoping to get at least ten participants. Indeed, ten participated, and two did not. Using the results, the researcher calculated the

¹¹ Replit, “Replit: The Software Creation Platform. IDE, AI, and Deployments,” *Replit*, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://replit.com/>.

¹² “Using and Interpreting Cronbach’s Alpha,” accessed December 1, 2023, <https://library.virginia.edu/data/articles/using-and-interpreting-cronbachs-alpha>.

¹³ “T-Test, Chi-Square, ANOVA, Regression, Correlation...,” accessed December 1, 2023, <https://datatab.net/tutorial/cronbachs-alpha>.

categories of concern separately before calculating the survey as a whole. The first concern (Questions 1, 4, 6, 8, and 12) achieved a 0.8211 score. The second concern (Questions 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15) achieved a 0.8451 score. The complete survey (Questions 1 through 15) achieved a score of 0.9388. All three scores implied the survey's relative trustworthiness.

```

1 import numpy as np
2 from scipy.stats import pearsonr
3
4 # questions for each question
5 q1 = np.array([4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4])
6 q2 = np.array([1, 1, 4, 1, 4, 3, 3, 3, 2])
7 q3 = np.array([5, 5, 5, 2, 3, 4, 3, 4, 2])
8 q4 = np.array([2, 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 3, 3, 2])
9 q5 = np.array([1, 2, 4, 4, 1, 4, 3, 5, 5, 2])
10
11 # function to calculate Cronbach's alpha
12 def cronbach_alpha(arrays):
13     item_variances = [np.var(array) for array in arrays]
14     total_variance = np.sum(item_variances, axis=0)
15     num_items = len(arrays)
16
17     return (num_items * (num_items - 1) * (1 - np.sum(item_variances) / total_variance))
18
19 # calculate Cronbach's alpha for the provided responses
20 alpha = cronbach_alpha([q1, q2, q3, q4, q5])
21 print("Cronbach's Alpha:", alpha)
22

```

Figure 4.4. Cronbach's Alpha: Concern 1

```

1 import pandas as pd
2 from pingvin import reliability
3
4 # create a dictionary with your survey data
5
6 question_1 = [5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
7 question_2 = [4, 3, 3, 3, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 5]
8 question_3 = [5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
9 question_4 = [5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
10 question_5 = [5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
11 question_6 = [5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
12 question_7 = [4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
13 question_8 = [5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
14 question_9 = [5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
15 question_10 = [5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
16
17 # convert the dictionary to a pandas dataframe
18 df = pd.DataFrame(survey_data)
19
20 # calculate Cronbach's alpha
21 alpha = reliability.cronbach_alpha(df)
22
23 print("Cronbach's alpha", alpha)
24

```

Figure 4.5. Cronbach's Alpha: Concern 2

```

11 question_1 = [5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
12 question_2 = [3, 1, 4, 2, 4, 3, 3, 3, 2]
13 question_3 = [5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
14 question_4 = [5, 3, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
15 question_5 = [4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
16 question_6 = [1, 2, 4, 4, 1, 4, 3, 3, 3, 2]
17 question_7 = [5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
18 question_8 = [5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
19 question_9 = [3, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5]
20
21 # convert the dictionary values to a 2D array
22 data_array = np.array(list(survey_data.values()))
23
24 def cronbach_alpha(data):
25     """
26     Compute Cronbach's alpha for the given data.
27
28     Parameters:
29     data (numpy.ndarray): The data is in the form of a 2D array where each row represents a
30     respondent and each column represents an item.
31
32     Returns:
33     float: Cronbach's alpha coefficient.
34

```

Figure 4.6. Cronbach's Alpha: Combined

Survey 1: Sample

Two weeks were allotted for Survey 1's collection. The researcher's survey collection agency, SurveyMonkey.com, provided helpful information concerning the collection window, noting that the largest portion of responses to surveys prompted by email requests were typically collected a few days after initial invitations were distributed. SurveyMonkey.com reported 41 percent on the first day, 66 percent within three days, and 80 percent within seven days.¹⁴ Collection trajectories plummet each subsequent week. Week two typically sees 11 percent. Week three receives, on average, 4 percent.¹⁵ Two weeks and one recipient reminder following the initial request seemed sufficient for this study, resulting in 194 survey visits, 13 opt-outs, 17 partial completions, and 164 total completions.¹⁶ Therefore, the total completion is approximately 27 percent of the combined average attendance¹⁷ for all nine congregations and 26 percent of their combined email distribution lists. When one considers that response rates drop by 17 percent for online surveys with more than twelve questions or that take more than five minutes to complete, the confidence in this project's 15-question, non-incentivized survey that took 3 minutes and 5 seconds on average to complete increases.¹⁸ With this in mind, the

¹⁴ "How Long Should a Survey Be Open? (Survey Period)," *SurveyMonkey*, accessed January 2, 2024, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/time-to-respond/>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ An opt-out is a survey site visitor who chose "no" on the consent page and was dismissed from the survey. A partial completion indicates a survey participant who skipped one or more questions. A total completion is a survey participant who answered all the questions.

¹⁷ While the "Average Attendance" category may not be the sole interpreter for gauging a congregation's core membership, many of the congregations in this study are small, and most entertain only a few visitors each year. Therefore, average attendance becomes a weightier factor when considering the congregation's giving and serving population.

¹⁸ "Survey Benchmarks: What's a Good Survey Response Rate?," *Xola*, last modified December 18, 2023, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.xola.com/articles/survey-benchmarks-whats-a-good-survey-response-rate/>.

researcher believes the effort's sample falls well within the range of 90 percent confidence and a 5 percent margin of error.¹⁹

Survey 1: Essential Statistics

Survey 1 resulted in a median score of 70 percent, a mean of 71 percent, and a standard deviation of 11 percent. Overall, the median and mean implied that at the beginning of the study, survey participants were favorably inclined toward Christians engaging in politics. However, the standard deviation hinted toward slight diversity in opinions and subsequent willingness relative to political engagement's forms or appropriateness. A closer look at Survey 1's scores (see Appendix U) revealed contrasts between voting behavior or political responsibility and concerns about contacting political representatives, candidate endorsement, fundraiser or rally attendance, and support for laws aligning with religious beliefs over secular views. For example (see Figure 4.7), consider the notable differences between Question 1 (voting frequency) and Question 14 (candidate endorsement). Question 1's responses indicated a high level of participation in candidate selection, while Question 14 showed a slight hesitancy to share publicly the candidate they intended to choose. Comparing Questions 2, 3, and 4 (see Figure 4.8), respondents believed strongly that Christians should involve themselves in political issues (Question 2) and yet were less inclined to participate in rallies or protests (Question 3), while barely a fraction had contacted their political representatives to voice concerns (Question 4). At first glance, such discrepancies meet with an underlying concern for this study, namely, that Christian belief and practice relative to public square engagement are often divided.

¹⁹ Qualtrics, "Sample Size Calculator," *Qualtrics*, last modified March 21, 2023, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/calculating-sample-size/>.

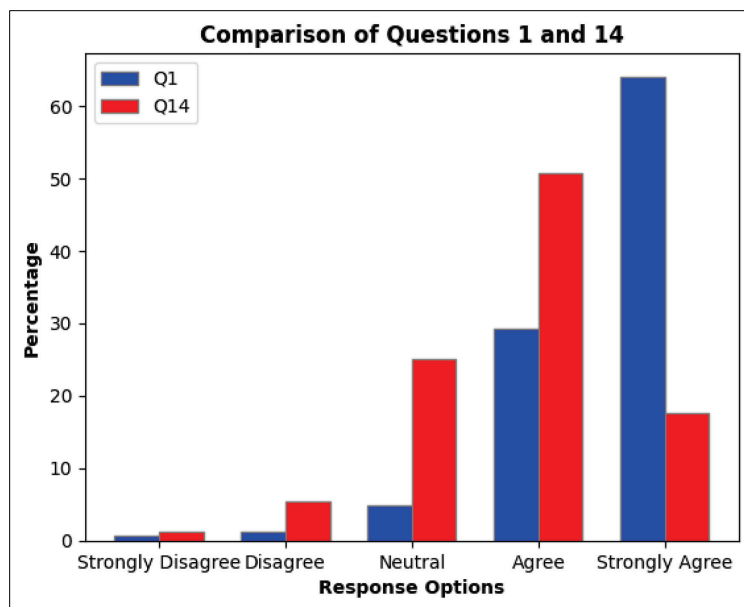


Figure 4.7. Comparison of Questions 1 and 14

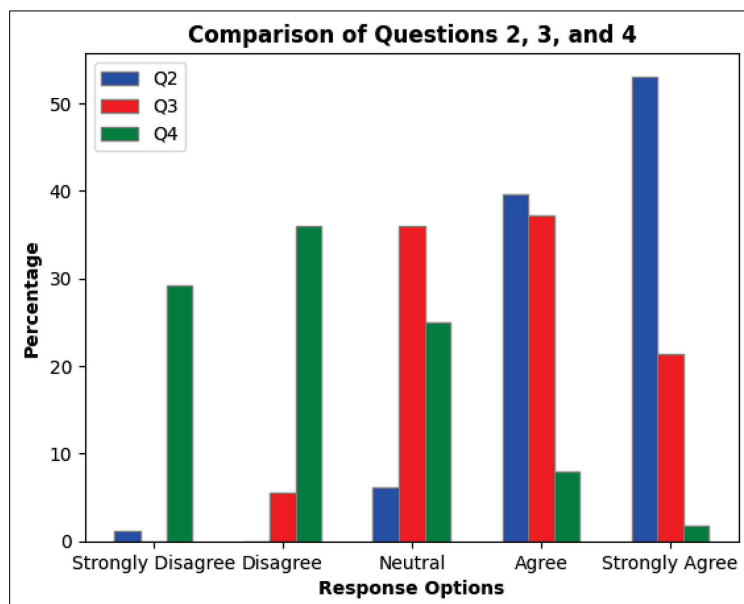


Figure 4.8. Comparison of Questions 2, 3, and 4

Survey 1: Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient

Much like net fishing, to detect, catch, and measure attitudinal shifts, a well-stocked location to cast and drag one's net must be identified. To do this, the fisherman looks for initial indicators (undercut banks, overhanging trees, etc.) signaling a catch's higher probability. Once a

suitable location is determined, the net (the second survey's administration) must be spread and put into place.

Survey 1 scoped and located the fishing hole, and its questions with higher or lower agreement levels served as the initial indicators. This seems sensible for multiple reasons. First (and innate to the Likert survey's design), questions with lower initial agreements (lower percentage scores) after the survey's initial administration are, by nature, the most sensitive to positive shifts. The inverse is true of questions with higher percentages, being more susceptible to negative changes. Second, the 15-question survey took aim at two spheres of concern: individual engagement levels and attitudes toward Christian involvement in the public square. While all the questions take aim at one of the two general concerns, the highest and lowest scores among both spheres highlight specific baseline elements directly related to the intervention's targeted objectives. In a practical sense, this means that rather than fishing the entire river (dataset), the targeted outcomes can still be observed through a subset of questions that show greater promise. The result is a more efficient observation as well as a more focused analysis considerate of the qualitative aspects inherent to the participating pastors' eNews messages and recipient feedback.

Choosing particular questions to monitor is not a step singularly concerned with higher or lower scores. Data-driven decisions in this regard must be made. Due to the survey's phrasing and objectives, the researcher knew to fashion the metaphorical net from the lowest scoring questions. The goal of the intervention was to move survey recipients toward engagement not away. To strengthen the net for capturing this, the questions selected required correlation testing.

To do this, the researcher employed Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho) test.²⁰

In summary, Spearman's rho measures the strength of association (monotonic relationship) between the survey's variables, quantifying the relationship and its potential trajectory. This benefits the intervention's aforementioned metaphorical net by predicting likely associative attitudes relative to these correlated mechanisms. In other words, if the test reveals two questions as highly correlated, it is nearly certain that respondents who agree on one will also agree on the other, thereby revealing a broader sweeping attitudinal pattern worth consideration.²¹

Of the survey's fifteen queries, Questions 12, 8, and 4 (consecutively) scored well below neutrality (50%), indicating respondents' levels of disagreement with each's premise. While Questions 6 and 11 were above neutrality, the researcher added them to the correlation test's reach, primarily because they fell below the mean, and by adding Question 11, the test reached into and represented the survey's second concern.

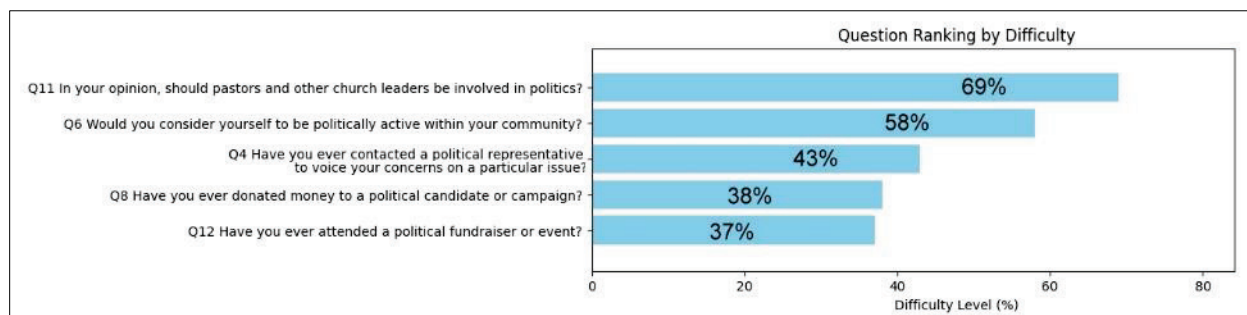


Figure 4.9. Question Ranking by Difficulty

²⁰ "Spearman Rank Correlation (Spearman's Rho): Definition and How to Calculate It," *Statistics How To*, accessed February 20, 2024, <https://www.statisticshowto.com/probability-and-statistics/correlation-coefficient-formula/spearman-rank-correlation-definition-calculate/>.

²¹ Focusing on the content of these questions can also provide gateways into more focused interventions associated with those specific factors and their resultant attitudes.

Because Spearman's rho is a pairing test requiring each variable to be matched against the others, the researcher performed the test, establishing each question as the test's initial predictor. Google Colaboratory was used to perform the tests.²² Figure 4.10 below demonstrates the essential coding formulation used for all of the tests.

The first test considered Question 12 (Q12). The following coefficients and P-values occurred. The summary that immediately follows explains the test's findings.

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q12 and Q11: -0.3
 P-value for Q12 and Q11: 0.6238376647810728
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q12 and Q8: 0.9999999999999999
 P-value for Q12 and Q8: 1.4042654220543672e-24 (*very close to zero*)
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q12 and Q6: 0.39999999999999997
 P-value for Q12 and Q6: 0.5046315754686911
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q12 and Q4: 0.7
 P-value for Q12 and Q4: 0.1881204043741873

Spearman's rho produces a final value between -1 and 1. Achieving a -1 means a perfect negative monotonic relationship, which is to say that as one variable increases, its paired value decreases. In reverse, a 1 indicates a perfect positive relationship. If 0 is achieved, then no monotonic relationship exists. It should be mentioned that 0.05 (5%) is considered the "common significance level."²³ Rising above this tends toward statistical insignificance, implying chance. Remaining below denotes statistical significance. Considering the results from Q12's testing, it appeared that Q11 showed a weak negative relationship and statistical insignificance. Q8 showed a near-perfect positive relationship with a statistical significance that was unlikely due to chance. Q6 offered moderate positivity, but with a P-value above the common significance level, its statistical significance is negligible. Q4 showed a strong positive relationship; however, its P-

²² "Google Colaboratory," accessed February 20, 2024, <https://colab.research.google.com/>.

²³ "T-Test, Chi-Square, ANOVA, Regression, Correlation...," accessed January 11, 2024, <https://datatab.net/tutorial/spearman-correlation>.

value rose well above the common significance level. The researcher concluded that Q12 and Q8 are, indeed, monotonically related and worth investigating following the second survey's administration and subsequent comparison with the first.

```

from scipy.stats import spearmanr

# Percentage scores for Q11
q11_percentages = [1.83, 15.24, 31.10, 39.02, 12.80] # Percentages for Q11: In your opinion, should pastors and other church leaders be involved in politics?

# Percentage scores for the other questions
q12_percentages = [54.27, 17.68, 20.12, 6.71, 1.22] # Percentages for Q12: Have you ever attended a political fundraiser or event?
q8_percentages = [58.00, 20.12, 21.95, 6.71, 1.22] # Percentages for Q8: Have you ever donated money to a political candidate or campaign?
q6_percentages = [9.15, 26.83, 35.37, 21.95, 6.71] # Percentages for Q6: Would you consider yourself to be politically active within your community?
q4_percentages = [29.27, 35.98, 25.00, 7.93, 1.83] # Percentages for Q4: Have you ever contacted a political representative to voice your concerns on a particular issue?

# Perform Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test for each pair of questions
spearman_corr_coefficient_11_12, p_value_11_12 = spearmanr(q11_percentages, q12_percentages)
spearman_corr_coefficient_11_8, p_value_11_8 = spearmanr(q11_percentages, q8_percentages)
spearman_corr_coefficient_11_6, p_value_11_6 = spearmanr(q11_percentages, q6_percentages)
spearman_corr_coefficient_11_4, p_value_11_4 = spearmanr(q11_percentages, q4_percentages)

print("Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q12:", spearman_corr_coefficient_11_12)
print("P-value for Q11 and Q12:", p_value_11_12)

print("Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q8:", spearman_corr_coefficient_11_8)
print("P-value for Q11 and Q8:", p_value_11_8)

print("Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q6:", spearman_corr_coefficient_11_6)
print("P-value for Q11 and Q6:", p_value_11_6)

print("Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q4:", spearman_corr_coefficient_11_4)
print("P-value for Q11 and Q4:", p_value_11_4)

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q12: -0.3
P-value for Q11 and Q12: 0.6238376647810728
Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q8: -0.3
P-value for Q11 and Q8: 0.6238376647810728
Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q6: 0.6
P-value for Q11 and Q6: 0.28475697986529375
Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q4: -0.19999999999999998
P-value for Q11 and Q4: 0.747060078104662

```

Figure 4.10. Spearman's rho for Q11

Question 11(Q11) produced the following:

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q12: -0.3

P-value for Q11 and Q12: 0.6238376647810728

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q8: -0.3

P-value for Q11 and Q8: 0.6238376647810728

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q6: 0.6

P-value for Q11 and Q6: 0.28475697986529375

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q11 and Q4: -0.19999999999999998

P-value for Q11 and Q4: 0.747060078104662

As already previously discovered, Q11 and Q12 were poorly related and statistically insignificant. The same was shown between Q11 and Q8. A moderately positive monotonic relationship occurred between Q11 and Q6. However, the P-value was high, implying insignificance. Q11 and Q4 produced a weak negative relationship and a higher P-value. The

researcher concluded that none of the correlations with Q11 were significant and, therefore, useful.

Question 8 (Q8) resulted in the following:

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q8 and Q12: 0.9999999999999999
 P-value for Q8 and Q12: 1.4042654220543672e-24 (*very close to zero*)
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q8 and Q11: -0.3
 P-value for Q8 and Q11: 0.6238376647810728
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q8 and Q6: 0.39999999999999997
 P-value for Q8 and Q6: 0.5046315754686911
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q8 and Q4: 0.7
 P-value for Q8 and Q4: 0.1881204043741873

Q8 and Q12 once again produced a near-perfect relationship and a high measure of statistical significance. Q8 and Q11 produced a weak negative relationship and little significance. Q8 and Q6 showed a moderate positive relationship but weak statistical significance. Like Q12's testing, Q8 and Q4 resulted in a strong positive relationship but weaker statistical significance. Once again, the researcher noted that Q8 and Q12 were worth considering relative to the metaphorical net. However, the researcher reconsidered Q4's consistent strength.

Question 6 (Q6) produced the following results:

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q6 and Q12: 0.39999999999999997
 P-value for Q6 and Q12: 0.5046315754686911
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q6 and Q11: 0.6
 P-value for Q6 and Q11: 0.28475697986529375
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q6 and Q8: 0.39999999999999997
 P-value for Q6 and Q8: 0.5046315754686911
 Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q6 and Q4: 0.49999999999999994
 P-value for Q6 and Q4: 0.39100221895577053

Q6 and Q12 resulted in a moderately positive monotonic relationship but overall statistical insignificance, once again indicating chance. In the rest of Q6's pairings with Q11, Q8, and Q4, the results were the same. The researcher decided against Q6's inclusion in the metaphorical net.

Question 4 (Q4) offered the following outcomes:

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q4 and Q12: 0.7

P-value for Q4 and Q12: 0.1881204043741873

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q4 and Q11: -0.19999999999999998

P-value for Q4 and Q11: 0.747060078104662

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q4 and Q8: 0.7

P-value for Q4 and Q8: 0.1881204043741873

Spearman's correlation coefficient between Q4 and Q6: 0.49999999999999994

P-value for Q4 and Q6: 0.39100221895577053

Q4 and Q12 showed a strong positive monotonic relationship between their percentage scores. However, as before, the statistical significance was low. Q4 produced a weak negative relationship and low significance with Q11. Q4 and Q8 offered a strong positive relationship but relative insignificance. Q4 and Q6 revealed a moderately positive relationship but general insignificance. The researcher concluded that Q4 continued to show possibility relative to a place in the metaphorical net.

Overall, Questions 12, 8, and 4 appeared correlated. Still, even as Question 4 produced a moderate to strong positive in most occurrences, it continued to show statistical insignificance, repeatedly implying the possibility of chance. In conclusion, the researcher elected to pay the closest attention to the results from Questions 12 and 8 following the second survey's administration, assuming that among the 15 questions, these two provided the sturdiest netting to capture and detect positive attitudinal shifts from one survey to the next.

Q12 and Q8 as Reliable Gauges

Survey 1 investigates an array of political behaviors, each question probing various aspects typical of commitment. Some of the aspects exist within deeper, more intimate spaces of the survey recipients, often determining well-established boundaries. These boundaries are extremely personal and often purposely limiting for protective reasons. To cross these

boundaries is to leave one's homeland and its assurances, ultimately exposing oneself to unfamiliar things. This requires commitment's action undergirded by deliberate willingness.

Questions 12 and 8 proved correlated. Interestingly, both questions examine deeply personal things. Question 12 measures a person's physical participation in political events. While voting is the ultimate expression of a citizen's engagement, it can occur without "tangible and important stakes,"²⁴ which is to say, it requires lesser initiative, demonstrating an equally lesser commitment. Presence at a political event is different. Unlike voting (which, for the most part, is relatively easily achieved within one's schedule while simultaneously preserving general anonymity among professional associates and family or social groups), participating in political events requires a higher commitment level to the ideology reflected by the citizen's vote. It requires a deliberate inclination to spend valuable private time doing something that may or may not provide direct benefit to the individual. Among countless others of an individual's personal prohibitions, presence assumes a willingness to be seen in public discourse interacting with candidates representing specific ideologies that may or may not be frowned upon by professional associates and those with whom close personal relationships are held. These considerations add weight to Question 12's usefulness, coalescing even more so when considering studies showing people who participate in political campaigns experience stronger attitudinal changes than those who do not.²⁵ This becomes the target beyond the intervention's initial goal. In other words, if a person is moved toward willingness to attend a political event, the odds are good he will experience a movement toward sturdier participation, eventually demonstrating more robust engagement levels in other public square arenas.

²⁴ John F. Freie, "The Effects of Campaign Participation on Political Attitudes," *Political Behavior* 19, no. 2 (June 1997): 136.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

Question 8 examines financial contributions. Like time and presence, one's treasures are often held by an equally tight fist. Giving money to a campaign that may potentially end in failure requires increased commitment. It is no surprise that studies correlate increased political contribution levels as predictors of increased political engagement.²⁶ Observed alongside Question 12, the researcher was confident that if attitudinal shifts occurred, the results from these two questions would reveal them.

Survey 2 (Survey 1 Redistributed): Sample

Initially, two weeks were allotted for Survey 2's administration and collection. However, the researcher closed the survey after eight days within which one reminder was sent by the participating pastors to their eNews recipients. The researcher noted a total of 166 survey visits, 2 opt-outs, 0 partial completions, and 164 total completions. The completion total was an exact match to Survey 1's total. Survey 2's total completion rate fell well within a range of 90 percent confidence and a 5 percent margin of error.

Survey 2 (Survey 1 Redistributed): Essential Statistics

Much like the first survey, the second survey's median score was 75 percent. Its mean and standard of deviation were 74 percent and 11 percent, respectively. This mirrored Survey 1's initial implications, which was that, similar to the study's beginning, survey participants were favorably inclined toward Christians engaging in politics at its end. Moreover, the standard deviation implied a pocket of diversity relative to political engagement's methods and suitability.

²⁶ Adam Hughes, "5 Facts about U.S. Political Donations," *Pew Research Center*, n.d., accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/05/17/5-facts-about-u-s-political-donations/>.

Furthermore, Survey 2 revealed similar contrasts between the same behaviors mentioned in the previous section entitled “Survey 1: Essential Statistics.”

Qualitative Observations

Research professor at the University of Houston, Brené Brown, once noted that “the power of statistics and the clean lines of quantitative research appealed to me, but I fell in love with the richness and depth of qualitative research,” adding that she “couldn’t resist the idea of research as story-catching.”²⁷ Indeed, plentiful stories were captured throughout this project’s implementation. Some merit sharing, especially as they encapsulate notable insights discovered among the participating pastors and their eNews recipients. The most prominent themes have been arranged in the following phase groupings: Phase 1: Week 1 to Week 4, Phase 2: Week 5 to Week 7, and Phase 3: Week 8 to Week 12. The divisions were determined by naturally occurring communication lulls during the project’s implementation. They do not coincide with the three-phase design noted in Chapter 3’s methodology.²⁸

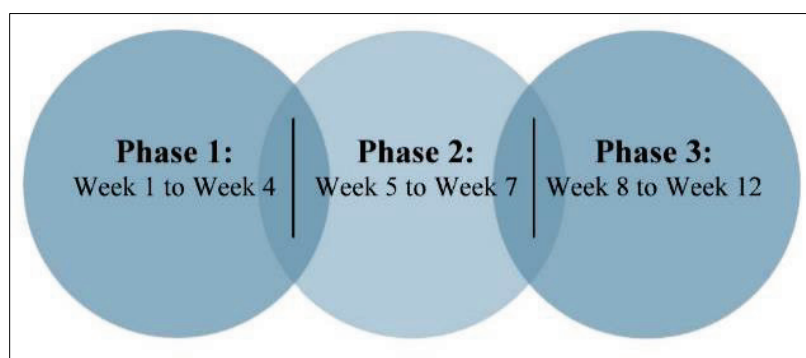


Figure 4.11. Qualitative Observations in Three Phases

²⁷ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2012), 252.

²⁸ A communication lull is defined as a portion of time in which very minimal or relatively insignificant communication occurs between the researcher and participating pastors or the eNews recipients and the participating pastors. It is likely the two lulls occurred as a result of the liturgical seasons in which the project was implemented. The lull between weeks four and five occurred during Lent’s midpoint. Lent is a particularly taxing time for LCMS Lutheran pastors. The lull between weeks seven and eight occurred during Holy Week and Easter, both of which are epicentral to Confessional Lutheranism’s worship calendar.

Phase 1: Week 1 to Week 4

Mission Drift

The possibility of mission drift exists within any incremental effort. This is to admit that even the slightest unnoticed adjustment to any course can produce an unfortunate trajectory and lead to a foreign goal's shore.²⁹ Safeguards prevent this. The researcher's watchful monitoring of each participating pastor's eNews messages, regularly measuring them against the writing rubric, was perhaps the most essential protection against such wandering. Doing so, the researcher detected a near-universal mission drift among the participant pastors in their third eNews message. Specifically, seven of the nine pastors wrote eNews messages that were dryly sermonic, neither including creative writing devices or what the researcher referred to in the individual seminars as the "nudge." The nudge is the deliberate encouragement toward engagement combined with a practical locale for the engagement's application. To reset their headings, the researcher immediately emailed all nine pastors, explaining the importance of adherence to the writing rubric. Following the email, the researcher spoke by phone with several of the pastors, answering their questions and providing practical "nudge" examples appropriate to their various topics. This resolved the issue.

As noted, the drift occurred early in the project and was immediately corrected. Therefore, the researcher was not overly concerned that one of the twelve messages had a lesser degree of focus. The reason for the drift remains unknown. Based on discussions with participating pastors, a few possibilities appeared likely, which may be worthy of further examination.

²⁹ Peter Greer and Chris Horst, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 64–66.

First, it is possible the researcher's guidance was not clear. However, none of the participant pastors expressed this. Moreover, the writing rubric was provided, thoroughly discussed during the seminars, and reiterated in communications throughout the implementation. Second, as eNews recipients began responding, it is feasible that pastors were somehow affected by the responses. Third, individual interests possess intense gravity. For the most part, all of the participant pastors' eNews messages showed their passion for pastoral care, sometimes at the expense of the writing rubric's instructions. Fourth, unknown personal or congregational pressures that capture the pastor's attention may cause a shift in focus. Finally, it could be that time constraints leading to mental fatigue caused reversion toward familiar topics and writing styles.³⁰

Inspiration

Conjuring content for a weekly eNews message is already challenging. Grappling with inspiration's specter is equally tricky. While one pastor offered somewhat succinctly that the weekly effort kept him "sharp and focused during Lent,"³¹ at various times within the first four weeks, four of the nine pastors reported feeling as though creativity's wellspring was already running dry. This was true in two ways. First, they expressed difficulty identifying relevant personal stories appropriate to their various weekly topics. Second, they struggled to provide their readers with varying locales for practical engagement. For example, one pastor noted that he "could only tell his people to contact their congressman so many times."

To combat the first struggle, the researcher put himself forward as proof that creativity's wellspring is generous, having received its weekly gifts toward eNews messaging since 2015.

³⁰ See footnote 28 concerning Lent.

³¹ The research phase occurred during what is, for many Lutheran clergy, the taxing season of Lent.

Following the reassurance, he offered practical ways for idea discovery. Additionally, he reminded some to consider using the writing prompt link or the quotation compilation highlighted in Seminar 1 while discussing the project's Planning Schedule (see Appendix T). This appeared to quiet the concern.

The researcher met the second struggle by directing the pastors' attention to engagement opportunities within their readers' immediate reach. In other words, while calling a senator, volunteering for a campaign, or attending a public meeting are powerful ways to engage, a simpler one might be to visit the local library during Black History Month. Is the publicly funded library promoting volumes rooted in Critical Race Theory? Would a letter to the librarian be a worthwhile effort? Perhaps an eNews recipient could visit the same library during June, which in many American communities is now recognized as LGBTQ pride month. Are books with inappropriate sexual imagery on display in the children's section? In either context, an eNews recipient has been given reasonably accessible avenues for engagement with leaders in their communities.

Trust

Trust was considered essential to the pastor and congregant relationship early in this prospectus. Further along, the researcher posited that the eNews messages would deal with topics in ways that, for many, might be considered as opinion. Mindful of Chapter 2's Literature Review, let the reader remember that trust is an essential battering ram to opinion's resistant shell. Along with Chapter 2's provisions, further research shows that people will trust another person's judgment before their own for various reasons. Robert Cialdini parses various opinion-bending factors in his book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Perceived expertise and social proof are two of his most prominent.

Concerning expertise, Cialdini writes that a “credible authority possesses two distinct features in the minds of an audience: expertise and trustworthiness.”³² Interestingly, Cialdini insists that people are more likely to align with credentialed experts in a field of study, even when the expert’s argument is weak.³³

Cialdini describes the concept of social proof as determining “what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct.”³⁴ He explains that this determination is primarily influenced by observable behavior. In other words, if a person sees others in his community demonstrating certain behaviors, he is likely to do the same. Moreover, social proof serves as a lever for expertise.³⁵ Suppose an eNews recipient considers the pastor a theological expert. As an expert, the pastor communicates and acts according to his expertise, thereby influencing others in the community to believe and behave similarly. In that case, the recipient is more likely to be swayed. After the second eNews was sent, participant pastors began receiving messages from recipients resonating with these two constructs. These messages increased in form and frequency over the twelve weeks. As they did, trust’s skyward trajectory appeared. The following are initial examples that emerged within the first four weeks.

One pastor reported a notable increase in church members “opening up” in person and by email or text to share ideologically specific articles, websites, and podcasts with the pastor they had previously kept hidden. He added that some believed he was “giving a much-needed voice to their concerns,” as if to say he was a figurehead of expertise acting on their behalf and in ways they desired to emulate. Another pastor reported a remarkable increase in personal text messages

³² Robert B Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2021), 191.

³³ *Ibid.*, 20–22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 115–16.

expressing thankfulness for his weekly messages. Some communicated appreciation not only for the content but also for the caliber of style. A third pastor reported similarly, adding that replies often contained kindly emojis. Relative to trust, this should not be overlooked. Research shows that reply messages containing emojis tend to imply a reader's level of understanding and support for the message sent, acting as powerful representations of otherwise hidden emotions.³⁶

A fourth pastor shared a message from a newly catechized member wrestling through personal tragedy and, as a result, had been absent from worship for quite some time. He reported that one of his eNews messages stirred a single-sentence response acknowledging the need for Christ "in a world filled with monsters." Albeit a brief reply, the straying and otherwise lurking member risked drawing attention to his absence, engaging directly in response to a mass-mailed eNews message that did not require an identity-betraying reply. This implies trust's strengthening through the eNews messaging, even as some research might suggest such interpersonal confidence is built primarily through long-term membership, regular worship attendance, and consistent participation in the church's social activities.³⁷

Phase 2: Week 5 to Week 7

Inspiration

Similar to Phase 1, although minimally, content inspiration was an expressed concern in Phase 2. Only one pastor mentioned it in passing near the phase's beginning. The researcher elected to discuss the topic briefly during Seminar 3. To supplement the discussion, he provided

³⁶ Isabelle Boutet et al., "Emojis Influence Emotional Communication, Social Attributions, and Information Processing," *Computers in Human Behavior* 119 (June 1, 2021): 3, 11.

³⁷ Ozan Aksoy and Dingeman Wiertz, "The Impact of Religious Involvement on Trust, Volunteering, and Perceived Cooperativeness: Evidence from Two British Panels," *European Sociological Review* 40, no. 1 (February 1, 2024): 143.

a link to one of his blog writings detailing inspiration's process and potential results.³⁸ Also, after receiving permission from all the participating pastors, the researcher created and shared with the participating pastors a cloud storage folder containing all of their individual eNews messages. Access to the folder was made available for two weeks after Seminar 4.

Writing Process and Limitations

During Seminar 3's discussion, the researcher asked all nine participant pastors to describe their comfort levels with the required writing and to explain whether they believed the effort was becoming easier or more difficult. All nine pastors expressed challenges relative to time constraints, avoiding sermonic styles, and others already mentioned. Seven communicated a joy for the task. Two reported a more comfortable sense for the newer creative writing style, suggesting it influenced other areas of their work. One confessed jovially, "I'm absolutely setting myself up to go beyond the twelve weeks." Another reported the same, although admitted "it might not be a weekly thing."

As was noted in this chapter's previous section entitled "Seminar 3," a Linear Regression Test was performed before the third seminar, identifying three pastors with statistically significant word count increases. The first of the three pastors with increased word counts reported that the effort had become an increasingly "comfortable and very positive exercise," in a sense, allowing him to write until he felt he was done. The second pastor noted the writing rubric's perceived (mistakenly) five-paragraph maximum as nearly impossible when explaining complicated topics to his largely unfamiliar congregation.³⁹ He found that the more he

³⁸ Christopher I. Thoma, "No Need That Anyone Should Teach You," *Cruciform Stuff*, January 21, 2024, accessed March 4, 2024, <https://cruciformstuff.com/2024/01/21/no-need-that-anyone-should-teach-you/>.

³⁹ The five-paragraph limitation was originally explained as a comfortable minimum rather than the maximum.

thoroughly explained each subject, the more his recipients began commending him for “thinking about this stuff” in detail, and they began offering additional topics for him to write about. The third pastor described a difficulty with “homing in on one particular aspect of what truly are multifaceted problems.” He felt the need to investigate each more thoroughly. As such, he discovered ways to craft his carriage to meet his typically unreached (or seemingly disinterested) members, some of whom had responded with appreciation and praise.

Epictetus wrote, “It is circumstances (difficulties) which show what men are.”⁴⁰ He further described such obstacles as tools used by God to fashion skillful Olympians. Concerning these three pastors, it could be estimated that their writing difficulties produced proficiency’s fruits. The first pastor discovered a joyful and seemingly endless ease with creative writing that he intended to continue enjoying. The second pastor realized a comfortable synergy between writer and reader, each meeting particular needs and providing assurances for the other. The third experienced creative writing’s benefits when reaching those who might otherwise be disinterested in public square-related content. In short, the Linear Regression Test’s quantitative results appear to have highlighted qualitative landmarks, namely, blossoming potentials among a portion of the participating pastors and their recipients. Overall, these landmarks imply augmented topic awareness and enhanced writing skills, resulting in increased engagement from eNews recipients.

Finally, it should be noted that other participant pastors demonstrated similar growth patterns that were not necessarily identified by the Linear Regression Test. These are expounded in the following sections.

⁴⁰ Epictetus, *The Discourses of Epictetus: With the Encheiridion and Fragments* (London, England: G. Bell and Sons, 1890), 70.

Increased Endearment Demonstrated

As with Phase 1, Phase 2 enjoyed an ever-increasing accumulation of positive communications from eNews recipients. Most notably, recipients iterated a gladness to know more about their pastors, expressing appreciation for seeing them as both clergymen and concerned citizens. Some communicated a growing eagerness for each forthcoming eNews. One pastor, relatively new to his post, reported an increased sense of trust for him among his members. The same pastor reported visits with people who asked him straightforwardly “to take on other topics.”

Email and text replies continued to increase while also varying in length. For example, one pastor reported regularly receiving various email replies with such commendations as, “Great article!” while also receiving longer messages like the following:

Hi Pastor. I’ve finally had a chance to read your article, and it’s awesome! Truly! I love all the biblical references. It’s a powerful tool to reference and share as we engage with our atheist and/or agnostic friends and family, not to mention the general population. Thank you for sharing God’s word so truthfully, eloquently, concisely, and lovingly. [We] both really appreciate you and feel truly blessed to have found [this church]!

eNews Expanded Influence and Usage

During Seminar 3’s discussion, three of the nine pastors mentioned that their eNews messages were regularly shared by recipients with others beyond the scope of the congregation’s email distribution lists. The messages were shared in both digital and hardcopy forms and occasionally resulted in direct communication with the pastor. One pastor explained that he printed and conspicuously placed hardcopies for a non-denominational congregation renting a portion of his church’s facilities. Within the first few weeks, he noticed the copies were disappearing. Conversations with some of the visiting church’s members described the messages as well-written discussion starters on complex and challenging topics. One visitor noted that the

messages gave him a fresh perspective on topics he had not considered deeply. Another said that the messages helped him iterate to friends and family “what he didn’t know how to articulate.”

In addition to the centrifugal results mentioned above, two more happenings relative to one pastor’s eNews messaging efforts are worth mentioning. The first is that some in his congregation asked that his messages be recrafted for use as Bible studies. The pastor did so, ultimately adding it to his weekly regimen. The second is that “two or three members took issue with the articles,” resulting in “lengthy meetings that, in the end, went very well and brought all involved back together again.” He further explained, “I was able to go even further into the biblical positions, and as it happens, we were able to talk about and settle other unspoken things.” In other words, the eNews messages struck sensitive chords with a small group of readers who, trusting their pastor, approached him for discussion. These discussions not only provided opportunities for biblical clarification concerning particular cultural topics, but they prompted investigation of the underlying issues that caused the initial discomfort, ultimately resulting in reconciliation.

Phase 3: Week 8 to Week 12

Lengthier Communications from eNews Recipients

Well into the implementation’s eighth week, it became increasingly noticeable to the researcher that shared replies from eNews participants were expanding in length. Rather than sending minimally-worded commendations, more eNews recipients were sending much longer expositions communicating previously unspoken thoughts concerning public square topics. One such example follows, being only the concluding portion of a 342-word message summarizing the participating pastor’s eNews effort:

So when discussing social issues that become contentious and uncomfortable, we should encourage others to search the Scriptures for real answers, just as you are doing in your

Truth Engaging Culture eNews, and God’s Word will lead more and more believers on the right path, so keep up the good work of informing and educating all of us so we can then vote for those that have our best interests and well-being in mind for our families and our future according to God’s will.

A Definitively Negative Response

As previously mentioned, one participating pastor reported eNews message pushback from a small group of parishioners. The interactions between the pastor and the group, as well as the subsequent results, were quite positive, ending in stronger bonds between them. Considering this end, the researcher did not count the conflict as definitively negative.⁴¹ By contrast, early into the eighth week, one participating pastor received a lengthier email compared to others distributed. It was the only definitively negative message reported and shared with the researcher from among all nine participating pastors over the course of the 12-week intervention. In it, the sender prefaced his concern:

I am a registered independent and a moderate who has always, since high school during the early 60s and college during the late 60s to the present, learned about issues, domestic and foreign. I endeavored to learn the context of an issue, pros and cons, and with a view of how each side met Christian morals and ethics. As a result, I agree with the Democratic Party on some issues and on other issues with the traditional Republican Party (which sadly no longer exists). And I am not a one issue voter.

The message’s sender communicated briskly that he had “no interest to engage in a debate or a point-counterpoint,” leaving little room for discussion. He added, “I simply wish to share some of my thoughts on my interpretation and perception of the scope and content of the eNews editions.” In the second of three short paragraphs of subjective concerns that followed, he noted

⁴¹ A response or reply (whether written or verbal) resulting in discussion refusal or irreconcilable division between a participating pastor and an eNews recipient was considered definitively negative.

parenthetically, “I did not research all items questioned, but enough for my purposes,” fulfilling the first presumption of the second limitation mentioned on page 29 of this prospectus.⁴²

The researcher asked the participating pastor by email how he ultimately responded. The pastor replied, “I thanked them for the feedback and honored their request...it wasn’t worth it to engage via email. They’re not very reasonable.” This is to say, the pastor’s relationship with the sender was already a known quantity, and relative to the effort, the message received was not necessarily unexpected. For the researcher, while this was somewhat disconcerting, it initially resonated positively in that the email’s sender received eight weeks of well-written and worthwhile content, enough to foster opportunities for cognitive dissonance. However, negativity’s flame ultimately signed the researcher after visiting the classic volume *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Within, Leon Festinger proposed that cognitive dissonance can and often results in increased immunity to repeated attempts at persuasive messaging. To relieve cognitive dissonance’s discomfort, a person “will change the cognitive elements involved, thus markedly reducing or perhaps even wholly eliminating the dissonance which now is so great.”⁴³ The participating pastor agreed this was characteristic of the message’s sender, writing: “Thinking about [the quotation from Festinger], you’re probably right. Continued cognitive dissonance would only make things worse. What is truly disheartening is that only changing the cognitive elements alleviates the dissonance, not changing the heart. What does this say about changing any dissonance? If we’re changing the elements, then we’re just tickling ears.”

⁴² “The first presumption concerns an understanding of the pastoral and parishioner roles. It asks if the message’s recipients actually consider their pastor to be an authority called by God to distribute objectively true information that expects a holistic change in alignment. It is also concerned with the parishioner’s subjective disposition. In other words, is the recipient indeed able to ask, ‘What is God saying to me through His servant by way of His holy Word?’ as opposed to asking, ‘How will I assimilate what God is saying to me through His pastor into what I already believe to be true so that I can continue to do what I am doing and believe what I believe?’”

⁴³ Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 129.

Respectful Disagreement

Two of the participating pastors received respectful email responses communicating disagreement. The first received a seven-paragraph (680 words) email in the eighth week from a relatively commending eNews recipient following a well-written explanation that included such topics as Antisemitism, Zionism, Hamas's terror attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war that followed. The message began, "I am happy that you are sending me your eNews." From there, it became a demonstration of ponderance. In other words, while typing, the writer attempted to digest the eNews message while making sense of what he already knew of Christian theology, history, and current social and geopolitical strife.

At the end of the message's second paragraph, the eNews recipient wrote, "It seems to me that you are condemning the violence of Hamas (it should be condemned) and saying very little about the much greater loss of life and property of those living in Gaza." The initial impression was that the tenor revealing an affection and trust for the pastor might change. However, it did not. Instead, as previously mentioned, it became an external wrestling match with the topics shared, ultimately ending with an innocuous, "Take my comments for whatever they are worth."

As with other messages sent to participating pastors, the researcher asked by email what was sent in reply. The reply was both humble and wonderfully pastoral and, by its conclusion, indicated no concern for division between himself and the message sender but, instead, a cordial trust capable of disagreement leading to further dialogue. The researcher asked the participating pastor if such an assessment was correct. He agreed. The participating pastor's reply was as follows:

Thanks very much for your response! I'm glad you took the time to continue the conversation. I think your criticism of my message is fair—I didn't really spend any time on the "collateral damage," if you will, nor did I acknowledge that violence is coming from both directions, which it certainly is. I agree with your assessment of the deficiencies in the knowledge and understanding of the issues at hand. I think they'll probably get worse before they get better. A two-state solution makes good sense to me, but every proposal in that regard has been rejected by one side or the other. We'll see, I suppose. Glad you could come for Good Friday yesterday evening. If I don't see you Sunday, Happy Easter!

During the eleventh week, another participating pastor received a 260-word reply to an exceptionally well-scribed first part of a two-part eNews message concerned with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. As with the previously described scenario, the reply's author wrote kindly while offering an alternative perspective to the pastor's view, finally concluding with, "I will be curious to read the next installation of this newsletter. Thanks for your work!" The pastor wrote an equally kind 375-word message commending the reply's author for his or her grasp of what was written, offering some focused clarification, and thanking the writer for sharing personal experiences relative to the topic. The pastor's reply was met with another response, which read, "Appreciate your thorough response—I look forward to hearing and discussing more," showing a stable trust between two opposing viewpoints, both of which were established on a desire for faithfulness to a biblical worldview.

Mission Drift

Mission drift appeared once again near the beginning of the third phase, but only for two of the nine participating pastors. Once detected, the researcher sent word reminding the pastors to stay the course according to the rubric. This corrected the issue. Based on the observed contents of the two eNews messages, the researcher recognized Easter's influence. In other words, the two participating pastors were writing in ways that focused more so on the resurrection of Christ than on applying the nudge. Considering the season, this was

understandable. As with the initial mission drift detected during phase 1, this was of little concern to the researcher, primarily because nine of the ten writing rubrics were employed, resulting in a minuscule deviation from the effort.

Participating Pastors' Concluding Perceptions

Within the project's formal framework, Seminar 4 was the final (post-intervention) opportunity for determining the participating pastors' immediate insights or concerns. Seminar 4's epicentral awareness was the participating pastors' experiences, namely, unmistakable behaviors common to most, if not all. The seminar mined these results through questioning followed by open discussion.

L. A. Paul notes that apart from cognitive ability, effort, or the theoretics of information intake, experience bears the most weight in learning's equation.⁴⁴ In other words, a person may have the knowledge and capabilities required for an effort, and yet, the effort's actual effectiveness and relative usefulness is only truly known when endured. Paul adds that while experience reporting is often restricted to the qualitative realm, it "extends past the merely qualitative" toward phenomenological forces, thereby implying quantifiable undertows.⁴⁵ This is to say that while an event's participant may report a uniquely subjective experience, the account is an echo of objective variables at work. Whether the reporting that follows demonstrates Paul's assumption is not certain. Nevertheless, what the participating pastors recounted among their varying communities bears a sense of continuity, implying a universal gravity inherent to the effort as a whole. As mentioned, the continuity was discovered through questioning and open

⁴⁴ L. A. Paul, *Transformative Experience* (Oxford, England: OUP Oxford, 2014), 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

dialogue. The process unfolded relative to three particular categories. They were reflective assessment, personal growth and development, and sustainability.

Reflective Assessment

During Seminar 4, the researcher asked the participating pastors if they felt as though the effort influenced congregational engagement, and if so, what made them believe this was true. More directly, he inquired concerning noticeable changes in congregational behaviors. Seven of the nine pastors noted an increase in open commendation, which is to say they received regular public praise from congregation members for their open grappling with controversial topics. Five of the nine pastors experienced increased topic recommendations and a clear shift toward unprompted interjections during casual conversations and public church gatherings such as Bible studies and general fellowship assemblies. This is to say that prior to their eNews efforts, congregation members did not initiate public discussions concerning DEI, wokeness, Critical Race Theory, or any of the other topics the pastors detailed in their writing. However, by the project's conclusion, this had become a frequent occurrence, and it was happening without concern for anonymity.

One pastor reported receiving regular newspaper and magazine articles from members concerned for maintaining his issues awareness. One pastor noted that a Christian Counselor in his church was regularly distributing his eNews messages to clients. Another pastor shared (while others in the seminar audibly agreed) that more members had expressed gratitude for the eNews messages, clarifying that the effort “emboldened them,” ultimately “granting them permission to share with others” what God’s Word said about topics that they had previously considered off limits.

Personal Growth and Development

The researcher continued Seminar 4 by asking the participating pastors to share what they discovered personally during the intervention. He encouraged them to discuss insights gleaned, namely, lessons learned concerning the role of communication in congregations and any unexpected challenges that emerged. The first insight generally shared was that even with the amount of writing required, the effort was indeed possible.⁴⁶ One pastor expressed appreciation for the discipline it produced. Another noted that the eNews had “become another important avenue for pastoral care in a very focused way.”

The second insight described was the increased sense of confidence, or as one participating pastor explained, “I have a lot more confidence with these topics than before. I’m not so worried anymore about reaching into areas or topics that people might think are too political or too controversial. People in my church want to know what I think about these things, and they’re looking for direction.” The same pastor added a newfound appreciation for the weight of a pastor’s words, both written and spoken. He affirmed that “whether or not the pastor realizes it, people are listening, even when they don’t agree. They’re reading what we’re writing. They want to know what we think.” He continued, noting the necessity for a clear understanding of the church’s positions on what are often ever-evolving topics. He affirmed his commitment to studying the issues in combination with God’s Word so that he can “communicate more clearly and make the necessary connections to what God has to say about it.”

Building on the aforementioned awareness, one pastor admitted that his view of the pastoral office had expanded, specifically, that it was “important to deal directly with cultural

⁴⁶ As was stated elsewhere, the reader should remember that the season of Lent is often an overly taxing season for Lutheran pastors. The project took place throughout this season.

issues, even from the pulpit.” In response, a pastor added that the writing rubric not only fostered avenues for unique communication inroads, but also communication directness. Another pastor added, “People appreciated the authenticity. And I found I wasn’t mincing words. I was taking a stand. The people need guidance. They need their pastor to lead.”

Continuing, one pastor reported thinking more diligently about the words he uses and a heightened awareness of the opportunities “that cross our paths for speaking up.” An additional pastor explained a newfound appreciation “for getting information out to church members about issues when they actually happen or before they happen.” He referenced a situation in his city that was brought to his attention by the researcher. A local school sent a letter informing its families that the first-grade class would participate in a lesson about gender preferences and personal pronouns and would be using various books to explore the topics with the children. Aware of the forthcoming event, the pastor was able to communicate with his congregation in ways that saw them engage with the school district, ultimately playing a part in stopping the lesson before it occurred. The community response made national news.

Finally, only one participating pastor shared unexpected challenges to his efforts. In the tenth week, an LCMS district official reached out to him for a meeting concerning his handling of certain topics in his eNews messages. Since the meeting had not occurred before Seminar 4, the pastor was unsure of the particular concern, even though the official’s alarm was the expressed cause for the meeting request. It should be known that the pastor is a member of a non-geographical district within a geographical district. In other words, his congregation resides in a state that has its own district governance, and yet his church holds membership in a district that exists in multiple states. Non-geographical churches often interact with and become

involved in geographical district happenings. As a result, ministry friendships are formed. Knowing the pastor and the district official, the researcher affirms this description.

Sustainability

To conclude Seminar 4, the researcher asked the participating pastors whether they intended to continue the eNews effort and, if so, at what level. The decision to continue was unanimous. A majority affirmed that their members looked forward to receiving the messages. Nevertheless, the continuance would take different forms. Some would write and send eNews messages with less frequency. One pastor defined this as “more like every two weeks than weekly.” Another already sends a monthly newsletter and indicated he would send along an eNews message with the formal newsletter. He would write and send others throughout the month “as issues arise” and “as time and inspiration allows.”

Apart from the eNews practice itself, the researcher asked how the pastors would sustain the effort’s momentum in their congregations. Three pastors reiterated their intent to bring an awareness of cultural topics into the pulpit. Two others would create or provide more formal resources relative to public square issues. One pastor planned to work to expand the eNews distribution list, while another would print and distribute more hard copies of the eNews to those who are not on his eNews distribution list.

Data Analysis

Initial Concern

As noted in the previous section entitled “Survey Reliability,” the Likert survey used at the intervention’s beginning and end was tested for internal consistency and dependability prior to its initial distribution. To do this, the researcher first investigated various testing methods,

ultimately electing to employ the Cronbach's Alpha test as the most assuring tool. In the same way, similar attention was given to the post-intervention results before searching for attitudinal shifts.

First, in a phone meeting prior to Seminar 4, the researcher discussed with his mentor the best methods for analysis. During the conversation, the researcher assumed T-testing was the likely instrument for recognizing the footprint of an attitudinal shift. However, he also wondered aloud about the tool's actual necessity, noting his interest in conducting a more direct comparative analysis, reminding his mentor that that the overall effort was deliberately uncomplicated and would be relatively easy to synthesize. Both agreed that a comparative analysis would likely suffice.

Second, with the second survey's beginning, the researcher reconsidered comparative analysis as the sole method for handling the intervention's results, and he recommitted to employing T-testing. That said, once the results began compiling, the researcher became concerned that T-testing's inherent assumptions might over- or under-compensate the eventual products. For example, T-tests assume normal distribution. Normal distribution, or the Gaussian distribution (bell curve), assumes symmetry around the mean score. This is to say that the distribution's left and right tails are symmetrical, essentially showing that values can potentially land on either side of the mean. A preliminary visual scan of the results revealed what appeared to be asymmetry among several of the questions. Therefore, to determine if abnormal distribution was a factor, the researcher performed a Shapiro-Wilk test (commonly used for smaller samples)⁴⁷ to confirm or dismiss the suspicion. If the suspicion was confirmed, rather than T-testing, the researcher would use the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test, which does not assume

⁴⁷ "Wilk Test," accessed May 6, 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/mathematics/wilk-test>.

normal distribution, but instead compares the medians of the pairs,⁴⁸ thereby providing more reliable results in this circumstance.

Shapiro-Wilk Test

The Shapiro-Wilk test was performed on both surveys using Google Colaboratory. A p-value of 0.05 or less rejects the test's null hypothesis of normal distribution. A p-value close to 0.05 suggests the likely possibility of departure from normal distribution. The results were as follows:

Shapiro-Wilk test results for Survey 1:

Question Q1: Statistic = 0.8026486039161682, p-value = 0.08514875173568726
 Question Q2: Statistic = 0.818183422088623, p-value = 0.1130499467253685
 Question Q3: Statistic = 0.8846827149391174, p-value = 0.3310718834400177
 Question Q4: Statistic = 0.920898973941803, p-value = 0.5357556343078613
 Question Q5: Statistic = 0.8611564040184021, p-value = 0.23243018984794617
 Question Q6: Statistic = 0.9356181621551514, p-value = 0.6351482272148132
 Question Q7: Statistic = 0.9401743412017822, p-value = 0.6671712398529053
 Question Q8: Statistic = 0.909316897392273, p-value = 0.4634961783885956
 Question Q9: Statistic = 0.906130313873291, p-value = 0.4446887671947479
 Question Q10: Statistic = 0.8796802163124084, p-value = 0.30786439776420593
 Question Q11: Statistic = 0.9541610479354858, p-value = 0.7668536305427551
 Question Q12: Statistic = 0.8670564889907837, p-value = 0.2547082006931305
 Question Q13: Statistic = 0.8734970092773438, p-value = 0.2808741629123688
 Question Q14: Statistic = 0.9205063581466675, p-value = 0.5332115292549133
 Question Q15: Statistic = 0.8676257729530334, p-value = 0.2569425404071808

Shapiro-Wilk test results for Survey 2:

Question Q1: Statistic = 0.7467131614685059, p-value = 0.02774088829755783
 Question Q2: Statistic = 0.8018214702606201, p-value = 0.0838451236486435
 Question Q3: Statistic = 0.9553487300872803, p-value = 0.775281548500061
 Question Q4: Statistic = 0.8650299310684204, p-value = 0.24687665700912476
 Question Q5: Statistic = 0.8448935747146606, p-value = 0.17890970408916473
 Question Q6: Statistic = 0.9304864406585693, p-value = 0.59969162940979
 Question Q7: Statistic = 0.9370569586753845, p-value = 0.6452129483222961
 Question Q8: Statistic = 0.9749829173088074, p-value = 0.906162679195404
 Question Q9: Statistic = 0.7804838418960571, p-value = 0.055650003254413605
 Question Q10: Statistic = 0.9239765405654907, p-value = 0.5559106469154358

⁴⁸ "Understanding the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test," *Statistics Solutions*, accessed May 6, 2024, <https://www.statisticssolutions.com/free-resources/directory-of-statistical-analyses/how-to-conduct-the-wilcoxon-sign-test/>.

Question Q11: Statistic = 0.9290254712104797, p-value = 0.5897403359413147
 Question Q12: Statistic = 0.9864672422409058, p-value = 0.965923547744751
 Question Q13: Statistic = 0.8923183083534241, p-value = 0.36889493465423584
 Question Q14: Statistic = 0.9002096652984619, p-value = 0.41104549169540405
 Question Q15: Statistic = 0.8009109497070312, p-value = 0.08242978155612946

As expected, all of Survey 1's questions were comfortably above the 0.05 p-value, indicating no evidence of the null hypothesis' rejection. However, question 1 in Survey 2 was well below the 0.05 threshold, indicating a departure from normal distribution. Even further, questions 9, 10, and 11 were faintly above 0.05, suggesting a slight departure from normality. Combined, questions 1, 9, 10, and 11 are 25 percent of Survey 2's totality. Therefore, the researcher elected to proceed with the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test, which is the more appropriate non-parametric counterpart to the T-test.

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was conducted using Google Colaboratory. The null hypothesis for a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test insists there is no significant difference between paired samples. The Wilcoxon test comparing Survey 2's results with Survey 1 produced two outcomes: a statistic and a p-value. The statistic reveals the strength of the difference between actual pairs. The p-value shows the probability of observable data. In this case, the test produced an unsurprising statistic of 0.0, essentially indicating no difference in the actual questions asked by identical surveys. However, the test's p-value of $6.103515625e-05$ suggested a significant investigation-worthy difference in results from Survey 1 compared to the results of Survey 2, thereby assuring the researcher that a quantifiable shift had occurred.

Comparative Analysis

First Concern: Questions 1, 4, 6, 8, & 12

The survey's first concern, represented by questions 1, 4, 6, 8, and 12, investigated individual engagement levels. It did this through questions that gauged personal or material participation in public square happenings. A simple comparative analysis of each question follows, and a summary deduction of the overall concern concludes the section.

Q1: Voting Frequency

There was a slight increase in the proportion of respondents who reported voting “Sometimes” and a decrease in those who reported voting “Often” from Survey 1 to Survey 2. However, the proportion of respondents who reported voting “Always” increased noticeably (Figure 4.12).

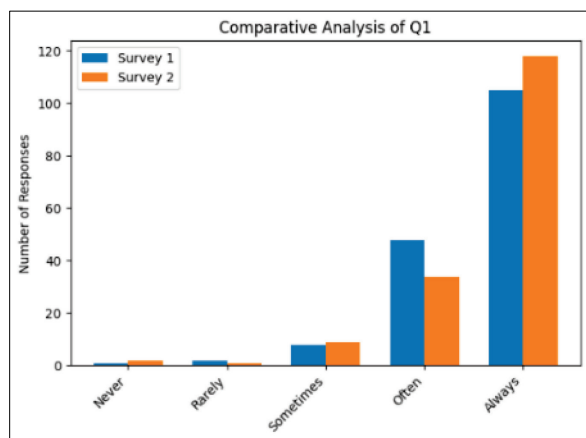


Figure 4.12. CA01

Q4: Contacting a Political Representative

The proportion of respondents who reported never or rarely contacting a political representative decreased between Survey 1 and Survey 2. “Always” also lost a respondent.

However, there was a noticeable increase in the proportion of survey respondents who reported contacting a representative “Sometimes” and “Often” (Figure 4.13).

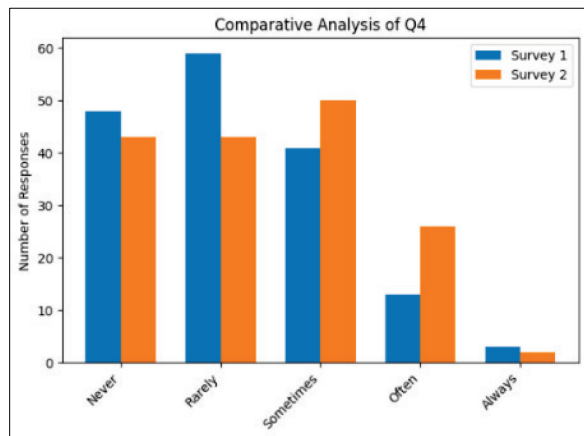


Figure 4.13. CA04

Q6: Politically Active in the Community

There were significant decreases in the proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed or disagreed with considering themselves politically active in their communities. There was a noticeable increase among those who chose “Neutral” or “Agree.” “Strongly Agree” realized only a slight increase (Figure 4.14).

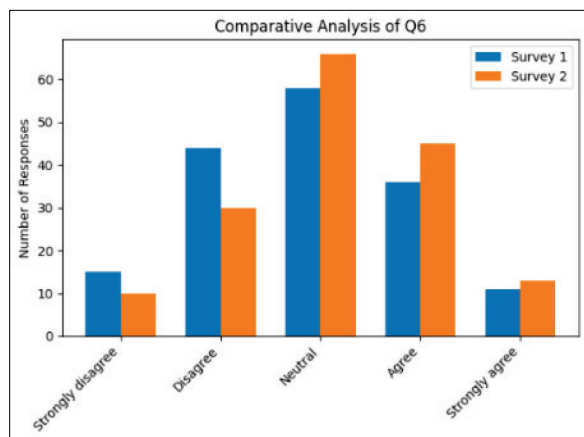


Figure 4.14. CA06

Q8: Donating Money

There was a sharp decrease in the number of respondents who reported never donating money to a political candidate or campaign. A slight decrease is visible among those who chose “Rarely.” Conversely, there was a meaningful increase in the “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always” categories. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section entitled “Considering Questions 8 and 12” (Figure 4.15).

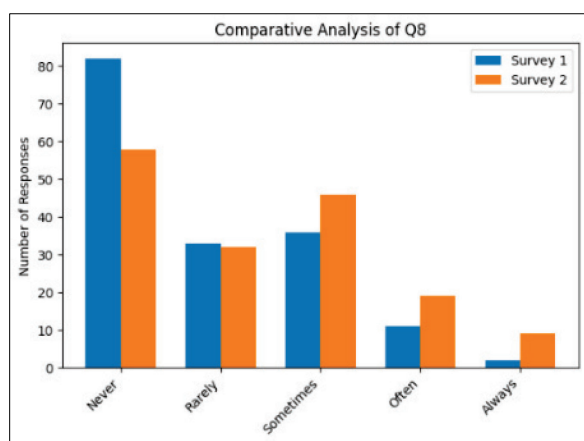


Figure 4.15. CA08

Q12: Attending a Political Fundraiser or Event

As with Question 8, there was a noticeable decrease in Question 12’s negative sense. The proportion of respondents who reported never attending a political fundraiser or event dropped by 21 percentage points. While “Rarely” and “Always” remained unchanged, “Sometimes” and “Often” showed definitive increases. Like Question 8, this will be discussed in more detail in the following section entitled “Considering Questions 8 and 12” (Figure 4.16).

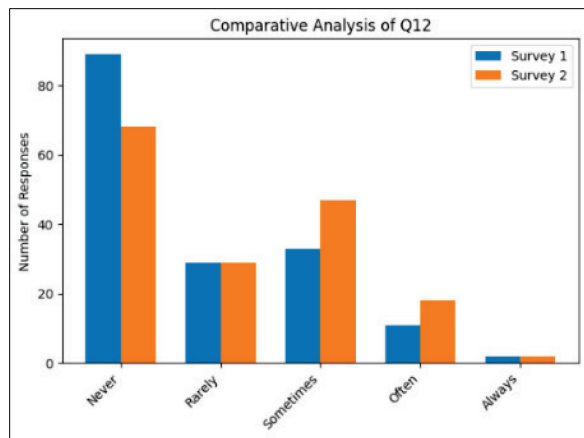


Figure 4.16. CA12

A Brief Summary of the First Concern's Results

There was a noticeable shift in responses from the survey's negative sense to its positive sense across all five of the first concern's questions. The shift appears significant enough to indicate changes in levels of political involvement over the course of the intervention's twelve weeks. For example, and in particular, the results from Question 1 suggested a potential shift toward more consistent voting behavior. Question 4's results showed a growing inclination among respondents to engage with political representatives, albeit intermittently. Question 6 implied a growing sense of community involvement or activism. Question 8 highlighted an expanding willingness among respondents to financially support political causes or candidates. Lastly, Question 12's results demonstrated a slow-growing propensity among respondents to attend political events or fundraisers.

Overall, the first concern's comparative analysis suggests evolving patterns of political engagement among respondents across various dimensions. While voting and community involvement showed signs of strengthening over time, others, such as contacting political representatives and making financial contributions, reflect shifts in attitudes or behaviors toward concern for sturdier participation in the public square's processes. Therefore, the researcher

proposes that these changes reflect evolving attitudes leading toward demonstrative behaviors related to participation in the public square among the eNews recipients in the nine congregations.

Second Concern: Questions 2, 3, 5, 7, 9-11, & 13-15

The survey's second concern was represented by Questions 2, 3, 5, 7, 9-11, and 13-15. The concern probed specific attitudes relative to Christian involvement in the public square. As with the first concern, a simple comparative analysis of each question follows. A summary deduction concludes the section.

Q2: Political Responsibility of Christians

While Survey 1 already showed a high agreement rate among respondents regarding Christian responsibility relative to political issues, Survey 2 revealed a decrease in the “Neutral” and “Agree” categories. It also showed a significant increase in the “Strongly Agree” grouping. Overall, Survey 2 indicated a slightly higher agreement rate compared to Survey 1 (Figure 4.17).

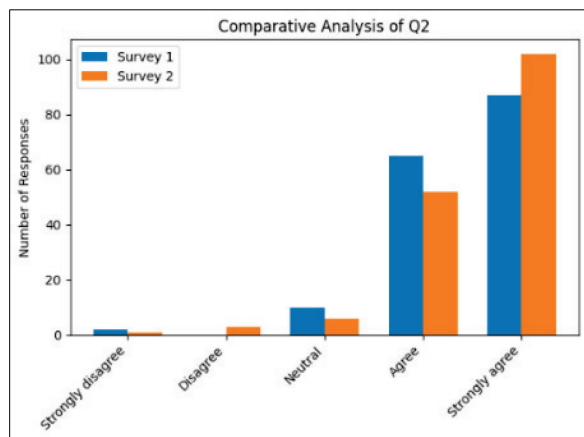


Figure 4.17. CA02

Q3: Christian Participation in Political Rallies and Protests

Survey 1 showed the “Neutral” category as near equal in preferability to “Agree.” However, even as Survey 2 revealed a shift toward “Agree” as significantly preferable to “Neutral,” it also registered a miniscule increase in both the “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” categories. Ultimately, Survey 2 resulted in a slightly higher agreement rate compared to Survey 1 (Figure 4.18).

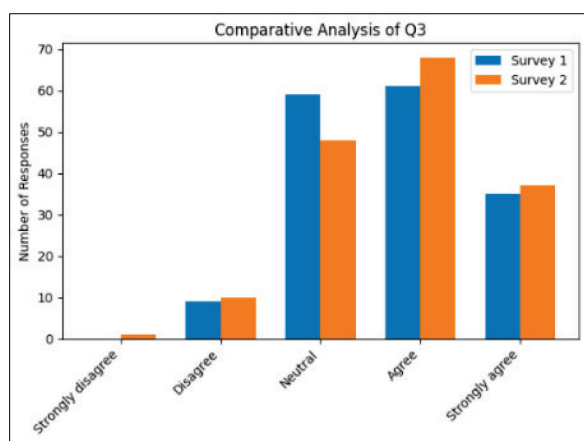


Figure 4.18. CA03

Q5: Christians Holding Political Office

Both surveys indicated an already lofty agreement rate among respondents regarding Christians running for and holding political office. While Survey 2 showed an overall slightly higher agreement rate compared to Survey 1, its only increase occurred in the “Strongly Agree” category. Micro-analyzing the three categories comprising the neutral and positive senses, it seems likely the increase in “Strongly Agree” was a direct result of the decreases in the “Neutral” and “Agree” categories, thereby affirming a positive shift toward support for Christians occupying political positions (Figure 4.19).

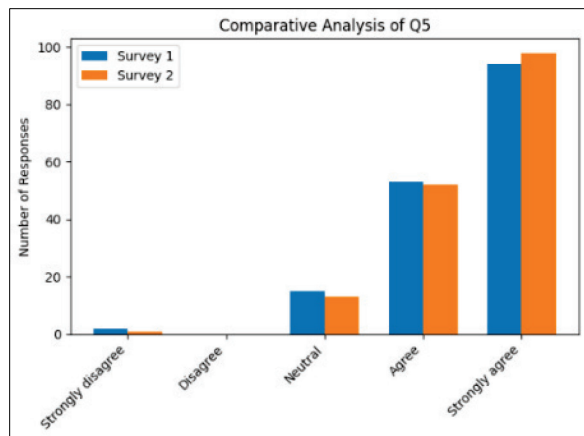


Figure 4.19. CA05

Q7: A Church's Political Stance

This question was of particular interest to the researcher. To begin with, both surveys indicated most respondents (67-72%) believe that churches should take a stand on political issues. Survey 2 showed slightly stronger agreement with the statement compared to Survey 1. Interestingly, both surveys showed a significant portion of respondents in the “Neutral” category. However, Survey 1 had a slightly higher percentage of neutral responses, indicating a greater level of uncertainty or indecision among respondents prior to the intervention. Reconsidering this perspective relative to other questions in the survey with similar results, Survey 2’s slightly stronger endorsement of the idea suggests eNews recipients shifted away from uncertainty toward the conviction that their church should lift its voice in the public square concerning cultural issues (Figure 4.20).

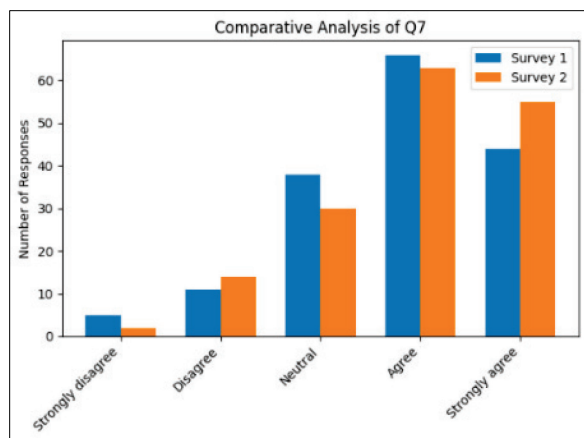


Figure 4.20. CA07

Q9: Christian Influence on Government Policy

As with previous questions, both surveys indicated a high agreement rate among Question 9’s respondents concerning Christians influencing government policy. Survey 2 also showed an overall higher agreement rate compared to Survey 1. Additionally, Survey 2 revealed a meaningful increase in the “Strongly Agree” category. Like Question 5’s decreases in the “Neutral” and “Agree” categories, the trajectory of Question 9’s “Strongly Agree” appears sourced from those losses, thereby indicating increasing momentum toward the question’s positive sense (Figure 4.21).

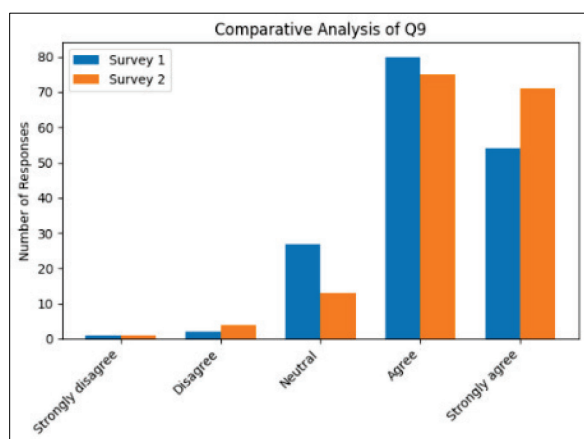


Figure 4.21. CA09

Overall, Survey 2 revealed a potential trend toward embracing the idea that Christians should use their influence to shape government policy. With the decrease in the “Neutral” category, Survey 2 also implied that respondents were less inclined to remain neutral on the question’s premise. Observing no change in the “Strongly Disagree” category and only a minimal increase in the “Disagree” category, it seems plausible that the change was by no means polarized but a distinctly positive shift, indicating a stronger endorsement of the question’s premise and a decreased willingness to remain neutral on the issue.

Q10: Christian Lobbyists

Immediately noticeable, Survey 2 showed an increase in the proportion of respondents selecting “Strongly Agree.” This suggests a trend toward stronger support for Christians being involved in lobbying efforts. Equally noticeable was the significant decrease in the proportion of respondents selecting “Neutral.” Consistent with previous interpretations, the researcher believes Survey 2’s respondents were less inclined to remain neutral on the issue, which is to say, like Question 9, the minimal increase in the “Disagree” category does not assume militant hesitancy but instead a shift toward the positive sense. This appears likely when considering the increases in the “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” categories. Largely, Survey 2 implied a stable (and gradually increasing) level of agreement with the idea of Christians being involved in lobbying efforts (Figure 4.22).

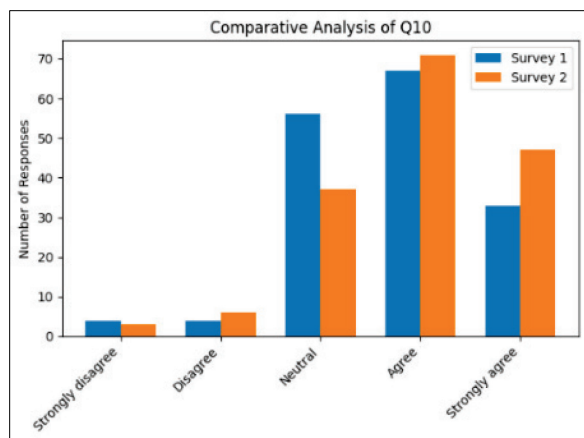


Figure 4.22. CA10

Q11: Church Leader Political Involvement

In a strictly quantitative sense, Survey 2 suggested a supportive trend toward pastors' and church leaders' involvement in the public square. That said, there are other observations worth mentioning relative to Survey 2's results. For example, while the "Strongly Agree" category nearly doubled from Survey 1 to Survey 2, both surveys showed relative consistency in the "Neutral" and "Agree" categories. This implies that a majority of the eNews recipients remain slow-moving toward supporting the question's premise (Figure 4.23).

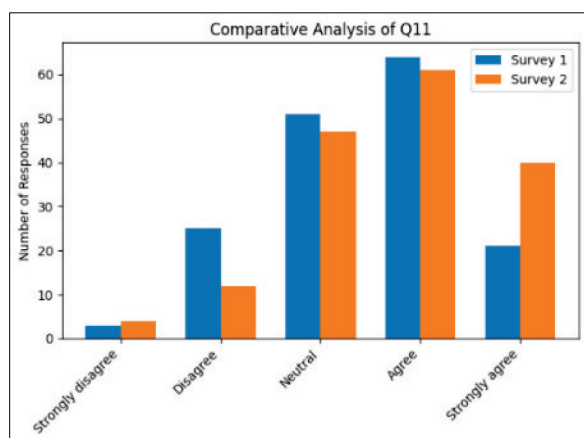


Figure 4.23. CA11

Q13: Cooperation in the Externals

Question 13 asked whether Christians should work together with people of other faiths to advance common political goals. In the LCMS, this cooperation is referred to as “cooperation in the externals.” It means, for example, that while a Lutheran would not normally partner with a Roman Catholic or Muslim in altar fellowship, an agreeable alliance exists between all three as they labor toward ending abortion.

Survey 2 showed a noteworthy increase in the proportion of respondents selecting “Strongly Agree” compared to Survey 1. However, there was little movement from the “Agree” category, implying a stable level of nuanced acceptance of the question’s premise. In other words, cooperation would be strictly dependent on a currently undiscovered variable.

Interestingly, the relatively small group of respondents who selected “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” remained precisely unchanged from the first survey to the second, revealing a minimal but devout opposition to the idea of collaboration between Christians and people of other faiths in the public square. Nevertheless, the overall trends suggest a nuanced shift in attitudes towards interfaith collaboration for political goals, with Survey 2 implying a sturdier endorsement of the idea (Figure 4.24).

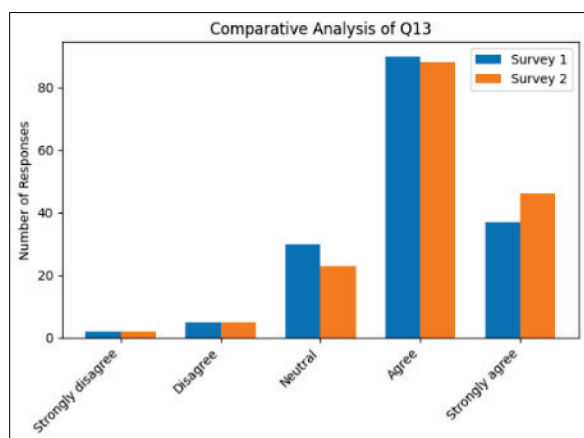


Figure 4.24. CA13

Q14: Christian Endorsement

Question 14 asked if Christians should publicly endorse political candidates or parties. Survey 2 showed increases in the proportion of respondents selecting “Agree” and “Strongly Agree.” Equally noticeable were the decreases in the “Disagree” and “Neutral” categories. Since no increase occurred in the “Strongly Disagree” category, the implication is a clear shift from Survey 1 to Survey 2 in the eNews recipients’ endorsement of Christians speaking open support for candidates and political parties. Additionally, Survey 2 implied a decreased willingness to remain neutral on the topic (Figure 4.25).

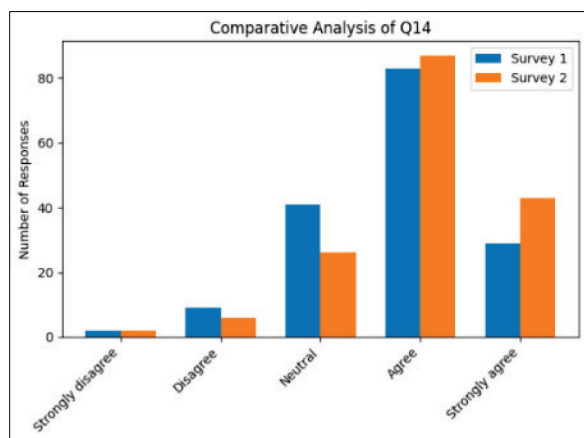


Figure 4.25. CA14

Q15: Faith Continuity Vs. Secular Determination

The last question on Surveys 1 and 2 wondered whether Christians should support laws that align with their religious beliefs, even if they conflict with secular values. The most noticeable change from Survey 1 to 2 was the decrease in the “Neutral” category. The sharp decline indicated far fewer respondents were willing to remain neutral on the issue, likely implying a more decisive stance. Considering the slight increases in all four of the surrounding categories, it would seem a decision was made. However, the overall quantitative trends suggest

a nuanced shift in attitudes toward Christians supporting laws aligning with their religious beliefs, even if they conflict with secular values and their force of determination (Figure 4.26).

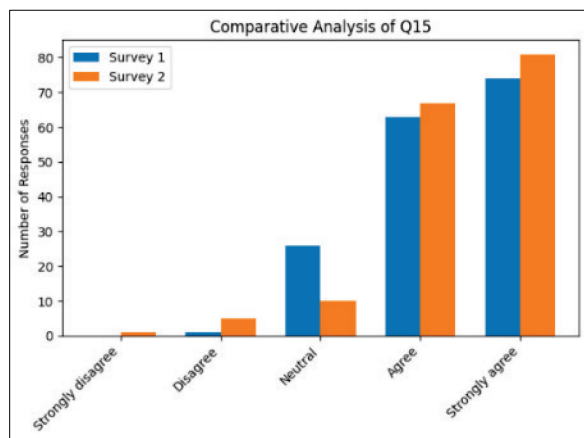


Figure 4.26. CA15

A Brief Summary of the Second Concern's Results

In summary, Survey 2's results highlighted evolving attitudes among respondents regarding the role of Christians in political engagement and the alignment of political beliefs with their religious values. For example, it showed higher agreement rates for Christians publicly endorsing candidates and parties as well as a strong consensus for Christians engaging in the public square in ways that influence legislation that maintains their Christian confession.

Reaching further into the second concern's sphere, Survey 2 showed a growing willingness among eNews recipients to flex their Christian muscles in the public square through formal activism. That said, Survey 2 also revealed a relatively stable distribution of responses across different levels of agreement concerning pastors' and other church leaders' involvement in politics. Although a positive trend was detectable, it was slow-moving, implying a looming hesitancy to support such things from one survey to the next.

Considering Questions 8 and 12

Questions 8 and 12 show concern for eNews recipients' behaviors regarding political donations and attendance at political fundraisers or events. Because of the more personal nature of these particular behaviors, the researcher determined to fix observation's reticule on Questions 8 and 12 as the best and final detectors for attitudinal shifts. To discern this, the researcher elected to conduct a T-test relative to each question before proceeding toward a deeper comparative analysis than what was provided in this chapter's previous section entitled "First Concern: Questions 1, 4, 6, 8, & 12." The tests would quantifiably confirm or deny an attitudinal shift and the worthwhileness of continuing with further study of the questions' importance. The tests were conducted using Google Colaboratory.

Questions 8 and 12 T-Tests

The null hypothesis for both T-tests was that there were no attitudinal differences from Survey 1 to Survey 2. The T-tests produced two values for each question. The first value is the T-test statistic, which showed the magnitude of the difference between the survey mean scores. The second is the P-value, which measured the probability of observing a difference between the surveys if the null hypothesis is in fact true. The following results were produced:

Q8

T-test statistic: -3.396430665220998

P-value: 0.0007671767299965405

Q12

T-test statistic: -2.503519082365465

P-value: 0.012784995951508263

The T-test statistic for Question 8 was negative, indicating that the mean for Survey 1 (1.8902) was generally lower than the mean for Survey 2 (2.3171). The low p-value indicated strong evidence against the null hypothesis. With a p-value of 0.000767, which is far below the

standard significance level of 0.05,⁴⁹ the null hypothesis was decisively rejected. This means that there was a statistically significant difference between Survey 1 and Survey 2 relative to respondents' attitudes (ultimately leading toward subsequent behaviors) regarding political donations. Juxtaposed with the previous comparative analysis, Survey 2's respondents trended toward contributing more money to candidates and campaigns than Survey 1's respondents.

Like Question 8, the T-test statistic for Question 12 was negative, indicating that the mean for Survey 1 (1.8293) was lower than the mean for Survey 2 (2.128). Question 12 produced a p-value of 0.012785, which is also far below the 0.05 standard, thereby confirming the null hypothesis' rejection. Therefore, there is an indication that a statistically significant difference exists between Survey 1 and Survey 2 in terms of respondents' attitudes concerning attendance at political fundraisers or events. Considering the preliminary comparative analysis, Survey 2's respondents, indeed, tended to support higher levels of attendance compared to Survey 1's respondents.

A Deeper Analysis

Survey 1's responses to Question 8 showed that half (50%) of respondents had never given money to a political candidate or campaign, and 20.12 percent had rarely given, implying that 70.12 percent of respondents were in some way opposed to supporting candidates and campaigns they might choose in an election with the resources necessary for winning the contest. Even when combining the Likert scale's neutral position ("Sometimes") and two positive positions ("Often" and "Always"), totaling 29.88 percent, Survey 1 clearly indicated a strong inclination among the survey pool toward withholding funds from political candidates and

⁴⁹ These statistical standards were checked and established earlier in this thesis.

campaigns altogether. Considering the factors already thoroughly unpacked earlier in this chapter, positive or negative movement relative to Question 8 would best indicate a trending attitudinal change away from a tightly held practice or opinion. The T-test has already established the existence of such a shift. A deeper comparative analysis discovered more.

For starters, Survey 1's distribution easily portrayed a downward trajectory toward lower levels of financial donations. However, even as 50 percent of Survey 1's respondents reported never donating to a political candidate or campaign, Survey 2's "Never" category dropped significantly to 35.37 percent. Even further, the distribution implied a higher percentage of respondents donating occasionally ("Sometimes" and "Rarely") compared to Survey 1's respondents.

Similar to Question 8, Survey 1's Question 12 showed that 54.27 percent of respondents never attended a political event, while 17.68 percent had rarely attended one. Compared to the survey's combined neutral and positive positions (28.05%), at the beginning of the project's implementation, 71.95 percent of respondents appeared strongly disinclined to be present at an event that was political in nature.

Again, Survey 2 appeared to reveal a shift. While 54.27 percent of Survey 1's respondents had never attended a political event, the number dropped to 41.46 percent by Survey 2. Against the backdrop of Survey 2's scale showing a gradual decrease from the "Never" to "Always" categories, there is a corresponding increase in the percentage of those indicating occasional attendance ("Rarely" and "Sometimes").

Relative to Questions 8 and 12, both surveys still showed a sizable portion of respondents as unwilling to donate to political candidates or campaigns or attend fundraisers or events.

Nevertheless, there was a detectable change. Survey 2 did indicate slightly higher levels of occasional engagement in these important arenas compared to Survey 1.

Summary of Results

The results have been sufficiently analyzed and summarized in the preceding sections. In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that the intervention conducted and presented here offered a multi-hued portrait of a population of Christians wrestling at the crucial intersection of faith and the public square. There, in the middle of the street, their pastors were regularly catechizing toward biblical fidelity. While the intervention indeed fostered greater consensus on a multitude of fronts relative to the importance of Christian engagement in the public square, there remained a nuance of thought about the appropriate forms and extents of the engagement. This is important, especially as future researchers labor to discern where and how they will meet Christians at the Two Kingdoms crossroad of Church and State.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In March of 1710, Lady Mary Montagu wrote in a letter to her husband, “General notions are generally wrong.”¹ Contextually, she scribbled the words as an invitation to her husband, Wortley, to dig deeper into the strata of his anger and distrust for her past behaviors. She wanted him to examine her words and deeds more closely so that a better, more accurate understanding concerning the incompatibility of their relationship might be made. Though an unfortunate circumstance, her oft-quotable point is well taken. Shallow observations applied to complex challenges will almost certainly result in unfortunate measures of wrongness, leading to even more ill-fated practices. This is true because superficial observation does not account for a composite issue’s nuances or innermost mechanics. Montagu, therefore, urged caution and care relative to a problem’s examination, data collection, synthesis, and solution.

In her letter’s conclusion, Lady Montagu’s pessimistic tonicity betrayed her low expectations, her words reading somewhat brashly, “I don’t enjoin you to burn this letter. I know you will.”² Her ultimate pitch is by no means appropriate to this project. Not only has the researcher overturned countless evidential stones (its relative literature, theoretical and theological foundations, best testing, and the like) to form a complete understanding of the challenge, but the project began and ended on hopeful tiptoes due largely in part to its uniqueness.

¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (London, England: Swan Sonnenschein & Company, 1893), 173.

² Ibid.

As stated in Chapter 1, this DMIN action research's purpose was to equip BOCPS pastors with writing methods that improve their members' public square engagement within a span of twelve weeks. Overall, the researcher is confident this was accomplished. Indeed, the project set a course for a unique and distant shore while simultaneously equipping its crew with a new and unique navigational tool designed to help reach it.

First, and perhaps tritely spoken among researchers, the project was distinct in that its approach was an integrated one, delving into both the quantitative and qualitative research spheres. Second, it was methodologically simple while remaining intuitively and scientifically robust. In other words, the process was sensible and underpinned by data-driven practices. Third, it was a multiphase approach employing teaching seminars and eNews communication built from the researcher's own writing rubric, yet to be known, tried, or tested elsewhere. Fourth, the project set the stage for practical application in almost any organization seeking to produce attitudinal shifts among those it serves while teaching usable skills to those who would venture to employ it. Lastly, but not completely apart from the previous point, even as the project is accessible, it is also adaptable. The effort can be aimed by almost any organization at various goals requiring an audience's attitudinal shift. Relative to churches, these broader possibilities have been demonstrated. For example, it can be used similarly as a simpler teaching tool during a particular church season, such as Advent or Lent.

Research Implications

Curriculum Development

The results of this intervention imply the possibility for curricula evaluation and revision in pre-seminary and seminary schools. By adding individual courses or additional modules dedicated to literature and poetry examination, communication science, creative writing, and

rhetoric to existing pastoral care and homiletics curriculums, there exists the potential for increased communication effectiveness among pastors, resulting in augmented receptivity and trust from parishioners. Moreover, the enhanced skills would benefit not only the future pastors within their immediate congregational settings but also the surrounding community at large.

Pastoral Leadership

By nature of their calling, pastors are leaders. As was shown early on in Chapter 2, history and its practices assumed pastoral leadership's extension beyond the pulpit and into the public square. This meant that pastors were not only equipped with theological knowledge but also with other practical skills. This intervention supposes that pre-seminary and seminary training programs may need to emphasize the development of these skills to better prepare future clergy for their roles as effective conduits between the people in their care and godly engagement in the surrounding community. Pre-seminary and seminary schools must consider the broader societal implications with which theological education and demonstration is concerned. To do this, even in part, the schools might consider incorporating individual courses or modules within current courses that teach Two Kingdoms theology more robustly and with an intentionality that shows genuine concern for civic responsibility.

Communication Science

One of communication science's thickest branches, creative writing, rested at the epicenter of this intervention's design. As such, the effort serves as a valuable contribution toward understanding persuasive speech within religious contexts. Extending beyond this initial prospect, it has direct implications relative to broader marketing efforts worthy of religious and nonreligious organizations' attention.

Research Applications

Relationship Strengthening

Apart from the attitudinal shifts this intervention anticipated and ultimately produced concerning engagement in the public square, had it failed to succeed toward its goal, increased endearment of congregation members for their pastors remained an equally ripe fruit plucked from the effort's tree. Indeed, strengthened bonds between the participating pastors and their eNews recipients maintained an enlivening trajectory that most pastors covet throughout their ministries. That said, pastors willing to interface with their congregants on a weekly basis using the methods demonstrated here would be well served for establishing trust and tenure in their worshipping communities. Considering the qualitative results recorded against their backdrop of only twelve weeks, a pastor might imagine the relationship-fostering potential and subsequent results from an eNews effort maintained over the course of many years.

Narrow and Broad Capability

Additionally, and has been suggested, pastors could recalibrate the proposed attitudinal-shifting effort to target almost any narrow or broad concern the congregation might have. In a broad sense, a pastor could focus his long-term eNews effort toward biblical stewardship. In a narrow sense, for example, a pastor desiring that crucifixes rather than corpus-less crosses adorn his congregation's nave could hone his efforts accordingly, gradually catechizing his readers concerning the benefit. Another example might be that the pastor's weekly eNews messages during the season of Epiphany could preemptively teach the significance of Lent's penitential nature so that when the season arrives, the congregation is prepared, willing, and capable of a more solemn observance.

Research Limitations

As with any endeavor, there will be constraints that affect or impede its course and completion. Against these, there is measured the well-worn but wise observation attributed to Calvin Coolidge, “Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”³ Whether he spoke these words is questionable. Still, the proverb rings true. Talent means nothing to a quitter. Idle genius will not receive its due. Unemployed knowledge promotes one’s own poverty. However, with determined persistence, betterment is had, and the reward is claimed. Indeed, it is as Einstein self-described, “It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with the problems longer.”⁴

Relative to this project, the barriers of time and grammatical skills appear most prohibitive. Logistically, attrition could be problematic. Anyone choosing to follow the methodology presented here must face these restrictive specters. And yet, they are conquerable if the one desiring the attitudinal shifts will only persist.

Time

It is no secret that clergy burnout is on the rise. Most researchers affirm time’s constraining sphere relative to ever-increasing workloads as a principal factor for burnout’s charred remains. For example, Thomas Frederick and his co-authors write that “clergy are often overwhelmed by role demands (time, energy, and expectations), how these demands increase

³ Deanna Gelak, *Lobbying and Advocacy: Winning Strategies, Recommendations, Resources, Ethics and Ongoing Compliance for Lobbyists and Washington Advocates* (Bethesda, MD: The Sunwater Institute, 2008), 21.

⁴ Barbara Baig, *Spellbinding Sentences: A Writer’s Guide to Achieving Excellence and Captivating Readers* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 281.

conflict, and how they result in a diminished sense of personal efficacy.”⁵ With already over-extended lives, it would seem the last thing a pastor would prefer is to add a weekly writing assignment to his already imposing schedule. However, there are plenty in the time-management field who would say that while time is indeed limited, one’s ability to produce more impactful outcomes through prioritized activity experience far less stress, more free time, and better relationships with co-workers and the ones they serve.⁶ As this research project has shown, focused and regular communication concerning cultural issues relative to parishioners’ lives (apart from Bible studies, visitations, and sermons) is extremely profitable for building trust capable of fostering faithfulness in the culture. Carving one or two hours from among the other less-productive activities to write a weekly eNews message is both doable and indescribably valuable, and commitment is the primary thread comprising its determined fabric.

Poor Language and Writing Skills

A sturdy grasp of language is essential. The ability to transfer language into written form is key. This project’s researcher has already shared plenty in this regard along the way. Still, it deserves repeating. Indeed, others continually echo the sentiment that sloppy writing draped with poor grammar actually causes readers physical distress. For example, researchers at the University of Birmingham “discovered a direct correlation between instances of bad grammar and subjects’ Heart Rate Variability (HRV).”⁷ This is to say that the poorer a speaker’s or

⁵ Thomas V. Frederick et al., “The Effects of Role Differentiation Among Clergy: Impact on Pastoral Burnout and Job Satisfaction,” *Pastoral Psychology* 72, no. 1 (2023): 124.

⁶ Travis P. Mountain, “Time Management: 10 Strategies for Better Time Management,” accessed March 4, 2024, <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1042&title=time-management-10-strategies-for-better-time-management>.

⁷ “Hearing ‘Bad Grammar’ Results in Physical Signs of Stress – New Study Reveals,” *University of Birmingham*, accessed March 1, 2024, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2023/hearing-bad-grammar-results-in-physical-signs-of-stress-new-study-reveals>.

writer's grammar became, the more stress a listener's or reader's heart experienced. The study's chief researcher, Dagmar Divjak, noted that poor language and writing skills affect the sympathetic nervous system, which ultimately "activates the 'fight or flight' response during a threat or perceived danger...."⁸ This alone is a warning to all who would write for public consumption. Moreover, it is an attention-getting nudge toward grammatical mindfulness, leading toward continued improvement.

While some enjoy writing capabilities associated with original genius, most do not. Therefore, determination and persistence are necessary for improvement. Countless researchers offer practical advice in this regard. Common to all is reading. For instance, Oxford Royale Academy insists that reading and writing are intimately linked, noting that one's own voice and style are shaped through literature studied in one's favored field.⁹ In other words, a blossoming engineer will read from the engineers. A medical doctor will scour medical pages. A scientist will peruse the science journals. And yet, most writers in each of these arenas will only attract readers as they have grasped and employed creativity's reins. This means not only reading for business but for pleasure. It means visiting with storytellers.

If a writer would succeed as this project hopes, he must work to improve his language and writing skills. As was mentioned, reading is essential. Practice is, too. This is to say that a writer improves as he practices. As it would go, a weekly eNews message born from this project's "Rubric for Writing" (see Appendix F) provides a practical habitus for the regimen.

⁸ "Hearing 'Bad Grammar' Results in Physical Signs of Stress."

⁹ Oxford Royale, "6 Ways Studying Literature Can Improve Your Creative Writing Skills," *Oxford Royale*, last modified April 25, 2018, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/studying-literature-improve-creative-writing-skills/>.

Attrition

The type of longitudinal research performed by this study is an exceptionally trusted form of data collection, primarily because of its pre and post-intervention tools. Still, one particular limitation remained lurking beneath its surface: attrition.¹⁰ In this instance, attrition is defined by the researcher as the changing or loss of survey participants relative to the available participant pool. In other words, while 164 people from a potential pool of 581 participated in Survey 1, and 164 people from the same pool (excluding the one recipient who asked to be removed from the list)¹¹ participated in Survey 2, it cannot be assumed that the same people participated in both surveys since anonymity was maintained throughout. While the researcher is confident in the study's design, progress, and conclusion, attrition remains a superfluous variable that cannot be dismissed. Mindful of the researcher's forthcoming thoughts on further investigation, similar studies might consider removing the anonymity factor.

Further Research

It might be supposed that with any research effort, the one performing the investigation will labor painstakingly to uncover every hidden detail and fill in every potential gap. Of course, and realistically, this is impossible, and so goes Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's words, "As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it."¹² Considering research's inevitable shortcomings, Saint-Exupéry's words acknowledge the tension that exists between examining a problem, working to understand and propose solutions for it, and concluding the research in a

¹⁰ Adam E. Barry, "How Attrition Impacts the Internal and External Validity of Longitudinal Research," *Journal of School Health* 75, no. 7 (2005): 267–270.

¹¹ See the section entitled "A Definitively Negative Response" in Chapter 4.

¹² Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Wisdom of the Sands* (London, England: Hollis & Carter, 1952), 155.

way that identifies avenues for further investigation. Along the way of this effort, certain gaps were discovered. They are presented below in brief.

Individual Authors' Effects on Writing

There are no small number of studies that prove reading enhances one's writing ability. Equally, there are plenty of studies that posit classical literature's positive influence on content and writing style complexity. However, the researcher wondered if engagement with specific authors might prove quantifiably more beneficial to budding eNews writers than others, and if so, in what capacity and to what end? For example, would Mark Twain's handling of colloquial language have been a more demonstrative primer for this experiment's participants than the likes of Dickens? Would Jane Austen's tendencies, rather than Emily Brontë's, better direct an eNews writer toward his goals? Is Longfellow a more suitable instructor for poetic style than Dickinson? The researcher wondered if testing these queries could prove beneficial.

Mission Drift

The researcher noted a sizeable mission drift early in the implementation's first phase and a relatively small drift in the third. In the section entitled "Mission Drift" beneath the subheading "Phase 1: Week 1 to 4," the researcher suggested five possibilities for the first mission drift's occurrence. These possibilities are not divided from the lesser drift that occurred in phase 3. The possibilities were concerned with such things as lack of clarity from the researcher, personal interests as distractions, burnout and time constraints, influence of recipient feedback, and external events. These prospects were proposed, but no suitable explanations were pursued and thereby discovered. Further investigation of the phenomenon could prove valuable to future studies with similar goals.

Multimodal Communication

The researcher's writing rubric required that a summarizing image be sent with each eNews message. The benefits produced by combining words and images were thoroughly discussed. However, what if the weekly eNews message was a video podcast? What if the effort consisted of words and relevant videos instead of static images? In the current age of multimodal communication, further research into these possibilities is warranted.

Denominational and Demographic Uniqueness

The intervention enacted and subsequently reported in this document was realized among LCMS congregations matching synodical and mainstream Christian denominational demographics, sizes, and attendance averages. It is possible that the unique denomination and demographics played significant roles in the results. Therefore, additional comparative studies involving other denominations and demographics could be performed to test the broader verity of the results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has traversed a vast expanse, ultimately illuminating noteworthy attitudinal changes of Christians toward active engagement in the public sphere. This was done through weekly eNews writing. Each aspect of the project was meticulously investigated, thoroughly discussed, and squarely presented. In doing so, the nuanced complexities surrounding the intersection of church and state were underscored, and a reasonable route forward was tested and proven. God willing, the effort will serve the Lord's churches well while providing one more molecule to the vast compound that is scholarly discourse.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT LETTER

[Date]

[Pastor's Name]

[Title]

[Church Name]

[Street Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear Rev. _____:

As a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the D.Min. degree. The purpose of my research is to equip pastors with writing methods aimed at improving their church members' receptivity for public square engagement and subsequent activity in it. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

A participant in the study must be a rostered Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor currently serving a congregation in the continental United States. A participant must also have been associated with “The Body of Christ and the Public Square” (BOCPS) conference at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Hartland, Michigan, in the past, whether through event attendance or formal participation.

In summary, after gathering a reasonably sized collection of congregation email addresses, a participant in the study will be provided a ten-step rubric and is asked to write and send a weekly email message to his congregation members. Reasonably speaking, this will take no more than sixty (60) minutes each week. The message (called an “eNews”) will be sent once a week for twelve weeks. Before beginning this process, a participant will send an introductory email to his congregation members explaining what he intends to do and directing them to an anonymous online survey. I will provide the participant with an introductory email template containing the survey link. Considering any preferential adjustments, this should only take five (5) minutes. At the end of the study, the participant will send a final email directing toward a concluding anonymous online survey. The same amount of time as the introductory email will be required. Also, as with the introductory email, a concluding email template and survey link will be provided.

Over the course of the study, the participant will attend four online seminars, each led by the researcher, Rev. Thoma. The seminars will last no more than ninety (90) minutes each. The goal of the seminars will be to help support the participants in the effort. It is the intention that all study participants begin the effort together with Seminar 1 on January 8, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. EST. A meeting link will be sent to participants one week before the seminar by email. Names and other identifying information will be requested from you as a part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed. While you will be known to the other pastoral participants in the

study, any information collected from your congregation members by the surveys will be strictly anonymous.

To participate, please reply to this letter [REDACTED] or call me [REDACTED] by Friday, December 15, 2023. If I receive word from you that you are willing to participate, I will send a packet of materials by mail for you to peruse. It will include a consent form and other helpful materials relevant to the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me. Once I receive the completed consent form, the study can begin.

Participants will receive free admission for themselves and one other attendee of their choosing to the 2024 “The Body of Christ and the Public Square” conference in Hartland, Michigan.

Sincerely,
Rev. Christopher Thoma
Executive Director, The Body of Christ and the Public Square
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

[Date]

[Pastor's Name]

[Title]

[Church Name]

[Street Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear Rev. _____:

As a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the D.Min. degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent as a reminder to let me know if you are willing to consider participating. The deadline for participation is Friday, December 15, 2023, so I will need to hear from you very soon.

As a refresher, a participant in the study must be a rostered Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor currently serving a congregation in the continental United States. A participant must also have been associated with “The Body of Christ and the Public Square” (BOCPS) conference at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Hartland, Michigan, in the past, whether through event attendance or formal participation.

As was shared in the original invitation, after gathering a reasonably sized collection of congregation email addresses, a participant in the study will be provided a ten-step rubric and is asked to write and send a weekly email message to his congregation members. Reasonably speaking, this will take no more than sixty (60) minutes each week. The message (called an “eNews”) will be sent once a week for twelve weeks. Before beginning this process, a participant will send an introductory email to his congregation members explaining what he intends to do and directing them to an anonymous online survey. I will provide the participant with an introductory email template containing the survey link. Considering any preferential adjustments, this should only take five (5) minutes. At the end of the study, the participant will send a final email directing toward a concluding anonymous online survey. The same amount of time as the introductory email will be required. Also, as with the introductory email, a concluding email template and survey link will be provided. Over the course of the study, the participant will attend four brief online seminars, each led by the researcher, Rev. Thoma. The seminars will last no more than ninety (90) minutes each. The goal of the seminars will be to help support the participants in the effort. It is the intention that all study participants begin the effort together with Seminar 1 on January 8, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. EST. A meeting link will be sent to participants one week before the seminar by email. Names and other identifying information will be requested from you as a part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed. While you will be known to the other pastoral participants in the study, any information collected from your congregation members by the surveys will be strictly anonymous.

To participate, please reply to this email or call me at [REDACTED] by Friday, December 15, 2023. If I receive word from you that you are willing to participate, I will send by mail a packet of materials for you to peruse. It will include a consent form and other helpful materials relevant to the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me using the stamped envelope included in the packet. Once I receive the completed consent form, the study can begin.

Participants will receive free admission for themselves and one other attendee of their choosing to the 2024 “The Body of Christ and the Public Square” conference in Hartland, Michigan.

Sincerely,
Rev. Christopher Thoma
Executive Director, The Body of Christ and the Public Square

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION REQUEST

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Church Name]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear Rev. _____,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a D.Min. degree. The title of my research project is "Pastoral Communication Leading to Improved Parishioner Engagement in the Public Square," and the purpose of my research is to equip pastors with writing methods aimed at improving their church members' receptivity for public square engagement and subsequent activity in it.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research study in partnership with you among the members of your congregation.

Please note that I am not requesting direct access to any of the members of your congregation or their personal information. Instead, I request permission to enact the study in your congregational setting as you elect to be a study participant. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and you are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. It is also understood that you will be the only one with access to your congregation's contact information and the only one communicating with the congregation's membership. It is also understood that you are at liberty to share or withhold any information or correspondence shared by congregation members with you throughout the study. If you choose to share information with me, all identifying information WILL BE STRIPPED before it is provided.

In conclusion, thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please reply to this message, being sure to complete and include the attached permission response template. The template is provided for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Rev. Christopher I. Thoma

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION RESPONSE TEMPLATE

[Date]

Reverend Christopher I. Thoma



Dear Rev. Thoma:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled “Pastoral Communication Leading to Improved Parishioner Engagement in the Public Square,” I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study among us here at [church name, city, state].

I have checked the following boxes as applicable:

- I grant permission for Rev. Thoma to access this congregation’s email list.
- I DO NOT grant permission for Rev. Thoma to access this congregation’s email list.
- I will provide Rev. Thoma with ALL information and correspondence shared with me by congregation members throughout the study.
- I WILL NOT provide Rev. Thoma with all information and correspondence shared with me by congregation members throughout the study. Instead, I am free to share or withhold information as I deem appropriate.
- If information or correspondence is shared, all identifying information WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to Rev. Thoma.
- If information or correspondence is shared, all identifying information WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to Rev. Thoma.
- I am requesting a copy of the study results upon publication.

Based on the above information, and in summary, it is understood that I will be the only one with access to this congregation’s email list, as well as the only one contacting the congregation’s membership. It is also understood that I am at liberty to share or withhold any information or correspondence shared by congregation members with me throughout the study. If I choose to share information with you, all identifying information WILL BE STRIPPED before it is provided. Also, I am requesting a copy of the study’s results once synthesized and published.

Sincerely,

[Pastor’s Name]

[Official’s Title]

[Church Name, City, State]

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Pastoral Communication Leading to Improved Parishioner Engagement in the Public Square

Principal Investigator: Christopher I. Thoma, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
--

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a rostered Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor currently serving a congregation in the continental United States. A participant must also have been associated with “The Body of Christ and the Public Square” (BOCPS) conference at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Hartland, Michigan, in the past, whether through event attendance or formal participation. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
--

The purpose of the study is to equip pastors with writing methods aimed at improving their church members’ receptivity for public square engagement and subsequent activity in it.

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. Participate in four collaborative sessions with the researcher and the other participating pastors over the course of the study. Each session will be no longer than 45 minutes.
2. Create an email distribution list for as many members of your congregation as possible—preferably, at least 25% of the congregation. This list will be kept and maintained by you alone. The researcher will not have access to the list. You will assure the congregation members that group emails will be sent as “blind copy” [BCC] messages only. A total of fourteen (14) email messages will be sent relative to the research project. *The time required for this step will depend on current church communication structures and the turn-around time required to receive new contact congregant information for the list’s formation.*
3. Once the distribution list has been created, an initial email should be sent. It will accomplish two things. First, it must announce the participating pastor’s forthcoming effort to send a weekly electronic newsletter message (eNews). Secondly, it must share a link to an online Likert Scale survey of fifteen questions assessing the message

recipient's position concerning Christian engagement in the public square. The researcher will provide an initial email template that includes the survey link. *This step will take only a few minutes to complete if the template is used.*

3. Following the researcher's provided rubric (included with this consent form), the pastor will write and send an eNews message of no less than five paragraphs on the same day and at the same time each week for twelve (12) weeks. *The time to write each eNews will vary based on the writer's schedule, motivation, and skills. Relatively speaking, the effort should take no more than 60 to 90 minutes in a single sitting.* The first week's message will be sent to the researcher for suggestions/evaluation before beginning official distribution. Throughout the course of the twelve (12) weeks, the researcher will be available to the participating pastors as needed to help craft their eNews messages. This side-by-side laboring will be available as needed via email, phone, and online video service.

4. Throughout the twelve weeks, all digital or hard copy replies received from eNews recipients will be forwarded to the researcher (all identifiable information redacted) for collection and study. (Please note that pastoral discretion will be the standard for sharing. A participating pastor can withhold any messages collected during the study from the researcher.)

5. Lastly, a final (fourteenth) email message sharing a second online Likert Scale survey of fifteen concluding questions should be sent. The researcher will provide a final email template that includes the survey link. *This step will take only a few minutes to complete if the template is used.*

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect from participating in this study include a formal list of congregation member emails for direct communication and strengthening personal relationships with the people in the pastor's care.

Benefits to society include discovering particular forms of communication that foster positive parishioner engagement in the public square.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, namely, they are equal to the risks relative to written communication available for public consumption.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Please note that all materials received from participating pastors and eNews recipients will be kept private and stored securely.

- Congregation member responses to the online surveys will be strictly anonymous. Confidentiality between the researcher and a participating pastor will be maintained during one-on-one sessions or as the pastor requests.
- Because the participating pastors will be openly sharing their efforts among their congregations and discussing the same in a collegial fashion among fellow seminar participants, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. First, it should be anticipated that congregation members will discuss what their pastors write and send. Although discouraged, participating pastors may share what was discussed in the seminars with persons outside the participant group.
- Data collected and analyzed may be made available for use in future research studies by other researchers. If the data collected unavoidably identifies participating pastors or recipients, contact information will be removed beforehand, and if necessary, pseudonyms will be used.
- Digital data will be stored on a password-locked computer. Hardcopy records will be stored in the researcher's personal office safe. After seven years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Only the seminars will be recorded for the sake of participating pastor content review. Only the participant pastors will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be stored on the video conferencing service's secured website and available by a secured link. Twelve months after the study's conclusion, all four seminar recordings will be removed from the conferencing service. Transcripts of the recordings will be stored and eventually destroyed according to the previous point detailing data storage.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study by way of free VIP admission for themselves and one other attendee of their choosing to the 2024 "The Body of Christ and the Public Square" conference in Hartland, Michigan. The approximate value of this compensation is \$400.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, the researcher, or The Body of Christ and the Public Square organization. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Christopher I. Thoma. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lucien Fortier at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in the seminars during this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX F

RUBRIC FOR WRITING

In total, fourteen (14) email messages will be sent over the course of the study, twelve (12) of which will be considered eNews messages. The first and last messages are not eNews messages and do not need to follow this rubric.

The following steps should be followed for producing a minimum of five (5) paragraphs of content for each of the twelve (12) eNews messages:

1. Choose from one of the following topics: *abortion, human sexuality* (i.e., transgenderism, homosexuality, etc.), *religious liberty, traditional marriage, Critical Race Theory, wokism, cancel culture, or parental rights*. (If another topic interests you but is not included here, please check with the researcher before developing it into an eNews message.) The same topic may be used more than once throughout the twelve (12) weeks.

2. Build your story's "carriage." The story carriage will serve to carry your writing's information to its recipient in a more personal way. The story carriage will include:

a.) deliberate usage of a literary device (see the attached supplement entitled "Literary Devices")

b.) a note of personal information never before revealed to the reader that can serve to transition to the selected topic. In other words, it must relate (even if only remotely) to the topic. The personal information shared may be something such as:

- a childhood memory
- a closely held but never before revealed personal opinion
- things that cause you to worry
- something unique to your family
- a strange but daily routine
- favorite art / literature / music / movie
- a memorable joke
- an inspiring quotation
- a challenge you have overcome

3. Give a brief overview of the selected topic. For example, if wokism is the topic, a crisp example of wokism (such as a recent news story demonstrating the topic) should be shared.

4. Share the Bible's perspective on the topic.

5. Offer pastoral encouragement to embrace the Bible's perspective.

6. Offer encouragement to engage in the public square according to Bible's perspectives, explaining the importance and giving possible examples of where / how / when it may be appropriate / necessary to engage.

7. Use <https://www.grammarly.com> to edit the message. (Grammarly's basic account is free and will more than suffice for this exercise.)
8. Add an image to the eNews message that reflects its tenor. High-quality royalty-free images are available at <https://pixabay.com>.
9. Distribute the eNews message by email, being sure to include the researcher in the distribution.
10. Print the eNews in hard copy form, making it available to attendees at the next regularly scheduled public worship gathering.

For eNews message examples, please see the samples included. Please note that the provided eNews samples are longer than what this rubric requires. Let them be examples of what is possible once a regular writing routine begins to take shape.

APPENDIX G

SEMINAR 1 LESSON PLAN

Lesson: Project Preparation & Transforming Simple Sentences

Objective: Explain the project and teach participating pastors how to enhance regular writing by using poetic devices.

Project Introduction and Conversation (30 minutes)

Open with prayer.

Provide an overview of the project (documentation, responsibilities, scope, purpose, and the like). Allow time for questions and conversation.

Lesson Introduction (2 minutes):

Discuss creative writing's innate ability to evoke emotions, create vivid imagery, and convey complex ideas using descriptive language.

Elements of Poetry (8 minutes):

Introduce key poetic elements such as metaphor, simile, personification, and sound devices (alliteration, rhyme, and the like). Explain how these elements can transform a simple sentence into vividly memorable forms of communication. Draw attention to the researcher's supplemental "Literary Devices" booklet provided in the packet.

Analysis of Simple Sentences (20 minutes):

(Say and discuss:)

To transform simple sentences is as easy as taking time to consider the sentence's basics. It means to focus on simple things like nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. These are the characters, locations, emotions, intentions, movements, and all of the necessary descriptors that present and represent them. These primary linguistic tools will be easiest to mold in service to and as influenced by any particular theme.

For example, consider the following sentence: "John ran to work." (Discuss the plain nature of the sentence. [*Show slide 1.*])

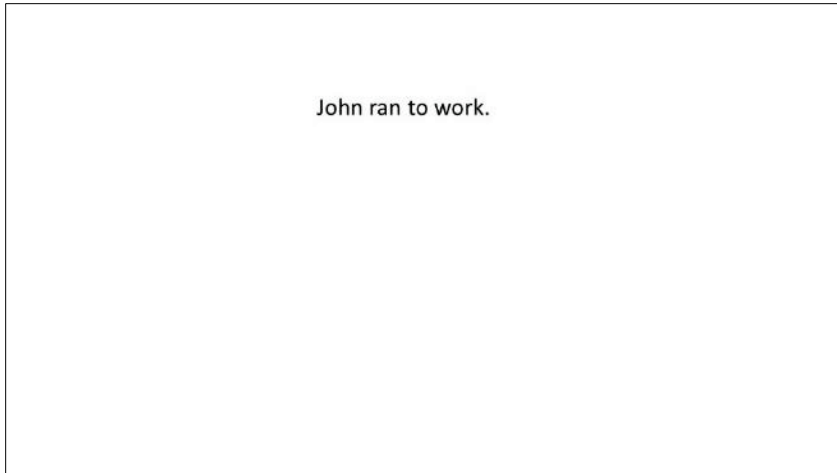


Figure A.1. Seminar 1 Slide 1

There is a lot that can be done to enhance this sentence simply by focusing on and changing the basics. The verb “ran” could be changed to “sped,” changing the tenor of the sentence. “John sped to work.” But now, notice the word chosen implies a certain nature to his haste. With one change, the writer is beginning to tell a tale rather than relay dry information. The writer is implying a purpose for John’s movement. What is it? Why is John running to work? Is he late and in jeopardy of losing his job, even though he despises it because he doesn’t make very much money? Is he afraid of confronting his boss, and if so, does he expect to get fired? The sentence may be developed creatively to include some, if not all, that information in a consolidated, descriptive sentence. For example: (Show slide 2.)

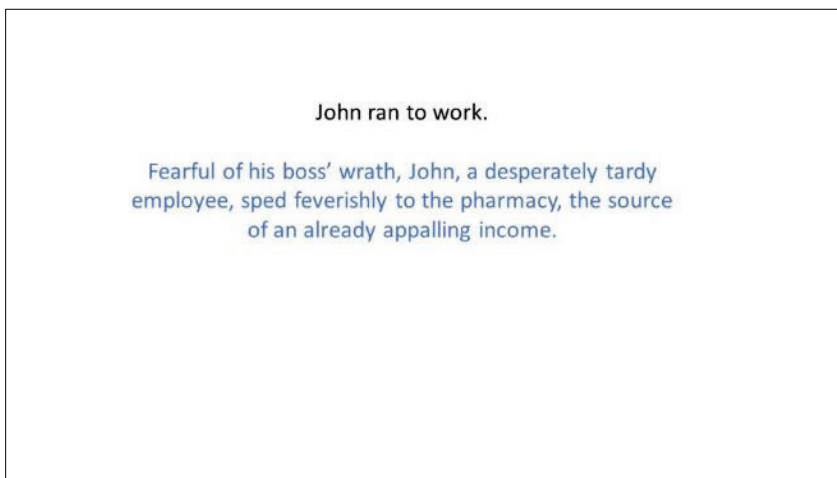


Figure A.2. Seminar 1 Slide 2

“Fearful of his boss’ wrath, John, a desperately tardy employee, sped feverishly to the pharmacy, the source of an already appalling income.”

Now the sentence has become more than just a simple, uninteresting detail about the actions of someone named “John.” A scene has been presented, a scene containing a real person in an actual, contextual struggle. Keywords were changed and descriptors were

used not only to illustrate John's plight, but his purpose, too, while at the same time providing a vehicle for emotion and tone. The listener is drawn into a living scene. He is allowed to meet John, to learn more about him and to sense his urgency. He experiences tension. He is following a story, rather than hearing of someone or something about which he could care less or is completely removed. Perhaps now that the listener knows John, he is either rooting for or against him.

Now that you know the story, to further exercise the muscle of creativity, try adding rhyme and meter. Consider the following: (*Show slide 3.*)

John ran to work.

Fearful of his boss' wrath, John, a desperately tardy
employee, sped feverishly to the pharmacy, the source
of an already appalling income.

In fear, the tardy John did speed
To work to meet financial need,
And though he was already late,
To face his boss, the harsher fate.

Figure A.3. Seminar 1 Slide 3

In fear the tardy John did speed
To work to meet financial need,
And though he was already late,
To face his boss, the harsher fate.

(Say and discuss: [*Show slide 4.*])

John ran to work.

Fearful of his boss' wrath, John, a desperately tardy
employee, sped feverishly to the pharmacy, the source
of an already appalling income.

In fear, the tardy John did speed
To work to meet financial need,
And though he was already late,
To face his boss, the harsher fate.

AABB quatrain form. Each first and second line rhymes, as do each third and fourth. Each line carries eight counts.

Figure A.4. Seminar 1 Slide 4

This poem is written in AABB quatrain form, meaning that each first and second line rhymes, as do each third and fourth. Each line carries eight counts. I set this limit for a reason. Keeping within this framework, I was forced to be concise, searching for words that not only iterated the inspired theme clearly but also fit together with the rest of the words to meet the limitations. Creativity was a must.

Assignment for Independent Practice:

(Say and discuss: [*Show slide 5.*])

Choose one of the following sentences to enhance. After enhancing the sentence, recraft it as a four-line quatrain following the same rules used by the researcher.

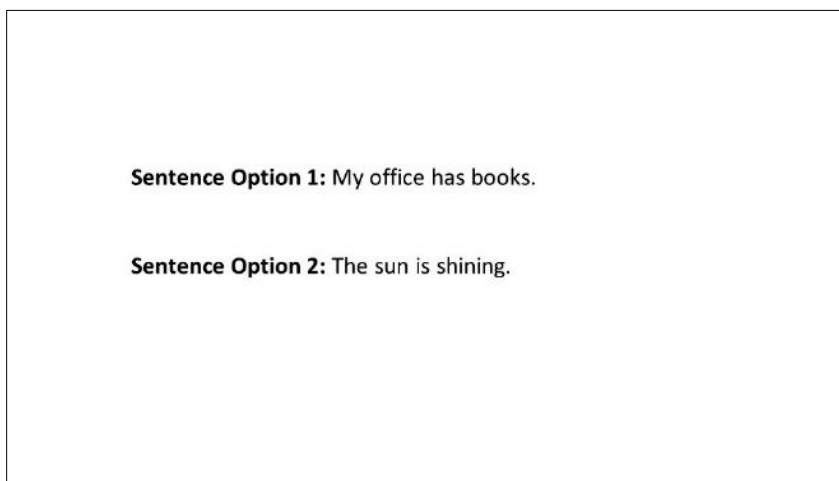


Figure A.5. Seminar 1 Slide 5

Sentence Option 1: My office has books.

Sentence Option 2: The sun is shining.

Be prepared to share your enhanced sentence and four-line quatrain with the researcher during your individual meeting (Seminar 2).

Conclusion

Inform seminar participants that after Seminar 1's conclusion, an email/link will be sent for scheduling the following week's individual meetings (Seminar 2).

Close with prayer.

[Note: The time allocations provided are approximate and can be adjusted based on the needs and pace of the seminar.]

APPENDIX H

SEMINAR 2 RECORD

Date: **Start time:** **End time:**

Participating Pastor:

Discussion

Favorite authors?

Quatrain exercise:

Preliminary draft of eNews 1:

How long did it take?

When (date/time) will you send it and why?

Discussion (“Rubric for Writing” comparison, commendations, recommendations, etc.):

Date/Time introductory email will be sent:

Reminders:

Include an image from a royalty-free source.

Strongly encourage recipients to take the first survey.

Use Grammarly to edit each eNews.

APPENDIX I
SEMINAR 3 RECORD

Open Discussion

[1) Describe your general sense of the project so far. 2) What are your thoughts concerning any eNews recipient responses received? 3) How would you describe your level of inspiration while preparing/writing? 4) Etc.]

How many visitors to your church do you receive per year?

Inspiration

[Share: <https://cruciformstuff.com/2024/01/21/no-need-that-anyone-should-teach-you/>]

Would you like access to one another's work?

Describe your comfort level with the required writing. Has it gotten easier or more challenging? What factors determined this?

Schedule of Events

eNews 12 must be sent by April 28.

Seminar 4 on April 29 at 7:00 p.m.

Send out the concluding email on April 28. The survey will open on April 29 and conclude on May 13. A follow-up email encouraging survey participation must be sent later in the week of April 28.

Discuss repeating survey 1 and the need to strongly encourage people to take the survey again, even though they took it once before. On average, the survey took most folks less than three minutes to complete. Remind the eNews recipients of this.

APPENDIX J

SEMINAR 4 RECORD

Intervention Conclusion**1. Reflective Assessment:**

- Do you feel as though the effort influenced congregational engagement, and if so, what gives you this impression?
- Have you noticed any discernible changes in congregational attitudes or behaviors since beginning the effort?

2. Personal Growth and Development:

- What lessons have you personally learned from this intervention about the role of communication in congregations?
- What personal insights or growth have you experienced as a result of participating in this intervention?
- Were there any unexpected responses or challenges you encountered along the way that were not already discussed with the researcher?

3. Sustainability and Future Directions:

- Will you be continuing the eNews writing effort beyond the project's conclusion?
- How do you envision sustaining the momentum (if any) generated by this intervention in the long term?
- How do you plan to integrate anything you have learned into your ongoing pastoral practice?

Wrap-up and reminder:

If the second survey has not yet been sent, it must be sent immediately after Seminar 4. The concluding eNews message template may be used if necessary.

A follow-up message encouraging survey participation must be sent out four to five days after the concluding eNews message.

APPENDIX K

PROJECT INTRODUCTION EMAIL TEMPLATE

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Lord be with you.

Now that I've gathered so many of your email addresses, I'm sending this note along to let you know about something I'm planning to do. I intend to send out an email message to you each week for at least the next twelve weeks. Depending on how it goes, I may continue after that. I may not. Either way, I expect to talk about various topics that come to mind. I also intend to speak freely with you, doing what I can to open myself up in ways that tell you more of what I'm thinking about things.

I want you to know I love you in the Lord and am glad I'm your pastor. With that, I hope what I'm going to try will be a blessing to you. I intend to send the messages out at the same time each week. Be sure to watch for them. By the way, I'll send them as blind copy (BCC) emails so that everyone's individual email addresses remain private.

Before I go, I have one more thing to share.

I'd really like for you to take a short fifteen-question survey. As you're able, please try to do so as soon as you can. Again, the survey is short. It won't take long. You can do it by clicking here: [SURVEY LINK].

Many blessings to you in your day!

In Jesus,

Pastor _____

APPENDIX L

PROJECT CONCLUSION EMAIL TEMPLATE

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Lord be with you.

What a joy it has been to spend a little time each week for the last twelve weeks writing a special note to you. I hope the eNews messages I've sent have been as much of a blessing for you to read as they've been for me to write. For one, they've served as unique opportunities to share with you in ways that I might not normally do so. In many ways, it has been refreshing, especially as any pastor's desire is to walk more closely with the people God has placed into his care.

[Choose one of the following courses:]

Because this has been such a blessing, I intend to continue sending the eNews messages to you, and my prayer is that they'll continue to be a blessing to you.

—Or—

Unfortunately, the extra time required to write these notes has proven to be challenging to my schedule, and with that, I've decided to take a break from the effort. Having been blessed by the effort, perhaps I'll pick it up again at another time.

[Continue with the following:]

To close, and similar to when I began the effort, I ask that you do me a quick favor and take a short fifteen-question survey. Try to do so as soon as you can. The survey is short. [Additional italicized text added to original note sent in participant packet:] *You'll notice it's the exact same survey you took twelve weeks ago. But please, I ask you to take it again! It's important that you do! Like the first time, it won't take long.* You can do it by clicking here: [SURVEY LINK].

God bless and keep you this day!

In Jesus,

Pastor _____

APPENDIX M

ENEWS WRITING SAMPLE 1¹

I probably shouldn't admit to it, but I've been watching TV, mostly Netflix, far more than I should these days. Honestly, I should be working on doctoral homework, or perhaps, looking ahead to the sermon texts for Holy Week and Easter. I have a couple of papers coming due at that time, so it would be wise to get a jumpstart on sermon preparation. The problem is, by the time I roll into the garage most evenings, the level of my zeal only seems capable of a routine involving a two-finger pour of whisky, a seat beside Jennifer, and an hour-long visit before bedtime with TV shows of the past.

For the record, our current reminiscence is *Knight Rider*. I loved *Knight Rider* as a kid. Watching it now, I can attest to the terrible acting, not to mention the very little effort that appears to have been placed on script-writing and special effects. Apart from the real reason Jen and I have gravitated toward such shows, we're also watching them for amusement. The dialogue is hilariously hokey. The storylines are riotously worse. And as I hinted, the special effects are often laughable. Take, for example, a particular scene that sees K.I.T.T., the artificially intelligent car, driving itself into a parking lot. As K.I.T.T. comes to a stop beside Michael Knight (played by David Hasselhoff), it's easy enough to see that the car isn't driving itself, but instead, the driver's seat has been removed, and a man dressed to look like the seat is in its place. The man's hands can be seen on the steering wheel. Jen and I rewatched and laughed at that scene a few times.

In another episode, Michael gets shot in his left shoulder. While pursuing the bad guys, he covers the wound with his right hand. The scene shifts to the dashboard as K.I.T.T.'s blinking voice indicator encourages him to go to the hospital. The scene turns back to Michael still nursing the wound, except now it's on his right shoulder and he's using his left hand.

We re-watched that scene a couple of times just for fun, too. I suppose apart from the humor, nostalgia is the real reason we started watching the show. We long for the days when television scriptwriters, directors, and producers knew better than to allow certain words or behaviors to be portrayed as normal. We miss the time when shows had a clearer

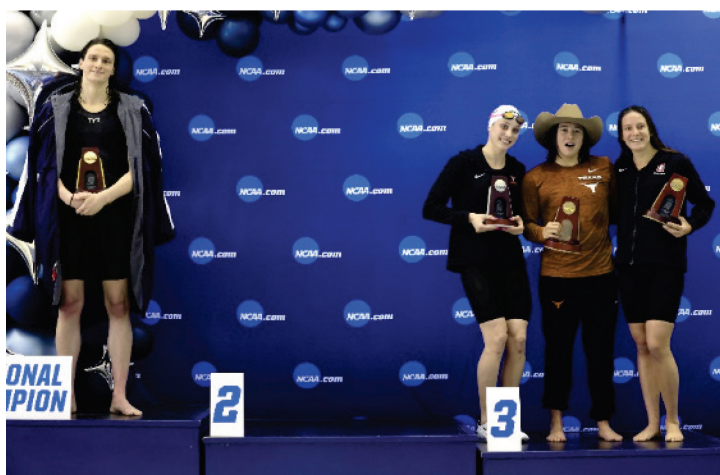


Figure A.6. 2022 NCAA Division I Women's Swimming & Diving Championship

¹ Christopher I. Thoma, "I'm Not Buying It," *Cruciform Stuff*, March 27, 2022, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://cruciformstuff.com/2022/03/27/im-not-buying-it/>.

understanding of right and wrong, truth and untruth, good and evil. I say this thinking that perhaps like me, you were troubled by the news that a man won the women’s NCAA 500-yard freestyle championship. Yes, you read that sentence correctly. A man won the women’s title. And by the way, a man won the distinction of USA Today’s “Woman of the Year.” Yes, you read that sentence correctly, too. And so, how are these things possible? Well, Lia Thomas² (formerly Will Thomas) and Rachel Levine³ (formerly Richard Levine) are both transgender females. Or is the term “transgender male”? I don’t know, anymore. It’s becoming rather difficult to keep pace with the latest wokisms being imposed upon us by this sin-sick world.

But for all I don’t understand, what I do know is that Lia Thomas, someone who is dominating women’s competitive swimming, and Rachel Levine, Joe Biden’s first and favorite



Figure A.7. Rachel Levine Appears during Her Confirmation Hearing in Washington, D.C.

choice for Assistant Secretary for Health, are both biological males in every way. For starters, I can say this because when Thomas and Levine die, if their mortal remains were ever exhumed, two male skeletons would be discovered. How do I know this? Because, apart from the fact that these two men’s biologics are written into every bit of their DNA (the distinction being that male DNA contains one X chromosome and one Y chromosome, while female DNA contains two X chromosomes), but also that without some seriously inventive reconstructive surgery, a male’s bone structure is very different from a female’s. In other words, gender isn’t a system of belief. It is an objective, biological fact, no matter the clothes worn, or the hairstyle donned.

You may dress yourself to look like the seat of a car, but you aren’t a car’s seat. You need special effects and the world of fantasy to be a car’s seat.

Interestingly, Joe Biden’s Supreme Court nominee, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson,⁴ was asked this past Tuesday by Senator Marsha Blackburn, “Can you provide a definition for the word ‘woman’?” Jackson’s answer: “No, I can’t. I’m not a biologist.”

Three quick observations in this regard. Firstly, Jackson is a woke progressive Democrat. There’s no hiding that fact. She’s on record for stating such things rather proudly. Secondly, if

² Justin Casterline, *2022 NCAA Division I Women’s Swimming & Diving Championship*, Photograph, March 17, 2022, accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/emma-veyant-transgender-swimmer-lia-thomas-ncaa-1689362>. See Figure A.1.

³ Caroline Brehman, *Rachel Levine Appears during Her Confirmation Hearing in Washington, D.C.*, Photograph, February 25, 2021, accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/usa-today-decides-that-a-man-is-a-woman-of-the-year/>. See Figure A.2.

⁴ Kevin Lamarque, *Ketanji Brown Jackson, Nominated to Be a U.S. Circuit Judge for the District of Columbia Circuit, Is Sworn in to Testify before a Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Capitol Hill, April 28, 2021.*, Photograph, April 28, 2021, accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-supreme-court-nominee-ketanji-brown-jackson-background>. See Figure A.3.

the term “woman” is undefinable to anyone other than biologists, then how do we know for sure she holds the honor of being the first black woman nominated to the Supreme Court? Even further, why is everyone everywhere using feminine identifiers like “she” and “her” when referring to her? Lastly, for as much as she wants to allow for truth to be anything to anyone, her answer affirmed gender is rooted in biology rather than an individual’s perception of “self.” If it weren’t this way, her answer would’ve been, “No, I can’t. I’m not a psychiatrist.”

Still, Thomas and Levine continue believing themselves to be women, which, as it meets with basic human autonomy, is tolerable to some extent. I suppose this is true in the same way that mental illnesses must be mildly accommodated during treatment. However, the problem is no longer that they’re convinced of something that isn’t true, but that they’re insisting the rest of us believe and live according to this untruth, too. Thomas has imposed his fantasy upon the entirety of women’s sports to the detriment of genuine female athletic achievement. Levine, on the other hand, has not only forced his fantasy on the entire nation, but as one of the first-face representatives of health science, he embodies the acceptance of pseudoscience. Perhaps worse still (albeit expected), the LGBTQ militia, along with its compliant voters and media, are jackbooting through America insisting that we allow ourselves to be assimilated into the mental constructs of these two very confused men. And if we refuse—if we speak up, if we push back, if we share opinions counter to the acceptable ones—we’re labeled as loveless bigots worthy only of cancellation. You should read some of the things that have been written about Senator Blackburn since Tuesday’s hearing. It’s telling if not also frightening.

For the record, I’m not buying into it. I discourage you from buying into it, too.

Last Sunday was a powerful day for understanding this here at Our Savior, especially considering the Epistle lesson from Eph 5:1–9, which is a text that doles out uncomplicated instructions to Christians for handling situations of sexual immorality. After six descriptive verses, in verse 7, Paul speaks prescriptively, “Therefore do not associate with them.”

In the Greek text, the word translated as “associate” is *συμμέτοχοι* (*symmetochoi*). However, I’m not so sure “associate” is the best interpretation. *συμμέτοχοι* means “co-partaker.” “Associate” conveys a simple connection to someone or something, but *συμμέτοχοι* implies a link that includes willful engagement and active participation.

Verse 7 sounds like Saint Paul’s way of saying, “Don’t buy into it.” I’d say he gave us a hint to his seriousness in this regard when he back in verse 3 that sexual immorality “must not even be named among you.” The word for “named” is *ὀνομαζέσθω* (*onomazesthō*), which carries the sense of not even mentioning such things out loud. Paul wants Christians to stay as far from sexual immorality as is humanly possible, which means we shouldn’t even leave the slightest impression we might be okay with it. Instead, we are to give a clear enunciation of truth while



Figure A.8. Ketanji Brown Jackson, Nominated to Be a U.S. Circuit Judge for the District of Columbia Circuit, Is Sworn in to Testify before a Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Capitol Hill

also making an effort to bring the errant back into the boundaries of God’s moral and natural laws. Paul aims in this direction for a reason. Right after warning against being co-partakers, he reminds Christians in verses 8 and 9, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

Paul’s words echo the words of Jesus in Matt 5:14–16. He teaches that because of who we are in Christ, we can bring the light of goodness, rightness, and truth right into the middle of the darkness. Continuing to verse 11, we hear Paul add, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

It’s not a Christian’s role to be silent, but rather we are called to expose the darkness. How is darkness exposed? Light. When the lights are shining, darkness is dispelled. When the lights are hidden, darkness maintains its grip.

The photos I’ve shared here, especially the uppermost image of Thomas and the three other swimmers, hints at everything said so far. In it, the three young ladies who competed against Thomas have elected not to be associated with Thomas’s meritless victory. I like that image a lot. I may even get it framed. Why? Because these girls have earned my respect. Risking their reputations, they’ve communicated the difference between right and wrong in a stunningly visual way. They’re not being cruel. They’re not being bigoted. They’re conveying truth adorned with smiles to a confused and erring media that’s applauding a confused and errant man.

I’m hoping these girls, their families, and all their friends will continue along in stride with Saint Paul’s words, eventually finding the courage to put their concerns into words.

I ask the Lord for this courage almost every day. I ask Him regularly to provide the same courage for you, too. I know so many of you are enduring challenging situations in your own families, friendships, and workplaces. As you stand in the middle of these things, I pray the Lord will strengthen you to be lights in the darkness, not seeking to disown anyone, but instead, to beam brightly for all the truth of God’s law and gospel—both His loving warning against sin and His incredible promise of forgiveness and restoration through faith in Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX N

ENEWS WRITING SAMPLE 2⁵

Figure A.9. Coexist

The Thoma family just returned from a rather short trip south to visit my parents. We met up with my sister, Shelley, and her family, too. My mom turns seventy tomorrow, and as it would go, we were actually able to sneak away for most of Friday and Saturday to celebrate with her. We met them all in South Bend, Indiana, which is about halfway between us. My mom was glad we came. And thankfully, returning home yesterday, we managed to stay ahead of the storms, having arrived just before they hit.

At one point during our adventures, as it is whenever one travels, it became necessary to eat. Unfortunately, there weren't many places near to where we were staying. As it would happen, however, right across the street from our hotel was a gas station with a pizza restaurant attached. When I saw it was a Noble Roman's pizzeria, I more or less lunged.

Noble Roman's was a thing for my family when I was growing up in Danville, Illinois. When we moved to Morton, Illinois, just before my junior year in high school, we left Noble Roman's behind, and I can say that I probably haven't visited one since I was sixteen or so. Still, seeing the sign brought back memories of pizza-making birthday parties and after-game gatherings with basketball families. Needless to say, I left the family to unpack, having promised them a delightful dinner. Because it was a fairly busy intersection, I decided to drive, which in essence, meant crossing from one parking lot over the road to the restaurant's lot. Easy enough. Except the restaurant's parking spaces were full. No problem. I wasn't staying long. With that, I pulled up next to a gas pump and parked.

Here's where it gets interesting.

On the other side of the pump was a minivan adorned with bumper stickers—so many stickers, in fact, that there was very little uncovered space left on the back hatch of the vehicle. Had its pilot been a little less aware of my presence, I'd have taken a picture, because I think like me, you would have laughed at the spectrum of stereotypical concerns communicated by what was, in essence, a rolling billboard of “political correctness.”

⁵ Christopher I. Thoma, “Bumper Stickers,” *Cruciform Stuff*, June 27, 2021, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://cruciformstuff.com/2021/06/27/bumper-stickers/>.

There were stickers shaming big corporations beside stickers complaining about pollution's effect on the natural environment. There was a sticker asking the viewer to save the lives of honeybees. There were stickers degrading guns and their owners. There were stickers decrying poverty and income inequality, one speaking rather specifically about raising the minimum wage. There were stickers warning of the dangers of climate change beside stickers selling the proposition that we're killing polar bears. There was a "Black Lives Matter" sticker near a "Stop Police Violence" sticker. There were stickers lauding PETA. Of course, there were stickers degrading President Trump and his supporters. There were stickers promoting marijuana. There were stickers celebrating transgenderism near rainbow-colored "equality" stickers promoting same-sex marriage. There was a sticker that referred to organized religion as evil—although, it was by no means a generalized statement since it displayed a Bible with a red X through it. Humorously, just below the "religion is evil" sticker rested another one promoting Wicca, which is the modern pagan religion that employs witchcraft. And as if that wasn't funny enough, only inches away from the Wicca sticker was a token "Coexist" sticker.⁶

I suppose I'm sharing this for a reason. I'll try to find my way to it.

I'll get there by first saying I saw a meme re-shared this morning by a friend which offered, "Villainy wears many masks; none so dangerous as the mask of virtue." For the record, the original sharer of the meme claimed the quotation's source as Washington Irving, suggesting it could be found in his delightful little volume *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. I know for a fact the line isn't in that book. I say this because I read Irving's story at least once a year. In truth, the quotation comes from the 1999 Tim Burton film "Sleepy Hollow." This, too, is a favorite of mine, even though it's hardly based on Irving's story. I like the film because I appreciate Johnny Depp's performance. I'm even more appreciative of Christopher Lee's brief appearance at the beginning. As it would go, Ichabod Crane is the one who mouths the line in the film, and for what it's worth, it's well-placed as a nod to what I think is one of the sub-themes of Irving's book—which is that while people may portray care and concern for others, in the end, most folks are really only concerned for the self, and this often results in a life of contradictory behavior. I'm guessing this is at the heart of the infamous line near the end of the book, something Irving writes with almost alarming plainness just after the schoolteacher, Ichabod, is thought to have met his end at the hands of the headless Hessian.

As he was a bachelor, and in nobody's debt, nobody troubled his head any more about him....⁷

This line is then followed by rich descriptions of the whole community simply going on without Ichabod. The reader is left with the feeling that for as virtuous as the community may actually be, its real creed is "better him than me."

I suppose the quotation in the movie hints to the screenwriter's knowledge of Irving's work, and with that, it's worth our while. Indeed, history proves that villains often prefer the

⁶ Gordon Johnson, *Coexist*, Digital Illustration, February 21, 2016, accessed June 11, 2023, <https://pixabay.com/vectors/coexist-islam-peace-symbol-1211709/>. See Figure A.4.

⁷ Washington Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (Linden, MI: Angels' Portion Books, 2019), 77.

mask of humble virtue, portraying concern for this or that issue, but in the end, only wearing it for the sake of “self.” They are a living contradiction in terms.

A similar bit of wisdom from Bernard Shaw comes to mind. With his tongue planted firmly in his cheek, even in the early 1900s, the Irish playwright tipped his hat to the inherent contradiction at the heart of virtue-signaling when he inferred sarcastically that the “more things a man is ashamed of, the more respectable he is.”⁸

I guess what I’m trying to say is that the owner of the van beside me at the gas pump in Indiana was indeed a flaming meteor of ideological contradiction. He looked to be uprightly concerned for so many noble things, and yet he betrayed his darker devotion to “self” and its opinions.

Think about it.

Coexist, being sure to be tolerant of other beliefs, but do it leaving room in your tolerance for hating people who support Trump. And remember, all organized religions, namely the Christian denominations, are evil. Except for the Wiccan religion. That organized religion devoted to witchcraft is okay. Also, because life is very important, we ought to be mindful of it even in its tiniest form. Thusly, honeybees are important. But unborn human babies, not so much. Along those same lines, don’t forget to be mindful of the environment, being thoughtful of nature and its laws as they meet with society... except, of course, when it comes to the natural laws governing sexual orientation and gender identity. Even though those laws are pretty much foundational to humanity itself, it’s okay to confuse them. I mean, regardless of the long-term effects, happiness must always eclipse truth, right?

I don’t necessarily know what the lesson to be learned here is, except maybe to say that sinful humanity most often lives by selfish opinion rather than fixed, objective truth. Of course, we all fall prey to such behavior. Even Christians. And it’s good to be aware of it.

But Christians know by the Word of the Gospel that while being aware of it is one thing, confessing and repenting of it is even better. Repenting and confessing is always met by the Lord’s forgiveness. His forgiveness continues to feed the ability to repent, confess, and amend our lives so that they realign with the truth of God’s Word. This keeps us from becoming a mess of contradictions that never really gain a firm grasp on actuality.

I dare say it’s what keeps genuine Christians from joining up with pro-choice, BLM, pro-LGBTQ groups, let alone slap their bumper stickers all over our cars.

Again, the Word of God is the Christian’s North Star. No matter our direction, whether we think we’re right or wrong, we can set our maxims by this standard—God’s standard. Established in this way, we’ll always be found in the impenetrably fixed grounds of Godly certainty.

⁸ Daniel Dervin, *Bernard Shaw: A Psychological Study* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1975), 153.

APPENDIX O

ENEWS WRITING SAMPLE 3⁹

Figure A.10. Mostly Peaceful Protests

Believe it or not, even though I typically write and send these notes very early in the morning, I'm not necessarily a morning person. It's just that putting my thoughts into words best happens in the morning. I can't say for sure, but I'm guessing it may have something to do with the effects of light and darkness on me as an individual.

There's a whole different feeling to being "up and doing" (as Longfellow described it) at 5:30 a.m. in the summer sun, especially in comparison to the winter months when, at this same hour, the sun is still laboring on the other side of the world. In the sunshine, there's a sense of eager vibrancy that mutes any sense of isolating dreariness, especially here in the church facility. By dreariness, I really mean loneliness, because by the time I usually arrive here any given morning, it's likely I won't see another person for several more hours. During the summer, the absence of people—of life-filled motion—seems less arresting, less empty. I can go from room to room doing what I need to do without even turning on lights. There's no need for artificial illumination. The windows throughout become light bulbs, each with the sun itself serving as the incandescent filament. The loneliness dissipates even more so when, through those same windows, I see the trees, the birds on their branches, the two resident rabbits I've affectionately named Frank and Betty scurrying through the yard, and so many other life-filled happenings.

The 5:30 a.m. hour during winter is something altogether different. It promises darkness.

For the most part, what's happening outside remains invisible, and the inner spaces of the facility feel a bit more cavernous. Turning on the artificial halogen lights doesn't seem to help all that much, and what little I may have been able to see of the outside's darkened landscape

⁹ Christopher I. Thoma, "Light and Darkness," *Cruciform Stuff*, June 20, 2021, accessed May 16, 2023, <https://cruciformstuff.com/2021/06/20/light-and-darkness-2/>.

becomes lost in their cold cathode reflection. Even worse, the unnatural light glaring throughout the enormous building carries a feeling of staleness—of dreadful isolation—that only comes unraveled when the sun finally rises and life begins arriving through the visiting people.

I suppose I don't want to be too allegorical with this stuff. Nevertheless, I think summer and winter both communicate truths about light and darkness. Speaking of truth, I think the deeper we dig into the imagery, the more we get a sense of the differences between truth and falsehood, too.

The Bible is fluent in its comparisons of light and darkness. Of course, our Lord refers to Himself as “the light of the world,” reminding His listeners that whoever would follow Him “will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Saint Peter refers to Christians as a chosen people called “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Saint Paul reminds his readers on countless occasions regarding their former status as people born of darkness (Eph 5:8), but then he is sure to encourage us to know our new identity as “children of light” by faith, no longer “of the night or of the darkness” (1 Thess 5:5). He so joyfully announces that God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col 1:13). From such grace-filled announcements, Paul can ask rhetorically regarding the Christian life, “For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14). He asks this aware of what—or even better who—most prefers the darkness: sin, death, and the devil. They are the ones he's identifying when he speaks of the “cosmic powers over this present darkness” with which we wrestle each day as Christians (Eph 6:12). These are the ones who labor to impose the pitch blackness of unbelief that “blinds the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4). These are the ones born from lies, who have “nothing to do with the truth” (John 8:44). But these are also the ones who, by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, have already been judged, convicted, sentenced, and will eventually be brought to nothing (John 12:31; 16:11).

These biblical texts alone help interpret the uneasy feelings that often come with actual darkness. But they also interpret by comparison the comforting warmth we feel in the sunlight. Even better, as these words arise from the source of real light—the Holy Scriptures—they relay the genuine sense of wellbeing we get from the sun in comparison to artificial lighting. I think that's the connection to be made in relation to truth and falsehood.

There are plenty of halogen-like lights in our world promising peace from various artificial sources. We all know how companies try to assure our happiness if only we'll buy their product. But the idea goes deeper still. I read an article already this morning about how the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services under the Biden Administration, Xavier Becerra, believes that if children are troubled in their sexuality, they should be allowed to transition to their preferred gender. Even worse, he thinks our tax dollars should pay for it. Becerra believes it's the duty of all Americans to help these kids embrace and follow through with the desired change in order to find the peace of mind every human deserves. First of all, we Christians know better than to think humans deserve anything. It was human sinfulness that made this world what it is. It's only by God's grace that He offers His care, allowing the sun to shine, the rain to fall, and the world to continue spinning. Secondly, and unfortunately for Mr. Becerra, the statistics are against him. Suicide rates are already high among youth struggling with gender dysphoria,

but they only get higher among the groups that actually follow through on the transition. Why? Because most end up regretting the change and all of the physiological complications that come with it.

Gender reassignment surgery is a false promise born from counterfeit light. In short, what Becerra is proposing is the devil's business, and Satan certainly loves to masquerade as bogus light (2 Cor 11:14).

Christians know what they know because God's Word is real light providing real truth. As the Psalmist declares, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). He speaks this way already knowing that God—the One who desires that all would be saved and brought to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)—is the source of its light, and so the Psalmist says as much when he joyfully scribes, "For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness" (Psalm 18:28).

I was visiting with our congregation president, Jeff Hoppe, by phone in the parking lot this past week regarding our employee policy handbook when a quotation from Lyndon Johnson came to mind. Johnson said something about how the hardest task is not necessarily doing what's right, but rather knowing what's right. Johnson was talking about his role as president, but I think the wisdom applies in this circumstance, too. Christians are bombarded with right and wrong scenarios every day. In the category of what seems to be "right" there is the avalanche of sensible opinion after sensible opinion that ultimately forms practices. Much of it seems virtuous on the surface, but only through the lighted lens of God's Word do we see the pocked surfaces and realize some have been misidentified as "good."

Take for example Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is a hot topic these days. CRT claims so virtuously to stand against racism, having birthed the "Black Lives Matter" movement.¹⁰ Standing against racism sounds great. I mean, who wouldn't want to do that? Better yet, who could legitimately defend the position that black lives don't matter? Of course, they matter! Still, in the spotlight of God's Word, the claims of CRT and its subsequent branches prove to be false narratives traveling a one-way street.

The Bible teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). No human being is untouched by sin's curse. With the same conclusiveness, Christ's sacrifice on the cross met the curse and its cost. By faith in Jesus, a believer stands forgiven and free to live according to this forgiveness. In contrast, one of the fundamental teachings of CRT is that redemption from inherent racist tendencies isn't possible. It teaches that while every race may be capable of discriminatory thoughts or actions, primarily only whites (of European and Asian descent), Christians, most males, and anyone who holds to traditional western values cannot escape it. They are, by default, unforgivably and immutably racist. Everyone else, by default, is morally innocent in this regard. For Christians who have a handle on God's Word, it's not hard to see how a position like this betrays an influence of devilish darkness.

Christians who regularly rest in the Word of God are also more likely to be able to predict the outcomes of such ideologies. The devil has always been the one at the wheel of such

¹⁰ CNN, *Mostly Peaceful Protests*, Screenshot of Newscast, August 27, 2020, accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/cnn-panned-for-on-air-graphic-reading-fiery-but-mostly-peaceful-protest-in-front-of-kenosha-fire>. See Figure A.5.

militant Marxist dogmas. And he's always ready to drive the machine to its extreme—which is why I'd say that CRT's only logical endgame is the same as the Nazis of the early twentieth century. Anyone who has ever taken aim at a utopian society has always been found in need of a “final solution” to its ungovernable problems. This should sound terrifyingly familiar when considering Nazi Germany, because it means eliminating the problem and its influences by force, and ultimately, extermination.

Along these lines, Ibram X. Kendi, one of the foremost leaders in the Critical Race Theory arena, insists that “there is no such thing as a not-racist idea.” He goes on to say there are only “racist ideas and antiracist ideas” and that encouraging different groups to love each other accomplishes little to nothing. He's even more adamant that while diversity education is good, it can't solve what he claims is an inherent problem. From his perspective, the only real way to defeat racism is to completely destroy the Western capitalist system and to further the Marxist dogmas that employ more racism. His words precisely:

The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.¹¹

What he means is that those he believes are innately racist must be met by an equal force of racism (more virtuous, of course) in order to subdue their inclinations and bring society into balance.

Kendi's light of truth is horribly halogened. It is a false light guiding toward a dreadful end. But people are buying into it because it's being sold as righteous. Interestingly, President Joe Biden is fully behind it. This isn't surprising since a recent poll showed that 85% of democrats favor CRT even as almost 60% of Americans see it as unfavorably dangerous. Still, Joe Biden has been very open about wanting CRT to be taught in our schools, governing our workplaces, and steering our military. I don't mean to be cruel, only honest, which is why I'll say I suspect this is only true of Biden because he lacks the cognitive abilities for actually sorting out CRT's endgame as he's led along by halogenic handlers. Unfortunately, as it is with the radical LGBTQ agenda, your kids are likely already incredibly immersed in this stuff at school, online, through the movies and TV shows they watch, and so many other avenues of influence in life.

This is all the more reason for staying connected to worship and Bible study! Equipped with God's Word, Christians are clad in the “armor of light” (Rom 13:12), and as such, are made ready for marking, avoiding, and fighting against these dangerous untruths. Kept apart from God's Word, we can only expect to walk in darkness.

Indeed, there's light and darkness, and for the most part, neither are all that difficult to discern. But within the category of “light,” there's the need to distinguish between real light and fake light. That's a little harder. With that, look to the Word of God. It's there you'll be equipped for discerning such things. It's there you'll realize that fake light doesn't belong in the category of light at all, but rather it belongs to darkness. It's by the real light—the Word of God—that

¹¹ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, First Edition. (New York, NY: One World, 2019), 287.

you'll be better equipped for measuring anything and everything according to the revealed will of God. It's there you'll meet the One who is the Light of the world—the embodied fulfillment of God's will for Man—the One who is for us the precise emanation of “the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78–79).

Summarizing this beautiful little text, it's God's will that we would know our sin, believe in the One who delivered us from sin, and walk in faithfulness to Him. This is the real sunlight of truth. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel for faith in Jesus Christ given by the verbal and visible Word of God (Word and Sacrament ministry) will you “know the truth,” and that truth “will set you free” (John 8:32).

APPENDIX P

LITERARY DEVICES: WRITING HELP FOR THE PARTICIPATING PASTOR

Introduction

Do you have it in you to become a more creative writer? I say, “Yes!”

In a phone conversation with a former professor, the opinion was given that “you either have it or you don’t. It can’t be learned.” I humbly disagree. I believe it can. I believe research proves it. But even apart from the research, I believe that when the Lord set you apart as one tasked with delivering His gospel, He implied His agreement, too. And so, we must be careful not to succumb to the assumption that any of the communication forms we use as pastors cannot be beautiful, insisting that prosaic opportunity belongs only to the hymn writers among us. In a sense, the Church’s hymnody demonstrates a potential available to every gospel-motivated effort. Even an everyday email can be literarily memorable, bearing an ultimate potential for moving its recipient attitudinally in ways that others might not. The project in which you are now participating will attempt to steer into this presumption. To do this, the following literary devices are offered for reference. Utilizing them will be of great benefit.

Theme

Like a good sermon, your message will involve a primary theme. In this case, your theme is your selected topic. To address it, you must be laser-focused upon it.

Forms and Devices

Form and device are inextricably linked. Their cooperative roles help to set the stage in unique ways that assist in delivering meaning.

Regarding form (style), just as there are many different sermon forms (expository, impressionistic, developmental, and the like), so too are there different writing forms. Some are very basic, while others are quite complex. For example, relative to poetry, there are many different configurations, each bringing to the literary table a distinctive character. Some popular forms include Quatrain, Sonnet, Palindrome, Acrostic, Heroic Couplet, Haiku, Free Verse, and Limerick. Even mentioning these, the list remains incomplete because, in the end, forms can also be original. Whichever you choose, know that each offers a unique system of delivery, and depending upon the theme, will either help to enhance or serve to detract.

Concerning devices, again, there are many. It serves a writer well to become acquainted with these because they offer different avenues for creativity. Each avenue will involve its own process for cultivating the theme, with the result being the best words in the best order.

There are many established devices from which to choose—alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, metaphor, simile, imagery, and others; and each labors uniquely to awaken the senses of the reader. Since poetry has been the example thus far, the most widely recognized device in poetry is rhyme. Note that rhyme is not necessarily to be excluded from the writer’s message. Rhyme plays by rules—but different rules than normal writing. As a result, a reader will likely remember stumbling upon rhyming sentences in material that has not been specifically referenced as a poem or song. The same goes for linguistic devices such as alliteration (the usage of words that repeat the same first consonant—such as, “Dim dirty death drives the desperate dirge”) and assonance (the usage of words that repeat a common vowel sound—such as, “Oh, no! The snow! As I go, it will be slow!”).

The opportunities for the writer to exercise creativity through the study and use of various forms and devices are vast. When you begin to reflect upon each, you will probably notice particular tools that are enjoyable and work well for you while, at the same time, you will discover others you prefer to avoid. It is the suggestion of this researcher that the following devices be utilized as they serve the Word of God by effectively constructing unified, coherent, and emphatic language.¹²

Point-of-view and Imagery

Perhaps the devices that will require the most investment of time and tears are Point-of-view and Imagery. However, their investment effort is great because they may just be the most important. Point-of-view is the frame for imagery. Imagery sets the visual stage for the theme.

Point-of-view is natural to every communicative context, whether it is happening in conversation or storytelling. Perhaps it is that most often in our day-to-day communication, we experience point-of-view in First Person (which is that the one speaking is a character involved in the story with limited information). Most writing, however, seems to take place in Third Person Limited (not necessarily part of the story but tells it with limited information about the characters) or Third Person Omniscient (not a part of the story but knows everything about each character, even thoughts and feelings). The use of Point-of-view is a creative device that the writer may employ beyond the usual exposition of a given subject. There are real people involved with the topic. They believe things. They have presuppositions. They have fears. They have joys. The writer has the unique and wonderful opportunity to imagine and discover those innate points of view and to give them a voice.

Imagery is a powerful tool for stimulating one or more of the five senses. Imagery helps the reader associate personally with an unfamiliar scene, thereby creating familiarity. For example, a sermon was preached years ago on Easter Sunday. During the sermon, a brief image was given of clocks being non-functioning in heaven's eternity. One woman, as she greeted the pastor after the service, smiled and said emphatically, "Amen, pastor! Where it is impossible for clocks to tick!" She continued that clocks would never be the same for her again. When she sees them, she will remember the imagery and its connection to her risen Savior and the eternity He earned for her. Of course, the point is not to confirm whether clocks will or will not tick in eternity, or whether they will be there at all. Instead, the point was to provide a memorable image that helps to bond the listener to what was preached at that moment. Of all the images used in the sermon, this is the one she remembered, and it helped to establish a long-term link with the Easter Gospel.

Relative to this exercise, imagery might be used in two ways. Firstly, in a narrative sense, imagery may be used to paint the landscape. For the reader to become a participant in the excursion, there must be a place to go that can be seen, felt, tasted, smelled, and touched. Imagery creates such mental concreteness. Consider the following excerpt from a sermon I wrote years ago on John 3:1-17:

The hour is late. The night is dark, and the air is cool. The smoke from the extinguished lanterns hangs lazily in the darkened windows. Somewhere in the city of Jerusalem, a Rabbi, *the Rabbi*, sits. A figure is moving through the city's shadows. It's a man earnestly making his way. He must go to the Rabbi. He must get to Him. His mind is flashing fiery images of the signs he's seen the Rabbi perform. His ears are ringing with the anxious

¹² A.M. Tibbetts and Charlene Tibbetts, *Strategies of Rhetoric with Handbook* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1987), 250.

discussions taking place among the Sanhedrin. His heart is burning from the words he's heard this Rabbi speak. But there is danger in this visit. What if his fellow Pharisees find out? What if someone sees and reports him? Their words ricochet in the cavern of his mind, "Yes, I saw Nicodemus with the teacher from Galilee. The old man went to visit Him for instruction. How scandalous!" But strangely, the tragic possibility does not deter him. It only presses toward caution. He must meet Jesus. He must discover, is this Galilean the Messiah, the Christ? Is this man the One to usher in the kingdom of God? Nicodemus finds the Lord, and even though the night is upon them, Jesus does not turn him away. Right here, right now, Nicodemus will meet Jesus. And in so doing, he will be reintroduced to the God he thought he already knew—to the Holy Trinity—and this introduction will be made through the Gospel in a nutshell.

Imagery feeds the need for point-of-view, giving it substance. Because point-of-view is not blind, imagery is necessary. As the story unfolds, the listener will be drawn to exist within real surroundings. As the listener follows Nicodemus in search of Jesus, he sees the city streets. He smells the lantern haze. He sees the Lord Jesus. The Third Person point-of-view has allowed access to this imagery which has met and provided for each of the human senses. In Isaiah 6, within the throne room of God, with imagery, the listener will have been brought in and will have tasted the chalky incense with the tongue. He will have smelled the same robust and sweet aromas wafting up and around the prophet's nose. He will have watched it swirl with the movement of the seraphim encircling the throne, hearing their massive wings scooping air and taking to flight.

Secondly, for information that doesn't necessarily tell a story, imagery can be used to create themes or subthemes that do. For example, read Jeremiah 31:7–9, a relatively abstract text from the prophet. Consider the following summary of the text:

The Word of the Lord in Jeremiah 31 is one that speaks forth hope in the face of hopelessness. It is a little chapter amidst a sea of wonderful context that lifts high in waves of God's everlasting love for his people. It swells a song of restoration and renewal, a renewal that brings perfection, a purity that belongs to the fairest virgin bride as her hand is engulfed by the gentle hand of her beloved. Untouched and undefiled, she stands before Him. And He loves her, not because of anything she has done, but because His love, as Jeremiah proclaims, is an everlasting love. And He loves her enough to die.

Not once does this reading mention the sea. However, creative imagery has been used to fashion a smaller, oceanic sub-theme to add imagery capable of carrying the message inherent to the text. "Context" has become equal to a "sea." God's love has taken the shape of waves undulating endlessly. The promise of restoration is carried by this same image of a wave building in strength and surging upward. Whether a reader can engage with the fuller concept of God's eternal love, an image of the sea describes a familiar locale for even those who may never have stepped foot on a beach. When they consider God's love, they will need only to be reminded of its massive strength and eternal motion compared to the vast expanse and potency of the sea.

Even further along, more imagery was added to the distinct contextual theme of the virgin. The scene was painted of God being the loving groom whose sturdy hand takes the hand of His bride with careful sensitivity. Even though the text may not reveal such a storyline, the reader has been engaged by colorful details that help to deliver the eternal storyline of redemption already fashioned from eternity. Such descriptions are not so easily forgotten.

Devices of Emphasis — Simile, Metaphor, and Hyperbole

With the usage of imagery, a writer will undoubtedly end up using Simile and Metaphor. Simile and Metaphor are devices that relay similarities between things that, in fact, are very different. Simile will typically present the comparative action by using the words “like” or “as,” which ultimately keeps the equated objects noticeably separate. For example, “The sun is like a light bulb” is a simile. Edmund Spenser, a 16th Century English poet, was quite fond of simile, using it well and often throughout his epic poem “The Faerie Queen.” Consider the portions below describing the menacing dragon from Book 1, Canto 11:

And over, all with brazen scales was armd,
Like plated coate of steele, so couched neare.¹³

His flaggy wings when forth he did display,
Were like two sayles, in which the hollow wynd
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way.¹⁴

His blazing eyes, like two bright shining shields,
Did burn with wrath, and sparkled living fyre.¹⁵

Metaphor will heighten the emphasis. A metaphor expresses its comparative action by saying that something is something it is not. For example, to say, “He has a heart of stone” is a metaphor. Throughout his poem “Paradise Lost,” John Milton uses metaphorical language to describe the devil. An example of this may be found in Book 4.

As when a prowling wolf,
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,
Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve
In hurdled cotes amid the field secure,
Leaps o’er the fence with ease into the fold.¹⁶

Hyperbole, like simile and metaphor, is also a comparative device. Hyperbole, however, is figurative language that compares in deliberately exaggerated ways. A simple example of this would be to say, “It took a gallon of hair gel to keep his hair in place.” Of course, experience tells the listener that a gallon of hair gel used on one head is ridiculous. The point is to say that he was having so much trouble with keeping his hair in place that it took a lot of gel to fix the problem.

T.S. Eliot, in his poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” uses hyperbole when speaking of the main character seeing his own head being carried to him like that of John the Baptist. Eliot does this to demonstrate his character’s debilitating fear of speaking to the women around him.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment into crisis?

¹³ M.H. Abrams and Stephen Goldblatt, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1 (London, England: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 752.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:753.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:1878.

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
 Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,
 I am no prophet—and here's no great matter.¹⁷

Personification

Personification is a wonderfully useful device that gives human abilities to inanimate objects, animals, and the like. Often it can be quite useful to a writer to take what appears to be a familiar part of the landscape within a text and give it an opportunity to be heard. It can be as simple as saying, “The tree stump resisted me stubbornly as I tried desperately to remove it.” Or it can be enhanced even further by adding intellectual consciousness: “The tree stump had resolved that he would not be moved from his home; all the while, I challenged his obstinacy with greater fervor.” Now the tree stump has a thinking/acting role in the story. The door is now open for creativity to ponder, “If a tree stump could speak, what would he say?”

In what is often considered to be one of the greatest poems in American literature, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” Robert Frost gives consciousness to the horse of a contemplative rider. Frost takes an unusual character in the story and gives it emotive qualities in order to highlight its confusion at the present situation and therefore press its preference for a specific decision. By doing so, Frost enhances the tension of the fuller theme of the poem, which suggests that this particular visitor to the snowy woods is caught up in his desire to remain in the serenity of the woods as opposed to returning to the bustle of regular societal life.

My little horse must think it queer
 To stop without a farmhouse near
 Between the woods and frozen lake
 The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake.
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.¹⁸

Repetition

In rhetoric, repetition is a helpful device for keeping listeners in tune with the theme as well as securely claiming long-term residence within the mind of listeners. This happens because by using repetition, a writer draws people to recognize patterns and to see more clearly what the writer intends to be remembered as significant in support of his theme. Each repetitive movement is meant to keep the reader moving in a forward motion, keeping sight of the theme at every angle, and never becoming tedious. William H. Willimon writes in *Undone by Easter: Keeping Preaching Fresh*:

One of my favorite Russian authors is Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy is known for his deliberate, frequent, and sometimes exasperating repetitiveness. . . . For instance, in the death of Prince Andrei, Tolstoy uses the words “weep” or “wept” almost a dozen times in just a few

¹⁷ Beverly Lawn, ed., *Literature: 150 Masterpieces of Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 419.

¹⁸ Edward Connery Lathem, ed., *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1969), 224.

paragraphs, almost like a refrain in a song. The repetition fixes the character in our minds while telling such a large, long, and unwieldy story as *War and Peace*. A more significant reason for Tolstoy's repetition is that Tolstoy seems to be searching, probing his characters, returning to them again, redescribing them, adding to our knowledge of them with each recurring encounter.¹⁹

One of the most memorable poems in American literature that utilizes repetition is "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. In this poem, the sadness of a man who has lost his love is represented by the annoying and tortuously repetitive cries of the raven, which squawks, "Nevermore." Throughout, Poe uses this single word to meet each attempt by the man of sorrow to avoid the misery of the loss of his dear Lenore. No matter which stanza of the poem you read, no matter how far the mind of the reader may wander in search of a different interpretation for the black bird's melancholy presence, no matter how the maddened character in the story seeks to ignore or excuse the harpings, Poe always meets the reader with his dark construal of hopelessness in the face of separation from a loved one in death through the repeated word "Nevermore." Through repetition, the reader is carried along and is never allowed to forget the theme of this gloomy work. Consider a few sample portions from various stanzas.

Till I scarcely more than muttered: "Other friends have flown before—
On the morrow he will leave me as my Hopes have flown before."
Then the bird said, "Nevermore."²⁰

"Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, of quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."²¹

"Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."²²

Repetition is such an effective device, it is used in advertising. Not many who lived during the 1980s will easily forget Clara Peller, the little old woman in the Wendy's commercials who repeated over and over again, "Where's the beef?" Repetition is used in political campaigns. When Barack Obama was nominated by the Democratic National Convention (and eventually elected to the office of president) in 2008, he accepted his newly acquired position to the mantra-like chanting of his repeated slogan, "Yes we can!" Many of the greatest speeches ever written are indeed considered great because they utilized repetition. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his speech entitled "I Have a Dream," spoke those very words many times throughout. Repetition is

¹⁹ William H. Willimon, *Undone by Easter: Keeping Preaching Fresh* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2009), 52.

²⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York, NY: Random House, 1992), 945. The last three lines of stanza 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 945. The last three lines of stanza 15.

²² *Ibid.* The last three lines of stanza 18.

not unavailable to the writer as a tool to help unify an effort, making its purpose and content memorable.

APPENDIX Q

ONLINE SURVEY 1

1. How frequently do you vote in political elections?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
2. Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be involved in political issues?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
3. In your opinion, should Christians participate in political rallies and protests?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
4. Have you ever contacted a political representative to voice your concerns on a particular issue?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
5. Do you believe that Christians should run for political office?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
6. Would you consider yourself to be politically active within your community?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
7. Do you believe that churches should take a stand on political issues?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
8. Have you ever donated money to a political candidate or campaign?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
9. Do you think that Christians should use their influence to shape government policy?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
10. Do you think that Christians should be involved in lobbying efforts?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
11. In your opinion, should pastors and other church leaders be involved in politics?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
12. Have you ever attended a political fundraiser or event?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
13. Do you think that Christians should work together with people of other faiths to advance common political goals?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
14. Should Christians publicly endorse political candidates or parties?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

15. Do you think that Christians should support laws that align with their religious beliefs, even if they conflict with secular values?

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

APPENDIX R

SURVEY 1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS
Question Summaries and Response Weighting

1. Frequency of voting:

Never: 1 Rarely: 2 Sometimes: 3 Often: 4 Always: 5

2. Belief in Christian involvement in political issues:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

3. Opinion on Christians participating in rallies/protests:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

4. Contacting political representatives:

Never: 1 Rarely: 2 Sometimes: 3 Often: 4 Always: 5

5. Belief in Christians running for political office:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

6. Self-identification as politically active:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

7. Belief in churches taking a stand on political issues:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

8. Donating money to political candidates/campaigns:

Never: 1 Rarely: 2 Sometimes: 3 Often: 4 Always: 5

9. Belief in Christians shaping government policy:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

10. Belief in Christian involvement in lobbying efforts:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

11. Opinion on pastors/church leaders involvement in politics:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

12. Attendance at political fundraisers/events:

Never: 1 Rarely: 2 Sometimes: 3 Often: 4 Always: 5

13. Belief in cooperation with people of other faiths for political goals:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

14. Belief in Christians endorsing political candidates/parties:

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

15. Support for laws aligning with religious beliefs vs. secular values:
Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

APPENDIX S

ONLINE SURVEY 2 (Unused)

1. To what extent do you participate in political elections?
Not at all Rarely Sometimes Often Always
2. Do you believe that Christians have a role to play in politics?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
3. Should Christians be involved in political demonstrations or rallies?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
4. Have you ever contacted a political representative to express your views on a particular issue?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
5. Would you be comfortable with a Christian running for political office?
Not at all Somewhat uncomfortable Neutral Somewhat comfortable Very comfortable
6. Do you consider yourself politically engaged within your community?
Not at all Rarely Sometimes Often Always
7. Is it appropriate for churches to take a stance on political issues?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
8. Have you ever made a financial contribution to a political candidate or campaign?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
9. Do you believe that Christians should use their influence to shape government policies?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
10. Is it appropriate for Christians to engage in lobbying efforts?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
11. Should pastors and other church leaders be involved in politics?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
12. Should Christians attend political fundraisers or events?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
13. Do you believe that Christians should partner with other denominations to advance common political goals?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
14. Do you believe that Christians should publicly endorse political candidates or parties?
Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

15. Is it acceptable for Christians to support laws that align with their religious beliefs, even if they conflict with secular values?

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

APPENDIX T

PLANNING SCHEDULE

The following schedule is provided for planning purposes. Use it only as it will assist in your effort. The first greyed portion serves as an example of how one might plan for each eNews message's content and delivery. For help with writing prompts, consider visiting: <https://blog.reedsy.com/creative-writing-prompts/>. Also, quotation books are an exceptional help in this regard. For example, consider the thorough compilation *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 8th Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Date	Item	Task / eNews Prospective Topic, Literary Device, Personal Info
<i>Week 6</i>	<i>eNews 5</i>	<i>Wokism / Personification / Funny story about a recent auto repair</i>
Jan. 29, 2024	Group Meeting (Seminar 1)	Project Discussion and Preliminary Assignments
Week of Feb. 4, 2024	Individual Meeting & Preliminary Message (Seminar 2)	Consultation with Researcher / Briefly introduce the forthcoming effort. Share Online Survey Link 1.
Week of Feb. 11, 2024	eNews 1	
Week of Feb. 18, 2024	eNews 2	
Week of Feb. 25, 2024	eNews 3	
Week of Mar. 3, 2024	eNews 4	
Week of Mar. 10, 2024	eNews 5	
Week of Mar. 17, 2024	eNews 6	[Mid-Project Seminar 3 this week—Monday, March 18, 2024]
Week of Mar. 24, 2024	eNews 7	
Week of Mar. 31, 2024	eNews 8	
Week of April 7, 2024	eNews 9	
Week of April 14, 2024	eNews 10	
Week of April 21	eNews 11	
Week of April 28	eNews 12 (& Concluding Message)	Conclude or continue the effort. Share Online Survey Link 2
Monday April 29, 2024	Group Meeting (Seminar 4)	Project Wrap-up and General Discussion

APPENDIX U

SURVEY 1 RESULTS

Q1: How frequently do you vote in political elections?

Never: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1

Rarely: 2/5 (1.22%) - 2

Sometimes: 3/5 (4.88%) - 8

Often: 4/5 (29.27%) - 48

Always: 5/5 (64.02%) - 105

Total responses: 164

Q2: Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be involved in political issues?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2

Disagree: 2/5 (0.00%) - 0

Neutral: 3/5 (6.10%) - 10

Agree: 4/5 (39.63%) - 65

Strongly agree: 5/5 (53.05%) - 87

Total responses: 164

Q3: In your opinion, should Christians participate in political rallies and protests?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.00%) - 0

Disagree: 2/5 (5.49%) - 9

Neutral: 3/5 (35.98%) - 59

Agree: 4/5 (37.20%) - 61

Strongly agree: 5/5 (21.34%) - 35

Total responses: 164

Q4: Have you ever contacted a political representative to voice your concerns on a particular issue?

Never: 1/5 (29.27%) - 48

Rarely: 2/5 (35.98%) - 59

Sometimes: 3/5 (25.00%) - 41

Often: 4/5 (7.93%) - 13

Always: 5/5 (1.83%) - 3

Total responses: 164

Q5: Do you believe that Christians should run for political office?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2

Disagree: 2/5 (0.00%) - 0

Neutral: 3/5 (9.15%) - 15

Agree: 4/5 (32.32%) - 53

Strongly agree: 5/5 (57.32%) - 94

Total responses: 164

Q6: Would you consider yourself to be politically active within your community?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (9.15%) - 15

Disagree: 2/5 (26.83%) - 44
 Neutral: 3/5 (35.37%) - 58
 Agree: 4/5 (21.95%) - 36
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (6.71%) - 11

Total responses: 164

Q7: Do you believe that churches should take a stand on political issues?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (3.05%) - 5
 Disagree: 2/5 (6.71%) - 11
 Neutral: 3/5 (23.17%) - 38
 Agree: 4/5 (40.24%) - 66
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (26.83%) - 44

Total responses: 164

Q8: Have you ever donated money to a political candidate or campaign?

Never: 1/5 (50.00%) - 82
 Rarely: 2/5 (20.12%) - 33
 Sometimes: 3/5 (21.95%) - 36
 Often: 4/5 (6.71%) - 11
 Always: 5/5 (1.22%) - 2

Total responses: 164

Q9: Do you think that Christians should use their influence to shape government policy?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Disagree: 2/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Neutral: 3/5 (16.46%) - 27
 Agree: 4/5 (48.78%) - 80
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (32.93%) - 54

Total responses: 164

Q10: Do you think that Christians should be involved in lobbying efforts?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (2.44%) - 4
 Disagree: 2/5 (2.44%) - 4
 Neutral: 3/5 (34.15%) - 56
 Agree: 4/5 (40.85%) - 67
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (20.12%) - 33

Total responses: 164

Q11: In your opinion, should pastors and other church leaders be involved in politics?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.83%) - 3
 Disagree: 2/5 (15.24%) - 25
 Neutral: 3/5 (31.10%) - 51
 Agree: 4/5 (39.02%) - 64
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (12.80%) - 21

Total responses: 164

Q12: Have you ever attended a political fundraiser or event?

Never: 1/5 (54.27%) - 89
 Rarely: 2/5 (17.68%) - 29
 Sometimes: 3/5 (20.12%) - 33
 Often: 4/5 (6.71%) - 11
 Always: 5/5 (1.22%) - 2

Total responses: 164

Q13: Do you think that Christians should work together with people of other faiths to advance common political goals?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Disagree: 2/5 (3.05%) - 5
 Neutral: 3/5 (18.29%) - 30
 Agree: 4/5 (54.88%) - 90
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (22.56%) - 37

Total responses: 164

Q14: Should Christians publicly endorse political candidates or parties?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Disagree: 2/5 (5.49%) - 9
 Neutral: 3/5 (25.00%) - 41
 Agree: 4/5 (50.61%) - 83
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (17.68%) - 29

Total responses: 164

Q15: Do you think that Christians should support laws that align with their religious beliefs, even if they conflict with secular values?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.00%) - 0
 Disagree: 2/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Neutral: 3/5 (15.85%) - 26
 Agree: 4/5 (38.41%) - 63
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (45.12%) - 74

Total responses: 164

 Median: 70%

Mean: 71%

Standard Deviation: 11%

APPENDIX V
SURVEY 2 RESULTS

Q1: How frequently do you vote in political elections?

Never: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Rarely: 2/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Sometimes: 3/5 (5.49%) - 9
 Often: 4/5 (20.73%) - 34
 Always: 5/5 (71.95%) - 118

Total Responses: 164

Q2: Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to be involved in political issues?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Disagree: 2/5 (1.83%) - 3
 Neutral: 3/5 (3.66%) - 6
 Agree: 4/5 (31.71%) - 52
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (62.20%) - 102

Total Responses: 164

Q3: In your opinion, should Christians participate in political rallies and protests?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Disagree: 2/5 (6.10%) - 10
 Neutral: 3/5 (29.27%) - 48
 Agree: 4/5 (41.46%) - 68
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (22.56%) - 37

Total Responses: 164

Q4: Have you ever contacted a political representative to voice your concerns on a particular issue?

Never: 1/5 (26.22%) - 43
 Rarely: 2/5 (26.22%) - 43
 Sometimes: 3/5 (30.49%) - 50
 Often: 4/5 (15.85%) - 26
 Always: 5/5 (1.22%) - 2

Total Responses: 164

Q5: Do you believe that Christians should run for political office?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Disagree: 2/5 (0.00%) - 0
 Neutral: 3/5 (7.93%) - 13
 Agree: 4/5 (31.71%) - 52
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (59.76%) - 98

Total Responses: 164

Q6: Would you consider yourself to be politically active within your community?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (6.10%) - 10

Disagree: 2/5 (18.29%) - 30
 Neutral: 3/5 (40.24%) - 66
 Agree: 4/5 (27.44%) - 45
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (7.93%) - 13

Total Responses: 164

Q7: Do you believe that churches should take a stand on political issues?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Disagree: 2/5 (8.54%) - 14
 Neutral: 3/5 (18.29%) - 30
 Agree: 4/5 (38.41%) - 63
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (33.54%) - 55

Total Responses: 164

Q8: Have you ever donated money to a political candidate or campaign?

Never: 1/5 (35.37%) - 58
 Rarely: 2/5 (19.51%) - 32
 Sometimes: 3/5 (28.05%) - 46
 Often: 4/5 (11.59%) - 19
 Always: 5/5 (5.49%) - 9

Total Responses: 164

Q9: Do you think that Christians should use their influence to shape government policy?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Disagree: 2/5 (2.44%) - 4
 Neutral: 3/5 (7.93%) - 13
 Agree: 4/5 (45.73%) - 75
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (43.29%) - 71

Total Responses: 164

Q10: Do you think that Christians should be involved in lobbying efforts?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.83%) - 3
 Disagree: 2/5 (3.66%) - 6
 Neutral: 3/5 (22.56%) - 37
 Agree: 4/5 (43.29%) - 71
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (28.66%) - 47

Total Responses: 164

Q11: In your opinion, should pastors and other church leaders be involved in politics?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (2.44%) - 4
 Disagree: 2/5 (7.32%) - 12
 Neutral: 3/5 (28.66%) - 47
 Agree: 4/5 (37.20%) - 61
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (24.39%) - 40

Total Responses: 164

Q12: Have you ever attended a political fundraiser or event?

Never: 1/5 (41.46%) - 68
 Rarely: 2/5 (17.68%) - 29
 Sometimes: 3/5 (28.66%) - 47
 Often: 4/5 (10.98%) - 18
 Always: 5/5 (1.22%) - 2

Total Responses: 164

Q13: Do you think that Christians should work together with people of other faiths to advance common political goals?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Disagree: 2/5 (3.05%) - 5
 Neutral: 3/5 (14.02%) - 23
 Agree: 4/5 (53.66%) - 88
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (28.05%) - 46

Total Responses: 164

Q14: Should Christians publicly endorse political candidates or parties?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (1.22%) - 2
 Disagree: 2/5 (3.66%) - 6
 Neutral: 3/5 (15.85%) - 26
 Agree: 4/5 (53.05%) - 87
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (26.22%) - 43

Total Responses: 164

Q15: Do you think that Christians should support laws that align with their religious beliefs, even if they conflict with secular values?

Strongly disagree: 1/5 (0.61%) - 1
 Disagree: 2/5 (3.05%) - 5
 Neutral: 3/5 (6.10%) - 10
 Agree: 4/5 (40.85%) - 67
 Strongly agree: 5/5 (49.39%) - 81

Total Responses: 164

 Median: 75%

Mean: 74%

Standard Deviation: 11%

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IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 25, 2024

Christopher Thoma
Lucien Fortier

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-737 Pastoral Communication Leading to Improved Parishioner Engagement in the Public Square

Dear Christopher Thoma and Lucien Fortier,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your project is not considered human subjects research because it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

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