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Church Hurt: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Survivors.

by

Raquel Anderson

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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2017

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College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

This dissertation was submitted by Raquel Anderson under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

The church is often seen as a place where people go to seek love, peace, and acceptance. Increasingly, there are occasions where these needs are not being met. Mansfield (2012) used the term "*Ecclesia exitus* ...the decision to permanently question one's faith, trust in the church leadership and/or withdraw from a congregation you had considered to be your 'church home," to describe the experience of Church Hurt. This study seeks to describe the experience of those who have undergone church hurt. Abraham Maslow in his seminal 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation* and his subsequent book, *Motivation and Personality*, posited a hierarchy of human needs that motivated human behavior, in conjunction with Social Constructionism, shall provide a theoretical framework(s) for the study. Phenomenological analysis as outlined by Moustakas (1994) was the methodology utilized, given its focus on capturing the subjective meanings and perspective of the research, participants lived experience(s). The study interviewed fourteen (14) respondents, eight (8) females, and six (6) males, derived by purposive and snowball sampling methods. To attain in-depth, "thick descriptions," semi-structured interviews, ranging in duration from forty minutes to an hour, were conducted, over a month long period. Four (4) themes were unearthed, Sanctity of the Church, Sense of Loss, Transformative and the Ineptitude/Ignorance in the Resolution of Conflict. The study shall provide survivors of church hurt experience a voice, and church administrator more sensitive and effective conflict management strategies to handle the church hurt experience, ultimately resulting in a more fulfilling ecclesiastical experience. *Keywords*: Church Hurt, Religiosity-Health, Transcendental Phenomenology, Conflict Management.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter Introduction

The church is one of the traditional universal spiritual entities bringing together believers in Christ and constitutes a physical manifestation as a well-organized institution. The church, as a community entity, can also be a socially fulfilling and effective institution in the lives of those involved with it (Axinciuc, 2011; Brown & Gary, 1994; Chaney, 2008; Ellison & Levin, 1998). It is an institution that is capable of bringing joy and fulfilling its members' deepest needs, but at the same time, it can be a source of hurt and bad experiences. Although the spiritual and universal manifestation of the church is always in existence, due to its nature as biblically being a creation of Jesus himself, the church is often put up on an idealized pedestal as depicted in Acts 2:44-35 (NKV).

> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their Possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those were being saved.

The above passage depicts the church as a fellowship, characterized by communal values of caring for each other with the individual subsumed by the community, where the praise and virtues of God dominates. As such, the existence of conflict is viewed as nonexistent, downplayed or barely acknowledged, as to do so disagrees with the most

fundamental ideals of the church (Lowry & Myers, 1991, Thomas, 1990). The existence of conflict within the church is seen as a failure.

The organized physical manifestation of the church, on the other hand, is operated by people who may be broken inside and/or are in the process of obtaining healing. The church as a moral and spiritual sanctity guided by the teachings of Christ that exist in the real world is subject to all the failings and vices that embody modern life. It is often one of the least equipped institutions that can effectively handle conflict, and by extension, the existence of Church Hurt. Undoubtedly, the church is a source of spiritual solace and moral guidance. However, like any institution/organization that has members from different races, class, ages, education, political opinions, and backgrounds, conflict will exist, making Church Hurt a phenomenon that will invariably arise. As such, the church, despite its many virtues (Axinciuc, 2011; Brown & Gary, 1994; Chaney, 2008; Ellison & Levin, 1998), may also be a source of inflicting pain due to the inadequacy of the people that comprises the organization. The excerpt below well underscores this argument:

> Although his drive was clothed in all sorts of impressive spiritual motives, and although his ministry was remarkably effective, down at the center were unresolved hurts of the past. Because these hurts remained a point of disorder in his private world, they came back to haunt him. They affected his choice and values and blinded him to what was really happening at a crucial moment of his life. The result was serious disaster, failure, embarrassment, and public humiliation (MacDonald, 1985 p. 46).

The above excerpt by Gordon MacDonald (1985) makes clear the case of Charles Blair, which constitutes one of the largest betrayals and hurt caused by the church. Even

though the Blair case is only one episode of such church hurt, today we are finding more people who have been deeply hurt by the very church from which they sought solace. Unfortunately, the church can become a place where people experience deep wounds rather than healing. Indications are that the majority of people who stop attending church do so as a result of offense or injury to their feelings that they sustained in the church (Mansfield, 2012). Church Hurt can occur due to the insensitivity of church leaders or other fellow members, or it might arise because the person involved is too irritable or sensitive to misunderstandings. For the purposes of this study, the definition of Church will be that which Mansfield (2012) expressed. According to Mansfield (2012), 'Church Hurt' is a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship and the effect is so dramatic that while the person still has faith, his or her trust in the church has failed. Church Hurt may result in the individual(s) leaving the church where the incident occurred to go to another church or remaining in that particular church, not functioning as effectively as they did prior to the impact of the incident (s). The traumatic element to the experience occurs when a place of trust, spiritual and social connection becomes a place of rejection, anguish, or disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even reject one's church. Irrespective of the sources/causes that influences one to adopt such drastic action(s), this study will examine the issue of Church Hurt at both the conceptual and experiential level.

Contrary to popular beliefs, conflicts and misunderstandings existed before the earliest stage of mankind, as shown by God kicking Lucifer (Satan before his change of name) out of heaven:

> How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!
>
> For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:
>
> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.
>
> Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15 KJV).

From the earliest stage of mankind, this is evidenced by Cain murdering his brother Abel:

> And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel, his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis, Chapter 4:6-9 KJV).

It is not known what was said when Cain spoke with Abel. However, an assumption can be made that whatever was said escalated the conflict, which resulted in Abel losing his life. Moreover, even in the early age of the church there was conflict, as shown with Paul and Barnabas in the book of Acts: “And there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus” (Acts 15:39 KJV).

As earlier posited, the church has always been comprised of a variety of individuals, personalities, and sensibilities; given such a mix, just like in any social context, wherever there is a group of individuals who co-exist and are interdependent for a period of time, then conflict will inevitably arise and so will the propensity to being hurt. Even within the bible it is argued that "there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20 NASB). Put another way, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God (Romans 3:22-23 NIV). These scriptures both highlight the implicit inevitably of man's fallibility to sin, and as such, members of churches are not immune.

Scott (2009) describing the nature of conflicts experienced by the early church states that this conflict "is the painful tension between what the Church claims to be and what it seems to be; between the divine ideal and the human reality; between romantic talk and about 'the bride of Christ' and the very unromantic, ugly, unholy and quarrelsome Christian community we know ourselves to be" (p. 11). Niebuhr (1960) also stated that "human nature is not wanting in certain endowments for the solution of the problem of human society" (p. 2). He feels that humans are unable to resolve their problems in their lives because they are sinful in nature. Since the church is also made up of the same inadequate group of humanity, no exceptions apply to it. Although most Christians are always trying to adopt a life of love and peace with one another, more often than not, they fall short of attaining this objective. They therefore end up hurting each other with words or actions, whether intentionally or not.

Sometimes, congregants go through a split/break away from the church because of the fact that the conflicts, when brought to their leaders, are not resolved effectively.

As a result, people suffer from ‘Church Hurt’ and leave the church to go to another church or start their own. VanDenburgh (1996) suggests that the issue of ‘Church Hurt’ is not exclusive to the conflicts that parishioners bring to the pastor; it is also inclusive of conflicts that arise between the church leaders and their followers. Additionally, an irony exists which suggests that conflict within a religious organization is sometimes harder to resolve because conflict itself is so often misunderstood and few people have the skills and or training needed to work through it and towards a resolution (Lowry & Myers, 1991, Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Thomas, 1990).

Another reason why conflicts run deep in congregations is because of how they tend to be viewed within the church community, in that the de facto reaction tends to be to turn away from the conflict rather than confront it in order to maintain peace within the church (Lowry & Myers, 1991; Thomas, 1990). For example, there is the argument posited that “Churches are collages of people with different systems of internal wiring, to use a building contractor’s image, and we must recognize those differences if we want people to be whole and at peace with themselves, each other, and with God” (Thomas, 1990, p. 1). Thomas (1990) further elucidates, “that we must find ways to conduct our church activities in such ways that differences are recognized, respected and resourced, rather than being rejected or destroyed” (p.1).

The issue of conflict within a congregation is problematic. One argument developed to explain church conflicts is that the leader is not meeting his or her responsibility to teach peace, love, unity and understanding. The reason this argument has been brought forward, suggests Stokes (2001), is that in contradiction to most religious beliefs, there can be a great deal of vying for power, position, and recognition by the

pastor or leaders. However, it should be noted that issues of conflict within a church are not isolated incidences; in fact, the commonality is greater than most realize (McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Stokes, 2001). It should be understood that churches are organizations with unique memberships because the majority of the labor and leadership is driven by volunteerism. The different personalities constituting the church can lead to conflicts from time to time. Furthermore, members are likely to bring the conflict to the pastor/leader for direction and resolution. In socioeconomically challenged communities, geographic locations where professional psychological servers are few, or in sectors where all resolution and problem solving becomes an individual responsibility of the church members, they look to their religious leaders for direction towards their purpose. However, the likelihood that the pastor/leader does not have the necessary skills and training can become a critical driver for Church Hurt (Lowry & Myers, 1991, McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Stokes, 2001; Thomas, 1990).

It is, therefore, paramount that churches undergoing conflicts involving pastors or church leaders develop and apply principles and strategies aimed at practically and effectively solving church problems. Although the majority of churches are started with noble intentions, they soon become swept up into unexpected and unintended church conflicts, which hamper growth. Most of them only focus on numerical growth while forgetting the spiritual and emotional well-being of their congregation, and with time, the leaven grows from the inside and creates unimaginable conflicts. When conflicts occur, leaders can be unaware and unequipped with how to respond while the various personalities in the church continue to collide with each other (McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Stokes, 2001; Thomas, 1990). According to Yperen

(2002), there are two points to note about church conflicts: “First, church conflicts are always theological, never merely interpersonal. There are many causes and reasons for church conflict, including cultural, spiritual, and structural factors. Second, all church conflict is always about leadership, character, and community” (pp. 24-25). LaRue (1996) concurs, arguing that most pastors/leaders are lacking in training on conflict management. As such, he is of the opinion that the main causes of church conflict are internal problems and poor relations with church leadership.

With the above in mind, it is important to note within the Bible, (church) conflict is seen as neither negative nor positive, right or wrong, but fundamentally a function of the natural outcome of God-given variety and personal dissimilarities between unique individuals. In fact, the Bible states in 1 Peter 2:5 (KJV), “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” This implies that conflict between individuals should be used as a means to build each other up. It has been posited that “when handled properly, conflict can result in significant benefits. It can stimulate productive dialogue; encourage a healthy reexamination of assumptions and preconceptions; lead to the discovery of new ideas, approaches, and method; and stimulate personal growth” (Sande, 2004, p.21). Conflict is thus seen as an opportunity to explore and celebrate differences; it is also an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God (Sande 2004, p, 21). Argued from another perspective, (church) conflicts presents one with the simultaneous prospect of buckling under the weight of divisiveness/disintegration and/or enhancing wholeness/reconciliation (Halverstadt, 1991). Whatever is the source of (church) conflicts or the functions of the conflict, conflict can be seen as an opportunity to glorify

God, to serve others, and grow to be Christ-like, once the diagnosis and solutions are underpinned in the teachings of the scriptures (Halverstadt, 1991; Sande, 2004). This perspective must be kept in mind; while the field of Conflict Studies is rooted in the secular world, any understanding and the resolution of (church) conflict cannot be separated from the spiritual realm and the teachings of the scriptures. In fact, Sande (2004) goes as far to posit, "the more we understand and follow what he teaches, the more effective we will be in resolving disagreements with other people" (p.19). This perspective cannot be dismissed as naive or idealistic but is really the most feasible approach when one considers the unique nature of the church environment. It is on this basis (among others) that a study that focuses on Church Hurt derives its relevancy to the field of Conflict Resolution.

The study seeks to explore another side of the ecclesiastic experience, an issue that has not gotten the attention it deserves, that of the experience of Church Hurt. Mansfield (2012) used the term "*Ecclesia exitus* ...the decision to permanently withdraw from a congregation you had considered to be your 'church home," to allude to the experience of Church Hurt. According to Mansfield (2012), 'Church Hurt' is a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance, brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship, and the effect is so dramatic that although the person still retained one's faith, his or her trust in the church has failed. The traumatic element to the experience occurs when a (previous) place of trust and spiritual and social connection becomes a place of rejection, anguish, and disenchantment that could lead to questioning and/or even rejecting one's church.

While there does not necessarily exist a direct causal relationship between the occurrence or presence of conflict(s) within the church and the incidence of church hurt, the connection between the two cannot be lightly dismissed or ignored. There are a plethora of reason(s) why church conflict(s) may arise, including selection of pastors/leaders, how funds are utilized in the church, and even such minor matters as to where the piano should be located or the color of the church carpet. Equally, there are multitudes of factors that may lead to the incidence of church hurt. Within the literature there is an implicit association with the two factors, which tends to be explained by the following logic: conflict(s) within the church may cause discord, disharmony, and discontent within the church, which may contribute to the occurrence of church hurt (Krejcir, 2007; McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Niemala, 2007; Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Stokes, 2001; Thomas, 1990; Uecker, Regenerus, & Valler, 2007). The strength of association between the two factors may be influenced by the cause, nature, and scale of the conflict; that is why in some of the literature, it is argued that the most important thing is learning how to resolve conflicts once they occur. It is within this context that the issue of church hurt cannot be ignored. A latent objective of this study is the focus on how to effectively address the issue of church hurt, which alternately can be seen as another way of dealing with conflict relations/issues within the church. This study seeks to explore and describe the concept of Church Hurt from the perspective of those who have experienced the phenomenon. The necessity and significance of the problem will be further outlined and underscored in subsequent sections.

Research Problem Statement

One of the primary reasons churches exist is to attract and retain a large group of people into their congregation as a way of furthering their goal of spreading the gospel everywhere. However, in the recent past, churches have seen an increasing decline in terms of their membership. Statistics have revealed a troubling development indicating that almost half of the American population does not have a home church. Churches began experiencing this decline in the 1980s when the overall church membership dropped by almost 10%, and it worsened in the 1990s when the decline rose to 12% with some churches recording a membership drop of up to 40% (Krejcir, 2007; Niemala, 2007; Uecker et al., 2007).

According to the United States Census Bureau of Statistics, 4,000 churches close down every year while only about 1000 new churches are started (Krejcir, 2007).

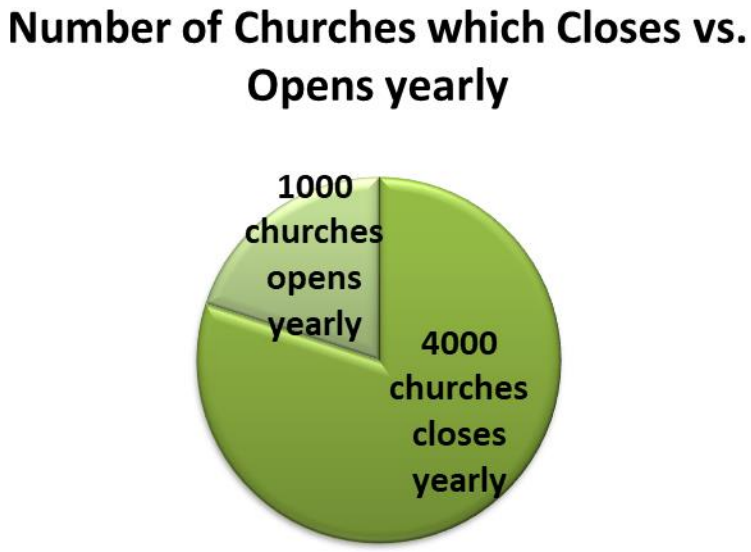

Figure 1. Church closures and openings. *Note*. Source: R. Anderson Adapted from US Bureau of Statistics, 2007

Every year, about 2.7 million church members drop from church membership. One of the main reasons is attributed to church members leaving as hurt and wounded

victims after experiencing some form of abuse, disillusionment, or from feelings of abandonment and neglect. Between the years of 1990 and 2000, Protestant denominations experienced a combined membership drop of nearly 5000, constituting 9.5% of the US population, while at the same time the country's population rose by 24 million (11%) (Krejcir, 2007). It is projected that by 2025, only 15% of the American population will attend a church, which will drop further to only 11% by 2050 (Krejcir, 2007). This phenomenon is not unique to America (Krejcir, 2007; Niemala, 2007; Uecker et al., 2007): in Europe only 2-4% of the population attends church regularly.

It is reported that nearly four (4) out of every ten (10) non-churchgoing people in America (constituting 37%) admitted that the reason why they avoid attending a church is due to negative past experiences endured in the church or by other church members (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014; Krejcir, 2007; Niemala, 2007; Uecker et al., 2007). The aftermath is that the modern church has become an instrument of pain and disillusionment rather than offering solace to its members. The issue of church hurt is really a focus on a person's unique manifestation of distress in the midst of congregational disharmony and communal strife. Given the urgency of addressing the real-life issue of church hurt and amid the well-documented decline of attendance to many churches, the need for a study that directs attention to the personal experience of those who have undergone the situation cannot be underestimated. This study, using the specific methodology of Transcendental Phenomenology, seeks to explore the lived experiences of persons who have endured the church hurt experience.

Objective(s) of the Proposed Research

The church is often seen as the epitome of harmony and not often associated by the lay person as a venue of social discord; it is often seen as a place for people to seek love, peace, acceptance, respect, and recognition. Unfortunately, as the literature earlier outlined the declining attendance in the church, the incidence of church hurt, increasingly, is seen as a significant element of that trend. On these occasions, individual congregants are in situations where their most basic needs are not being met. Instead, they are being ignored or feel frustrated; as such, they leave their respective church feeling hurt and disillusioned. This is a personally distressing psychological experience that Mansfield (2012) refers to as "church hurt." The core objective of the study is to describe and capture the essence of the experience from the perspective of those who have undergone the church hurt experience.

Research Questions

Creswell (2006) establishes that the research questions play an intricate role in framing a study. The questions should be narrow in scope and address one aspect of the proposed study. To these ends, the investigator offers the following research questions for consideration and feels that if the study is thorough and consistent within its scope of content and detail, it will positively impact and serve the research community with a better understanding of the issue. However, these research questions are basically provisional in nature; given the specific methodology associated with this study, and the issue of bracketing, the primary focus of the study is to describe and capture the essence of this occurrence from the perspective of those who have undergone the church hurt experience. As such, while these are the stated research questions, they may not

necessarily be the main interview questions, as those will be a function of what transpires in the interview context and in the interaction of the research participant's demands on how they wish to express or articulate their respective lived experiences of church hurt (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Lopez & Willis, 2004):

1. What are the perceptions of those participants regarding their experience of church hurt?
2. How did the respective participants respond to the church hurt experience?

Definition of Terms

Pastor/Leader. A religious leader of a congregation usually of Christian faith. The titles of Minister, Bishop, Reverend, Elder, Deacon, Evangelist, Pastor, Apostle and Prophet/Prophetess also have the same meaning (Djupe & Olsen, 2003).

Congregation. In terms of Christian religion, a congregation represents the members of a particular Church/denomination. For the purpose of this study, congregation will be defined as members of the Apostolic/Pentecostal denomination (Djupe & Olsen, 2003).

Church Hurt. According to Mansfield (2012), 'Church Hurt' is a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship and the effect is so dramatic that while the person still has faith, his or her trust in the church has failed. The traumatic element of the experience occurs when a place of trust and spiritual and social connection becomes a place of rejection, anguish, or disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even rejections on one's church.

Conflict. "An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (Wilmot & Hocker 2010, p.11).

External Conflict. In terms of Christian religion, external conflicts are issues that a church member brings to the church's religious leader for resolution (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

Internal Conflict. This conflict occurs within a given system due to the demands placed on the system as a result of either interpersonal or external issues (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

Mentoring. Mentorship is a relationship in which a person with greater experience and wisdom guides another person to develop both personally and professionally. This relationship will help achieve mission success and motivate team members to achieve their career objectives (Rigotti, 1997).

Church Hurt. For the purpose of this study, based on research, the researcher concludes that Church Hurt may be defined as disagreements among individuals that is seemingly nonnegotiable due to the deprivation of basic human needs. These disagreements can be moral or doctrinal based.

The Purpose and Significance of the Study

The fact that leaders do not possess enough skills to handle conflicts when they arise is concerning, considering that conflicts are an inevitable part of our daily lives (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014). Though pastors are mandated with training their congregations on how to become Disciples of Christ, it is still doubtful whether Christians understand the entire counsel of Christianity, including such things as how to

prevent and/or resolve church conflicts. On a fundamental level, the issue of church hurt is really a focus on a person's unique manifestation of distress in the midst of congregational disharmony and communal strife.

From another perspective, this study resonates from a personal perspective, as it represents a painful, dispiriting and traumatic experience that was undergone several years ago. From that experience and the countless times one has encountered other individuals who have endured the experience of church hurt, this study developed and evolved in my mind over the years. This represents just another stage in one's desire to not only understand this phenomena but also a basis for further study on the issue in the future.

It is within this context that the issue of church hurt cannot be ignored, as effectively addressing the issue can also be seen as another way of dealing with conflicting relations/issues within the church; herein lies the study's significance: that of conflict management or settlement. The significance of this study, while it originally grew out of my personal interest in conflict and religious studies, would prove beneficial to church administrators, ministries and contemporary congregations. The purpose of this study is to describe and capture the essence of the church hurt experience from the perspective of those who have undergone the phenomenon of church hurt.

Few scholars have ventured into the discord of church dispute and church hurt, thus this research will help bridge that gap with a wider objective of helping churches resolve church conflicts and avoid church hurt. It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide a deeper understanding of church conflicts as well as investigating some of the ways pastors can improve in resolving church disputes or lessening the occurrence of

negative social situations that may lead to church hurt, while also being specifically beneficial to church administrators, ministries and contemporary congregations by using the specific field of conflict management and resolution. Additionally, it is hoped that given the dearth of research on the subjective descriptions of church members who leave their respective churches, the study shall provide survivors of church hurt experience a voice and provide foundational data for further research. Finally, specifically within the field of conflict studies, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the area of conflict management and resolution as well as the analysis of social relations and institutions in order to better understand the ideal circumstances that will lessen the occurrence of non-violent conflict.

Theoretical Perspectives

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One's spirituality is a very personal decision, and as such is influenced by fundamental underlying motivations in order to meet some basic needs. The decision to attend a particular church and to leave a particular church are in all likelihood motivated by the ability of the respective church to meet these basic needs. The objective of this study is focused on describing the church hurt experience, the extent to which one's needs have been unfilled, ignored, or frustrated, and ultimately how these needs have been addressed. To this end, Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation serves as an applicable theoretical framework for this study, since it concurrently attempts to explain how an individual's needs could motivate them to attend a particular church and what may have influenced them to leave. Maslow's (1943) theory focuses on how the respective motivation influences the needs of the individuals and how it may

eventually affect their actions or behaviors. Maslow (1943) posited that human beings by nature have a rank of needs that have to be met, and that each succeeding rank of needs is developed after the prior rank of need has been satisfied. However, any rank of need does not have to be completely met for the next need to manifest itself. As each level is satisfied, it ceases to be a motivation for the individual. When Maslow initially posited this theory of human motivation, he suggested that there is a "pre-potency" of these human needs, meaning that if only one need is met, the next one appears.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy contained five ranks of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization, with the first four needs being labelled as basic or deficiency needs, while the fifth was labelled as a growth need. Essentially, Maslow's theory was a theory of progressive levels being satisfied as one developed as a person. That is, one must satisfy lower ranked deficiency needs before progressing to higher ranked development needs. Once these needs have been realistically fulfilled, one may be able to attain the highest rank, labelled self-actualization.

The first rank, physiological, is the most basic human need and alludes to those needs that have to be fulfilled to continue living physically. Maslow (1943) suggested that this first level has the greatest pre-potency of any needs. It is this basic need that all other needs are predicated on, the one that has to be fulfilled prior to the other needs being met.

The next rank posited by Maslow (1943) was that of safety. While Maslow saw a pre-potency in the needs, he advanced the views that when the safety needs are unmet, even the physiological needs do not lose their significance. Safety needs vary with individuals, depending upon their circumstances in life. Maslow (1943) gave the

example of children's need for a well-organized and predictable world. The need for safety comprises of the desires to be safe from both physical and psychological harm. The possibility existed that for church attendees, psychological safety was more of an issue than physical safety.

The third rank of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was what he referred to as the love need. This need has also been referred to as the need for 'belonging' or the 'social' need. Another aspect of the need of belonging or the social need is for the individual to find a place within a group and relationships with other individuals.

The fourth rank of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy is the desire for esteem by the individual. This encompasses the need to have a good standing, respect, and deference from others. Maslow's hierarchy addresses two ranks of self-esteem. The lower rank deals with the individual's ego and their need to be respected by others. For this need to be met, there must be an acknowledgement of some prestige or appreciation for what they have accomplished. The higher rank of self-esteem or self-respect involves what an individual thinks of his or herself. Individuals who have this need met will generally like themselves.

Maslow's (1943) final and highest rank was that of self-actualization, the level of psychological growth when all of the prior needs have been met and the individual's full potential have been attained. When the potential of the self is realized, the individual has fulfilled his/her potential. That is, they are what they are meant to do or to be. For Maslow, self-actualization is a need and not a driving force in the individual's motivation.

Maslow's (1943) theory does not necessarily indicate that it adheres to a strictly sequential progressive process. Maslow allowed that these needs may occur in a dynamic and disorganized manner; as such, the ranks are substitutable, and not fixed, as when a particular need arises or its influence felt is more a function of one's social context, immediate life experience or circumstances. Maslow (1943) also posited that the motivations behind certain behaviors may not necessarily be attributable to a singular motive, but may have multiple motives.

The extended quote below from *Why Our Teenagers Leave Church* (2000) highlights the seemingly intuitive applicability of Maslow's theory on the concept of Church Hurt. That is, the decision to leave one's church generally arises from a multitude of reasons, and as such any study that seeks to explore the concept of understanding why and how a negative church experience may cause one to permanently leave one's church is a worthwhile endeavor:

> The reasons for dropping out of church seem to be highly interrelated. Those who chose to disconnect perceive the church as irrelevant because they sense they are unaccepted and their needs are neglected. They also feel unaccepted because they don't discern their church as attempting to provide them with relevant and targeted programming…This combined with perceived intolerance, hypocrisy and condemnation have estranged young adults from their church (Dudley, 2000, p. 27).

The above quotation has a key excerpt that states "they sense they are unaccepted and their needs are neglected," a point which serves to underscore the relevance and applicability of Maslow's (1943) theoretical framework in understanding the experience

of church hurt from the participant's perspective. The issue of needs and motivation are significant underlying concepts within the concept of church hurt that cannot be emphasized enough. A church that fails to adequately or effectively address the most fundamental needs of its members will find that ultimately, at some point in time whenever conflict(s) arise, this may in turn influence the occurrence of the church hurt experience. Maslow's (1943) theoretical perspective aptly encompasses the relevant tools to explore the following salient issues that will arise when studying the concept of church hurt: Firstly, what the respective participant experienced. Secondly, how they viewed and described their respective (Church Hurt) experiences. Thirdly, exploring what factors influenced their decision to leave or remain in their respective church. This study, while seeking to understand the phenomena, will utilize Maslow's (1943) perspective as the main theoretical lens to achieve these objectives.

Social Constructionism

The second theoretical perspective that shall be utilized in this study is that of Social Constructionism. The origins of social constructionism can be attributed to the original proponents of symbolic interactionism, mainly Mead, along with Marx, Schutz, and Durkheim, and developed in its current form mainly by the work of Berger and Luckmann (1991). Social constructionism arose out of an attempt to come to terms with the nature of reality and has been associated with the post-modern era in qualitative research. It is a perspective that is mainly focused on the nature and construction of knowledge, how it develops, and how it comes to have the importance for society. The main social constructionist perspective posits that many aspects of one's daily existence are a function of unspoken social pacts, institutional or social actions, rather than

objective reality, and as such attain significance with the context of social interaction while not existing independent of human subjectivity.

Social Constructionism rests on two main tenets; the first is that it views knowledge and truth as created not discovered by the mind. That is, it is created within a social context, and the process of social interaction of individuals is crucial to the creation of knowledge. Social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practices people engage in as the focus of enquiry (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

The second major tenet of Social constructionism is that it accepts society as a duality that has both an objective and subjective reality. The former is brought about through the interaction of people with the social world, who establish and reproduce patterns and routines of communication and social interactions. These patterns in time become ritualized and institutionalized, providing an embedded resource for future generations to draw upon. This is the objective aspect of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

The other element of the society as subjective reality focuses on the concept of reality at the micro-individual level, which is derived primarily through the process of socialization. The process of socialization encompasses the transmission of patterns and routines of communication and social interaction. This gives meaning to the objective reality of society and renders it meaningful at the individual level, as it is internalized and thus subjective reality is shaped (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). In other words, there is shared meaning and understanding, so much so that concepts need not be developed from

the beginning constantly in daily conversation, thus assuming a reality which becomes commonly taken for granted.

Critical to both major tenets is the central role language plays in social interaction, the development of knowledge, truth and the conception of social reality. In Social Constructionism, conversation is the most significant means of preserving, altering and recreating subjective reality. Subjective reality is comprised of concepts that can be shared effortlessly with others. Language predates concepts and provides a means of structuring the way the world is experienced. It is language that is indispensable to the formation of thoughts and makes concepts possible, and not vice versa. Social constructionism, as posited by Berger and Luckmann (1991), makes an epistemological rather than ontological claims on the construction of knowledge.

Social Constructionism is applicable as a supplemental theoretical model for this study for two main reasons. The first is the focus of the study. This study addresses the flipside of the religiosity-health connection (to be addressed in the section below), that is the 'dark side' of one's involvement in church activities. It will delve into how the social experience of church hurt impacted their subjective-psychological conceptualizing of the church hurt experience. Secondly, the utilization of phenomenology, with its emphasis on capturing the structure of the participant's experience based on their reflection and interpretation of their narrative(s), coincides with Social Constructionism's focus on the construction of reality within a social context. A central tenet in social psychology holds that difficulties arising in a given sphere of life are more likely to be a source of distress if the sphere in which the problem emerged is significant to the individual(s). While Social Constructionism is influenced by Sociology, the preeminence it gives to social

interactions and context in influencing the construction of reality or knowledge touches upon an important element of this research. That is, given that churches are very much social institutions, how individual processes the church hurt experience will be influenced by the social context and interactions within the church.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Introduction

Within the field of study on church studies, an area that has undergone scrutiny in recent years has been the increasing focus on investigating the link between involvement in religion and one's health (see Fincham, Beach, Lambert, Stillman, & Braithwaite, 2008; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Koenig, McCullough &Larson, 2001; Schawdel & Falci, 2012; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009; William & Sternthal, 2007). More specifically, there's an implicit religiosity-health connection; a number of studies suggest that people who are more religious tend to enjoy better health than those who are less religiously inclined (Ellison and Levin, 1998). Delving further into this area of study, there's an ever-expanding group of studies that focus on establishing a link between religiosity and psychological or subjective well-being (see Bergin, 1983; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Fincham et al., 2008; Pargament, 1997; Levin & Chatters, L.M. 1998; Levin, Taylor & Chatters, 1994; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009; Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody, & Levin, 1996). Since religion is inherently a social phenomenon with people tending to worship in groups, social relationships and networks are likely to thrive in such settings, thus having positive health protective and enhancing effects. This basically confirms the vast number of studies in secular contexts indicating that having a strong social support network is associated with better health (Krause & Larson, 2001).

Religion may contribute to subjective or psychological wellbeing in number of ways, such as the provision of spiritual assistance and guidance (through both good and especially bad times), personal and social support, moral guidelines or scriptural influence on lifestyle, a common and coherent ideology, organizational structure, and a

force of social cohesion (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Fincham et al., 2008; Levin & Taylor, 1993; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Levin, Taylor & Chatters, 1994; Pargament, 1997; Taylor, et al., 1996).

While there is no doubt that there is some validity to the above assertions, what has been established thus far has been nothing but casual associations. However, discerning the distinctive contribution of religiosity to life satisfaction and subjective well-being and how religiosity actually impacts these various indices are areas for further exploration. A lot of these studies do not necessarily control for other well-known predictors that also have a positive impact on the religiosity-health link, such as gender, age, marital status, and income, among other factors (Ellison, & Gay, 1990; Fincham., et al, 2008; Holt, Llewellyn, & Rathweg, 2005; Holt & McClure, 2006; Krause, Ellison, & Marcum, 2002; Stone, Cross, Purvis, & Young, 2003).

It has been the work of Mansfield (2012) that has directed the spotlight on the possible fact that the church could actually be a source of psychological distress or trauma. Although this will be explored in detail later, in brief, Mansfield (2012) defines 'Church Hurt' as a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance, brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship and the effect is so extreme that the traumatic element to the experience results in the church becoming a place of rejection, anguish, or disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even reject one's church. The term 'church hurt,' in light of the well documented positive religiosity-health link highlighted above, is really both intellectually a curiosity, a source of puzzlement and seemingly counter intuitive at first glance. A church is seen as a place of spiritual and social sanctity and generally not as a site of social turmoil and

psychological distress. However, the seemingly straightforward religiosity-health link is really just that-a well-established associative link, not a causal relationship-and as the preceding paragraph highlights, it has a lot caveats mitigating the positive religious-health link. In fact, there are a few studies that focus on the negative side of the religiosity-health link as having a deleterious impact on one's psychological well-being. Three (3) areas tend to be highlighted: negative interactions with fellow church members, more specifically, those arising from interpersonal conflict in the church (Krause, Ellison, & Wulff, 1998); negative religious coping responses (Pargament, 1997); and religious doubt (Ellison, 1994; Krause, Ingersoll-Dayton, Ellison & Wulff, 1999). Irrespective of which of the above categories may be the source of the negative experience in the church, the affected parties may either adopt negative religious coping methods, question their faith, or withdraw from religion or church altogether, among other responses (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Ellison, 1994; Krause et al.,1998; Krause et al., 1999; Pargament, 1997).

While there does not necessarily exist a direct causal relationship between the occurrence or presence of conflict(s) within the church and the incidence of church hurt, the connection between the two cannot be lightly dismissed or ignored. There are a plethora of reason(s) why church conflict(s) may arise, including selection of pastors/leaders, how funds are utilized in the church, and even such minor matters as to where the piano should be located or the color of the church carpet. Equally, there are a multitude of factors that may lead to the incidence of church hurt. Within the literature there is an implicit association with the two factors, which tends to be explained by the following logic: conflict(s) within the church may cause, discord, disharmony and

discontent within the church, which may contribute to the occurrence of church hurt (Krejcir, 2007; McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Niemala, 2007; Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Stokes, 2001; Thomas, 1990; Uecker et al., 2007). The strength of association between the two factors may be influenced by the cause, nature, and scale of the conflict; this is why, in some of the literature, it is argued that the most important thing is learning how to resolve conflicts once they occur.

Similarly, there are studies that try to provide a theoretical framework for these negative responses of an individual's experience(s) within a religious context. There are scholars who assert that religious doubt may be a source of conflict with other church members who still adhere closely to their beliefs (see Ellison, 1994; Krause et al., 1999); members who have doubts may withdraw from fellow church colleagues due to a feelings of incompatibility of beliefs and attitudes. This observation is attributed to the 'homophily' principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cool, 2001). According to this perspective, similarity in attitudes, beliefs, and values tends to support interpersonal association and connection. Conversely, a loss of shared values and beliefs should lead to social disengagement.

Other studies (Burke 1991; Krause, 1994; Thoits, 1991) from a different perspective have posited that beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors that are incompatible with roles that are integral with one's personal identity can be source of tension. It is a perspective influenced by identity theory, which posits that people occupy multiple social roles (Burke 1991; Krause, 1994; Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2009; Thoits, 1991). Related with each role are clusters of normative expectations that influence actions and provide the foundation for gauging role performance. By providing direction, as well as

mechanisms for assessing role enactment, the shared behavioral expectations associated with social roles promote a common sense of meaning and purpose. Identity theory further posits that not all problems will generate the same effects on everyone, as the impact of a problem on a person is a function of the social role(s) they hold or perform. Within the context of this study, it simply means whatever the cause(s) of church hurt to the individual, how it affects them is a function of how invested in the respective social roles and the social context they were, in this case the church. Those who occupy minor roles and/or are not religiously inclined may not be equally affected by a person who occupies a significant role within the church and is much more invested in what transpires in such social contexts (Burke 1991; Krause, 1994; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009; Thoits, 1991).

It within this academic/scholarly context that this study carves out an investigational niche. The concept of 'church hurt' encompasses the earlier mentioned instances that negatively impact the religiosity-health link and initiate the same negative response(s). Church hurt is a wide-ranging, but equally a specific term, that covers a vast arena of social experiences. This study explores the religiosity-health social experience from the opposite end of the spectrum. That is, it focuses on the negative subjective/psychological experience of those who have encountered negative experience(s) with their church and a distinct response to this situation, those who left their church as a consequence. Church hurt, as a concept at the individual level, can represent intra and interpersonal conflict, or conflict within a person and between individuals. Likewise, it could be argued that 'church hurt' can be viewed both as a cause and effect. This study explores the latter, that church hurt is a consequence of negative

experience within the church and the subjective experiences of these individuals. Within the field of conflict resolution, this study sits with the blurred boundaries of mediation, negotiation, reconciliation and peace studies.

Keeping the topic above in mind, there was the additional issue raised by Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013), along with Streubert and Carpenter (1999), on the role of the literature review when undertaking the descriptive phenomenology. Within the discussion of bracketing (discussed at length later in the study), there is the argument that a too detailed literature review runs the risk of the researcher being too influenced/informed on the topic to be able to conduct a study that truly reflects the experience of the participants who have undergone a particular phenomenon. So while this literature is comprehensive, it is also sensitive to the issue(s) raised by the earlier mentioned authors. What follows shall be a brief discussion of church hurt, followed by a detailed discussion of Mansfield's (2012) conception of the term church hurt.

Church Hurt

Conducting a survey of the literature on the specific topic of Church Hurt was a difficult task since there was a severe dearth of relevant material on the experience of church hurt from those who experienced the phenomenon personally. As will be discussed at length in the following section, when a Google Scholar search on Church Hurt was initiated, it tended to uncover books mainly written from an individual/personalized viewpoint with a religious background and from a self-help perspective. Even when 'Church Hurt' is the central part of the respective book's title (as in Mansfield's case), it is not the central focus of the book's narrative. The issue/concept of 'Church Hurt' is usually depicted as a backdrop to one's journey to redemption and

forgiveness and spiritual growth. Church Hurt is usually depicted as an impediment to be overcome. Church Hurt is often used as a thematic framework to discuss more wide ranging issues, such as reasons for the decline in church attendance, conflict management (resolution) and peace education in the church. Thus, the argument shall not be forwarded that the topic has not been written about, but rather, it has tended to be rather sparse in nature and does not necessarily address the topic in a direct manner.

It is instructive to note that Stephen Mansfield's (2012) work, entitled *Healing your Church Hurt: What to do when you still love God but you have been wounded by his people,* is demonstrative of the many books written on the participant in the field of congregational studies/peace studies; the issue of church hurt is mentioned as a subtext and not the main focus of his work. The focus is on overcoming the experience. His work was selected because a cursory search of the term 'Church Hurt' on Amazon reveals that it is the most (positively) reviewed on the site and the author is a New York Times bestselling author (based on his previous works). A cursory glance at similar titles on books with the words 'Church Hurt' in their title is reflective of this observation, namely Dr. Joyce L. Carelock's (2009) work *Church Hurt Can Make you Bitter or Better: you choose,* Angela L. Corprew-Boyd's (2008) work, *Church Hurt – The Wounded Trying to Heal,* Judith R. De Wit's (2011) work entitled *Forgiving the Church – How to Release the Confusion and Hurt when the Church Abuses* and, tellingly, in Steve Sutton's (2014) more recent work entitled *Recognizing the Pain and Controlling Suffering: Finding the Purpose in Church Hurt.*

Most of the above-mentioned books have been written from the perspective of the self-help industry; that is, the emphasis is on how the individual 'heals' or overcomes

the negative experience of church hurt after it occurred. So much ink has been spilled on the topic, but more importantly, not much formal study has been directed at the concept of Church Hurt or more specifically, studying those who have actually experienced the church hurt phenomena. Neither the concept nor the phenomena of church hurt has been the studied directly or specifically. It is within this context that the study's objective is to understand and describe the subjective experience of church hurt from those who experience the phenomena, not on how they overcame church hurt.

According to Mansfield (2012), 'Church Hurt' is a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship and the effect is so dramatic that while the person still has faith, his or her trust in the church has failed. The traumatic element to the experience occurs when a place of trust and spiritual and social connection becomes a place of rejection, anguish, or disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even reject one's church. From such a perspective, one sees the relevance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs being especially applicable as an explanatory framework that might explain the distressing nature of the church hurt experience.

What is interesting about this condition is that all levels of church, including the leadership, the community, and the parishioners experience the phenomena (Mansfield, 2012, p. 35). More formally, Mansfield (2012) described church hurt as:

> *Ecclesia exitus*- the Latin term for church dropout…the decision to permanently withdraw from a congregation you had considered to be your 'church home.' The symptoms are many, but the outcome is unambiguous:

> Pain, disappointment, and spiritual anomie." He goes on to observe that "spiritual injury occurs more often than we would like to admit…In our thirst to experience the righteousness of God, we sometimes forget that we have the capacity to wound others, even in a spiritual environment (p. vii).

Interestingly, while Mansfield (2012) openly acknowledges church hurt as the source of a lot of "emotional pain" (p.65), his manner of dealing with church hurt is illuminated when he comments that "hard times can make us better if we go through them in a redemptive way" (p.66). He underscores this perspective when he later uses a Swahili proverb to make the same point: "Life has meaning only in the struggle, victory or defeat is in the hands of god, so let us celebrate the struggle" (p.82). Later on in his work, he quotes Hebrews 12:15, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (p.95). The underlying message(s) is that one should embrace the church hurt experience but not allow it to embitter oneself; that is to say, church hurt should be an empowering experience that should allow one to flourish according to one's Christian/spiritual principles. At the heart of this call to embrace the church hurt experience is Mansfield's (2012) request to "forgive, to let go of the bait in that trap and pull yourself free. The solution is to recover your soul from the pit." (Mansfield, 2012, p.99)

The concept of forgiveness is the key platform for Mansfield's (2012) conception of recovery from Church Hurt. From his perspective, he argues that "hard things are as much ordained as blessings. At the very least we can say with the psalmist, 'It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees'" (Mansfield, 2012, p.122). The underlying theme to Mansfield's (2012) conception of the Church Hurt experience is that

it should be viewed as a potentially transformative opportunity. In short, Mansfield (2012) sees the Church Hurt experience as a 'blessing in disguise,' an experience that should be embraced since it could become a catalyst for receiving God's blessing and becoming a more developed/evolved person in the spirit/teachings of Christ.

The text above is consistent with an earlier discussed issue raised, where it was noted that within the Bible, (church) conflict is seen as neither negative nor positive, right or wrong, but essentially a function of the natural outcome of God-given diversity and dissimilarities among unique individuals. In fact, when handled properly, (church) conflict can result in substantial benefits, such as stimulating fruitful dialogue, encouraging a healthy reassessment of expectations and presumptions, leading to the discovery of new ideas, approaches, and methods, and inspiring personal growth (Sande, 2004). Whatever the source of (church) conflicts, conflict can be seen as an opportunity to glorify God, to serve others, and grow to be Christ-like, once the diagnosis and solutions are underpinned in the teachings of the scriptures (Halverstadt, 1991; Sande, 2004). This perspective must be kept in mind; while the field of Conflict Studies is rooted in the secular world, any understanding and the resolution of (church) conflict cannot be separated from the spiritual realm and the teachings of the scriptures. In fact, Sande (2004) goes as far to posit, "the more we understand and follow what he teaches, the more effective we will be in resolving disagreements with other people" (p.19). This perspective cannot be dismissed as naïve or idealistic, but is really the most feasible approach when one considers the unique nature of the church environment.

Mansfield's (2012) perspective of having a sanguine view of the Church Hurt experience, while not without its merits, tends to relegate the subjective experiences of

those who have undergone such an emotionally painful experience to that of being insignificant, as just part of a journey on to 'better things' spiritually. He implores those who have been wronged by directing them with the best of intentions to "find even the smallest opening of compassion for their lives that *charizomai* spirit of mercy and grace can flow in. Forgiveness can reign and you will be free" (p. 109). Ironically, the advice, while undoubtedly well meaning, to some extent subjugates the 'emotional pain' and psychological distress of those suffering to the mandates of some spiritual mantras, which at times can seem a bit insensitive. In the realm of practical and effective conflict resolution practice(s), this may be self-defeating if the ultimate objective is to achieve lasting reconciliation. For example, he observes when opining on getting over the church experience, "you are not cursed. You were *just hurt* (emphasis added). Don't let a lie keep you from what you were made to be." (p. 131). The problem with these pithy intonations is that the extent of the mental and spiritual anguish of those who experienced the church hurt has not been fully acknowledged and/or even addressed, and as such, the majority of Mansfield's (2012) work is centered on the process of getting over and/or moving on from the church hurt aspect of the experience. While that is evidently the objective of his work, it can be argued that insufficient attention is focused on the subjective realm of the experience of those who have undergone the church hurt, as such, this will mitigate the effectiveness of his solutions to the problem.

At the expense of questioning Mansfield's (2012) perspective, it should be reiterated that his viewpoint is reflective of books on the topic of church hurt. The problem with this approach is that the purported audience it writes about, and is directed towards, is never really given a platform to express their voice on the experience. The

source of the pain is never really addressed; put another way, the respective need that was unfulfilled by the church experience is never really addressed. It is just swept under the all-encompassing carpet of 'forgiveness,' when in fact hurt may arise from a myriad array of sources. More importantly, Mansfield (2012) does not seem to have an active role for forgiveness and reconciliation dealing with the church hurt experience while it is actually happening; it only assumes a place of significance after the event or experience has been transpired, but within the field of mediation, such an approach would be considered ineffective. Given that a key objective of resolving conflict(s) is that of addressing the relational and substantive issues of the affected parties within the context of the conflict, Mansfield's (2012) approach seems to be counterproductive, since it focuses on reconciling the affected party of the conflict with the negative consequences of the church hurt experience.

Authors Magnuson and Enright (2008), in an insightful article, addressed the above concerns when they posited "a three-tiered holistic psycho-educational approach called "The Forgiving Communities," that targets three interdependent categories; the family, the school, and the church. The goal of The Forgiving Communities is to deepen individuals' (and society's) understanding of forgiveness" (p.114). The model they advocate is based on biblical scriptures, with the following quote epitomizing their perspectives on forgiveness:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another: Forgive as the

> Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Col. 3:12-14).

The key point that Magnuson and Enright (2008) and Marshall (2000) posit is that having a forgiving church that is both a spiritual institution/community which embodies the above principles in its everyday social relations is more likely to produce a social context that intrinsically addresses instances of church hurt if and when it occurs. Additionally, a 'forgiving church' is less likely to possess members who resort to permanently leaving their respective church as the first and/or only solution and the default way to address instances of deleterious experiences. However, for this concept of a Forgiving Community to be effective, especially within the church, "it is important to have capable and competent leaders who can allow persons to be at different places in the [forgiveness] process while, at the same time, shaping and guiding communal process of forgiveness" (Marshall, 2000, p. 191). The same point can be reiterated from another perspective, when Kober (2000) argued that:

> Christian leaders who model confession of their own sins break the barriers of self-righteous attitudes that permeate conflicted groups. Whenever we work with a conflicted church or school, the public confession of a leader becomes a key event. What usually follows is a time of confession and forgiveness that is unrestricted and free-flowing. The confession of leaders leads to forgiveness, and people also respond with confessing their own sins (p.6).

The key ingredients for *Forgiving Communities* to be effective lies with church leaders who model and exemplify key principles of peace-making such as confession, forgiveness and repentance at both the interpersonal and organizational level. While it is

not necessarily a top-down approach, at least in the initial stages of the process, the influence of model leaders implementing the process is undeniable (Halverstadt, 1991). This leads to the next point of concern with Mansfield's (2012) approach that underscores the relevance of this study being undertaken.

With the information above in mind, it is easier to appreciate one's concern with Mansfield's (2012) approach in that it is basically a 'post-church hurt' reaction/solution to the church hurt experience, which has been met with limited success due to "our culture's general disinterest in facilitating change that takes substantial time and effort, we get disastrous results" (p.vii). He implicitly confirmed this when he further noted that "the proportion of those who are "gone for good" is growing" (p. vii), this means the current trend of those who leave the church permanently due to bad experiences. A question that arises then is, why not devise an approach that deals with the church hurt experience while they are in it or experiencing it? Does any potential intervention have to occur after one has left one's church *permanently*? In that case, by Mansfield's definition of church hurt, any interventions are doomed to fail. It is in this context that a decision to study the phenomenon of church hurt attains significance as a formal study, since the study attempts to describe the church hurt experience from those who have experienced it personally, thus providing insight into how one could potentially intervene *prior* to the individual taking the decision to leave the church *permanently*.

Given that one of the theoretical lens that shall guide the analysis of the study, Social Constructionism, another (sub) set of research questions/issues that shall influence the focus of the study centers on the subjective construction of the respective participant's understanding of their church hurt experience(s). Social Constructionism is

an appropriate theoretical lens, since the study shall delve into the process of how the social experience of church hurt impacted their subjective conceptualizing of the church hurt experience. Secondly, the utilization of phenomenology, with its emphasis on capturing the structure of the participants' experience based on their reflection and interpretation of their narrative(s), coincides with Social Constructionism's focus on the construction of reality within a social context. On that basis, important issues include, at what point does one begin to become conscious of the onset of the church hurt experience? Was it a case of internal (psychological) or external (social) prompts that lead to one's consciousness at the onset of the experience? At what point was the experience labelled 'church hurt' recognized? Was it from the outset or in retrospective? What specific need(s) or value(s) were unfulfilled or negatively influenced, or actually lead to one's decision to leave one's church? A study which explores the feelings and subjective experiences of persons having undergone the church hurt experience in uncovering the essence(s) of what such an experience entails is simply required. This study shall adopt a humanized micro-level and intimate depiction of the church hurt experience.

Causes and Sources of Church Conflict and Church Hurt

A cursory glance of the literature tends to have a focus on the issue of church conflict and how that may influence some element of church hurt, resulting in the decision by members of the particular congregation to leave their respective church for another or to leave the church permanently. Apart from those books that address the issue of 'Church Hurt' discussed above, most of the literature on church hurt tends to discuss it in oblique manner. Callaman (2015) supports this view, arguing that Church Hurt is seen

as a consequence of much larger macro forces happening in the church community and is generally not seen from an individual micro level as something that individuals experience personally. The following section will illustrate that these larger causes have played a role in negatively impacting church attendances and, in turn, affected its member's willingness to stay or leave their respective churches. It is within this manner that the issue of church hurt has tended to be addressed in the literature; that is, macro level forces have an ultimate impact at the micro- level, or, from another perspective, macro social forces adversely affect the personal or psychological wellbeing of the individual eventually. Church Hurt is a wide-ranging but also a specific term that covers a vast arena of social experiences. Below is a basic chronicling of the various causes and/or sources of church hurt, mainly to provide more operational or concrete examples of what the term church hurt refers to in real life and not just a theoretical or abstract nebulous term or concept.

There have been several high-profile examples of church hurt. One such example is the case of when Malcolm X learned that the Honorable Elijah Mohamed had a number of affairs with his female followers, resulting in many illegitimate children, and he decided to leave the Nation of Islam. In terms of mainstream Christianity, there have also been a number of incidences that have served to test one's faith of both the church and its leaders. Djupe and Olson (2008) discussed the impact of faith gone awry and analyzed the rise and fall of Jimmy Swaggart. At the time of Swaggart's fall from grace, the evangelist had millions of followers and one of the most profitable and successful ministries in the world. According to the authors, "the emotional damage that came as a result of Swaggart's actions led to many feeling as though God had directly cheated them

out of their faith" (Djupe and Olson, 2008, p. 98). In both of these instances, it becomes apparent that the church and those who lead them are looked upon as something much greater than what they actually are. This is an important point because "...at the end of the day, these leaders are only human and experience the same temptations that the common person does" (Djupe & Olson, 2008, p. 99).

In the same way, a person may feel that a mechanic can fix any car and any problem. Those who are active and committed members of a congregation often feel that their pastor can solve any type of problem; however, this is often not the case (Mansfield, 2012). The investigator believes that Church Hurt is much more amplified when events occur in the communal and small congregations. From a social perspective, there are issues that are driving a minister's inability to support the parishioner on matters that are not spiritual (Stone, 2001). At the forefront is a reality that suggests that many local religious leaders are lay people who have not completed the rigorous educational standards that priests and rabbis have to submit in order to lead a congregation. Stone (2001) states, "these leaders are often ordained within the ministry that they will later lead" (p. 5). There is no easy way to state the fact that although a person may have a passion for preaching the gospel, is learned in the Bible, and lives a life in accordance with the teaching of Christ, the minister may not ultimately possess all of the skills needed to fulfill the many roles and interpersonal functions that make a community-entrenched pastor complete. Counseling and human support, including those skills needed to help people navigate through conflict, have become essential elements in supporting today's congregations (Stone, 2001, p. 9).

Additionally, there is also another issue which may also be serving as a catalyst for the onset of church hurt. The aspect of organizational culture should be considered in regard to this topic. Stone (2001) affirms that even when the pastor is trained and is qualified to provide an array of counseling processes, it is not uncommon to find that there are instances where the religious leader is limited in the type of counseling and support that can be offered. The researcher conducted a study over a fifty-two-year period and found that although the needs of the communities' the pastor support have changed, therefore requiring support that is more interpersonal, the church's elders would limit counseling to matters of religion only (Stone, 2001, p. 1). It can also be suggested that in such a strict environment, the inherent disconnect has also been identified as a primary reason church hurt is present in so many religious organizations. Furthermore, this issue has existed in the Catholic Church since its inception, but it can be why so many look to more socially based religious affiliations (Mansfield, 2012).

In regard to theological causes, the evidence is two-fold: the feeling of calling that is separate from the feeling of ownership and the unexpected growth in number. With regard to the former, when pastors possess too much sense of ownership, this may result in church conflicts. Although pastors do not say they own the church they minister, the majority of them have confused both themselves and their members vis-à-vis this aspect (Park, 2006). In most instances, pastors have invested a fortune in constructing a church building. This causes them to look at the church as the most important thing to them. Thus, they start developing a sense of ownership and attachment to the church, which may create problems within the church (Park, 2006). Focusing on the latter, even though every church leadership looks towards growth in numbers, unexpected growth can be

problematic. According to Dobson, Leas, and Shelley (1992), increases in church membership may trigger conflicts because it brings about a change in personalities and those who were comfortable with the old way of things may oppose the new personality emerging. Susek (1999) proposes that pastors should be able to determine whether this growth is good or destructive to the church before immersing themselves in its glory. The more a church grows, the more members will develop a market demand which, if unfulfilled, results in conflicts.

In terms of cultural causes, the church is constantly being influenced by the secular culture. For instance, theology of church growth is highly influenced by secular marketing theories. As such, marketing is one aspect that has placed the modern church at risk. Wells (1994) clearly criticizes this and strongly rejects the secular marketing as being ineffective for a church setting. Many church leaders have experienced the adverse effects associated with marketing the church. Most pastors look at it as a way of reaching the unreachable groups while making them more appealing to both old and young. Additionally, the business mind leads them to want to attract enough people to be able to raise the necessary funds to operate the church. The effects of this is that the conventional activities of Christianity, such as fasting, prayer, discipleship, and so on, are forgotten and even thrown out the window in some cases, which is bound to create church conflict.

Cultural crashing is another aspect that is very evident in today's churches. As Barna (1992) states, "in current America, the disparities between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, married and single, conservatives and liberals, urban, suburban and rural, American-born and foreign-born, Christian and non-Christian, and child-bearing

and childless have become more pronounced and divisive than ever" (p. 51). The cultural dissipation experienced in America in general has seeped into the church and has become part of its culture. Culture crashing has actually occurred inside rather than outside of the church. According to Susek (1999), culture crashing takes place when a pastor or a member of the church accepts a position or joins the church when a certain culture exists and then seeks to radically change it. In today's church, there is a culture clash between the young and the old. When the young seeks to introduce changes to the 'traditional' way of doing things such as adopting more contemporary worship services, there is bound to be conflicts (Susek, 1999). It has been stated that people mistake customs with spirituality. According to Liesch (2005), adopting a certain style of worship does not make one spiritually superior, but rather behavior and adopting a holy lifestyle is more likely to reflect spirituality.

Spiritual causes can be explained in terms of the spiritual immaturity of pastors, church leaders, and dynamic sin. With regard to the former, the majority of pastors want to be viewed as good and faithful servants. However, few of them have developed mechanisms of evaluating their own strengths and weaknesses, which may affect their ministries (Susek, 1999). Peterson (1992) has cautioned believers into striving to discern between a profession or calling and a job or craft. Spiritual immaturity of pastors has been labeled as one of the main causes of church conflicts today. Most pastors work with the assumption of pastoral success where they look at themselves as having been called as pastors. In fact, most Bible colleges and seminaries focus their teaching on pastoral crafts and skills, thus neglecting the role of prayer, meditation, fasting, and worship in carrying out pastoral duties. The majority of church members will bestow spiritual

maturity on a person simply because he or she has been chosen as a pastor. The probability of being spiritually immature is never considered. As time goes by, some pastors may feel a sense of expectation and undue pressure being placed on them. In most cases, the pastor may refuse to accept their inadequacy in spiritual maturity and fail to seek expert help (Park, 2006). This results in a church leader who is hypocritical, one of the main sources of church conflicts.

The other aspect of spiritual cause is the external forces of sin which forces church members into confrontations and condemnation of each other. Church members should at all times remember that they are brothers and sisters, should not fall the temptation of criticizing and judging the dissident groups, and that conflicts can sometimes be a way of overcoming challenges. Park (2006) suggests that church conflicts arising from external forces of sin are as follows: "first, church members habitually causing church problems; second, wrong doctrines of heresy; and third, church members regarding the office as a good name and a power" (p. 67).

Structural causes mainly observed in modern churches include disharmony due to lack of effective pastoral leadership, disharmony due to change of Senior Pastor, and distrust as a result of repeated conflicts. Any imbalance experienced in the church organization is bound to result in church conflicts. Most sociologists agree that maximum diversity is a crucial feature of future society. On one end of the spectrum, the church tolerates diversity of the ministry while on the other end, the unifying ministries must continue (Marshall, 1979). The ability to unify diverse persons and different tasks is team-building. Thus, Christians should look at team-ministry as a parallel structure as

this defines pastoral duties. They also need to understand that this leadership is founded on servant-leadership (Maxwell, 1997).

According to Park (2006), the more church members run into church conflicts, the more often they are likely to repeat them. Thus, modern churches that continue to see conflicts are likely to continue experiencing conflicts. Change of senior pastor can also unsettle a church and cause even more church conflicts. In that case, change of pastor, where necessary, should only occur in three circumstances: the retirement of a pastor, transfer to another church, or health issues. On the other hand, a new pastor should remember that the congregation will have the expectation that he or she is a competent and faithful pastor and that he or she will give due regard to the existing church culture and tradition (Park, 2006). Failure to adhere to these expectations will see the pastor face resistance and rejection associated with 'culture clash'. The leadership style the new pastor adopts is also of importance. Dobson et al. (1992) notes that "when a congregation hires, either deliberately or by mistake, a pastor whose leadership style differs from his predecessor, conflict is a near certainty" (p. 112).

Emotional causes comes in the form of dispositional conflicts among church leaders, existing inner hurts of members or pastors and burned out pastors. With regard to conflict between leaders, there are two types of pastors: people-oriented leaders and task-oriented leaders. This disposition can cause divisions between them. However, this need not be the case. As Augsburger (1973) explains, "conflict is natural, normal, neutral, and sometimes even delightful. How we view, approach and work through our differences does -- to a large extent – determine our whole life pattern" (p. 3). People should therefore learn to view conflicts merely as honest differences. They should seek to

understand and even respect the various dispositions. Most especially, pastors should learn how to prevent church disputes in advance.

Another emotional cause of disputes is that some pastors or members of the church may be experiencing some form of church hurt. Even believers sometimes are fighting some hurt or pains of life just like everyone else. In general, these individuals may be suffering from desertion, rejection, neglect, or being misunderstood, which causes them to avoid other people. Unfortunately, in most cases, hurts experienced by members are caused by the church itself, members, or even former pastors (MacDonald, 1985). According to Nouwen (1972), "the pastor is called to recognize the sufferings of his time in his own heart and make recognition that starting point of his service….nothing can be written about ministry without deeper understanding of the ways in which the minister can make his own wounds available as a source of healing" (p. 14).

The other emotional aspect is a burned-out pastor. Some pastors are tempted into giving too much attention to the public and their needs while neglecting their own private needs (MacDonald, 1985). These pastors may be involved in too many activities such as programs, meetings, spiritual relationships, learning, work, etc., until it becomes untenable. Then, they may start suffering from fatigue, disillusionment, defeat, and failure, which may all be very overwhelming. According to MacDonald (1985), "pastors can be driven toward a superior Christian reputation, toward a desire for some dramatic spiritual experience, or toward a form of leadership that is really more a quest for domination of people than servanthood" (p. 47). When that happens, it is unlikely that these pastors will continue to serve the church with as much faithfulness and devotion as

would have been the case; church members may experience emotional and spiritual hurts from these pastors, resulting in more church conflicts.

In order for the church to be current, it must embrace the fact that followers' need for religious support has dramatically changed (Wittschiebe, 1956). Wittschiebe's (1956) words are interesting, considering these are conclusions that were reached many years ago, therefore confirming the realization that the role of minister as counselor has been under scrutiny for quite some time. If the research is to appreciate the magnitude of social needs by the parishioner, then an examination of how important the pastor-counselor is in regions where people are at a loss for self-identification of solutions, navigating through issues within the community and/or home, or other influences that are preventing happiness and fulfillment from taking place is needed (Erdmans, 1995). Also, one must keep sight of the reality that the higher the level of deprivation and socioeconomic stress that exists in a given community, the greater the number of worship centers to support the needs of the community (Erdmans, 1995, p.34). Competition is especially visible in this nation's inner cities although harsh competition exists to increase membership. Therefore, if a person either experiences church hurt or is simply not being religiously fulfilled, there is a strong likelihood that the member will consider joining another congregation.

The researcher believes that by their very nature, smaller community-born churches are the most vulnerable to complacency by their membership. Although these churches do well connecting people with community programs and services, this demographic of the population has little trust in bureaucracies and authority for that matter. Uslaner (2011) supports this line of thought and suggests that although there are

programs available for minority empowerment and support, too few take advantage of these offerings based on a perceived reality that there is a hidden agenda and if the program is used that they will in some way be hurt. Therefore, people in an impacted sector find common ground with those who are representative of who they are. This is why, according to Mansfield (2012), there is a greater potential of harm that is committed when people rely on religious leaders who are of the same demographic and that leader is unable to deliver. Whether the organization realizes it or not, they are the strength of the community and because of this, must position religious leaders for success by ensuring that the leaders have express training and understanding in supporting the membership through most instances of life's issues and conflicts.

As was noted earlier, it is important to reiterate that in the Bible, (church) conflict is seen as neither negative nor positive, right or wrong, but fundamentally a function of the natural outcome of God-given variety and personal dissimilarities between unique individuals. Conflict and its resolution is viewed as a transformative experience, as an opportunity to glorify God, to serve others, and grow to be Christ-like, as long as the analysis and identification of solutions are underpinned in the teachings of the scriptures (Halverstadt, 1991, Sande, 2004). In fact, Sande (2004) goes as far to posit, "the more we understand and follow what he teaches, the more effective we will be in resolving disagreements with other people" (p.19). This perspective cannot be dismissed as naïve or idealistic, but is really the most feasible approach when one considers the unique nature of the church environment. It is on this basis (among others) that a study that focuses on church hurt derives its relevancy to the field of Conflict Resolution.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology Overview

Chapter Introduction

This study describes and capture the essence of Church Hurt from the perspective of those who have undergone the church hurt experience. The following research questions guided the research process: First, what are the perceptions of those participants who have undergone church hurt? Second, how did the respective participants respond to the church hurt experience?

Many scholars have referred to the term 'methodology' as the method utilized during the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). A methodology is applied in order to validate, modify or discover new information. It is then used to create some laws and theories to predict such phenomena and try to control its reason. The most common methods used in social studies have been divided into two categories, quantitative or qualitative methods, and each has its own features and characteristics. Quantitative methods are most appropriate when the objective of the study is that of comparing data in a systematic manner, or with the purpose of making generalizations from within a specific population or between differing populations. Additionally, quantitative methods are best utilized when the objective is to evaluate the validity of theories with hypotheses.

In contrast, adopting qualitative methodologies is most appropriate when the objective is to explore a subject about which little is known in advance or, in constrast, when one wishes to discern the meanings, motivations and reasons that usually go unnoticed in standardized methods, like those affiliated with a survey (Jennifer, 2012; Wertz, 1983; Westbrook, 1994). It is for the latter reason that a qualitative approach to the study was adopted, given the emphasis on describing the subjective and personal

experiences of individuals who have knowledge of a particular phenomenon, that of church hurt.

Qualitative Research Traditions

There are various traditions that are employed in qualitative research. Creswell (2007) describes five common qualitative traditions, namely: narrative, grounded theory, case study, ethnography and phenomenology (See Table 1, page 49). In regard to narrative research, the researcher is said to explore the life of an individual. Narrative research is best used when the aim is to tell stories of an individual's experience. These stories make up an individual's life. This method was not appropriate as the goal of this study is to garner the essence of the lived experience of individuals.

Grounded theory focuses on developing a theory based on data that was discovered. This theory is deduced from data gathered from a large number of participants. Grounded theory is similar to phenomenology in that is utilizes interviews as the primary method of data collection and all participants in the study have similar experiences. (Creswell, 2007). This method was not selected as for the purpose of this research, the meaning of the experience, is what the researcher is seeking to describe, not developing a theory.

Ethnography focuses on large group of individuals who share similar culture. In this method, the researches examines the "shared patterns of behavior, beliefs and language" (Creswell, 2007, p.68) of the group. This method is also not applicable for this study as participants do not have the necessary grounding in cultural anthropology noted by Creswell (2007).

Case study, on the other hand, involves an in-depth analysis of an issue through one or more cases within the same setting or context. Creswell (2007) defines cases study as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases), over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p.73). This method is also inappropriate for the purpose of this study, due to the fact that the researcher is not interested is describing a particular case of the study participants.

This study primarily focuses on the lived experiences of the participants who have undergone the church hurt experience. The aim to describe what it is that they have experienced and how they experienced it. This will be done through the significant statements, meanings of those statements, and themes of the meanings, to develop an exhaustive description of the phenomenon of Church Hurt (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, a phenomenological method was utilized to further develop the qualitative framework. This was the most logical choice for answering the research questions, as it assists with discovering and understanding the environment evolving from the lived experience of the participants. (See table 1). Creswell (1998) concurs that qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p.99). The emphasis on how individuals constriuct meaning through interactions within a social context aligns with the purpose of this study in discovering how individuals experience and understand the Church Hurt phenomenom.

Table 1

Qualitative Research Traditions

Tradition	Types of Tradition	Unit	Origin discipline (s)	Purpose
Narrative	Biography, autobiography, life, history, oral history	Traditional, a single individual	Humanities and social sciences, including anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology	To explore the life of the individual
Phenomenology	Hermeneutical, transcendental. Describing whal all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon	Several individuals	Psychology and philosophy	To understand the essence of the experience
Grounded Theory	Systematic, constructivist. To generate or discover a theory.	Several individuals' experiences	Sociology	To develop a theory grounded in data from the field
Ethonography	Confessional, life history, auto-ethnography, feminist ethnography, ethnographic novels, realist ethnography, critical ethnography	Entire cultural group	Anthropology and sociology	To describe and interpret a culture-sharing group
Case Study	Single instrumental case study, collective case study, intrinsic case study	One issue, through one or more cases in a bounded system	Human and social sciences, and applied areas, i.e. evaluation research	To develop an indepth description of a case or cases

Note. Adapted from Creswell (2007).

For the purposes of this study, the step by step guidelines of phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994) was implemented as a map which explored the essence of Church Hurt from individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenological research prescribes a series of steps that are included throughout this dissertation. Creswell (1998) recommends describing the lived experience of the participants, working to dissolve

preconceived notions, acknowledging the realities of this, and lastly refusing the contrast between the subject-object and accepting reality through the individual's experience. Moustakas (1994) suggested bracketing, which is basically focusing on the researchable interest. This ensures that the study remains connected to the experiential questions while compiling stories from the lived personal experience of the participants. The next step of horiontalization provided directions of assigning values to each developing segment of meaning. Continued analysis of data occurred through coding where clusters developed and transformed into experiential themes. Table 2 below outlines the procedural steps in phenomenology and how it was mapped in this study.

Table 2

Procedures in Phenomenology

Determining Approach	I selected phenomenology as the approach for describing the lived experience of those who undergo the Church Hurt phenomenon
Determining Phenomenon	Common experiences of those who undergo Church Hurt
Recognizing philosophical assumptions	I was guided by Maslow theory of Needs and a social Constructivist view because this study will focus on the participants' views, voices and their realities. Much effort will be made to bracket my own experiences while simultaneously remaining reflective, fully present and engaged.
Determine individuals who have experienced the phenomenon	Fourteen 14 participants were identified to participate in sharing their Church Hurt experience
Data Collection	Moustakas recommendation for two broad questions, to describe experiences and to describe the context of those experiences was followed
Analyze data	Data collected from the interviews with the 14 participants was analyzed
Write description of participants' experiences	A description of themes or "meanings" that emerged was provided
Write composite or 'essence' of the phenomenon	The above descriptions were synthesized

Note. Adapted from Creswell (2007).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a tradition in German philosophy developed by Edmond Husserl that focuses on the in depth meaning of an aspect of lived experience as perceived by actors in a situation (Berg, 2004). This has been referred to as *verstehen*; roughly translated, it is the German for the interpretive understanding of human interaction. A more comprehensive definition is that of Patton (1990), who views phenomenology as philosophy, a methodology, and an approach; more specifically, he asserts:

> …a phenomenological study…is one that focused on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience (p.71).

A phenomenon can be a feeling, sensation, experience, relationship, or an object such as an organization, group, or culture. The objective of the researcher is to describe the structure of the experience based on the reflection and interpretation of the participants' narrative, with the aim of uncovering the implicit structure and meaning of such experiences.

Phenomenology was firstly developed from a philosophical perspective by Husserl in direct opposition to positivism. Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about the objects is reliable. Phenomenologists thus dismiss the mind versus body duality (or that of object and participant). Experience and behavior are an inseparable relationship. Husserl argued that

to arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experiences must be ignored because people can only be sure of how things appear based on their experiences and personal consciousness. Therefore, any inquiry cannot engage in 'science of facts' because there are not absolute facts; we can only establish 'knowledge of essences.' As such, realities are treated as pure 'phenomena' from where absolute data can be gathered. Consequently, pure phenomenological inquiry seeks essentially to describe rather than explain (Groenewald, 2004; Lopez, & Willis., 2004). Husserl's phenomenology is considered transcendental because it adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective acts and the objective correlated (behavior). Phenomenological analysis examines the correlation between the noema (the "object" as experienced) and the noesis (the "mode" of experiencing). To finally arrive at the essence of a phenomena, the researcher must coalesce the noema (external perception) and the noesis (internal perception).

Within phenomenology, language is viewed as a primary symbolic system through which meanings are both constructed and conveyed; as such, its attempt at capturing 'deep' information and perceptions is mainly acquired through inductive, qualitative methods, such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation. At the heart of the phenomenological analysis is an attempt to arrive at a description of a lived experience that is couched from the perspective of the respondent who is living, or has lived through, the phenomenon. That description is also somewhat influenced by the interest of the researcher, who has some interest in the phenomenon under study (Wertz, 1983). Phenomenological description is a fine balancing act between the researcher's focus on capturing the participant's subjective accounts, without imposing his or her own

personal interpretations on those accounts. The topic of church hurt emanating from a person's (negative) experience with the church can be a private and sensitive issue. As such, phenomenology's inherent focus is on the primacy of the respondent's voice, perceptions, and perspectives, which make the perfect methodological platform to describe such a phenomenon (Sadala & Adorno, 2001).

The above discussion on Phenomenology as a philosophical tradition and methodological practice may seem to give the misguided impression that this is what constitutes phenomenology, but as Finlay (2009) highlights, there is much diversity in the research methods and techniques that are utilized under the label of phenomenology. However, Giorgi (1989) has argued that despite the wide range of practices, there are four main underlying characteristics that define the methodology:

> The research is rigorously descriptive, uses phenomenological reductions, explores the intentional relationship between persons and situations, and discloses the essences, or structures, of meaning immanent in human experiences through the use of imaginative variation (p.7)

As was stated earlier, this study will adhere to the branch of phenomenology as developed by Husserl and currently advocated by Moustakas (1994), given that the objective is to focus on a description of the phenomenon of the church hurt experience. The aim will be to elucidate the 'essential and underlying' (thematic) structures of the experience.

This study is heavily reliant on the first-person accounts and utilizes everyday language to convey the lived experience of the respondents, while avoiding theoretical academic generalities. To the same degree, the temptation to go beyond the

descriptions/narratives of the respondents will be avoided, as the explicit aim of this study is to understand how church experiences have led to church hurt for the individual(s) concerned. The appropriateness of utilizing the methodology of phenomenology for this study will be guided by the issues raised by Creswell (2007) when he argued that:

> The researcher determines if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach. The type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomena (p.69)

With the focus of this study centered on exploring and describing the subjective constructions of the lived experiences of those who have experienced church hurt, phenomenology was chosen. As a methodology, phenomenology focuses on the construction of meaning, or the bringing to the forefront the experiences of individuals from their own viewpoints. The participants' experiences of this study and the inherent purpose of phenomenology make it the most appropriate methodology for this study. It is, for the reasons stated above, Transcendental Phenomenology, with its focus on the construction and the understanding of meaning from the participants' experiences, that was deemed the appropriate methodology for this study. To assist with effectively executing the practical issues and process associated with this methodology, the works of Moerer-Urdhal and Creswell (2004); Groenewald, (2004); Lin, (2013); Lopez and Willis, (2004); Finlay, (2009); along with Yuksel and Yildrim (2015) were utilized for guidance. The first illustrates Transcendental Phenomenology in a concrete sense, the second

demonstrates the essential principles of phenomenological research on a step by step basis, and the latter three focuses on distinguishing the differences between interpretative ((hermeneutic) and descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology.

As can be seen by the research questions that guided this study, the focus is on the subjective construction of the respective participants of the church hurt experience. The phenomenological inquiry will delve into abstract issues such as, at what point does one begin to become conscious of the onset of the church hurt experience? Was it a case of internal (psychological) or external (social) prompts that lead to one's consciousness of the onset of the experience? At what point was the experience labeled "church hurt?" Was it recognized from the outset or in retrospective? What specific need(s) or value(s) were unsatisfied or negatively impacted that influenced or actually lead to the decision to leave one's church? Transcendental Phenomenology, with its emphasis on the capturing of profound information and perceptions while tapping into the consciousness of the respective respondent(s), makes it the most suitable methodology for this purposes of this study. Additionally, utilizing phenomenology was seen as an appropriate methodology that could assist in exploring a concept/phenomena that has been written on, but not studied from, an original and novel fresh perspective (Lin, 2013). This made the decision to adopt the use of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology that much easier.

A final point that needs to be addressed concerns and underscores why a phenomenological approach was adopted for this study as opposed to similar or related methodology such as grounded theory. Firstly, the nature and objectives of this study were appropriately aligned with the nature and objectives of phenomenology. This study was initially guided by a specific research question that ruled out utilizing grounded

theory, as grounded theory is usually conducted to uncover a research question for testing; that is not the objective of this study. Relatedly, phenomenology focuses on describing the subjective meanings of lived experiences of the individual subject(s) regarding a particular phenomenon, experience, or issue, whereas with the adoption of a grounded theory study, the aim is to is to generate or discover a theory (Babbie, 1995; Boyd, 2001; Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Sandelowski, 1995).

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis refers to the largest body of material used for analysis in a particular study. In this study, the interviewees/respondents were the primary unit of analysis. This assisted with developing a platform through which experiences for each individual member can properly be captured and observations made in that regard (Westbrook, 1994).

Population and Sampling

According to Hycer (1999), "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the types of participants" (p.156). Purposive sampling was utilized to identify the primary participants to be included in the study. The participants were selected based on personal judgment along with the purpose of the research, meaning respondents who will have experienced the phenomena under consideration, church hurt. This personal judgment was followed up by a confirmation that they had undergone the Church Hurt phenomenon. Additionally, there was a demonstrated willingness to participate in the study. To acquire additional participants, snowball sampling was utilized; this sampling is a method of widening the sample pool by asking an informant or

participant to recommend others for interviewing (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Sandelowski, 1995).

In total, fourteen (14) participants were recruited for the study based on their experience(s) of church hurt. The number of fourteen (14) was arrived at based on the need to recruit an adequate number of respondents that would provide enough information needed to offer an in-depth understanding of the topic. Creswell (1998) stated that for phenomenological studies the number of participants that are adequate is between "five (5) to twenty-five (25)" (p.64). In contrast, both Boyd (2001) and Creswell (2010) recommend interviewing between two (2) to ten (10) research participants as adequate for reaching the point where the topic is inundated or saturated, or when the participants bring nothing new to the topic of at hand (Sandelowski, 1995).

The basic criteria that guided the selection of the respective participants for the study were as follows. First, the study recruited participants aged twenty five (25) and older, with the objective of selecting participants who were most likely to be articulate and mature enough to reflect on, and express themselves on, their respective church hurt experience(s).

Second, the participants selected were individuals who had primarily undergone the church hurt experience in the past seven (7) years, with the objective of selecting participants who had adequate time to effectively reflect on and communicate their memories and experience(s) of church hurt while it is still relatively 'fresh' in their minds. Subjects who have experienced the phenomenon of church hurt within the past twelve (12) months shall be excluded to avoid the risk of making them re-live the trauma of the experience and also to allow sufficient time to heal from the experience. This latter

factor also eliminates potential subjects who are currently undergoing the church hurt experience.

Third, fourteen (14) participants were selected from individuals who were currently a member of a congregation through the dual process of purposive and snowball sampling. Fourth, the study attempted to affect an equitable gender balance of respondents; however, in actuality, eight (8) women and six (6) male participants were recruited. Given that it is well known that the demographic balance of most churches consists of a predominance of women over men, this was reflected in the eventual gender balance of those who were recruited for the study. In addition, women tended to be more open to being interviewed about the sensitive and vulnerable issue of church hurt, and as expected, there ended up being a female predominance in the eventual gender balance of the actual respondents.

Negotiating entry to my potential sample population was procured as a result of my many connections in the Pentecostal and the wider evangelical community, through my speaking engagements in the Church community for well over a decade, and finally through my professional contacts as a Success Coach at Career Source Broward. Subsequent to my gaining approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), recruitment of potential respondents was commenced through a solicitation correspondence detailing what the study entailed, encompassing its objective(s), a concise statement of the focus of the study, and ultimately the significance of the study. Interested participants were invited to call me to express interest in participating in the study, to validate their eligibility, and to schedule an interview. Most of those who expressed interest in being interviewed welcomed the focus on such a topic,

which they felt needed to be highlighted; they were in fact very fascinated that such a topic was being formally explored.

Finally, all participants were contacted initially through a ‘gatekeeper’ who was a current member of a given congregation at the time, who obviously had undergone the church hurt experience, who knew others within their respective church, and who assisted me in introducing me to other such congregants. The final step consisted of conducting a brief telephone or face to face conversation with the potential participant for the purposes of outlining the basic nature of the study and gauging their interest and/or willingness to participate in the study. Of note is that during the interviewing period, five (5) potential respondents, either out rightly (but politely) declined to be interviewed, or repeatedly kept rescheduling the interviewing times (for a variety of reasons), so ultimately, they were not excluded from the study.

Data Collection Methods

Direct contact with participants is usually required for qualitative study. Given the nature and purpose of this study, interviews were deemed the best choice of obtaining the required information. Therefore, the researcher received approval from Nova Southeastern University International Review Board (IRB) to conduct interviews with participants. A copy of the informed consent form is located in Appendix B. Semi-structured interviews will be discussed in detail below.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Since the research study is qualitative in nature, a semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interview for collecting data was deemed most appropriate. As explained below,

> A semi-structured interview is a technique for generating qualitative data and is characterized by open-ended questions that are developed in advance and by prepared probes. In the semi structured interview, the interviewer has a set of questions on an interview schedule, but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather dictated by it; the interviewer is free to probe interesting areas that arise from participants' interests or concerns. (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013, p. 4).

This data gathering method permitted the researcher to utilize an (interview) guide that allowed a relevant range of questions to be asked and issues to be explored, while giving the interviewees the scope to introduce perspectives that were deemed significant and relevant. The main objective of carrying out semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interviews was to establish how the participants feel about certain issue of their Church Hurt experience(s).

A semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interview was deemed the most appropriate data collection method for the study because it would give the researcher an opportunity to capture respondent's perceptions and experiences towards factors that cause church conflict and church hurt. A semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interview structure allowed participants to add things to the topic that the researcher had not previously considered. There were also other more pragmatic reasons for conducting the semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interviews, including the increased likelihood of participants to keep a pre-arranged appointment for an interview, rather than respond to a questionnaire. More specifically, the semi-structured interview drew upon one my main professional skill sets as a success coach, which entails me seeing many clients on a daily basis, listening to their issues, assessing their needs, and analyzing what

needs to be done address these concerns in a practical manner. The soft skills of being able to listen actively and respectfully and being compassionate and genuine are all critical qualities that augments the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Such skill sets enhance the quality of the interviewing process, aids the breaking down of barriers to communication, and contributes towards a safe environment favorable to the revelation of personal and sensitive information (Creswell, 2004; Hycer, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

The interview stage of the study transpired over a month long period between August 22-September 18, 2016, with the interviews ranging in duration from a little over twenty minutes in the shortest one to one lasting over one and a half hours. For those participants that agreed to participate, their formal consent was secured with them reading and signing a copy of the consent form. Interview dates were then agreed upon at the convenience of the participant. Interviews were conducted in person, face to face at locations that were determined at their convenience or comfort level. While a face to face interview was not mandatory, it was the preferred method of conducting the interview since it was deemed a more comfortable and personable social setting that was more likely to yield “richer” data. Data not limited to what was said, but allowed the researcher to be in a position to observe and record other intangible and nuanced matter as well as not limited to what was said, but more importantly how it was said, in tandem with noting any significant body language signifiers. Such face to face interviews were (preferably) conducted either prior to or after church service, at a place of work, or in a public setting such as at a public library or park, book shop, or restaurants.

The individual interviewing process began with the interviewer firstly expressing her appreciation to the respective participant for consenting to participate in the study. Then the interview itself began, with the same guiding question directed at each participant. Guiding questions were succinct and open ended, aimed at soliciting detailed, spur-of-the-moment replies from participants. These questions were posited initially with the objective of channeling the initial direction of the interview and was not something that rigorously adhered to. This also ensured some overall uniformity in the whole interviewing process and ensured that the respective participant received the similar structures of inquiry (Patton, 2002). The following question initiated all interviews: "When you think of the church, what readily comes to mind?" Followed subsequently by, "Have you experienced some form of Church Hurt?" On other occasions it was necessary to ask follow-up, probing questions or request that participants elaborate on responses for the purposes of clarification and garnering additional information of the question on hand. Interview questions were designed in order to get at a more in depth meaning of the impact of church hurt on the respondents.

The interviews were semi-structured and in-depth, aided with the use of an audio tape recorder along with transcription material that were utilized to ensure that details given by the participant were captured and a minimal amount of information/data missed. Most questions were directed to capture the respective participant's experiences, emotions, beliefs and opinions about their church hurt experience(s). The focus of the interviews was centered on what goes on within the participant and get the participant to describe their respective lived experience of church hurt in language as devoid of abstract constructs as possible; according to Hycer (1999), this is one form of bracketing.

Additionally, it was deemed important to note the participant's body language, facial expression and tone (non-verbal cues), as these too are relevant in telling their story and/or shaping or capturing their respective narratives. The researcher strove to ensure that respondents were not interrupted during the interview process by anyone or outside influences; this was another factor that was considered in choosing the eventual location for the respective interviews.

Patton (1990) describes a tape recorder as an "indispensable" (p. 348) tool to be utilized in the interviewing process, as it has the advantage of capturing data more proficiently and ensuring the researcher's time is more focused on the interview itself. The respective interview recordings were all identified using a number to discreetly identity the respondent while maintaining their confidentiality. At the conclusion of each interview, all respondents were thanked and reminded of the possibility of a follow-up telephone calls to clarify any area of concern and also to confirm their respective interview transcripts for accurateness.

Loftland and Loftland (1999) recommend the utilization of field notes to assist with the organizing and analysis of data. For each respective respondent, a basic composite was constructed that encompassed demographic and biographical information on each participant. When applicable, anything of distinction that transpired in the interview setting/process was also noted. At times, my own perceptions of the respondents' attitudes and body language was also noted, however, this was done at the conclusion of each interview while the impressions were fresh in my mind, rather than during the course of the interview, as it was important to focus on the interviewing process itself.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological inquiry is a methodological process that seeks to identify, understand and describe in depth the common reality of individuals' narratives of their lived experiences of a phenomena (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described the phenomena as "what appears in the consciousness" (p.26). The ultimate objective is capturing the essence of an experience from a group of individuals who have commonly undergone the phenomena of church hurt. The process of analyzing the data in phenomenology employs a unique set of processes and procedures exclusive to the methodology such as bracketing, phenomenological reduction, horizontalizing, organizing invariant qualities and themes, and constructing textural descriptions. For the purposes of this study, the eight (8) stage approach to data analysis suggested by Moustakas (1994) was utilized as a guideline for this study. The steps of data analysis, as outlined by Moutaskas (1994), were the sole guiding force in the data analysis, and any point of departure shall be highlighted when relevant. This process shall later be illustrated in a step by step basis using one of the respondents in the study, with a focus on how one theme –sense of loss- was unearthed for this respondent.

As noted in any phenomenological study, the in-depth interview transcripts form the foundation of the research data. Moustakas (1994) posits that the data analysis stage is initiated with the organization and preparation of the data gathered. This was preceded by the transcription of the respective interviews, which was captured after repeated replays of the audio-recording until all relevant information was captured by Microsoft Word; a separate document was created for each transcribed interview. Next, all the audio-recordings and the Word documents were placed in a password protected folder on

my computer and also placed on a flash drive that was also password protected in a safe area of my place of residence in case something were to happen to my laptop. A physical copy of the interview transcripts was then filed with each of the respective respondent's informed consent documents; this was emailed to each respondent for member checking. The respondents were each afforded the opportunity to validate the accuracy of their respective transcripts and where applicable, suggest changes if errors were detected. All transcripts were verified and returned over a two week time period. While the process of transcribing the interviews was arduous and extremely time consuming, it afforded me the opportunity to refresh my memory and re-familiarize myself with the data, while also allowing on an intuitive level the ability to start to detect underlying commonalities in the respondent's narratives.

In accordance with Moustakas (1994), the first stage of formal data analysis involved the *horizontalization* of the data. This step involves listing all statements deemed as applicable and descriptive of the church hurt experience being taken from the transcripts and recorded on a separate piece of paper. At this stage, Moustakas (1994) recommends that the researcher "be receptive to every statement of the co-researcher's experience (respondent) experience, granting each comment equal value," (p. 122). Essentially, this is recommending that the researcher keep a fresh, non-judgmental eye when accessing each individual statement, and is indispensable in avoiding judgment and biases later during the research process, referred to as epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). The process of bracketing also enhances the researcher's ability to understand the participants' experiences from their own perspectives and produce a relatively objective description of the participant's reality (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The statements

that were lifted from the respective transcripts are referred to as the horizons. For illustrative and descriptive purposes, I have compiled a small sample of the horizons extracted for one of the respondents (Deidra, Interviewee #6) in this study. Given the vast number of horizons, it is somewhat impractical to list all the horizons, for this respondent or the other respondents in this study. However, this step simply involves an exhaustive and relevant listing of the raw data – the interview texts, applicable to the phenomena under study.

Table 3

Horizontalization

…from my experience because I grew up in the church I grow up into the Christian Lutheran Church I was taught to believe in God and into the Son of God Jesus and at this particular time I was trying to find a place to grow personally move it away from my family's church trying to move to another place of growing so I found this church through a friend and upon finding this church it started very well it seems like the pastor was really in tune with the Holy Spirit and definitely had a anointing over his life. …At this particular time like I said I was looking for growth. …I was looking for spiritual food I was done with the baby food. …I had a family and a daughter and a husband who was at sea so there were times that I could not make it to church and if I could not make it he would actually call me or to have one of the deacons called me to tell me to come. …And if I didn't come then he would hold it against me and some time away and sometimes he would hold grudges or speak differently or even not speak to me. …And I could not really focus on the word of God because I was in an uncomfortable place while trying to grow it caused the light that was inside of me to be dimmed because it caused me to be explaining myself to a man that I was not married to and so in a lot of ways I felt like the pastor was trying to be over my life so with this being said I felt like there was so much sorrows. So many things that were being told to him from other people about me and that was really hurtful because as a child of God you know it supposed to be the house of the Lord and those things weren't supposed to be going on and so I decided to leave and when I decided to leave he kept on calling my job over and over again at that time I was working at the police department and I had to ask my supervisor to talk to him because he would not stop calling me. …Had it not been for my supervisor then he wouldn't have stopped I felt like there was like a title hold on me and I just felt really uncomfortable because I felt like I

was being stalked and I really didn't appreciate it.

…And when you were being stalked it's a very lonely feeling and when you're being stalked by someone who you're not in a relationship but it's a sort of relationship and I wasn't the only female that this was happening with I felt like this fine line with being crossed and I became very uncomfortable because he just wanted to control all the women in the church because most of them were either divorced, single or maybe married to somebody who wasn't there for them spiritually and for me my husband was away at Sea so he wasn't with me all the time so it seems like he kind of gravitated and pull the woman who did not have a spiritual leader in their life as far as a man.

The next step in the analysis process, *Invariant-Constituents*, involves a reviewing of all the horizons listed for each respondent to ensure that the researcher removes all repetitive, overlapping, and imprecise jargons present in the respective verbatim transcripts. This stage of the process involves reducing the data of experiences to an exhaustive listing of all non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Moustakas, 1994). Adhering to the process, Moustakas (1994) recommends two issues that must be the focus of accessing each horizon: first, "does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding the phenomena under study, and secondly is it possible to abstract and label it?" (p.121). The horizons that met these criteria were referred to as invariant constituents of the experience of the respective respondent. Each invariant constituent is ultimately meant to enable the researcher to determine which expression(s) to select from the respondent's interview transcripts of his/her lived experience. This process is also an essential aspect of cleaning up the raw data. This process serves the dual purposes of reducing and eliminating redundant data for the next step of the analysis process and also assisting the researcher to initiate the process of summarizing the initial raw data. Again, for illustrative and descriptive purposes, the same respondent (Deidra, Interviewee #6) is utilized to highlight a listing of all the invariant-constituents.

Table 4

Invariant-Constituents (representing different themes)

…Felt like this was the place that God had sent which I still do because I had a lesson to learn. …But in this particular church the particular apostle that we call them. He went by the title Apostle even though he was the pastor of the church and so he invited me to come back and so they would have church services every night of the week which was okay because it's never too much to praise and worship but then there were times that I wasn't able to make it to church because of work. … There were times that I shared personal things with him and he brought them out before the church and I'm not comfortable with some of the things that he would share about me before the church so after being there for a while it made me think that maybe this wasn't the place for me to be you know to be able to grow because it was so intense and there was so much going outside of the word of God. … And if I didn't come then he would hold it against me and some time away and sometimes he would hold grudges or speak differently or even not speak to me. … I felt myself kind of broke and it reminded me of that what happened in my childhood and so emotionally I was very distraught and so I had to move away from the people that I made a bond with because they were so attached to him because of the spell that he cast or the control that he was doing and I couldn't I couldn't subject myself to that because it made me feel very uncomfortable. …So for me when I found myself going at first I was growing but then after a while I wasn't I felt pain I feel uncomfortable and that pain kind of reminded me of something that I felt from childhood. … And when you're searching for Christ and for a place to serve and a place to worship and this take place then you start to question God. Like God why am I going through this I've been serving to you I've been hungry for you word I've been wanting to grow? … It is through this that you learned that everything is a process like you've got to grow through different things in order to really get to the level that you're asking God to take you to but it was very difficult.

The next step in the reduction process of the data analysis process encompasses *Clustering and Thematising the Invariant Constituents* (Moustakas, 1994). For these purposes, a theme shall be defined as "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (Desantis &

Ugarizza, 2000, p.362). Clusters of themes are typically formed by grouping units by meaning together, a method of analysis that encompasses a constant comparison and contrasting (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Leininger, 1985). The invariant horizons, or meaning units, were assembled together to form core themes for the respective respondents on the study. For illustrative and descriptive purposes, the process of how invariant constituents were arrived organized and gathered to form a theme – Sense of Loss - for the same respondent (Deidra, Interviewee # 6) are presented below. A similar process was carried out for the other respondents in the study.

Table 5

Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents.

Sense of Loss
Questioning of Spiritual faith
Emotional/Psychological distress
Betrayal of personal confidences
Controlling behaviors
Vindictive behavior
Negative interpersonal social situation
Sexual Harassment

As posited by Moustakas (1994), the next stage of the data analysis process-*Individual Textural Descriptions*-involves the writing of individual textural descriptions for each respondent, which is another way of suggesting that the researcher provide examples from the original interview transcripts data to validate the particular theme(s) earlier identified. This is carried out for the purpose of presenting the respective respondent's perceptions of the phenomena under investigation, in this case, church hurt. These descriptions give the 'what' of the experience. Moustakas (1994) recommends that the respondent's own words be included/cited to convey their distinctive perceptions of the phenomenon being studied. This was done for the fourteen (14) respondents. For

illustrative purposes, the same respondent Deidra (Interviewee #6) is utilized to demonstrate the data analysis process for how a specific theme, sense of loss was validated.

Table 6

Individual Textural Description

But in this particular church the particular apostle that we call them he went by the title Apostle even though he was the pastor of the church and so he invited me to come back and so they would have church services every night of the week which was okay because it's never too much to praise and worship but then there were times that I wasn't able to make it to church because of work I had a family and a daughter and a husband who was at sea so there were times that I could not make it to church and if I could not make it he would actually call me or to have one of the deacons called me to tell me to come. And if I didn't come then he would hold it against me in some kind of a way and sometimes he would hold grudges or speak differently or even not speak to me. There were times that I shared personal things with him and he brought them out before the church and I'm not comfortable with some of the things that he would share about me before the church so after being there for a while it made me think that maybe this wasn't the place for me to be you know to be able to grow because it was so intense and there was so much going on outside of the word of God.

The next stage in Moussakas' (1994) process is referred to as the individual structural description, which involves the researcher providing the previous theme/quote/comments of the respective respondents. Put another way, Moustakas (1994) posits that individual explanations are provided across the board for all the respondent's quotes or their individual textural descriptions.

The subsequent step in the data analysis process is that of the provision of *Composite Structural Descriptions*. Here, Moustakas (1994) explains that in forming composite structural descriptions, the invariant meanings and themes of every respondent are studied in depicting the group as a whole (pp.137-138). The step of composite structural descriptions encompasses the same measures pertinent at the individual level,

but it is applied in global manner for all the respondents. The researcher describes a particular theme for the whole group in order to explain why a theme identified should be considered valid. The composite structural description basically encompasses a synthesis of the individual textural descriptions, but also involves a description that is much more, since it explains a respective theme at the individual level but also covers all the respondents in all their subtle nuances. In short, both individual textural and composite structural descriptions are interdependent, with the former a prerequisite for the latter and the latter essentially an aggregate or compilation of the former (Moustakas, 1994). The composite structural description enables the individual descriptions of the respective respondents to be representative of the whole. This stage requires the researcher to be constantly flipping between the individual invariant meanings and themes of each respondent while simultaneously providing a synthesis of the respective invariant meanings and themes that depicts the group as a whole.

Table 7

Composite Structural Descriptions.

The theme of a '*sense of loss*,' encompassed situations spanning issues of betrayal by the pastor, or congregants who were close to the offended party, in some instances due to the nature of the situation, the offended party (whether real or imagined) experienced a sense of ostracism, that deeply affected the quality of their social interactions and as such made their continued attendance at the respective church untenable. In most instances it was not just a matter of their faith/spirituality coming into question, but it involved instances of social isolation, emotional and psychological distress, and simple plain disillusionment with that social context, that their continued presence simply became untenable. Instances of church hurt in these situations was so painful that a change of scenery was deemed the most viable option as the respondents all felt that their most fundamental need, that of a sense of belonging, respected and spiritual needs were not being met.

The final step in the data analysis process for this study collapses the previous two steps of Moustakas' (1994) eight stage analytical process into one, that of providing a

Synthesis of the Texture and Structure into an Expression. This step of the process, represents the researcher's understanding of the experiences of the respondent as revealed by the respondents' testimonies/narratives, it also represents a summary of the respondents understanding of the phenomenon under study, an interpretation/representation of what is happened to the respondents as a consequence of their lived experience of the phenomenon under study.

Central to the achievement of providing a C*omposite Structural and Textural Descriptions*, is the concept of 'imaginative variation' (Moustakas, 1994). This is both an abstract and interactive process, as described by Moustakas (1994) below:

> The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meaning through the utilization of imagination, varying the frame of reference, employing polarities and reversals' and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions. The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words, the "how" that speaks to the conditions that illuminate the "what of the experience" (p. 85.)

This utilization of 'imaginative variation' emphasizes the use of subjectivity with the researcher systematically collecting and analyzing the participant's experiences and feelings, and making meanings through discourse (Moustakas, 1994). This final stage involves "extracting general and distinctive themes from the interviews and making an amalgamated summary, which must reflect the context or horizons from which the themes emerge. The end result will be a complete composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals–that is what they experienced and how they

experienced it" (Moustakas, 1994). In short, it at this stage the researcher provides an understanding or explanation of the phenomenon, but what also what is happening to the respondents based on the narratives of the respondents.

Table 8

Synthesizing Structural and Textural Description into an Expression

The church hurt experience represents a lot of different things to the various respondents, nonetheless, the church as an institution, when asked about what the church represents to them, the respondents tended to cite the need for love (social need), the need to have respect and deference from others, (psychological) safety. Whether it is an idealistic conception of what the church is supposed to be, or qualities that they are looking for, the point is that the church is an entity or site of social interaction, where one expects such needs to be met. In instances where such needs are not met or expectations have been negatively impacted as in an instance of church hurt, then the experience/feeling of a sense of loss may occur, which may partially explain why some respondents affected by Church Hurt decided to leave their 'offending" churches. As the interviews reveal, the occurrence of Church Hurt is an experience that can lead to a shattering of one's worldview, of one's spirituality, one's faith, one's 'spiritual family,' and even a reassessment of one's circle of friends. Church Hurt can a deeply disturbing experience, at the spiritual, emotional, psychological level, but it cannot be explained solely based on the church hurt experience being a function of underlying needs being frustrated and/or unmet. Another instructive lens to interpret the Church Hurt experience is that of Social Constructionism. This is useful since it provides insights into subjective-objective duality of the church as both an abstract and concrete duality, and by extension the model enables one to view the Church Hurt experience as both an intensely personal but at the same time a social experience. For the respondents who conceived the Church Hurt experience as a 'sense of loss,' they tended to convey experiences spanning issues of betrayal by the pastor, or congregants who were close to the offended party, in some instances due to the nature of the situation, the offended party (whether real or imagined) experienced a sense of ostracism, that deeply affected the quality of their social interactions and as such made they continued attendance at the respective church untenable. In most instances it was not a matter of their faith/spirituality coming into question at least ultimately. In most case it was just a case of the social experience at the church they were first attending becoming untenable to the point the most feasible solution to the situation was to leave the offending church, as they felt their needs were no longer being met.

Validity and Reliability

It could be argued that the true objective of qualitative research should be "generating understanding" (Stenbecka, 2001, p. 55) of a situation, event or phenomenon that would otherwise prove challenging to comprehend. From another perspective on the same concept, Lincoln & Guba (1985) argued that the term 'credibility' refers to the ability of the researcher to demonstrate that the phenomenon under study was accurately identified and categorized, and that it must be "credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (p. 296). For anyone conducting qualitative research, the ultimate objective is conducting a study that accurately describes a phenomenon under consideration and conveys insight and understanding to a wider audience, while simultaneously accurately representing the thoughts, perceptions and attitudes of the subjects/participants of the respective study/phenomenon under investigation. To meet these objectives, several measures were undertaken. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), two main strategies were adopted, that of triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation involves cross-checking transcribed interview data with that of the audio-recorded data to the similar data generated across both sources, as both measures are integral to corroborating what the respondents had divulged. Member checking is integral for the establishment of credibility; it involves requesting the respondents to review, revise and validate the (interview) data initially, and invite them back to do so likewise at later stages of the research process, such as when the data is being analyzed, interpreted and broken down to provide feedback. The involvement of respondents/participants during these stages of the research process affords them an

opportunity to rectify misinterpretations by the researcher, provide additional insights, or confirm the researcher's findings. Both processes were adopted during the course of this study. Upon completion of the transcription of all interviews, copies were sent to all respondents for their perusal and comment(s). In all instances, respondents confirmed that the transcripts had accurately captured their opinions. Additionally, at a very advanced stage of the coding process of the data analysis, the respondents were requested to confirm or deny whether the essence of their respective interviews has been effectively depicted and if the overall interpretative and categorizing of the various theme were applicable and/or appropriate interpretations of the data.

The twin issue(s) of reliability and validity presented a double bind for this study. While acknowledging the leeway in the coding of the interview transcripts process to influence the researcher's subjectivity and interpretation, this study focused on the attainment of validity, rather than reliability, since it has been argued that "there can be no validity without reliability, hence demonstration of the former, is sufficient establish the latter" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). To address these concerns, several measures, as outlined above, were adopted to address concerns in the validity of the findings. As earlier discussed, bracketing was an important measure adopted for the purpose of achieving and demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analysis process (Ahern, 1999; Westbrook, 1994).

Another factor that guided the study in the objective of achieving validity was Pereora's (2012) definition of validity of a phenomenological study; Pereora posited that "to be judged valid, a phenomenological study must take into consideration methodological congruence (rigorous and appropriate procedures and experiential

concerns' that provide insight in terms of plausibility and illumination about a specific phenomenon" (p.19). It is widely acknowledged that definitive and concrete guidance on how to execute the methodological procedures of phenomenology can be conceptual and abstract (Lin, 2013) at times, which leads to the application of its procedures to ensure that this does not occur. As stated earlier, the works of Moerer-Udhal and Creswell (2004); Groenewald (2004); Lin (2013); Lopez and Willis (2004); Finlay (2009); and Yusel and Yildrim (2015), were all utilized to achieve 'methodological congruence' as a key component in enhancing and thus achieving the studies' validity.

Ethical Considerations

As the principal investigator of this study, I take undertake the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of all respondents with the utmost of gravity that such concerns deserve. Therefore, most of the ethical issues that could have been a source of controversy were addressed prior to the onset of this study. Working in tandem with Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), all potential issues that may have negatively impacted all respondents were addressed, given that live human subjects/respondents were the focus of the study. The issues raised and subsequent parameters of accepted practices, as directed by Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in such settings, were strictly adhered to at all stages of the research process.

To that end, during the first calls to potential participants, they were all informed of what the study entailed, encompassing its objective(s), a concise statement of the focus of the study, and ultimately the significance of the study. More importantly, they were all explicitly notified of the voluntary nature of their participation in the project, their rights

as research participants, and possible benefits of their participation in the study. Participants were informed that would be no compensation involved as a consequence of their participation in the study. At this juncture, participants were afforded the opportunity to seek clarification or raise issues of concerns they wished to be addressed. All potential participants were asked to sign the informed consent form prior to the start of the interviews. Each participant received a copy of their signed informed consent form.

Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the topic at hand, participants were made aware that they could always request a short break, reschedule, or stop the interview if it became a source of psychological or emotional distress. Special precautions were also undertaken to eliminate instances of embarrassment, stress, and discomfort to the participants. In fact, during the course of two interviews for this study, the highly traumatic nature of the recollections was the basis of some obvious emotional distress. In one case the respondent actually broke down crying, but after the interview was paused for a couple of minutes, the respondent, after gathering herself, elected to continue the interview. The respondent was ‘at pains’ in allaying any concerns that the interview itself was not the source of distress, but rather the recollection of a particular incident. She was, however, glad to be afforded the opportunity to talk, recount, and reveal the incident to someone. The researcher also strove to maintain appropriate behavior and objectivity while interviewing the respective participants. Confidentiality of the data was secured for the respondents as well as their anonymity by providing personal assurances during the interviews that there would be the use of pseudonyms and other measure to affect the anonymity of all respondents and thus protect their respective

identities. The participants' actual formal names were only listed on the informed consent form as required by the Institutional Review Board.

Demographic Profiles of Respondents*

David. Interview 1; Gender: Male; Age: 42; Marital Status: Married one wife never been divorced. Faith: Seventh Day Apostolic.

Marlene. Interview 2; Gender: Female; Age: 28; Marital Status: Married one husband never been divorced. Faith: Church of God in Christ

Stephanie. Interview 3; Gender: Female; Age: 32; Marital Status: Single (never married). Faith: Church of God in Christ

Adrienne. Interview 4; Gender: Female; Age: 43; Marital Status: Married; Faith: Apostolic

Kurt. Interview 5; Gender: Male; Age: 37; Marital Status: Single never married; Faith: Apostolic

Deidra. Interview 6; Gender: Female; Age: 35; Marital Status: Married. Faith: Church of God in Christ

Joy. Interview 7; Gender: Female; Age: 47; Marital Status: Married; Faith: Apostolic

Robert. Interview 8; Gender: Male; Age: 41; Marital Status: Married; Faith: Apostolic; Occupation: Mechanic

Sherina. Interview 9; Gender: Female; Age: 39; Marital Status: Single Divorced; Faith: Apostolic

Terrence. Interview 10; Gender: Male; Age: 64; Marital Status: Married; Faith: Apostolic

George. Interview 11; Gender: Male; Age: 33; Marital Status: Married; Faith: Apostolic

Sean. Interview 12; Gender: Male; Age: 44. Marital Status: Married. Faith: Apostolic

Jacqueline. Interview 13; Gender: Female; Age: 59; Marital Status: Single never married; Faith: Church of God in Christ

Natalie. Interview 14; Gender: Female; Age: 52; Marital Status: Single, divorced; Faith: Church of God in Christ

* The real names of the respondents have not been utilized in this study, nor has their real age been disclosed; ages given are an approximation to assist in protecting the identity of the respondents. This was an issue agreed to beforehand with the respondents.

Precursor to the findings: an introduction to the themes

The church is often seen as the embodiment of relative social harmony and spiritual solace, among other virtues. Religion may contribute to subjective or psychological wellbeing in a number of ways, such as the provision of spiritual assistance and guidance (through both good and especially bad times), personal and social support, moral guidelines or scriptural influence on lifestyle, a common and coherent ideology, organizational structure, and a force of social cohesion (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Fincham., et al, 2008; Levin & Taylor, 1993; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994; Pargament, 1997; Taylor et al., 1996). From this backdrop, the church is seldom viewed by the secular-minded as an institution an instrument of pain, disillusionment, and social discord. Unfortunately, as the literature earlier highlighted, one of the features associated with the modern church is that of declining attendance, with church hurt

increasingly seen as a contributory factor to this worrying trend. The personally distressing psychological experience is what Mansfield (2012) refers to as "church hurt." Given the urgency of addressing the real-life issue of church hurt, amid the well-documented decline of attendance to many churches, the need for a study that directs attention to the personal experience of those who have undergone the situation cannot be underestimated. The core objective of this study aims at describing and capturing the essence of the experience from the perspective of those who have undergone the church hurt experience. Below are the main findings of the study organized along thematic lines.

Findings and Themes

For the purposes of this study, a theme shall be defined as "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (Desantis & Ugarizza, 2000, p.362). These themes were instrumental in bringing understanding to the central research questions of this study. Firstly, what are the perceptions of the participants regarding their experience of church hurt? Secondly, how did the respective participants respond to the church hurt experience? These were ideas, concepts, and issues that recurred within and across the various interview transcripts repeatedly in various forms that served to highlight or illustrate central ideas pertinent in illuminating one's conception of Church Hurt. Within each theme, several quotations from the various respondents were utilized in illustrating the theme while serving the fundamental objective of answering the research questions driving the study.

In this section of the study, the themes explicated from the data shall be explored in depth. Four (4) themes were unearthed from the data. They were, firstly, Sanctity of

the Church, which loosely depicts what the church as an institution means to the respondents. This theme is important in a fundamental sense since it serves as a backdrop to understanding the traumatic element of the Church Hurt experience. The second and third themes are basically two sides of the same coin and were respectively labeled as S*ense of Loss* and *Transformative*. Both these themes basically explored the divide among the respondent's ultimate reaction to, or framing of, the Church Hurt experience. This refers to those who saw it as a wholly negative experience and those who viewed it as a transformative experience. The final theme, labeled the *Ineptitude/Ignorance in Resolving Conflicts,* is problematic in the choice of labels, but it was an issue that arose time after time in the interviews. As will be discussed at length later, this theme, addressed an issue that arose as it related to the extent to which the negative impact of the Church Hurt experience could have been alleviated.

Sanctity

This theme encompasses the church in both the spiritual and secular sense as a social institution, physical construction, and an abstract ideal that is both reflective and descriptive of ideal patterns of social relations within the church. As such, the language used by the respondents to describe what the church means to them is best embodied in this term/label/theme. As earlier posited, one's spirituality is a very personal decision and is influenced by basic underlying motivations in order to meet some basic needs. The decision to attend a particular church and to leave a particular church are in all likelihood motivated by the ability of the respective church to meet these basic needs. While the objective of the study is focused on describing the church hurt experience, the extent to which one's needs have been unfilled, ignored, or frustrated and ultimately how these

needs have been addressed was also looked at. Thus, it is unsurprising that the very first theme that immediately manifested itself during the course of the interviews was how the respective respondents viewed the church. Approximately fifty percent of all the participants that have been interviewed viewed the church as a place of sanctity. Below are excerpts from various participants who viewed the church as a place of sanctity:

> "The church [can] be a Saving Station a place of Refuge a place where you could go and talk to anybody past or whoever and it stays there, so in essence it is a place where you should find security". **(Adrienne, Interview # 4)**
>
> "[The Church] is Safe Haven a place where people can go and not only receive it also gave of themselves freely without any kind of motive or any preconceived ideas so basically it's a place of safety". **(Kurt, Interview #5)**
>
> "The Church is a meeting place…that everyone is comfortable and that everyone has everything in, and no one is left out and no one is felt like they're not up to a certain standard. So the church should be a place where everyone feels equal and that they have one goal and they're working towards that one goal". **(Joy, Interview #7)**
>
> "As a place of refuge, where people come to meet with God, a place where people come to worship with God." "These (church people) that…I spend more time with than I did my family". **(Robert, Interview #8)**
>
> "A place or a community where we are able to have first-hand relationship with Jesus Christ a place where they are supposed to feel loved and a sense of security because Jesus Christ is the husbandman and we are his bride". **(George, Interview # 11)**

> "The church is a place of refuge. A place where people come to meet with God. A place of worship where people come to worship with God. A place where people who feel oppressed can come and meet with God and the assurance that's basically what the church is. In all the church is really God's church and so it is a place where we come to worship the Lord God Almighty". **(Sean, Interview #12)**
>
> "When I think of the church what comes to my mind is a place of worship, giving thanks, a hospital for sick people, not only sick physically but mentally, spiritually, I think of it as my home, a dwelling place, a sacred place, a place of joy, pleasure, a place where you cry, a place of worship". **(Natalie, Interview #14)**

The common underlying issue is that the church is an institution that not only meets one spiritual needs, but also meets one's social, emotional, and psychological needs. The imagery and mindset that the above quotations conjure are instrumental contexts to understand why the issue of Church Hurt can become such a troubling, painful, and traumatic experience for those unfortunately experiencing it. The church was often viewed as an institution that is a like a refuge, a 'home away from home,' and a very close-knit community, where one's social ties tend to be on a fairly intimate and personable level. The church, as a community entity, can also be a socially fulfilling and effective institution in the lives for those involved with it (Axinciuc, 2011; Brown & Gary, 1994; Chaney, 2008; Ellison & Levin, 1998). This is an institution that is capable of bringing joy and fulfilling its members' deepest needs. Church life is not solely centered on the scriptures (although admittedly, it is a significant part of the social milieu), but also around one's relationship with one's pastor.

To this end, Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of Human motivation serves as an applicable theoretical framework for this study, since it concurrently attempts to explain how an individual's needs could motivate them to attend a particular church and what may have influenced them to leave. Maslow's focus on the need for safety, love, and esteem are ideals for which the church is a social milieu in which such needs are actively sought and cherished. It is important that such a context be explored and established, as it serves to explain in many instances why any instances of church hurt would prove to be a deeply traumatic experience that would haunt a few of the respondents, as in some instances, respondents felt a sense of betrayal, a sense of trust being broken, and a sense of security being breached. Incidents of church hurt, in whatever context they arose, was such a significant event in the context of the respondents' lives that often times it negatively impacted how they viewed their interaction with their fellow church members and how their church members interacted with them, leading them in many instances to question their own faith. In the latter instance, a few respondents viewed church hurt as a betrayal of the scriptures, since the people they looked up to or expected to behave differently, given their faith, contravened or contradicted their expectations in situations where they expected them to be there for them. What this reflects is that along with the conception of the church as 'family,' there rare social expectations and behaviors that are consistent with images.

As such, when respondents were asked, "When you think of the church, what readily comes to mind?", the above responses tend to predominate. This indicated that their conception of the church is infused with certain ideal qualities, intimating the various needs that they expect the church to fulfill. Maslow's (1943) conception of needs

of love (social need), the need to have the need to have good standing, respect and deference from others, (psychological) safety, are all implicit in the respondents' initial conception of what church means to them; whether it is an idealistic model or one reflecting/projecting needs or qualities that they are looking for, the point is that the church is an entity that one expects such needs to be met. The church is often seen as a safe social space, a safe haven, and a place of acceptance where one experiences a sense of belonging to worship and grow with fellow worshippers. This is a strongly felt and highly valued need/desire, and when it is violated, often times it is the source of emotional and psychological distress, leading to what the respondents referred to as "church hurt." The latter point brings into focus the second theoretical perspective in this study, that of Social Constructionism. This is a perspective that is centered on the nature and construction of knowledge, how it develops and how it comes to have the importance for society. In the main social constructionist perspectives, the theory posits that many aspects of one's daily existence are a function of unspoken social pacts, institutional, or social actions, rather objective reality. As such, they attain significance within the context of social interaction and do not exist independent of human subjectivity. Social Constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practices people engage in as the focus of enquiry (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). This is relevant because when the respondents are positing their conceptions of what "readily comes to mind when they think of the church", they are revealing aspects of their worldview on what the church should be about, which reflects a duality in the manner in which language communicates their reality of what the church should be about while also informing/influencing their

social interactions at church. Thus, analysis of language and communicative patterns, as best afforded by scrutinizing the language in the interviews, illustrate key elements of social constructionism. For example, when the church is seen as a family, it depicts an ideal that is both descriptive and reflective of social ideals and practices within the church.

Another main tenet of Social Constructionsim is that it views society as a duality that is both an objective and subjective reality. The former is brought about through the interaction of people with the social world, where they establish patterns and routines of communication and social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The earlier mentioned depictions of the church is reflective (ideally) of how members of churches interact with each other and illustrates and replicates the said patterns of social interaction in reality. Therefore, when social practices such as church hurt arise and negatively impact the established (and expected) patterns of social interactions, then a social pact has been breached. The established and accepted norms of communication and social interaction have been breached, which may result in a new one being established within the said social context (church) or new social context (church) that conforms to one's ideals (and also meets one's needs).

It must be kept in mind that because of the focus of the study and the self-selecting nature of the respondents for the study, there is a built-in bias to see the church in a predominantly negative light. However, as the following chapters will illustrate, to see Church Hurt as a standardized and consistent concept is to miss the nuance and complex nature of the concept and the experience. What shall be an exploration of the Church Hurt experience and what is hoped to be illustrated is that the respondents had a

diverse range of reactions, emotions, and at times conflicted perspective of what the experience meant to them. Some respondents may have negative reaction while undergoing it, but had the opposite view in retrospect as an experience they embraced, while some respondents had a wholly negative experience and would not wish it on their worst enemy. For some, it led them to question their faith, spirituality, and their relations with their fellow congregants, while for others it simply reinforced their faith in God. How one reacts to the Church Hurt experience is simply a function of circumstance and individual personality. However, what will become clear is that when one starts the study from the above backdrop of the church as an emotional, psychological, and spiritual bedrock, a refuge, and a family away from home, then it serves to better understand the nature of the Church Hurt experience that will be explored next.

Sense of Loss or Transformative

While the seemingly straight forward religiosity-health link is well documented, as discussed earlier in the review of the literature section, it is really just that: a well-established associative link, not a causal relationship (Bergin, 1983; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Fincham et al, 2008; Pargament, 1997; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Levin et al., 1994; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009; Taylor et al., 1996). It was further noted that there are a few studies examining the negative element to the religiosity-health link as having a deleterious impact on one's psychological well-being. One area that has been the focus centers on the negative interactions with fellow church members, more specifically, those arising from interpersonal conflict in the church (Krause, Ellison, & Wulff, 1998) such as Church Hurt.

While there does not necessarily exist a direct causal relationship between the occurrence or presence of conflict(s) within the church and the incidence of church hurt, the connection between the two cannot be lightly dismissed or ignored. Within the literature, there is an implicit association with the two factors that tends to be explained by the following logic: conflict(s) within the church may cause, discord, disharmony and discontent within the church, which may contribute to the occurrence of church hurt (Krejcir, 2007; McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Niemala, 2007; Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Stokes, 2001; Thomas, 1990; Uecker et al., 2007). The strength of association between the two factors may be influenced by the cause, nature, and scale of the conflict. This study explores the religiosity-health social experience from the opposite end of the spectrum: it focuses on the negative subjective/psychological experience of those who have encountered adverse experience(s) with their church as well as a distinct response to this situation, those who left their church as a consequence.

The work of Stephen Mansfield (2012), entitled "*Healing your Church Hurt: What to do when you still love God but you have been wounded by his people*," has focused on the possibility fact that the church could actually be a source of psychological distress or trauma. Mansfield's (2012) concept of church hurt, as outlined earlier, depicts it as a deeply traumatic experience that may cause a person to question his/her faith, lose (social) connection with their fellow congregants, and worse, leave their church for another to ensure his/her needs (as outlined above) are met. According to Mansfield (2012), 'Church Hurt' is a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship and the effect is so dramatic that while the person still has faith, his or her trust in the church has failed. The traumatic

element of the experience occurs when a place of trust and spiritual and social connection becomes a place of rejection, anguish, and disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even reject one's church. Mansfield's (2012) perspective is, however, tinged with an optimistic slant when he argues that while church hurt can be a source of a lot of "emotional pain" (p.65), it also is an opportunity that "…can make us better if we go through them in a redemptive way" (p.66). The heart of Mansfield's (2012) call is to accept the church hurt experience and embrace it as a potentially transformative opportunity, a 'blessing in disguise,' and an experience that should be welcomed because it could become a catalyst for receiving God's blessing and becoming a more developed/evolved person in the spirit/teachings of Christ. So, the church experience is both a painful and traumatic experience but it is also a catalyst for spiritual and personal transformation.

Analysis of the interview transcripts offered substantive proof of both sides of the coin. It is on this basis that two (2) distinct themes emerged when analyzing the narratives of the church hurt experience. The first is those who saw it as deeply painful and traumatic experience to the point that they left their church. Then there is the second group, who, while acknowledging the painful nature of the church hurt experience, saw it as a transformative experience and either reconciled with the offending party or had the issue resolved and stayed with their church, either through defiance or just to put the incident behind them and framed the church hurt experience as one that 'made them a better person.'

The former group will be labeled as a '*sense of loss*,' while the latter group will be labeled as a '*transformative.*' The former tended to encompassed situations spanning

issues of betrayal by the pastor or congregants who were close to the offended party; in some instances, due to the nature of the situation, the offended party (whether real or imagined) experienced a sense of ostracism that deeply affected the quality of their social interactions and made their continued attendance at the respective church untenable. In most instances, it was not a matter of their faith/spirituality coming into question. In the cases outlined in the four (4) illustrations below, they all left the church they were in; all cases reflected a deep sense of betrayal in the manner in which they were treated. Hence, they could not continue to attend the chuch, as the respective incidents were just too painful and the nature of the social relationship with their respective churches ended because they felt their needs were not being met. In the first instance, David felt humiliated and betrayed in the manner in which he was bypassed for the leadership of the church, especially since he was lead to believe he was being groomed specifically for the post over a decade-long period. The fact that when he tried to have the matter addressed he was told to go and read certain scriptures in the bible for the reasoning behind the decision did not help matters.

> I know church hurt, I know that very well. It reached a point, and I will leave it alone, they selected a pastor, after my pastor who had been there for over thirty seven years and had retired...in his retirement his request was he wanted me to be …Because I was the last pastor he licensed and ordained to be selected to pastor his church, this really hurts. I got a call. I think over thirty something people applied, I was at the top five, and I don't know how that was reached. The church came together to vote on the final three. I was in the top three. Two was eliminated. They selected a guy who was from Alabama, not even from Broward

> County, he did not have nothing to do with this church. He was a Missionary Baptist reverend, they figure because he was a few years older than I was, I was just thirty, they would select him over myself, and could not even could not understand. This church raised me to do this. My pastor invested the churches finances for the next pastoral preacher for this ministry to be myself or the other guy who left. When I found out, I had to hear, I had to wait on a phone call, the head deacon says, they selected the pastor who was there now, because they feel you are too young and it may be a risk for the church to give you pastorage, and the car automobile, …it hurt me, it hurt my mom as well, since she was the secretary, she was the financial, she did pretty much, I was born in this church. To see the people who had a hand in raise in me, house me…this is what I had to deal with. But I have to overcome that so…**(David, interview #1)**

In Deidra's case, the quoted passage outlines the 'tip of the iceberg,' as it was not just a case of an overbearing pastor, tt was also when Deidra confided in him and he decided to use her personal information as the basis of his of some of his sermons. Given that it was a small church of less than thirty, it was not hard for some of the congregants to guess who he was alluding to. The situation escalated into a case of the pastor stalking her, becoming manipulative and overstepping the boundaries of a pastor/congregant relationship, to the point of Deidra having to withdraw from the church due to the improper nature of the evolving relationship and because she did not feel her pastor was fulfilling her spiritual needs.

> But in this particular church the particular apostle that we call them he went by the title Apostle even though he was the pastor of the church and so he invited me

> to come back and so they would have church services every night of the week which was okay because it's never too much to praise and worship but then there were times that I wasn't able to make it to church because of work I had a family and a daughter and a husband who was at sea so there were times that I could not make it to church and if I could not make it he would actually call me or to have one of the deacons called me to tell me to come. And if I didn't come then he would hold it against me in some kind of way and sometimes he would hold grudges or speak differently or even not speak to me. There were times that I shared personal things with him and he brought them out before the church and I'm not comfortable with some of the things that he would share about me before the church so after being there for a while it made me think that maybe this wasn't the place for me to be you know to be able to go because it was so intense and there was so much going outside of the word of God. **(Deidra, Interview #6)**

In the case of Jacqueline, the situation, as outlined below, is fairly straightforward. She was requested to take up a post at the church she attended for employment and after a four month period, was unceremoniously fired without notice. Apart from the circumstances of the source of church hurt, she met a stone wall of silence and uncooperativeness. While it was primarily a secular matter dealing with substantive issues, given that it occurred in a church setting that had implications for social relations within the church and the fact that the matter was never satisfactorily resolved, she unsurprisingly left the church.

> I was actually called away from my job to come and work for the church. And for months after I left my job to come and work for the church the church fired me

> for no good reason and left me as a single person jobless and unable to pay my bills and they did it in such a way that you it really hurt me to my core. The thing about it is that a tax the church at the time because you know they fired me in mid-June and when it came time for me to pay my rent in July I didn't have the money so I sought help from the church and they totally ignored my call for assistance. You know I sent an email and also left voicemail and they totally just ignored me altogether. It was hurtful because there was no form of assistance that was given to me no form of even consideration for assistance that I pleaded for. They did not even give me time to find a new job they let me go suddenly and so to me it was a lack of empathy, it was a lack of care, there was a lack of concern and for me not the love of God being on display in that situation. **(Jacqueline, Interview #13)**

In leaving that particular church, she did reveal that apart from the manner in which she was mistreated, she mainly left because her needs were not being met by her church and her new church met those needs. As the quote below reveals:

> I was looking for a Ministry that was teaching the word of God and not just teaching but living the word of God I was looking for a place where I could grow you know the Lord gives us gifts and talents and these are for the building up of the kingdom and so I wanted to be a part of building the kingdom of God so I was looking to do that in a local congregation. **(Jacqueline, Interview #13)**

Another case of a respondent who left her church because of how she was treated was Marlene, who was badly treated by her church. Below she outlines the context in which the incident transpired:

> Well I was born and raised in the church I've been in the church my entire life church was all I knew and then I got to an age of understanding where I experienced Church Hurt because I was looking for them to help me but yet I was being rejected. For example my cousin who was the pastor and the previous church I went to people began to judge me based on how I presented myself because I guess I wasn't living up to the standard of the church I couldn't wear pants and I couldn't wear jewelry I had to wear a skirt and so when I did they said is that the pastor's family that is walking around not living up to the scripture. I was trying to do things with the group and I remember even my sister we paid our funds to be a part of this group to go in and then we never got the call to come and participate in any activities. Even when we would try to participate they will tell us how we were doing it wrong like I try to do things and they were telling me that it was doing wrong everything I did was rejected and so I felt like I didn't want to go to church anymore I started to know people and I started to know their personal life too much and the more I got to know them is the more I didn't or rather no longer believe in the gods that they were preaching about. However, as I got more mature I recognize that the church is Christ enough people and because I was immature at the time I was looking to the people and so when they begin to hurt me I didn't want to have anything to do with God because I view them as god. **(Marlene, Interview #2.)**

Here, Marlene experienced a ‘classic’ case of Church Hurt: when an incident occurs, the respondent is treated badly and inappropriately by the church (and by extension its congregants); she is in fact ostracized, the needs that she felt that the church

would provide for her are not met, and she feels betrayed. The experience leads her to say "It altered my vision on people in general it out of my relationship with my face I got to a place where I believe that it didn't take all of that I really wanted to live out the call that was on my life in a sense… I really didn't want to be bothered with church people with church affiliation." It altered her whole opinion of her religion, due to the behavior of her fellow congregants. She felt rejected. She further opined that, "I felt like the church people they were all walking around with masks and so I didn't want to be in that myself." She basically felt that her fellow congregants, who called themselves Christians, were not living up to their Christian ideals and were being "fake." Eventually, due to the uncomfortable nature of the situation, she decided, "I left because of the disconnection that I felt within my church. I left because I was not accepted. The ministry that I wanted to participate in was spoken against and I couldn't dress a certain way. I heard so much I couldn't that I didn't know if I could."

Unfortunately, the manner in which Marlene left her church is not uncommon, as there was an intergenerational element to the situation because she was a relatively younger member of her congregation and the 'elderly' members of the congregation disapproved of her manner of presenting herself; she was socially ostracized and she felt rejected. However, in looking back, Marlene did have the opinion that the experience made her stronger and that the she cannot put all the blame at the feet of the church in how the matter was ultimately handled, as when she revealed:

> I think church hurt comes from comes from the lack of maturity on the person receiving the hurt and it is because I didn't really know god. When you know god you would recognize that we are the church when god is in us and when we don't

know this then we look to people. We have to take accountability of what we encounter at church. I say this that I get hurt at my job all the time and I don't stop from working because I get a pay check at the end of two weeks. But in the church people tend to blame god. However if we would say hey you hurt me then I believe that it can be resolved. As I said I didn't even seek help I just blamed others and ultimately god and left the church all together**. (Marlene, Interview # 2)**

As the above four (4) quoted passages illustrate, when incidents occur that do not meet the expectations of individuals who feel their sense of justice and moral values are impinged upon, their need for feeling respected and safe is negatively impacted; it has real life repercussions with respect to their belief in the church as a place of sanctity or as a safe social space. When that social pact is broken, in some instances their world view of the social context is impacted and the church is no longer is the place they envisioned. This has a negative impact on the social relations within the church context, as the social harmony and equilibrium are disrupted and decisions are made to have those needs met elsewhere. When the church becomes a site of conflict, especially a conflict that is at odds with one's spiritual values and moral compass, it may negatively impact one's social relations within such a context, especially given the morally distinctive nature of the social context within which the conflict or dispute occurred. Thus, for some individuals, they may need to relocate to an alternate social context (church) that is consistent with those values, hence the decision to leave a particular church for another after an incident of church hurt.

Closely aligned with the above theme of "loss" are the respondents whose church hurt arose from either a sense of being judged and experiencing a sense of ostracism or social isolation and those respondents who felt betrayed by their pastor. An example of this is the participant whose pastor, when they were confided in, used the personal information as material for their Sunday sermons, personal information shared in a personal sphere and then shared in a public setting to parties who were never the intended audience. This was irrespective of how the respondent eventually dealt with the church hurt experience, because the sense of betrayal was the source of the church hurt experience:

> I started dating a guy and shared information with head leaders of church. He is currently incarcerated and he wanted to engage in marriage quickly and as such I shared the information with one of the head leader who in turn contacted my mother and sister as if I was a child. Although it was done out of concern it was a form of betrayal as when information is shared with leaders it should be kept in confidence and not taken from that setting and being discussed outside of you and that particular person. That is how is experienced my church hurt…It made me feel like I could not trust head leadership and it made me feel like if I could not go to my leaders to talk about major decisions about my life who could I go to? I mean I could go to God but the leaders were placed to shepherd my soul and if I could not go to them in confidence then who could I turn to? It made me feel like I couldn't really trust my leadership which is the more damaging part of the church hurt. **(Stephanie, Interview #3)**

In the case of Adrienne, the betrayal of trust by the pastor of the church was both the source of church hurt and a negative influence/impact on the ongoing church hurt experience. Unfortunately, these occurrences of the pastor or fellow congregants betraying the confidence of the confidant is not uncommon and was featured in many of the respondents' narratives. The use of Adrienne's narrative is both illustrative and insightful in the deleterious impact this aspect of church hurt has. The excerpt below also alludes to an issue that will be touched upon later: the ineptitude, the inability, or, in some cases, the mere incompetence of how those in authority or with influence deal with the various guises that church hurt incidents may arise from. Below is an incident of domestic violence that the pastor chose not to investigate and, to make matters worse, used the congregants personal narrative as source material for her Sunday sermon. This was clearly a situation that exploited the victim emotionally and psychologically in an abusive manner and lead to a breakdown in trust at a time of vulnerability:

> My first experience as far as getting hurt in the church was when I was a young child and my mother one of the missionary in the church was married to a deacon the only because that was in the church. And he physically abused both my mother and myself. He wasn't my dad just my step dad and this abuse went on for years and we tried to talk to a pastor who was a female at the time and to let her know what was happening because we were afraid to tell anyone else we were afraid to tell family members…. I guess I was hurt because I believe that the pastor would have investigated what was going on we were coming to church with bruises and there was one point when I went to church and I could not sit down on my rear and because of how sore it was from the beatings.

> There are also stuff that I confided in the pastor about as it pertains to my father you know I went to him and spoke to him for direction and he was preaching my business on the pulpit for Sunday message. And I was like God are these the people that you said over me to watch over my soul if I cannot confide in them if I cannot come and see her when I was younger I did this and I did that and it's affecting me how do I have move past it without it being preach over the pulpit has a message which it should not be as a message. **(Adrienne, Interview #4)**

The case of Robert further highlights the issues of betrayal of trust play in the church hurt experience. As you will see, it was a very sensitive situation that a very active parishioner in the church was facing, in which it was intimated that he had acquired HIV/AIDS due to the sudden weight loss over a short space of time. What is most illuminating of Robert's narrative account is the concluding remark that he makes when he reflects on the whole experience and the role that the betrayal of trust by his pastor played in leaving his church eventually.

> The first one for me that really really hurt is that I had a best friend at the time and I was also the best man in his wedding there was a time that I had a thyroid problem and so it resulted in me losing a lot of weight rapidly in all I probably lost about 75 pounds in 1 year and so I went down to about a hundred and sixty pound and not only did my best friend but also the pastor at the time had it to say that I had AIDS. because these are people that I knew and I spend more time with them than I did my family I that was very active in the church and what they did not only did they say I have AIDS but when I was around them if I used a dish at their house or a cop and I washed it and put it back into the Container they would

> take it out and we watch it or they would throw it out and it really hurt because as I said before these are people that I have traveled with I was always around them Saturday's I would be at their house and Sunday I will be with them at church. It's people that know me quite well and they had it to say that I got AIDS from a young lady that was in the church who was a prostitute and God saved her and fill her with the Holy Ghost and it just so happened that we work at the same location so because we were co-workers we were somewhat close and so they spread the rumor that I got it from her and it really hurt because these are people who should have known me better...
>
> I think one of the things that I was looking for is whether or not I could trust the pastor though mainly because of the fact that the church that I was coming from I could not trust that Pastor because if I told him something it was a short fact that you would hear it from the pulpit the following Sunday and if your name wasn't called people would still know it was you because of how much details this would be given about your life... **(Robert, Interview #8)**

It must be noted that how Robert is 'classified' for this study is problematic because he falls into both labels of this study, in that he did eventually leave his church because of the incident cited above; however, he did also view the experience as something that made him stronger, when he reflects,

> It's not something that I would wish on anyone especially if you're not strong enough but I personally believe that if I had not gone through some of the things that I have been through in church. I don't think I would be able to encourage people new converts because I recognize now that I can share when someone

come to me and say you know I'm really hurt about this particular situation and how should I deal with this particular situation how do you handle being hurt. He was merely included at this juncture of the study for illustrative purposes, because the role that the pastor played in betraying his trust, while not the primary impetus of the church hurt experience, played a major role in his ultimate decision to leave his church.

However, it must be noted, as outlined by Mansfield (2012), how church hurt is handled may boil down to just a function of personalities involved and social circumstances. In an objective sense, it is not necessarily how bad the incident is, but how the respective individual(s) perceives/frames the situation and chooses to handle the situation that is key. From another perspective, church hurt is both a personal/individual experience and an interpersonal experience that attains a social element making it a social phenomenon because of the repercussions it has for impacting social relations within the specific social context of the church it occurs in. Interestingly, as will be outlined below, when dealing with church hurt that is viewed as '*transformative*,' there is not much objective difference in the harshness/cruelty of incidents of church hurt; however, for whatever reason, the individuals handle their situations differently. In some instances they viewed church hurt as Mansfield (2012) posited, one that is a positively transformative experience.

Irrespective of whether the sources of church hurt emanated from instances of betrayals of personal confidences or the spreading of malicious rumors, even if by very close associates, the individuals below (they were not the only ones of the sort, but were chosen mainly for illustrative purposes) all remained with the respective churches that the church hurt occurred in after the incident. In many instances the relationship between the

'transgressed' parties and their 'offenders' actually improved or they saw the experience as a catalyst of personal and spiritual growth:

> I started dating a guy and shared information with head leaders of church.He is currently incarcerated and he wanted to engage in marriage quickly and as such I shared the information with one of the head leader who in turn contacted my mother and sister as if I was a child. Although it was done out of concern it was a form of betrayal as when information is shared with leaders it should be kept in confidence and not taken from that setting and being discussed outside of you and that particular person. That is how is I experienced my church hurt. **(Stephanie, Interview#3)**

In the case of Stephanie, she remained with the church and maintained her relationship with the person who caused the church hurt (her pastor) on the grounds that "everyone will make mistake and who am I to walk around not wanting to forgive others because they made a mistake. The bible says if you don't forgive your brother how you can expect Christ to forgive you." As Mansfield (2012) has argued, the Church Hurt experience can be framed as an experience that should be embraced, since it could become a catalyst for receiving God's blessing and becoming a more developed/evolved person in the spirit/teachings of Christ. This is a point reiterated by Stephanie and the other respondents below when looking back at the church hurt experience. Stephanie demonstrated this when she stated, "For me I am thankful for the lesson as it has allowed me to recognize that my relationship with God should always be stronger than with an individual." The Church Hurt experience was an occasion to put into practice the teachings of the bible in basically forgiving the individual for his transgression.

Natalie's situation similarly reflects what transpired in Stephanie's case, in that she remained with the same church that the incident occurred in; even though the situation was one that she admitted openly hurt her deeply, she called on her faith and her love of the lord to deal with the situation. In the aftermath of the incident, it affected how she looked at her fellow congregants, as she ended up being frozen out of several positions she had previously served on and being ostracized by a few of her fellow congregants. The gist of Natalie's situation is outlined below:

> My experience was due to a broken marriage. It started where I had been in the church for years and then got married and brought my husband into the church. So it is a situation where I have been into the church for years and my husband is new to the church. It so happened that the marriage did not work as such we went to the pastor so a decision could be made as to what were to do. It was not working so we decided that separation would be best. He took everything to the church and I don't know if it was because he was a man I don't know. However the church folks took side with him. Now here is a man that just recently came into the church and the church took side with him. I have been going to the church for over 5 years and here is a man that has come into the church does not have an identity for himself, he is only known as my husband and the situation did not work we decided to separate and people start taking sides. Now this is where the hurt comes in where people that should have known better or I would have thought would have known better handled the situation badly. They would have their little clique, they were talking about me, and they stopped talking to me.

> I couldn't figure out what was going on but he had everybody twisted. He had his side of his story, nobody came to me and asked for my side of the story.
>
> Everybody had their own story, everybody was doing their own thing they had my name all over the church and that just hurt to the max. When you sit and think about that this is a church that I have served in and worked in and people were treating me like this?
>
> It got to the point where there was one particular sister who we were good friends who served together on the same committee and we used to sit together. It got to the point where she was now sitting at the other side of the bench.
>
> Now we are talking about Christians folks, church people and she started to sit at the other side of the bench and she started to throw her words and her shade at me and I all I did was decided that I was not going to stop going to church because I know who I am, whose I am and I am not going to stop going to church. So every Sunday I am telling you this went on for months. 99% of the folks passed me and would not say a word to me. I would just go every Sunday and literally cry.
>
> Now what my husband would do is that he would come to the service and if he sees my car he would come inside and sit behind me and he would throw his words all through service. I never did this man anything. It just got to the point where it was not working and just the way that the church folks behaved that just did it for me. It really hurt. **(Natalie, Interview #14)**

Natalie's situation was amply quoted because it appropriately illustrates one example of what Church Hurt is like from the perspective of the one affected and the fairly unique characteristics of the situation, in that the Church offered her no support,

nor did the congregants. In fact, this was a situation where the church did not meet all her needs except her spiritual needs, which was more fueled by her own personal needs and her desire to have her needs fulfilled in that specific social context (church) rather than elsewhere. It was a situation that was the source of a lot of emotional and psychological distress. It was more from personal resilience and persistence that allowed her to see the situation through; as she later revealed, "I cried and prayed and fasted and meditated. Also because I am mature it allowed me to just deal with the situation. I told you that I went every Sunday and all I did was cry but I wouldn't stop going until eventually it just went away. I really just ignored all the alienation." However, what is more revealing and insightful regarding her decision to remain in a seemingly untenable and socially uncomfortable situation in the aftermath of the incident, was the fact that "I love the lord I love him and that is why I remained. I said lord I love you and I am not leaving this church and make it seems like I am running. I said God you are good to me and I will not leave the church. Yes, it is my love for God that caused me to remain." What is interesting about Natalie's situation is the fact the she remained in the situation "until it just went away." That is, the church did not actively nor effectively address the situation, it was just left as is. There seemed to be no policy, procedure, or process to deal with the situation; this was a case of the church abdicating its responsibility to be a 'safe' place for all its congregants.

The situation of Terrence is a bit different, in that he remained with the church for a period after the incident outlined below, but eventually left but again for reasons unrelated to the incident:

> One of the most prominent word that comes to my mind now is when I was asked by one of the leaders to manage a very to store and while I was doing so they came to me and expressed that they were experiencing a financial loss and that they were convinced that I was the one who was stealing the product and given to others so as to help them which resulted in them experiencing a loss…This was very hurtful as I have been trying to live honestly and therefore this was a deep wound in my soul to be accused of being dishonest. it impacted me so much because I was a minister and I was held in high regards with the congregation that I have been ministering to for years so this would totally deformed my character as such it caused me to cry to lay on my stomach and my face in the dirt and cried. I remember just lean on the door and crying crying until the dirt even got around my eyes and in my nostrils because of the anguish and the pain that I felt inside of being accused of such a horrible thing. **(Terrence, Interview # 10)**

Terrence's situation is similar to Sean, another respondent who had a similar demographic profile to him, in the sense that he relied on the power of prayer, forgiveness and reconciliation mainly due to his position of Bishop in the church. Normally, most of the interviewees in the study were lower level members of their respective churches; in this instance, the incident occurred with a relatively senior member of the congregation:

> I relied on God to do whatever it is that he said he would do. and just as God said he would work it out he did move up on the children to confess what they had done and for the leaders to come to me and apologize so I learn to trust the word

> of God as such there was no need to take the matter to the church or to members of the board to get it resolved. **(Terrence, Interview# 10)**

Terrence went on to narrate how the situation ultimately unfolded and how he felt about the experience in retrospect. As outlined, Terrence depicts a perspective that Mansfield (2102) supported when he implores those who have been wronged to "find even the smallest opening of compassion for their lives that *charizomai* spirit of mercy and grace can flow in. Forgiveness can reign and you will be free" (p. 109).

> I remained in the church for a time because I was waiting on God to show me what to do I waited in that church on to my heart forgive so that my heart did not Harbor bitterness or malice and when my heart is at the right place then the Lord will allow me to leave not because of the hurt but you usually because I had outgrown the level of ministry that they were given in those congregations and the Lord allowed me to move on. **(Terrence, Interview # 10)**

The situation of Sean arose out of an interpersonal conflict with another of his peers in a professional sense. Below, he outlines the essence of how the situation unfolded:

> The one that came to my mind especially as one that occurred which leaders where someone whom I trusted and known from I was 9/ 10 years old was attending our church and how he reacted because he had a short temperament He wanted to usurp leadership and First time when I stood my ground regarding his actions he left the church but then after a while he came back and I welcome him with open arms and I you know reinstated him into his position of leadership because you know he was someone that I was really grooming for the ministry.

So this time around when he came back you know he still had the same attitude and so to resolve the issue that was at hand being the pastor I decided that I was going to have a meeting with him of course my wife was there and some of the Elders of the church and so we spoke to him regarding his attitude and to me it went well because you know when the meeting was done we both hugged and shook hands and stuff and then he left the meeting and the left the church all together and then started to spread rumors with members of the church that the reason why he left is because I chewed him out in the meeting and you know I was very disrespectful to him and so he was pointing fingers at me to make it seem like I was a bad leader and you know some members of the congregation believed him even my mother was saying to me why is it that I did that but I promise that I didn't do anything like that my wife and all the other Elders were there and they can attest to the fact that the meeting went really well no we left without any form of animosity so I am not sure as to why he reacted the way that he did.

So he continued to spread a rumor that I was disrespectful and arrogant when I was dealing with him which was really not true and so after a while I heard that what he did was to open another church somewhere in all some of the factors that are in the church informed me of this and I am not at Liberty to recall their names but they informed me that he started a church even close by to where this church is actually located. His actions really left me one day you know I really really hurt because I didn't do anything to Warrant such a behavior from him and so I was really hurt in the way that he handled the situation. I believe that he acted the way

> that he did because he had his own agenda and all his own agenda of starting his own church and that the reason why he did what he did and it really hurt me it was really painful for me. **(Sean, Interview #12)**

It must be noted that Sean, like Terrence, is someone of authority within his church; he is the Pastor of his church, and the situation involved an understudy that he was in fact grooming for a leadership role in the church, as someone who could possibly replace him eventually. Despite efforts to resolve the situation with his protagonist in an amicable manner by meeting face to face with others present, the situation escalated to the point his protagonist left his church and opened up his own church nearby. Sean undertook all the recommended steps that the situation required, but to no avail. It must be noted that during the course of the interview, Sean revealed several other instances of Church Hurt he experienced as the Pastor of his church, but, at no point did he ever contemplate leaving the church or questioning his faith. In an insightful comment he stated, "I remained because I believe that I am called to that church. I am not the only individual called and so it is my responsibility to do God's work until I am promoted to something else or somewhere else as God sees fit. I am a fighter I have patience and resilience in life and so that has helped me remain in my position."

Sean was, however, emphatic on the transformative/redemptive element to the whole Church Hurt experience when he revealed that the Church Hurt experience(s), in retrospect, allowed him to grow on an individual, spiritual and professional level.

> It made me stronger. It builds me up as giving more experience to help other pastors or younger pastors to stay put until God help them to overcome the

> situation. And to ensure that I advise them that the pulpit is not a place to get even with others. It is not something that I want to go through every time as it is detrimental to your spirit and also to your body It causes a lot of stress and causes your blood pressure and sugar to level to raise and so it causes a lot of stress and so that is my evaluation of the experience **(Sean, Interview # 12)**

George's situation is also distinctive in the sense that how his experience of Church Hurt was resolved had a lot to do with how the members of the church handled the situation. A meeting was held to directly address and resolve the situation and there were members who reached out to him during the course of the situation, as illustrated in the quotation outlined below:

> I will have to say that one ….my most recent experience was when I felt forsaken because I had an experience where I was in relation with a young lady getting to know her and basically the church did not approve of our relationship and when that went sour between the young lady and I she told lies on me and thought that the church would have been there as a community to offer strength but rather what I experienced was the total opposite and because of that it kind of opened up my eyes to realizing that sometimes persons will preach and teach out love but when it comes on to showing it expressing it there are times when individuals are left wanting because of this I almost left church almost came out of ministry almost lost my footing but thank God there was an older lady who out of everyone she showed me love and compassion she took the time out to meet with me sat with me listened to what I had to say and realized that I had found myself in a vulnerable place and rather than opening up my shame and publicly

> humiliated me what she did was to take me in and showed me where I went wrong and also showed me the path as to how to establish my footing and because of that one individual I am still in the church even though I have been hurt by that church. **(George, Interview #11)**

George's situation is distinct in the sense that in a lot of the other cases of Church Hurt, the respondents did not feel the church was there for them when they needed the church; it did not fulfill its role as a place of sanctity and a safety net. It did not fulfill that need for making one feel safe or providing an emotional safety net; however, in this instance, it clearly fulfilled that role. In fact, as outlined, the respondent flourished and he grew spiritually, personally and professionally out of the experience; he is currently the Youth Pastor at the church. In fact, having gone through the experience, it places him in a position to understand and undertake his role of engaging with young people in a more effective and empathetic manner.

> I would say that it is one of my worst experience. I have had bad experience in church but this particular experience was the worst…however it was also one of my best experience because I went through all that pain all that hurt that took place today I am such an advocate for young people and for persons who are vulnerable. Persons who can't speak up for themselves publicly you know because they may be afraid to express themselves. But because of what I experience it has allowed me to develop a voice to help people so in retrospect though it was the worst experience I believe that it was one of the best experience because it helped to shape me into the individual that I am today. **(George, Interview 11)**

Central to Mansfield's (2012) conception of the transformative element of the Church Hurt experience is the concept of forgiveness, since he believes "hard things are as much ordained as blessings. At the very least we can say with the psalmist, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees" (p.122). Valid as that perspective may be, as the 'redemptive' examples of Church Hurt illustrate, for that potential to be realized, sometimes it takes more than that. In the case of George above, it had a lot to do with simple steps of simply addressing the 'situation' head on and meeting with the affected parties directly and resolving the attendant areas of concern as best as is possible under the circumstances. George's situation represents the best possible scenario outcome, whereby a potentially troubling situation that could negatively impact social relations within the church, because of the positive manner in which it is addressed or framed by the person being impacted, Church Hurt becomes a facilitator for personal growth for the individual affected, improves social relations between the affected parties, and results in a church that is better off for the experience.

The underlying theme to Mansfield's (2012) conception of the Church Hurt experience is that it should be viewed as a potentially transformative opportunity, a 'blessing in disguise,' and an experience that should be embraced, since it could be a catalyst for receiving God's blessing and becoming a more developed/evolved person in the spirit/teachings of Christ. The respondents who fell into the 'transformative' camp in the findings were consistent with a discussion raised earlier: within the bible, (church) conflict is seen as neither negative nor positive, right or wrong, but essentially a function of the natural outcome of God-given diversity and dissimilarities among unique individuals. In fact, (church) conflict, when handled properly, can result in substantial

benefits, such as stimulating fruitful dialogue; encouraging a healthy reassessment of expectations and presumptions; the discovery of new ideas, approaches, and method; and inspiring personal growth (Sande, 2004). Whatever the source of (church) conflicts, conflict can be seen as an opportunity to glorify God, to serve others, and grow to be Christ-like once the diagnosis and solutions are underpinned in the teachings of the scriptures (Halverstadt, 1991; Sande, 2004).

One of the features of these interviews is the seemingly common, but distinctive, nature of the various experiences of Church Hurt being highlighted. As has been alluded to earlier in the chapter, when asked about what the church represents to them, Maslow's (1943) conception of needs of love (social need), the need to have the need to have good standing, respect and deference from others, (psychological) safety, are all implicit in the respondents' initial conception of what church means to them. Whether it is an idealistic model or one reflecting/projecting needs or qualities that they are looking for, the point is that the church is an entity that one expects such needs to be met in. It would also partially explain why such some respondents affected by Church Hurt decided to leave their 'offending" churches and why some decided to stay. This could partly be attributed to whether these needs were being met or not, but it also alludes to another element, the disparity in the respondents' various reactions to Church Hurt, which includes an element of subjectivity that influenced their framing of their respective experiences and how they reacted to those experiences.

As a theoretical model, Social Constructionism was seen as applicable as a supplemental theoretical model for the study for two main reasons. First, it focuses on how the social experience of church hurt impacts the respondents' subjective-

psychological conceptualizing of the church hurt experience. Second, the utilization of phenomenology, with its emphasis on capturing the structure of the participant's experience based on their reflection and interpretation of their narrative(s), coincides with Social Constructionism's focus on the construction of reality within a social context. With the many quotes included in this study for illustrative purposes, insights are revealed in the mindset of the many respondents in this study. They highlight a wide range of emotions, including a sense of betrayal, hurt, confusion, determination, resilience, surprise, shock, and resignation, among others.

Social Constructionism posits that many aspects of one's daily existence is a function of unspoken social pacts and institutional or social actions rather than objective reality. As such, they attain significance within the context of social interaction and do not exist independent of human subjectivity. What this essentially means, as it came to be reflected in the interviews, is that another element of the institution/organization of the church is the implicit covenant that the church is also a site that meets certain needs; when that covenant is broken, it will involve a renegotiation of how one sees the institution of the church they attend, along with the associated social relations that are inherent within said institution. This is a process that occurs at the personal and interpersonal level, it a process that is both psychological and social psychological in nature, and it is both a subjective and an objective process.

As the interviews reveal, the occurrence of Church Hurt is an experience that can lead to a shattering of one's worldview, spirituality, faith, and 'spiritual family,' and even a reassessment of one's circle of friends. Social Constructionism provides an overarching theoretical lens for assessing insights into subjective-objective duality of the church as

both an abstract and concrete construct that spans this duality. Social Constructionism explains the commonality of the responses to the many instances of Church Hurt that have been outlined, while concurrently explaining the diversity of experiences and reactions to these same instances of Church Hurt. Church Hurt, as can be seen from these many vignettes, is both an intensely personal and social experience. As the interesting case of Natalie illustrates, even in the direst of circumstances in which one has their faith tested, is betrayed by one's church, and is ostracized by one's fellow congregants, the extreme nature of the Church Hurt in such an instance only serves to reaffirm one's faith in God at the expense of one's belief in one's fellow congregants and pastor. Social Constructionism assists in explaining such perceptive and nuanced instances of Church Hurt.

Ineptitude/ignorance in Resolving Church Hurt

The theme to be explored here is problematic with respect to how to accurately describe an issue that arose from a thorough analysis of the interview transcripts. This theme attained significance for the study because from the discussions during the interviews with the respondents, and the subsequent scrutiny of the transcripts, when reexamining the individual incidents of Church Hurt from the lens of someone in Conflict Resolution, I could in several instances pinpoint the many stages of these incidents where appropriate and effective interventions may have been initiated to possibly alter the trajectory of the experience and alleviate the negative repercussions of these experience for these individuals. The conflict with the labelling of the theme arose from the fact that the term 'ineptitude' connotes a lack of competence by those who were involved in the situation, thus implying that those who had the power, experience, resources, and skill

sets to handle such situations of Church Hurt did so in a manner that exacerbated the situation. From another perspective, there was the impulse to use the term 'ignorance' as a label for this theme. The problem with that viewpoint is that in some instances, the issue of Church Hurt was not recognized as both a concept and an issue that deserved much attention, and as such was just allowed to just run its 'natural course.' As a compromise, both terms were used to address the situation. It was, however, an issue that had to be brought up to the front of the analysis before proceeding with a discussion of the theme itself. Nevertheless, to provide some context in which this theme is to be understood, some background is essential.

The issue of conflict within a congregation is problematic, as issues of conflict within a church are not isolated incidences; in fact, the commonality is greater than most realize (McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Stokes, 2001). It is only natural that, like any organization with a plethora of different personalities, incidents of Church Hurt can arise from time to time. Furthermore, members are likely to bring conflict to the pastor/leader for direction and resolution. In socioeconomically challenged communities, geographic locations where professional psychology servers are few, or in sectors where all resolution and problem solving becomes an individual responsibility of the church members, they look to their religious leaders for direction towards their purpose.

However, the likelihood that the pastor/leader does not have the necessary skills and training can become a critical driver for church hurt (Lowry & Myers, 1991, McIntosh & Rima, 1997; Sande, 2004; Shawchuck, 1983; Stokes, 2001; Thomas, 1990). Still, to lay it at the feet of the pastor is unfair, since in many instances, when the Church Hurt situation arose, there was no formal process or procedure in place to handle the

situation. It was either expected to resolve itself by letting it play out, or, when the hurt member did turn to certain parties they expected to help, they were either rebuffed, ignored, or betrayed. The bottom line was that when certain situations erupted in the church, there was no clear path, process, or procedure on how to deal with the situations as they arose, so it lead to the conflict escalating and then petering out. The protagonists either choose to leave or remain with the church, depending on how they personally handled the conflict themselves and their respective approach in how they dealt with their antagonists. The problem with conflict within the church is that it is sometimes seen as something that should not occur; if it does occur, as in David's case, it is a situation that is left up to what the Lord has in store, with no or minimal proactive or preventative action taken to address the situation, as the following comments reveal:

> Number one seek the face of God handle nothing in your own abilities as to what you think should be done right or wrong God has a plan and so what is his direction. I would have waited, if they had waited on an answer from God not just what they feel from an emotional standpoint. Don't appoint another person unless you heard from god. **(David, Interview #1)**

In the case of Terrence, when he was going through his situation, he made it clear that:

> I went and asked the Lord why he allowed such things? Is it an issue that many people over the world have why do you allow this to happen to me? He told me that the world does not comprehend the ways of God and I too had similar views but because of the experiences that I've had and that a mother taught me to inquire of God I spoke to God and he opened my revelation as to be able to understand why I went through the things that he allowed me to go through. as a matter of

> fact the Lord gave me this passage I do not remember where it is but it goes something like this it says let the righteous smite me because when they do it will be like ointment on my head. So he caused me to understand that the hurt that comes from a righteous person not willfully but out of ignorance leave them cause they need to learn that they have hurtful ways and behavior patterns. **(Terrence, Interview #10)**

In short, they responded based on their spiritual teachings, believed that God knew what was best, and conflict and/or these instances of Church Hurt was all in God's divine plan. As such, it was best left to unravel in its own natural way, and they thought they would receive divine intervention or insight in what was the next best course of action (if any) to undertake. While it may seem baffling to the secular oriented individual, it is not a perspective that is unfamiliar in the world of the religious oriented or 'church folks.' While the field of Conflict Studies is rooted in the secular world, any understanding and the resolution of (church) conflict cannot be separated from the spiritual realm and the teachings of the scriptures. While the above quotes were in the minority, they do reveal an influential viewpoint that cannot be lightly dismissed. In fact, while this was a viewpoint that was explicitly expressed by two respondents, it is a viewpoint that undoubtedly influenced the actions, thoughts, and attitudes of some of the main protagonists involved in the many incidents of Church Hurt explored. Sande (2004) goes as far as to posit that "the more we understand and follow what he teaches, the more effective we will be in resolving disagreements with other people" (p.19).

The case of Sherina's situation, while distinct, is also troubling as it illustrates a simple case of innuendos and rumors among 'church folk' that could have been easily

resolved by having a simple sit down with all the parties to the situation concerned to clear the air and have the issues resolved. However, it was ineptly handled and allowed to escalate to the point that one of the aggrieved suffered/experienced evident and visceral emotional and psychological distress to the point of breaking down for a few minutes during the interview as she recounted the incident. She has also recounts that she had to receive counseling during the whole ordeal as she 'seemed' to have experienced something of a 'nervous' breakdown during the tail end of the incident and was subsequently diagnosed with some mental health issues. A synopsis of the background to the issue is provided below. However, for the purposes of not disclosing too much personal details that might reveal the respondent's identity, only this part of her narrative shall be outlined, mainly to highlight the seemingly mundane backdrop to the whole church hurt experience:

> There was a family that I was close to in the area that I'm now living with. The lady that I was really good friends with prior to moving to this area was really like a family you know they are Apostolic and they were actually involved in the ministry the husband at the time was the assistant pastor and he was ordained and became the lead pastor of their Church but her mother and aunt and uncle goes to the church that I go to so I was really close to them and there were times for the holidays when I wasn't able to get back home I would spend the holidays with them or even sometimes during the week I would go and have dinner with them and even on weekends as they were like my family…We became really really close she ended up passing away unexpectedly. When she passed away I wanted to be there for the family because we were really close I wanted to be there for her

daughter and for her mom and just be there because I was going through mourning her loss also as her death was very sudden and unexpected. So I wanted to be there for her family her mom and her daughter and what ended up happening is that I would spend a lot of time with her daughter and that was spend a lot of time with her mother however there was a lady in my church that end up telling my friend's mother that she should be careful for me because I would try to steal my friend's husband and to take my friend's place…then her mother did not say anything to me right away but it was interesting because during the time my friend's husband and I started to become really close and he started expressing interest in me, so the whole time this was happenin he was pursuing me but he was also going through mourning so I don't know if that was just him going through the mourning process but the whole time I was there trying to be supportive and be a strength for this family and this lady a total outsider made this comment and my friend's mother just started to treat me differently. And one day she made this comment about me being close with my friend's husband and I asked her what was she talking about and she said well sister so and so said that I should be careful for you because you were trying to steal my daughter's husband…In fact it was him that was trying to pursue me and not the other way around so what end up happening is that his parents and my friends parent and the group of friends ended up telling him that it was best that him and I do not even communicate at all or have any type of interaction or relationship at all because of all that the daughter would not talk to me she wouldn't respond to any of my text messages or my calls my friend's mom her on her uncle my

> friend's husband mom and dad and sister-in-law and then another whole extension of three other couples that were friends decided that they were just going to shut me off. **(Sherina, Interview# 9)**

The main trouble was that the respondent experienced social ostracism and isolation, based on the accounts below, by her fellow church members; at no point was there any attempt to clear the air with all the respective parties to the matter, at least none that included the respondent. Even when it was proven that there was no validity to the situation, apart from the pastor's wife asserting that she was praying for the respondent and also speaking to the alleged purveyor of the rumor, nothing else substantive was done. She was never asked to apologize to the aggrieved parties or publicly address or denounce the situation she had initiated; that seemed to be the extent of the actions taken to address the situation. Sherina, recounting what she was going through at the time, reflected

> I felt like it helped open my eyes to the fact that even though they were always saying that I was a part of their family and even though there were people that I trusted and loved they are still human beings flesh and blood who are capable of anything and that just the reality of the situation is that they are human beings and they really didn't love me because if they did they would not have done what they did so I believe that's what it showed me and to be honest it made me feel like I really have to be careful of who you allowed to get close to you because if people who are close to you are capable of doing that then you should just probably deal with people on the surface and not let them get too close to you to be able to hurt you to that depth**. (Sherina, Interview# 9)**

It is a perspective that is illustrative of a few of the respondents reflecting back on their church hurt experience. Following what they went through, they tended to lose a sense of trust and openness with the fellow congregants (for those who chose to remain in the place of worship that they experienced the church hurt, as in the case of Sherina).

However, it was the comments of David and Terrence that initially inspired the prelude which opened this chapter: are the stories instances of ineptitude or ignorance in the resolution of Church Hurt instances? If one is confronted with a 'troubling situation' and one decides to leave it in the hands of God or is awaiting guidance from above in how to resolve the situation, how does one label such an approach? Is it appropriate to label such an approach as incorrect or inappropriate when it comes to god's subjects or spiritual matters? If a (conflict) situation arises, wherein one or both parties to the conflict hold such a perspective, what is the best way to intervene? If the outcome to the said situation was labelled as 'god's will,' is it ethical or appropriate to intervene? If so, what is the best approach? Such insights are revealing and insightful, and to some extent uncover the mindset of 'church folks' when it comes to identifying and addressing the issue of conflict within the context of the church.

However, the following excerpts reveal what were the 'prevailing' sentiments of many of the respondents, with respect to whether the Church Hurt situation, in their view, could have been avoided or the effects 'mitigated' if the church they were attending at the time had handled the situation differently. Many respondents, in looking back, advanced the notion that if those who had the power or influence to make a difference in the situation they were involved in were 'better equipped' to handle the situation, then maybe it would not have been such a negative experience, or that the negative element of the

experience could have been mitigated or even averted. A quick perusal of the following quotes reveal that a few of the respondents highlighted several factors that could have had a positive impact on their experiences of Church Hurt, namely leaders in the church who were trained to handle such counseling matters and the need for better interpersonal skills by those involved for how they handled the situation. The commonality of the views expressed below highlights one of the key areas that needs to be addressed by church leaders when incidents of Church Hurt arise, and as such had to be introduced as a theme/issue of some significance, irrespective of how it was labeled.

> I don't know how leaders were selected, there really should be a process that they are trained. I don't think that people should be selected because they are faithful in attending church. I believe that the church needs to be equipped with trained leaders and this would lessen the impact of church hurt. **(Marlene, Interview # 2)**
>
> I believe that if churches have better leadership then the individuals that attend the church what not and color so much hurt today's Church need to cater for the entire human being and when you don't have proper leadership that it is impossible to cater for the entire human being. **(Adrienne, Interview #4)**
>
> At a time I would say no but after going through this event (Church Hurt) I feel that training is necessary. Not to teach how to be anointed or how to preach but how to deal with people and the issues that they are being faced. Pastors should be counsellors and should be able to lead and counsel other. They need to be trained so that they can know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate as to what to say to the people that they are leading **(Deidre, Interview, #6)**

…Yes I believe that pastors should be trained on how to deal with conflict so that they have the knowledge of how to approach it as they are going to have to deal with it. Yes I think so one of the reason why I felt very betrayed is because it was a family to me it wasn't like I just started going to the church I was going there for all my life and so I'm going to feel as if I'm really a part of it. So it was very shocking for me, it was scary, it was new and it was an eye-opening experience for me. So if they're trained they're able to help when the need arise. I don't think that they should just be placed in a position because they have a calling on your life or because they have a gift of preaching the word. If you're going to get to be the Shepherd of the flock which that's what pastors are in my understanding then they should be able to deal with the situation that they are confronted with. And if they're going to have a large church then it's going to be even more necessary because they do have so much more people to deal with and more issues to deal with **(Joy, Interview # 7)**

I recognize that in the church especially in the apostolic church that I've been associated with even though there might be a head a lot of the times when you try to talk to people regarding certain things they say that it is a figment of your imagination a lot of the issues are not taken seriously they either brush it aside push it under the rug or say I'll deal with it later and later never comes. Definitely to me I believe that if there is a more open door policy if you are hurt then you are able to say to the mother you know or evangelist or whoever you know this is what it is that is happening in my life and then the person is able to give you some Godly advice and at the same time more than willing and able to sit down with

you and discuss you. I realize that people run away from counseling in the church and I realize that some persons don't know how to deal with it you know it's not their problem and so they leave the one that is hard to deal with it by his or herself and it becomes a bigger problem it becomes more detrimental to that individual because even if they fast and pray then that hurt is still there and not a lot of people know how to deal with the fact that I'm hurt by a minister in the church. I still have to say that I still have to listen to this Minister and then the pastor is not doing anything about it or the bishop is not doing anything about it are those who are in Authority are not doing anything about it they are sweeping it under the rug and it leaves you damaged emotionally because they just want you to pray about it or get over it but it's not that easy to do **(Robert, Interview #8)**

I think it would have been better if the pastor had come and sat with me one-on-one and ask me what took place between the young lady and I you know try to find out what the situation was altogether because as I said you know it was a lie that the individual told on me and it spread through the entire church and the community so I believe that a better approach would have been to meet with us one-on-one and get to the bottom of it to unravel it from the beginning so that everyone would know that what was said was a lie and then it would not have impacted me the way that it did or impact of the church the way that it did because they would have known that this was a lie and so it would have stopped right there **(Robert, Interview #8)**

As these quotes illustrate, the negative impact of the Church Hurt situation may have been magnified or exacerbated by the manner in which the respective experiences

were (mis)handled in some instances, not necessarily in all instances, by design; however, more often than not, the situation resulted from the fact that the persons involved, or with the responsibility to handle such matters, either ignored the incidents, lacked awareness of how to appropriately or effectively deal with the incident, or just relied on the belief that somehow the matter would resolve itself. In many instances, there did not seem to be any formal process or procedure within the churches to handle such incident(s). Whatever the sources of the problem, there seemed to be a lack of resolve or possibly the skill set needed to handle the problem. In some instances, there seemed to be a glaring insensitivity or lack of empathy to the plight of the respective individual(s), which lead to the person losing faith or respect in their church leaders and congregants questioning their faith and spirituality and leaving the church. These are incidents whose negative impacts could have been mitigated and/or alleviated.

As a phenomenon, Church Hurt is inevitable, as is conflict, but the extent and the negative consequence(s) of it can be addressed and certainly curtailed, as the respondents above revealed when looking back at their experience(s). The terms ‘ineptitude and ignorance’ may be too strong, however from the vantagepoint of some respondents, Church Hurt does not necessarily have to have such distressing and demoralizing effect(s), given the distinctive social context in which it occurs, the Church. The occurrence of Church Hurt, within the Church, an institution that ‘supposedly’ embodies some of the highest ideals, should not be source of such pain and trauma, but it is, and as such, policies or strategies should be put into place to deal with incidents effectively. The respondents attended their respective churches to have specific needs met, and as such, invested their time and belief in that church, only for it to fail them at times when they

needed it most. It is possible the both church leaders and members of the congregation are unaware of the phenomenon of Church Hurt, or unaware of the emotional and psychological distress that it may be source of, but this clearly is an issue that needs more attention and resources directed at addressing it.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Chapter Introduction

Within the field of church studies, an area that has gone under the spotlight in recent years, there has been the increasing focus on investigating the link between involvement in religion and one's health (Fincham et al., 2008; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Koenig et al., 2001; Schawdel & Falci, 2012; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009; William & Sternthal, 2007). More specifically, there's an implicit religiosity-health connection. The underlying logic is that religion may contribute to subjective or psychological well-being in number of ways, such as the provision of spiritual assistance and guidance (through both good and especially bad times), personal and social support, moral guidelines or scriptural influence on lifestyle, a common and coherent ideology, organizational structure, and a force of social cohesion (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Fincham., et al, 2008; Levin & Taylor, 1993; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Levin et al., 1994; Pargament, 1997; Taylor et al., 1996).

Church hurt is a wide-ranging, yet equally specific term that covers a vast arena of social experiences. Stephen Mansfield's (2012) work, entitled "*Healing your Church Hurt: What to do when you still love God but you have been wounded by his people*," has examined the possibility fact that the church could be a source of psychological distress or trauma. Mansfield (2102) defines 'Church Hurt' as a deeply traumatic spiritual grievance brought on when an event or series of events takes place within one's house of worship and the effect is so extreme that the traumatic element of the experience results in the church becoming a place of rejection, anguish, and disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even reject one's church. However, based on this study, the

researcher concludes that Church Hurt may be defined as disagreements among individuals within the church that is seemingly nonnegotiable due to the deprivation of basic human needs. These disagreements can be morally or doctrinal based.

Dissertation Findings

The study interviewed fourteen (14) respondents, eight (8) females, and six (6) males, derived by purposive and snowball sampling methods. To attain the in-depth description that phenomenology promises, semi-structured interviews ranging in duration from forty minutes to an hour were conducted over a monthlong period. Four (4) themes were drawn from the data; the first is Sanctity of the Church, which loosely depicts what the church as an institution means to the respondents. This theme is important in a fundamental sense since it serves as a backdrop to understand the traumatic element of the Church Hurt experience. It was in this theme that the relevance of Maslow's (1943) applicability model was most relevant; by exploring and illustrating the respondents of what the church means to them, we are getting some insight into what are the needs they expect the church to fulfill for them. Put another way, this theme revealed a global idealistic, and to some extent practical, basis for what appeal a particular church has for them. Hence, terms such as 'a spiritual refuge,' 'a family,' and 'a place of safety' all highlight imagery and metaphors alluding to the church as a both spiritual ideal but also a real-life site of emotional security, with a divine and moral compass, in short, something to turn to turn to when times get rough. It is from this context that whatever transgressions or mishaps the respondents experienced must be judged. The Church Hurt experience cannot be judged in isolation or from a secular perspective in which an infraction or slight has been committed and it is a matter to simply be resolved. Many of

the respondents experienced and expressed a sense of betrayal, deep disappointment, and injustice as if an unspoken pact had been broken.

The second theme, Loss or Gain, was divided into two (2) groups: S*ense of Loss*, and *Transformative*. Overall the theme of Loss or Gain explored Church Hurt in detail by providing extended quotations of the myriad contexts in which Church Hurt experiences arose from the respondent's perspective. It was, however, divided according to the respective respondent's ultimate reaction or framing of the experience. That is, those who saw it as a wholly negative experience vs. those who viewed it as a transformative experience. For those belonging to the former group, the Church Hurt experienced tended to be a bitter, acrimonious, painful, and traumatic experience that led to them leaving their respective church. The key feature of this group of respondents were those who saw the Church Hurt experience as a painful and damaging experience and who saw minimal redeeming qualities to the experience and tended to seek another Church that would meet the needs that their church at the time did not meet. This group tended to see the Church Hurt experience as something to be put behind them. The Church Hurt experience had a negative impact on how they interacted with their fellow congregants at all levels.

The respondents who belonged to the other group had one defining feature to them: they saw the Church experience in a relatively positive light. This group of respondents tended to frame the experience from the perspective Mansfield (2012) posited, "Hard times can make us better if we go through them in a redemptive way" (p.66). Mansfield (2012) depicted the Church Hurt experience as a 'blessing in disguise,' and an experience that should be embraced, since it could become a catalyst for receiving God's blessing and becoming a more developed/evolved person in the spirit/teachings of

Christ. For the respondents who fell into this group, their views of the Church Hurt experience tended to be consistent with the view that Mansfield (2012) advocated. The experience was something that, while negative and painful at the time, was seen in retrospect as a moment of 'growth' spiritually, emotionally, and even professionally. Some may have left the church that the Church Hurt transpired at; however, most tended to stay in the same church. The main difference between both groups was how they framed the Church Hurt experience in retrospect.

As discussed earlier, the final theme, *Ineptitude/Ignorance in Resolving Conflicts*, is problematic in the choice of labels, but it was an issue that arose time after time in the interviews. This arose irrespective of which the camp the respondents fell into: the negative or positive frame of reference for their Church Hurt experience. As was concluded earlier, the negative impact of the Church Hurt experience was at times exacerbated by either ineptitude and/or ignorance in the manner with which the respective experiences were (mis) handled. Whether this was by design or inadvertent is hard to fully discern. In many instances, there did not seem to be any formal process or procedure within the church to handle such incident(s). Whatever the sources of the problem, there seemed to be a lack of resolve, or possibly the skill set needed for handling the problem. In some instances, there appeared to be a glaring insensitivity or lack of empathy for the plight of the respective individual(s), which lead to the person losing faith or respect in their church leaders, congregants questioning their faith, and leaving the church. However, the negative impact of the Church Hurt experience could have been alleviated.

Another significant feature of this theme is the fact that it was both descriptive, but more importantly, prescriptive. This involved the respondents looking back at their Church Hurt experiences, whether positive or negative, and providing their assessments of whether it could have been handled better and how it could have been handled differently (at least from their perspective). One of the key recommendations was the need for those in leadership positions at their church to undergo some form of conflict resolution training, especially in mediation. The leader(s) needed a more fine-tuned skill set to make them more empathetic and sensitive to issues pertinent to their congregants that may seem innocuous to them.

Interestingly, while Mansfield (2012) openly acknowledges church hurt as the source of a lot of "emotional pain" (p.65), he asserts that one should embrace the church hurt experience and not allow it to embitter oneself; that is to say, church hurt should be an empowering experience that ought to allow one to flourish according to one's Christian/spiritual principles. This perspective cannot be dismissed as naïve or idealistic, but is the most feasible approach when one considers the unique nature of the church environment. Given that a key objective of resolving conflict(s) is that of addressing the relational and substantive issues of the affected parties within the context of the conflict, Mansfield's (2012) approach seems to be counterproductive since it focuses on reconciling the affected party of the conflict with the negative consequences of the church hurt experience.

Authors Magnuson and Enright (2008), in an insightful article, addresses the above concerns when they posited "a three-tiered holistic psycho-educational approach called 'The Forgiving Communities'" that targets three interdependent categories: the

family, the school, and the church. The key point that Magnuson and Enright (2008) and Marshall (2000) posit is that having a forgiving church that is a spiritual institution/community which embodies the above principles in its everyday social relations is more likely to produce a social context that intrinsically addresses instances of church hurt if and when it occurs. Additionally, a "forgiving church" is less likely to possess members who resort to permanently leaving their respective church as the first and/or only solution to address instances of deleterious experiences. However, for this concept of a Forgiving Community to be effective, especially within the church, "it is important to have capable and competent leaders who can allow persons to be at different places in the [forgiveness] process while, at the same time, shaping and guiding communal processes of forgiveness" (Marshall, 2000, p. 191).

The key ingredients for *Forgiving Communities* to be effective lies with church leaders who model and exemplify key principles of peacemaking such as confession, forgiveness, and repentance at both the interpersonal and organizational level. While it is not necessarily a top-down approach, at least in the initial stages of the process, the influence of model leaders implementing the process is undeniable (Halverstadt, 1991). This leads to the next point of concern with Mansfield's approach that underscores the relevance of this study being undertaken.

Contribution to the Field

A question that arises is, why not devise an approach that deals with the church hurt experience while they are experiencing it or are still members of the church? Does any potential intervention have to occur after one has left one's church *permanently*? If that is the case, then by Mansfield's definition of church hurt, any interventions are

doomed to fail. It is in this context that a decision to study the phenomenon of church hurt attained significance as a formal study, since the study attempted to describe the church hurt experience from those who have experienced it personally, thus providing insight into how one could potentially intervene *prior* to the individual making the decision to leave the church *permanently*. As such, this study additionally contributes to the field of conflict resoulution, as the principles taught through mediation and negotiation, if applied properly, can produce a win-win outcome for participants that have encountered the church hurt phenonenon. The need to understand social relations and lessen the occurrence of non-violent conflict should not go unnoticed.

Limitations of Study

This phenomenological study focused on the lived experience of those who have undergone the Church Hurt experience. However, like all research, the researcher encountered some limitations. First, there was insufficient male participation, as the researcher was hoping for equal gender participation. However, the response to Church Hurt was similar across gender lines. Second, the unique experience of all 14 participants might not represent all the various types of hurt that congregants experience; this still needs to be addressed.

Recommendations for Further Research

This phenomenological study had a limit of 14 participants from denominational sects of Christianity, with the majority being Apostolic. Based on the findings, the recommendation is for leaders to reevaluate how conflicts within the Church are handled, and also for leaders to implement and enforce policies for resolving conflicts in the Church. For future studies, researchers could: a)expand the study to various religions to

verify the degree of hurt that exists in other religions; b) examine the impact of denominational and congregational structure on Church Hurt; c) focus on whether clergy members and family have a different reaction to Church Hurt than congregants; d) verify if congregational size impacts church hurt; e) determine if educational level impacts the Church Hurt phenomenon; and f) a quantitative methodology could be utilized to see if findings are similar.

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Appendix A: Sample Questions

1. When you think of the Church what comes readily to mind?
2. Please share your experience of Church Hurt.
3. Could you please describe how Church Hurt impacted you from when it occurred and what is your view of it now?
4. Did you take any formal actions with the Church?
    a. Does the Church have a policy or procedure to handle this situation?
    b. What action (s) (if any) did the Church take?
    c. Was it helpful or less helpful
5. Did you receive any external help or support?
    a. What was helpful?
    b. What was less helpful?
6. What influenced your decision to remain or leave the Church?
7. If applicable, what are/were you looking for in your new congregation?
8. If applicable, did you reveal anything about your past experience(s) to your new Church about what happened to you?
9. In retrospect how would you evaluate the Church Hurt experience?
10. What better ways do you believe the church could have handled the Church Hurt experience?

Appendix B: Consent Form

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
Church Hurt: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Survivors

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol #

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For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information
No Specific Site

What is the study about?
I would like to invite you to participate in a research study examining Church Hurt which will add to the knowledge related to Resolving Conflicts in Religious Organizations. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the area of Peace Studies in terms of social relations and how to lessen the occurrence of non-violent conflict. It will prove beneficial to Church Administrators, ministries and contemporary congregations. It will give survivors a voice and provide foundational data for further research.

Why are you asking me?
The approximate number of participants involved in this study is sixteen (16). You are being asked as I would like to obtain information about those who have experienced Church Hurt and how they were impacted by the experience.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to participate in a private interview face to face, which I will record on a digital recorder. The questions will be geared towards gaining information about your Church Hurt experience. You will be asked to provide detailed feedback about your experiences in Church Hurt and your understanding of the concept. This feedback may be positive, negative, or both. It is important to share honest feedback in order to determine the factors that influence this process from your unique point of view. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to terminate the interview, and withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. The interview will last between 30 to 60 minutes.

Is there any audio or video recording?
This research project will include audio recording of the interview. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, Ms. Raquel Anderson, personnel from the IRB, and the dissertation chair, Dr. McKay. The recording will be transcribed by Ms. Raquel Anderson. Ms. Anderson will use earphones while transcribing the interviews to guard your privacy. The recording will be kept securely in Ms. Anderson's home in a locked cabinet. The recording will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study. The recording will be destroyed after that time by deleting the recording. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?
Risks to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risks you experience every day. Being recorded means that confidentiality cannot be promised. Sharing your experience about Church Hurt may make you anxious or bring back unhappy memories. If this happens Ms. Anderson will try to help you. If you need further help, she will suggest someone you can see but you will have to pay for that yourself. If you have questions about the research, your research rights, or if you experience an injury because of the research please contact Ms. Anderson at (954) 822-2791. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions about your research rights.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?
There are no benefits to you for participating.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?
The transcripts of the recordings will not have any information that could be linked to you. As mentioned, the recordings will be destroyed 36 months after the study ends. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, or Dr. Mckay may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:
If the researchers learn anything which might change your mind about being involved, you will be told of this information.

Voluntary Consent by Participant

By signing below, you indicate that:

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Church Hurt: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Survivors*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____