LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY IDENTIFYING FACTORS INFLUENCING

CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH

UNCHURCHED AND DECHURCHED

FAMILIES

A Prospectus Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Jason Robert Waters

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2020

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April 15, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Many medium-sized churches experienced significant growth followed by years of declining attendance (Haskell et al., 2016). Many of them are in locations that could allow for significant growth. It seems as if some once growing churches no longer recognize how to best reach their communities and how to minister to the needs of the families making up their surrounding communities.

The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and de-churched persons and families. At this stage in the research, regular attendance and engagement will be defined as at least twice monthly attendance at a local SBC church.

Twenty-one full-time ministers and 31 members in Floridian SBC churches were selected as a cross-sectional systematic sampling to be studied in this research study. Information concerning the churches' surrounding populations were derived from the United States Census, the churches' county and city research population statistics, Lifeway Research, Barna Group, and surveys that have been conducted by the Florida State Baptist Association.

This multiple case study, a qualitative, comparative analysis was done by interviews in small groups of five subjects or less. One-on-one interviews were conducted to clarify the findings from the small group interviews. It also involved gathering information from the church's record databases. The researcher also spent significant time observing and recording habits, practices, expectations, rules, and rites of the subject churches.

Keywords: church growth, dechurched, decline, membership, medium-sized church (MSC), regular attendance, unchurched

Dedication

To my bride, Julie Parrott Waters: Thank you for your inspiring love for me and our girls, your dedication to us, your ongoing encouragement, and unquestioned willingness to sacrifice for our sake. You are my favorite part of every day. You make everyone who knows you better and me most of all.

To my treasures, Sarah Beth and Brittany: You continually enrich my life in ways that any vocabulary would fail to define. Your character, creativity, brilliance, beauty, and love for me keep me dancing with joy. I love the way God shows His goodness through you.

To the church: We will never be worthy of His love. We will always strive to delight our Savior by doing our best to reflect His character. We will pray that the Holy Spirit uses our lives as vehicles to deliver the unchanging, transforming truth of the Living Word. We are God's plan to deliver hope to the nations. We are His beloved and He is ours.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank both Dr. Troy Temple and Dr. Gary Bredfeldt for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to pursue my dream to pursue a doctorate degree. I was a long shot and you selflessly cashed in a lot of chips for me to have the opportunity. You gave me the chance to stand on your shoulders to reach for something I could not have reached without giants of faith and academia like you. I could never adequately express my degree of gratitude toward you. In my mind you are the embodiments of an ideal teacher. You seemed to perfectly balance challenging your students and encouraging us to strive for excellence. You are a big part of what makes Liberty University great! Keep training champions. Hebrew 12:1-3.

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First Baptist Church (FBC)

Florida Baptist State Convention (FBSC)

Medium-sized Church (MSC)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Qualitative (QUAL)

Quantitative (QUAN)

Mixed Methods (MM)

Participating Church (PC)

Participant Group 1 (MH)

Participant Group 2 (FB)

Participant Group 3 (ST)

Participant Group 4 (CM)

Staff (S)

Active Church Member/Attendee (M)

Nonattender, Participant from the surrounding community (NA)

Focus Group (FG)

Question (Q)

Focus Group Question (FGQ)

Participant Pseudonym Coding: First 2 letters denote participant group; 3rd Letter denotes Staff/

Attendee/ Nonattender. The last letter is a letter or number representing an individual participant.

Example: MHMA is person "A" (A) who is an attendee/member (M) of MH church (MH).

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Many medium-sized churches have experienced an ongoing decline (Haskell et al., 2016). Many long-time members have observed the trending decline in both attendance and involvement in their home churches with growing concern. The decline does not seem to be a matter of a lack of love. It may not be the fallout of some church war or even a leader's moral failure. They may work very hard and want what is best. For some reason, their continued hard work and commitment seem to have increasingly less effect on some members as well as their surrounding community.

This chapter overviews the theological, sociological, educational, and leadership concerns related to the truncation of many medium-sized churches. The background to the problem and statement of the problem was discussed first. Next, the researcher identified the research purpose statement and offered exploratory research questions. Assumptions and delimitations of the research and definitions of key terms were stated. Lastly, the reader gained an understanding of the significance of this study and presented an overview of the research design.

Background of the Problem

In recent years, many medium-sized churches experienced significant growth and then many years of consistent decline followed (Haskell et al., 2016). These are often in locations and among populations that allow for significant growth. It seems as if some churches no longer understand how to best reach their communities and how to minister to the needs of contemporary families who make up their surrounding communities. The target population and the percentage of inactive church attendees have significantly increased. There are more

unchurched people surrounding many churches than at any other time in their histories. God still loves the unchurched and expects his churches to reach them. Churches want to see their lives transformed. None the less, many Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches remain in a consistent decline.

Theological Context

As one begins to consider the questions churches should be asking about their communities it is wise to consider what the Bible says, as the guiding literature for local churches. There are two biblically fundamental areas of relational concern for this study. Each in its relation to the other can have a very significant effect on the successes and failures of the others. They are the relationship between God and his church and the relationship between churches and their surrounding communities. This review briefly examines salient biblical texts and theological considerations as identified by leading scholars in the field.

God in Relationship with His Church

The Pew Research Center finds that one in every three millennials (people born 1981-1996) have either put religious affiliation aside or never identified with it in the first place (Lipka, 2015). Former Catholic Pope Benedict XVI laments the consequence of relativism's effects on the West saying that it has led to the most serious spiritual crisis since the fall of the Roman Empire over fifteen hundred years ago (Ratzinger & Pera, 2004). In the West, the church does not reflect the continually expanding imagery described in the first chapter of Acts. It seems to be waning, instead.

John Piper, Nic Ripken, and James Smith show that God's plan according to The Bible is for the church to continually grow as the good news of the gospel is taken throughout every nation (Piper, 2010; Ripken & Lewis, 2013; Smith, 2009). God promises to be with the church to

guide, encourage, empower, protect, and help (Is. 41:10, Matt. 28:20, 2 Cor. 13:11, Phil. 4:9). He promises to give them the right words to say at the right moments as they trust him (Lk. 12:12). It seems that God has an expectation for his church to effectively reach the unchurched and continually grow in faith.

The Church and Its Surrounding Community

Rod Dreher (2017) offers a strategy for growth that also guards the rightful focus of an harmonious integrity of the local church. Quoting Ignatius, he says the church is to "expand God's Kingdom- first in our hearts, then in our own families, and then in the world" (Dreher, 2017, p. 73). He goes on to add that it is important for the church to have boundaries, as referenced in Micah 7:11. He says the church also must make sure that those borders do not stay where they are, as referenced in Micah 7:12. The plan of the church then is to continually press its borders outward. The role of the local church is to introduce Christ in areas of need and where hope is lacking (1 Pet. 1:3-6).

D. A. Carson proposes that it is important for leaders to wrestle through every major turning point in redemptive history (2012). He says that leaders must simultaneously recognize that their cultural location requires that some scriptural emphases be given higher priority than others. This allows the church to have a greater intercultural consensus on the teaching of The Bible. It also allows for a flexible arrangement around the demands of various surrounding cultures. Carson argues as a culture changes the comprehensiveness of the Gospel story and its interwoven emphases still lead to ongoing reformation, shaping, and course realignment as should be seen in every person and every culture that follows Christ (2012). His basis is that different cultures, at different times, are asking different questions about life and reality. They express their search for hope in different ways. One of the roles of the church, then is to

understand the reality of its surrounding community and apply corresponding biblical texts to best lead others to Christ as the perfect answer to their questions (Carson, 2012).

In many ways, churches that are in decline can align well with Carson's findings (2012). Their difficulty with the encompassing culture does not seem to be the result of accosting sinners in the name of righteousness (Niebuhr, 1956). The church may logically agree with what Carson says, "salt does not confront, it enhances" (Carson, 2012, p. 143). In their communities, it may be that some churches are being neither confrontational nor enhancing through their efforts.

It seems that the present station of some churches may not be a result of the wrong things they have done. The church might be more accurately described by the great things that it has overlooked doing (Collins, 2001). It may be that they are not answering the questions that the surrounding culture is presently asking. How do they discover those questions? How can a church recognize the ways that its surrounding community is expressing a search for hope?

Sociological Context

One might consider the priorities and needs of declining churches' surrounding communities shifted over time while the church did not. In a sense, the community may have begun asking different questions about life and faith. They may be expressing their need for hope in a different way.

While churches are working hard to answer important questions, they may no longer be the questions that the community is asking. If this is true, a disconnect may result between the church and its surrounding community. Kotter encourages the wise leader to recognize change is inevitable (Kotter, 2012). Navigating the innate dangers that Covey (2001) identifies with change, such as the baggage of fear, is often difficult. This is increasingly true of those who do not know what questions are being asked by the surrounding community.

David Livermore argues that "most innovators are intense observers" (2016, p. 61). Great innovations are a result of keen observation and asking the right questions (Bennis, 2009). Considering the work of these leaders in business, we see correlations related to the plight of the medium-sized church in its contemporary context. Two significant questions remain. What questions can the leaders of the church ask to get the right answers? Following this question, what would need to be done to lead the church from where it is (in steady decline) to the next stage in its growth?

Theoretical Context

Most declining churches may quickly say that they are ready for the next chapter in the life and growth of the church. After ten or more years of decline, one may ask, why have they not taken the leap into their next chapter? Why do they continue to hesitate? William Bridges (2017) says that beginnings depend on endings. The problem is that people tend to dislike endings (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). His research shows that the art of leading change successfully is not in the change itself. Rather, the art of leading change is in the (psychological) transitions people must make to bring about change. Change leads to the end of traditions, the end of habits, the end of a norm (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). These once brought satisfaction and fulfillment to their adherents. A great leader, Bridges argues, is one who knows how to honor the past and celebrate its passing without staying stuck in it (Bridges & Bridges, 2017).

To move forward into the next chapter of success, Bridges says people need to know several vital factors. They need to know the purpose, the big picture, the plan, as well as where they fit in the plan (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). These factors help move the middle 60 percent (Covey, 2009) of a group to where they need to be to be most effective. It helps to

metaphorically move the right people to the right places on the bus to work to bring about their progress (Collins, 2001).

John Kotter (2012) suggests that the biggest impediment to creating change is culture. One changes culture by adopting new values or expressing old values in a way that is more meaningful to those who hold them than previous expressions can (Sampson, 2011). To help people let go of cultural practices that keep them stuck in the past and prevent them from aligning with the present reality, Bridges' research demonstrates that leaders do better to sell problems rather than solutions (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). He helps leaders understand when people are sold on a problem, moving to a solution becomes increasingly easier.

"People do what they believe is most valuable" (Yperen, 2002, p.77). When beliefs are expressed as actions that align with one's current reality, problems are easily resolved. When one's beliefs do not align with reality, the result is conflict. It may be reasonable to consider once growing, conservative, SBC churches are experiencing decline because of a simple misalignment with reality. The ways that they believe are most effective to minister to families may no longer be the most effective. Inaccurate cultural assumptions can become a prison that diminishes the ministries of leaders (Lingenfelter, 2008).

Stephen Sampson (2011) reasons a proper understanding of culture and the gospel mission are essential to any church. Having a right understanding of one without the other leads to distortions of both (Chester & Timmis, 2008). When people can have a clear vision of both they can function cooperatively much like the key and the engine of an automobile.

Max De Pree has been a sage to many top leaders for over three decades. He believes that asking the right questions may be more important than getting to an answer (Ledbetter, 2016). Whether a resolution is a right solution or not depends on how it relates to the current reality (De

Pree, 1989). De Pree (2004) suggests many businesses approach problem-solving by simply applying guesses as solutions to problems hoping something works. The problem is, sometimes none of the reactionary guesses do the trick and businesses go under. Churches likewise capitulate. Endeavors can fail when they do not meet the demands of reality.

Jim Collins recalls a lesson from the late Bill Lazier as he said, "do not try to come up with the right answers. Focus on coming up with good questions" (2009, p. 2). Collins (2009) goes on to show how a litany of empires and civilizations throughout history is evidence that the mighty can fall. One might argue that each empire fell, as any endeavor can fall, including local churches when the selected approaches to success do not meet the demands of their reality. The question remains, how can a medium-sized church best align with its current reality in a way that leads to the church fulfilling its missional purpose? In other words, questions are being asked by the surrounding local communities and how can churches offer a solution in a way that leads them to Christ? There is a gap in this knowledge within the context of medium-sized churches who are experiencing an ongoing decline that this research has addressed.

The Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

The researcher has had the opportunity to be in leadership in a growing church. He has also had the opportunity to be in a church whose attendance had been in a slow decline for many years. This church took difficult and deliberate steps to change its direction. While the first few years of the change process were very difficult, it led to a time of growth that was unparalleled in its long history. The researcher also served in another church that had also been in a long and slow decline. He recognized some commonalities in these churches as well as others that he has helped through week-long or weekend training events and speaking events. The researcher is personally familiar with the problem and very interested in discovering more about churches that

are in decline. The objective of the researcher is that his research can lead to a solution for these churches as well as others like them.

Statement of the Problem

A healthy amount of research has been done to study businesses in decline. Researchers have identified common markers among businesses in decline and the critical differences between them and similar businesses continuing to grow and gain greater positions in their markets (Collins, 2001; Covey, 2009; Lencioni, 2012). Little has been done to discover how studies such as Jim Collins' research might relate to churches, specifically. Likewise, there a significant amount of research studying church decline in general (Barna, 2017; Earls, 2017; C. Hadaway, 1990; Mars, 2017; Martin, 2015). It seems no formal research has been done to study how medium-sized SBC churches that are experiencing ongoing decline perceive and understand the current values of their community. It appears the important life questions the unchurched and dechurched are asking may not be the questions these churches are answering. They may be answering important questions that the community has not been asking for a while. If this is the case, then the result might be unchurched and dechurched do not recognize the relevance of the church in their lives. The question is, what are the important life questions for them? How are the unchurched and dechurched expressing their search for hope today?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, was to identify factors that positively and negatively influenced mid-sized church attendance and engagement among unchurched and de-churched persons and families. Regular attendance and engagement were defined as at least twice monthly attendance at a local SBC church.

Research Questions

The following Research Questions guided this study:

RQ1. What is the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the needs of families in the communities surrounding medium-sized SBC churches (defined as those whose average weekly attendance is 300-1,000) and the people within the church?

RQ2. What is the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the primary values held by families in the communities surrounding medium-sized SBC churches and the people within the churches?

RQ3. What are the salient relational competencies that the people in medium-sized SBC churches need for the church to effectively lead families in their communities to attend their churches?

RQ4. Are there ministries the identified churches are providing to their communities that are having negligible or no measurable effect on the community?

RQ5. Are there ministries churches can offer that would best minister to the contemporary circumstances of the families that live in the churches' surrounding communities?

Assumptions and Delimitations

The researcher assumed every medium-sized, SBC church has a deep desire to reach its community with the message of the Gospel. These churches show evidence of a willingness to be sacrificial from an individual as well as a corporate stance. A consistent ultimate objective of fulfilling the Great Commission was noted.

The researcher also assumed that the dechurched and unchurched are still searching for hope and meaning in some way. There are common themes in a community's search for hope that can be identified by their expressed values and needs. Their search for hope can be best answered by the Gospel.

Delimitations of the Research Design

This research is delimited as follows.

1. This research is delimited to theologically conservative, SBC Churches.

2. This research is delimited to churches averaging 300-1000 in average Sunday morning worship attendance.

3. This research is delimited to churches that experienced significant growth leading to at least 400-1200 in average attendance between 10 and 20 years ago.

4. This research is further delimited to churches that have been in a consistent steady decline for at least four years resulting in at least a 20% reduction in overall average attendance.

5. This research is delimited to churches that have had no church splits, known moral failures among its pastoral leadership, or any similar events leading to a sudden reduction in worship attendance of 20% or greater within six-months.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used commonly through this dissertation and are defined as follows.

1. *Church growth:* An increase in the overall attendance of Sunday morning worship services or primary worship services based on an annual average. The sum of all the monthly averages in attendance for a given year must be at least 5% greater than the sum of the same twelve month's averages from the previous year.

2. *De-churched:* An individual or a family who held membership in a church according to the church's by-laws, were regular attendees of that church and are presently not active attendees in any church.

3. *Church decline:* A decrease in the overall attendance of Sunday morning worship services or primary worship services based on an annual average. The sum of all the monthly averages in attendance for a given year must be at less than the sum of the same twelve month's averages from the previous year.

4. *Membership:* One who has gained formal acceptance and belonging in a church through a vote of affirmation by the members of the church according to the church's policies and bylaws.

5. *Medium-sized church (MSC):* A church who averages between 300-1000 average attendees during their Sunday morning worship services or primary worship services.

6. *Regular attendance:* Taking part in or being present during a given church's primary worship services at least twice monthly when averaged over 12 months.

7. *Unchurched* or *nonattender:* A person or family who is not aware of having a membership at any church, does not profess Jesus as Lord, does not strive to live in subjection to the teachings of The Bible, and does not attend any church or church-hosted Bible study more than three times per year.

Significance of the Study

Pew Research estimates that one-third of millennials (people born 1981-1996) have either disengaged from church or were never engaged to begin with (Lipka, 2015). A slightly larger percentage attend but only sporadically (Lipka, 2015). It may be reasonable to consider many people who disengage from church or never considered becoming involved do so because they do not recognize the church as relevant to their current station in life or is not aligned with their personal belief system. There is also a possibility that the church has created its own culture with its own expectations and requirements that are arguably good in one manner but obtrusive to the spread of the gospel throughout the community in another manner.

As one explores The Bible, one may discover God came and spoke the local cultural language and used his host culture's common colloquialisms. He dressed in a way that was consistent with the time and that made sense to the people (Hirsch et al., n.d.). People may feel that the church is irrelevant to their lives because of the church's inattention toward meeting their needs, knowing them, having compassion for them, or being aware of what is important to those who make up the community. What is the church to do? It may begin by asking the right questions and observing how unchurched and dechurched are expressing their search for hope.

This research may help moderately large churches that are in decline, as well as many others that are not, discover more effective means of connecting with their communities for the means of evangelism. It can also help these churches to foster an atmosphere of connected community within and thus become a relational magnet for those who are outside. The research may help churches to reframe their present circumstances in a way that they can better recognize their current opportunities for growth and become more effective in their expressions of missional living.

Summary of the Design

This multiple case study, a qualitative comparative analysis was conducted using focus groups (FGs) gathering in groups of four to eleven participants. The research also involved gathering information from the church's available databases. The researcher also spent significant time observing habits and recording, practices, expectations, rules, and rites of the participating churches (PCs).

Focus groups with the ministerial staff were done in person at the PC campuses. Focus groups with the church's active membership were conducted in small groups at the PCs as well. Focus groups with members of the surrounding community were conducted in small groups near the PCs. These were compared to the statistical findings of the other research groups mentioned to better understand and to give an explanation to the data that was collected from the PCs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW
Overview

Reality can be an unrelenting and disastrous foe to leaders who are unclear about its actual constitution. It can run like a freight train over the dandelion that is many leaders' misperceived assumptions about it. Business leaders say it is vitally important to have a clear understanding of the circumstances making up reality. It does not change simply because committed leaders refuse to recognize it (Collins, 2009). Reality crushes the leaders who cannot recognize it for what it is because of their commitment to some other idea (Covey, 2009).

Long-time members may observe the trending decline in both attendance and involvement among 80% of U.S. churches with growing concern (Mars, 2017). The decline does not seem to be a matter of a lack of love. It may not be the fallout of some church war or even a leader's moral failure. They may work very hard and want what is best. For some reason, their continued hard work and commitment seem to have decreasing effects on some members as well as their surrounding communities. Exhausting every familiar method, many may wonder if there is nothing they can do to slow or stop the decline.

The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families. This review searches precedent research among Christian and preeminent leaders in the fields of leadership, business leadership analysis, and local church leadership analysis. The primary goals of this literature review are to explore the salient points of concern for declining SBC churches whose average weekly attendance is 300-1000 and to seek a viable solution to their ongoing decline. This review explores the principal theological and theoretical themes as well as the salient related literature. The researcher hopes that this review helps justify a research study to fill a gap in the literature.

Theological Framework

As leaders consider the questions churches should be asking about their community, they are wise to consider what The Bible says as the guiding literature for the local church. There are three fundamental areas of relational concern within churches. Each, in its relation to the other, can have a very significant effect on the successes and failures of the others. The first two areas of relational concern are God's relationship to the local church and God's relationship to those he elects as leaders for the church. The third is the relationship between the church and its leadership. This review explored salient Scriptural texts and theological considerations as identified by leading scholars in the field. This review is limited in scope to the context of the leadership of churches who experienced significant growth for a period then has experienced a slow and consistent decline for at least 10 years.

God in Relationship with His Church

The Pew Research Center finds that one in every three millennials have either put religious affiliation aside or never identified with it in the first place (Lipka, 2015). Former Catholic pope, Benedict XVI, laments the consequence of relativism's effects on the West saying that it has led to the most serious spiritual crisis since the fall of the Roman Empire over fifteen hundred years ago (Ratzinger & Pera, 2004). In the West, churches do not presently reflect the continually expanding imagery described in the first chapter of Acts. It seems to be waning, instead.

Micah 7:11-12 speaks of the Kingdom of God as having defined borders (walls) as well as continually expanding its borders, drawing people in from every direction. As the early church grew, Paul offered a prayer for the church of Thessalonica's increasing growth and favor within its community (1 Thes. 3:12-13). In the next chapter, he offered both a motive and instructions

for growing the church (1 Thes. 4:1-12). The book of Acts described the followers of Jesus as finding favor with others and adding to their number every day (Acts 2:47). Acts 5:14 says that the church consistently added to their number. It does not give a specific number or range but describes the people's response in faith as multitudinous. Acts 6:7 and 9:31 describe the church as continually being built up and continuing to numerically increase. Acts 11:24 (English Standard Version) says that "the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number believed and turned to the Lord." Acts 16:5 explains the church as both strengthening in faith and increasing in number. In their communities and at their period, people were asking significant questions, and the people of God gave them compelling answers to their questions. People's lost condition (spiritually wandering without direction and not knowing how to get from where they were to where they were supposed to be) was replaced by clear and evidential hope as they turned to Christ in faith (Rom 15:13-15).

The growth of the church in the New Testament was not because the conditions were conducive to easy or rapid growth. They faced very high levels of adversity. Fourteen of the twenty-eight chapters of the book of Acts report imprisonment of believers because of their faith. Chapters seven and eight describe examples of the opposition from both the Roman government and the Hebrew Sanhedrin. Acts six and seven discuss some of the inner turmoil the church faced such as Ananias and Sapphira's deception and caring for the widows who were in need. Robert Elkington (2011) argues that the imprisonment of the church's primary evangelists and leaders should have either significantly reduced the church's influence in its community. The open and public persecution should also have made members of the community apprehensive about any association with the church. Despite aggressive maltreatment, the church grew at an alarming rate (Elkington, 2011).

These representative Biblical references fit God's plan and expectations for his church. He promised to be with the church to guide, encourage, empower, protect, and help it (Is. 41:10; Matt. 28:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9). He promised to give them the right words to say at the right moments as they trust him (Lk. 12:12). It seems evident that God has an expectation for his church to effectively reach the lost and continually grow in faith.

God's Kingdom and the Church's Surrounding Community

Rod Dreher (2017) offers a strategy for growth that also guards the rightful focus of an harmonious integrity of the local church. Quoting Ignatius, he says the church is to "expand God's Kingdom- first in our hearts, then in our own families, and then in the world" (Dreher, 2017, p. 73). He goes on to add that it is important for the church to have boundaries, as referenced in Micah 7:11. He says the church also must make sure that those borders do not stay where they are, as referenced in Micah 7:12. The plan of the church then is to continually press its borders outward.

Dreher contends that the places where millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z (1997-present) most regularly gather are the places that need the presence and community influence of the church the most (Dreher, 2017). He shows that those who do not have the influence of the church in their lives tend to wander into very destructive and unhealthy tendencies. For example, he offers several statistical pieces of evidence that support his claim that public schools (a common place for Generation Z to gather) are on the "front lines of the latest and worst trends in popular culture" (Dreher, 2017, p. 156). The role of the local church is to introduce Christ in areas of need and where hope is lacking (1 Pt. 1:3-6).

In a parallel but broader scope, D. A. Carson proposes that it is important for leaders to wrestle through every major turning point in redemptive history (Carson, 2012). He says leaders

must simultaneously recognize their cultural locations require some Scriptural emphases be given higher priority than others. This allows for the church to have a greater intercultural consensus on the teachings of The Bible. It also allows for a flexible arrangement around the demands of various surrounding cultures. Carson argues as a culture changes (for example, persecution stops) the comprehensiveness of the Gospel story and its interwoven emphases still lead to ongoing reformation, shaping, and course realignment as should be seen in both every person and every culture that follows Christ (Carson, 2012). His basis is that different cultures, at different times are asking different questions about life and reality. They may express their search for hope in different ways. One of the roles of the church then is to understand the reality of its surrounding community and apply corresponding Bible references to best lead others to Christ as the best answer (Carson, 2012).

God's Kingdom Mission and the Local Community

Maintaining a focus on God's kingdom mission keeps the Bible and the expression of the Holy Spirit through churches as the guiding force rather than the surrounding culture as the guiding force for churches. It allows churches to recognize that the local churches' surrounding cultures, even if they are aggressively antagonistic toward churches, are not the enemy nor the problem; sin is (Eph. 6:12). The churches' surrounding cultures are metaphorically the board upon which sin plays its game and has its effect.

Likewise, the Bible is a guiding force, as is the Holy Spirit, through churches (Jn. 8:12). Churches are not the guiding force on their own (Matt. 5:14). Every church is its culture's guiding force as it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This frees churches to be what they are intended to be. They are free to bear the light of hope to their communities (Jn. 8:12). The warnings by Paul to the church in Corinth and John's prophetic warnings to seven regional

churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3) revolve around their disengaging from their holy pursuit of Christ. The warnings also revolved around their disengagement from their goal of missional living within the surrounding culture they were positioned in.

The relationship between God's churches to their surrounding communities. Many local churches may align well with Carson's findings (2012). Their difficulty with the encompassing culture often does not seem to be the result of accosting sinners in the name of righteousness (H. Richard Niebuhr, 1975). The churches very likely agree with what Carson says, "salt does not confront, it enhances" (2012, p. 143). In their positions, it could be that some churches are being neither confrontational nor enhancing through their efforts.

It seems that the present station of some churches is not a result of the wrong things it has done. It might be more accurately described as the great things that it has overlooked doing. It may be that they are not answering the questions that the surrounding communities are presently asking. How do they discover those questions? How can churches recognize the ways that their encircling communities are expressing their search for hope?

Paul, by observation, discovered a present and pertinent question that the Athenians were asking. They had erected an altar with an inscription, "to the unknown god" in the Areopagus. As God's messenger, he answered their crucial question by pointing them to Jesus (Acts 17:16-34).

God's Relationship with His Chosen Leaders for His Church

H. C. G. Moule (1861) illustrates the relationship between the pastor and his community to a warrior's shield. In his commentary on Romans (1861) he says that the shield of freedom has two symbolic colors (metals). The gold front, whose approach sets people free from tyrannical dominion, is the front side. The other side, held by the warrior, is silver. He says that the gold

side represents the coming of a new king who recognizes their need for rescue. The king's coming is brought about by those who look to the silver side; those who are his servants. Without the silver side being taken up, the gold side does not come. The work of the Lord is delivered by the Lord's servants. His servants are the leaders who blaze the path of freedom as an act of ongoing and willful subservience to the will of their king (Moule, 1861). Pastors, the Lord's servants, are expected to understand the issues, problems, and needs of their communities. They must know the questions the communities have to deliver the right help.

Church Leaders' Roles Regarding God

Murray Harris (2001) argues that pastoral leadership is not a matter of leaders enacting their own will or their own vision. He instructs that their role is recognizing the will of their master and taking their people in the direction of the master's will. Harris says that one of the great Christian paradoxes is that freedom leads to slavery and slavery leads to freedom (Harris, 2001). Churches that are the freest, he surmises are churches that are the most content to be willful slaves of Christ (Harris, 2001). The churches who willfully shed their status as slaves of Christ to follow any other leadership or pursue any other priority find themselves bound as slaves to another. Freedom, according to the new covenant, is not the right to do whatever one pleases (Jer. 31:31). It is "the Spirit-energized ability to live a life that pleases God because it reflects his character" leaving one unrestrained by folly or sin (Howell, 2003, p. 163).

In his work, Harris (2001) reveals how leaders who stand on expectations for power and upon expectations for authority are only able to do so until a greater power or authority comes along. Slaves, however, operate under the power and authority of their master (Harris, 2001). As leaders operate under the authority of Christ as their master, they can do so with confidence (1 Pt. 2:6). They do not have to be concerned about the coming of a greater authority. They do not

worry about being overruled. The leaders can boldly take their shields and step forward from the safety of their castles, expanding the borders of their king (Dreher, 2017; Ps. 145:18; Is. 41:10). The leaders, acting on the authority of God as the greatest of all masters, can be a harbinger of hope and freedom to those who need a leader and who have nowhere to run and no escape from the tyranny of sin's oppression (Ps. 9:7-10). They deliver answers to the questions (i.e. meet the unmet needs) of those who are in search of hope.

The slaves of Christ may likely wonder how they can act according to the right initiative and boldness and not be thwarted by introspective second-guessing whether they are acting on the authority of God or by hidden personal motivations. Don Howell Jr. calls godly pastors each to ruthlessly and honestly "lay their souls bare before the penetrating sword of Scripture" (Howell, 2003, p. 299). The Bible can penetrate, cut through, expose, and renew the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). The leaders' guidance and assuredness rest in the whole of Scripture. Their passions (anger, delight, etc.) can fuel success when they are following wisdom (Howell, 2003; Prov. 8:33, 19:20). Their passions can, just as easily, cause them to lose all perspective when they are not directed by wisdom (Prov. 15).

The Church Leaders' Role Regarding God's People. Howell (2003) discusses the relationship between leaders' positions and power. He says that having positions of authority without the Holy Spirit and having positional authority without personal credibility typify the misdirected leader. Their "capacity for personal ruin and corporate malfeasance is unimaginable" (Howell, 2003, p. 84). It is the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit that enables Christian leaders to capably appropriate their positional authority in ways that yield symbiotic beneficence for leaders, churches, as well as the host communities.

Howell (2003) also relates local churches' leaders to the leadership of Nehemiah. Nehemiah recognized a clear need that the people of Israel had (Neh. 1:3). There were questions that the people needed a resolution too but had no way to resolve them on their own (Neh. 2:3). Nehemiah engaged as a leader not by sending help or support but by going to lead them and personally bringing help. He took a full part in the daily labor, guard duties, and supplying water (Neh. 2:8, 4:8-9). He did so at a great personal sacrifice. His leadership by example encouraged and inspired the people of Israel to follow his lead without hesitation. "Nehemiah was a civic leader with a reformer's agenda" (Howell, 2003, p. 127). His mission was not just to rebuild a wall around Jerusalem. He recognized that he was rebuilding the heart of his people (Howell, 2003). He knew that the security of Jerusalem and its inhabitants depended more on the people's covenant fidelity than it did on the strength of the city's walls and gates (Howell, 2003). Howell shows that the heart of the matter was the heart, mind, and actions of a godly leader whose passions were in line with God's. Nehemiah's ability to leverage his positional authority depended on his willful subservience to God as well as knowledge of God's will as it related to his people's needs.

Timothy Laniak's (2006) work offers local church leaders a reminder that Jesus, considering the breadth of his mission, went very slowly while developing and leading his twelve disciples. He moved them at the speed of their understanding and their ability. Laniak (2006) continues by arguing that if Jesus had led them according to the importance of his task, he would have left them so far behind they could never catch up. He did not just lead them, he developed them along the way. His purpose in moving them was their formation. Jesus led, and he simultaneously prepared them to lead. He taught them, he modeled perfect ministry for them and spent personal time with them. This allowed them to grow closer to him on a personal level

and he also grew close to them. In the same way, Jesus also consistently had a passion for the community. He recognized their greatest needs and met their needs as a way of showing pastoral compassion (Laniak, 2006).

Church leaders regarding judiciousness. Paul reminds the church in Ephesus to make the best use of its time (Eph. 5:16). Likewise, he encourages the church in Colossae to act with wisdom toward those who were outside the church, making the most of every opportunity (Col. 4:5). Collins (2001) reminds leaders that time is a precious and expendable commodity that should be used carefully. In a similar vein, J. Oswald Sanders (2007) reminds leaders that "The President of the United States has the same twenty-four hours as we (sic). Others may surpass our abilities, influence, or money, but no one has more time" (Sanders, 2007, p. 94). Each person, he adds, has exactly enough time to do the whole will of God in their lives (Sanders, 2007). The parable of the minas (Luke 19:12-27) is a parable about fiscal responsibility as well as a parable about time. Each servant was given an allotment of money. When the master returned after a long journey, he wanted to know what the servants had done with his money during the time he was gone. He wanted to know if they had made the best use of their time with his resources.

The parable of the minas is also a parable about understanding the reality of the circumstances the stewards were placed in. The servants who were rewarded had observed what was valued by those around them. They used their observations to utilize the master's resources in ways that would produce a profit.

The two who pleased their master understood their markets well. They also made wise use of their time. J. Oswald Sanders (2007), speaking of recognizing reality for what it is as well as seeing the potential to make the most of opportunities says, "eyes that look are common. Eyes

that see are rare" (Sanders, 2007, p. 57). He uses Peter as an example. The Pharisees looked at him and only saw an unschooled fisherman (Acts 4:13). Jesus saw a prophet, preacher, saint, and leader in Peter. Jesus saw someone worth investing in (Sanders, 2007).

The leaders of many churches might say that the members who make up their churches have looked, at but not seen, its community in many years. They have not recognized their communities' needs the way that Jesus often did with the crowds. They have not spotted potential as Jesus did with Peter. It may be argued that most people who make up churches are not cold nor hard-hearted. It may be that they are very generous, loving, and warm-hearted people who simply have not observed their surroundings in a while, and their surroundings have changed significantly while they were not paying attention.

It may be time for churches to start being observant toward their communities again. It may be time to start asking poignant questions to understand the ambitions, hopes, struggles, and needs of their communities. With great insights from leaders in various sectors, a few questions remain for local churches. What questions are the people in their surrounding communities asking about life currently? Also, how are they expressing their need for hope? Once the right questions are asked, as De Pree (1989) and Ledbetter (2016) suggest, the answers become a lot easier to ascertain.

Theoretical Framework

Max De Pree has been a sage to many top leaders for over three decades. He believes that asking the right questions may be more important than getting to an answer (Ledbetter, 2016). He points out that it often does not take much to see when something is not right. One can overlook what is not right and hope that it goes away or that what is wrong might have no effect. One can also come up with various plans of attack to resolve the problem. One's resolution may

or may not work. It depends on if the resolution is a right solution to the current reality or not (De Pree, 1989). This may appear as simple common sense. De Pree (1989) suggests it is not as common as one might think. This theoretical framework explores the work of leading organizational theorists as well as church organizational leaders and researchers as they relate to Florida Baptist churches who are in ongoing and unwanted decline.

Leadership and Resolving Problems

A common colloquialism among trained automotive mechanics illustrates what De Pree and Bernice Ledbetter suggest the heart of the problem is. Some automotive mechanics diagnose problems for free and then charge to fix them. They may say something like, "the issue is W. It is likely caused by X, Y, or Z. X is common and inexpensive. Y is common also, but more expensive. Let's hope it is not Z. That gets very expensive." They may suggest trying to repair W first. If that does not work, they move down the line of logic and increasing expense. This is common enough that most readers who have visited an automotive mechanic can recall a similar conversation personally. Master mechanics commonly poke fun at this approach saying they are "just throwing parts at the problem until something sticks" (Huscher, 2011, p. 21). Master mechanics argue that it is better to take one's time diagnosing the problem and then replace the malfunctioning part rather than replacing good parts until one stumbles upon the damaged one (Wagschal & Wash, 2014). The key, they argue, is making a good diagnosis and not just going on hunches. De Pree suggests that many businesses approach problem-solving by throwing parts at it and hoping something sticks (2004). The problem is, sometimes none of the thrown parts do the trick and businesses go under, churches capitulate, and endeavors can fail.

Jim Collins recalls a lesson from the late Bill Lazier, a highly respected figure in business and investment law, a professor at Stanford Law School, and respected leader across a wide

range of industries as he said, "do not try to come up with the right answers. Focus on coming up with good questions" (2009, p. 2). Collins (2009) goes on to show how a litany of empires and civilizations throughout history is evidence that the mighty can fall. One might argue that each empire fell, as any endeavor can, including local churches when their approach to success does not meet the demands of their reality.

Leadership and Five Stages of Decline

Jim Collins, in *How the Mighty Fall,* researches several of the best-known business market leaders in several large sectors that were highly successful at one time, but no longer exist today. He marks a five-stage trend that many successful businesses can recognize as stages of decline. The first stage he identifies is leaders' hubris borne of success (Collins, 2009). In this stage, arrogance and entitlement can get in the way of focusing on the organization's primary objective. This can cause their primary objective to suffer and in effect, a leader's business can suffer.

His second stage of decline is marked by an undisciplined pursuit of more (Collins, 2009). He evidences that leaders can confuse big with great. Easy profits lead to the abatement of discipline. "A system of bureaucracy subverts the ethic of freedom and responsibility that marks a culture of discipline" (Collins, 2009, p. 63). He suggests that people think about their roles more in terms of them being their jobs than their responsibilities. In *Good to Great*, Collins shows how bureaucracy is created to compensate for incompetence and a lack of discipline (Collins, 2001). Bureaucracy becomes important for the function of the company. It also becomes a leash that restrains the company's innovation and creativity.

Collins identifies the third stage as a denial of risk (2009). During this phase, the team dynamics break down and blame gets placed on external factors. Rather than looking at what

leaders and their team can control, they pass the blame of failure on such things as a downturn in the market, untimely weather, and the like. If leaders are not taking responsibility for their outcomes, then they do not look for what they can do to be more successful in their market (Collins, 2009).

This leads to stage four, where leaders grasp for miraculous salvation. Stage four may be a series of quick fixes or "silver bullets" (Collins, 2009, p. 97). Collins also notes that companies may look to a star leader or personality to join the team and essentially act as their company's savior (2009). They may also respond with chronic restructuring, looking for vital resource retaining efforts to abate the tumultuous undertow (Collins, 2009). Collins' last phase is the capitulation to irrelevance or death (2009).

Getting the Right Things Done

Peter Drucker (2004) challenges organizations to ask themselves what they are doing that they do not need to do because either someone else can do it better or it is no longer necessary? Churches are likely expending a great deal of their energy, human, and physical resources accomplishing goals that are no longer necessary. Drucker suggests evaluating goals and programs by asking, "if we were not doing this already, would we start today" (Drucker, 2008, p. 68)? He suggests the best organizations understand what they can change and what they cannot.

Organizations, including churches, who have been experiencing decreasing effects may be doing so because their lack of change or organizational innovation has led to a gap between what they accomplish and what the community around them wants or needs. Churches who have a strong commitment to their unchanging God (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8) may assume if they change their approach to ministry then they are failing their unchanging God. They can assume how they do ministry and why they do ministry are equated. Drucker argues the church's mission (their

purpose for existence) must not change (P. Drucker, 2008). Why it exists must not change. How churches accomplish their missions can change according to the demands of reality and within the bounds of Scripture (Carson, 2012; Mt. 10:16).

While the purpose of the church does not change, its practices can. One of the failures of declining churches may be their commitment to meet modern challenges with old solutions (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Churches' growth and success depend on doing the right things the right way.

Church leadership and problem-solving

This research focuses on medium to large-sized SBC churches in Florida who experienced significant growth in regular weekly attendance from a few hundred to at least 1500 in membership and 300-1000 in regular, weekly attendance. Current staff members at some churches, like First Baptist Church of Brandon, FL reported the executive team developed the mindset they could do no wrong. Following their lead, and Collins' (2009) four stages of decline, this church launched a series of bold efforts expecting their name in the community to only become greater. As these costly efforts landed flat, the groups decided it was time to do something else big, a restructuring of sorts while ignoring the risk. They built several buildings and purchased several properties with the expectation that they would quickly double in size again and pay off their debt.

After ten years First Baptist Church of Brandon, FL, were still $6 million in debt and one-sixth their previous size. They would not verbalize that they are beginning to accept capitulation to irrelevance. Their actions showed they may be accepting irrelevance, however. There have been no ministry efforts other than the most basic and necessary maintenance of ministries and facilities in the last five years. As the researcher considered how the leaders of

leaders such as De Pree and Collins respond to problems, he was inclined to ask what questions can the leaders of SBC churches in Florida can ask to get the right answers? Additionally, what will need to be done to lead such churches from where they are (in steady decline) to the next phase of their growth? Are there identifiable patterns among churches who were in decline but have redirected their trend toward growth in attendance and engagement with their community?

Christian Business Leadership and Leadership in the Local Church

Henry Cloud, in his work *Boundaries for Leaders*, discusses the value of well-placed borders for leaders of an organization that can guide the organization forward (2013). He explains that boundaries can come in the form of bureaucracy and power plays that can negatively affect a work environment minimizing the effectiveness of teams. Healthy borders can function as clear guideposts for people to navigate forward without hindrances from outside the organization and disruptive distraction (Cloud, 2013). Cloud argues that for people to lead successfully, they must recognize that the personal and interpersonal aspects of leadership are equally as important as the popular leadership themes of vision, implementation, and strategy (Cloud, 2013). He finds that most leaders spend their energy on figuring out the right plan. The art of leading is turning vision into a reality that produces the intended results (De Pree, 1989). For Cloud, the real problem is not in finding the right plan. Rather, the real problem is "getting the people to do what it takes to make the plan work" (Cloud, 2013, p. 1).

Leadership and Responsibility for Results

Many of Cloud's theories correlate with the problematic trend of decline among many MSC Florida churches. He states that leaders' current realities are a result of either the effort the leaders made or something they allowed to happen. He argues that effective leaders recognize they are "ridiculously in charge" of the results that they get (Cloud, 2013, p. 126). One may

reasonably argue the disconnect between some churches and their communities are a result of lacking awareness of the disconnect and inadequate attention being given to maintaining a healthy relationship. As attention and energy have been focused elsewhere, the churches' disposition could be a result of the values of their churches' cultures that leaders have created as well as those they have allowed. Cloud's assessment, great leaders recognize they are ultimately responsible helps resolve a problem Stephen Covey describes as leaders assigning blame to outside forces (Cloud, 2013; Covey, 2009).

Leadership and problematic circumstances. Covey (2009) also explores the topic and his findings are like Collins (2009) and Cloud (2013). His research shows that companies who face difficulty do so with four associated dangers. These are the failure to execute the plan, navigating crises of trust, loss of focus, and fear of the unknown. He explains there is a significant difference in results between companies who know their goals and those who know how to achieve their goals (Covey, 2009). His challenge to leaders is to ask whether they are "moving the middle" (Covey, 2009, p.19).

Covey explains that many try to rest the success of their company on the shoulders of their top performers. Some try to shore up their bottom performers. Covey shows that by moving the middle 60 percent by just a small measure, a company consistently outperforms an equivalent company that manages to get more from their top or bottom 20th percentiles. Moving a company ahead happens most naturally when one moves the middle of the pack ahead (Covey, 2009).

Covey encourages the wise leader to recognize that change is inevitable. Change comes with the baggage of fear (Covey, 2009). The promotion of an innovative idea in a business meeting can be met with any series of questions about the unknown borne by fear. One can become paralyzed by hypothetical "what if" questions. Kotter reminds readers everyone may

admit "there are problems, then come the buts" (2012). He argues the biggest impediment to leading successful change is organizational culture (Kotter, 2012).

Bruce Wilkinson (2005) offers simplistic maxims explaining that one cannot control what one cannot control. Also, it is hard for leaders to influence people who do not consider the leaders to be people with authority or ability in any given area (Wilkinson, 2005). Agreeing with these maxims, Covey shows leaders have greater effectiveness by "working within their circles of influence, not their circles of concern" (Covey, 2009, p. 77). Posner and Kouzes propose organizational leaders who are honest, competent, and forward-looking can lead their organizations to a better future. (2017). Effective leadership is essential to successfully navigate problematic circumstances and accomplishing a preferred future (Bredfeldt & Mohler, 2006).

Leadership and the problem of priority drift. Concern can grow as one considers the varying sprawl of ministries that churches may have offered for many years. During the growth phase, many projects were often birthed by volunteers who saw a need that they felt passionate about ministering to. Each one became a new cog that works from the primary ministry cog of the church. Over time many cogs may have been added, taking more and more focus from the primary purpose of the church. Collins might argue churches have missed what many good businesses miss. He calls it the hedgehog concept (Collins, 2001). He explains great businesses function like a hedgehog. They have one defensive and offensive strategy and the do it extremely well. He says good companies are often comparably like foxes. They try to do a wide variety of things well. In the end, he shows the fox never seems to catch the hedgehog. The hedgehog just balls up into its prickly defensive position until it is ready to move ahead again, his only competitive measure of response (Collins, 2001). Using the hedgehog concept is a primary factor that separates good organizations from great ones (Collins, 2001).

Church leadership and responsibility for results. One might consider that the priorities and needs of the communities that surround churches may shift over time while the church, trying to stay faithful to its mission, may not. In a sense, the community may have begun asking different questions about life and faith. They may be expressing their need for hope in a different way.

Churches may be working hard to answer important questions, but they may no longer be the questions their communities are asking. A resultant disconnect might grow between the church and its surrounding community. Navigating the innate dangers Covey (2001) identifies with change is difficult. This is increasingly true of those who do not know what questions are being asked by the surrounding community. David Livermore (2016) proposes the best way to understand a community is to join them in what they do.

Livermore adds "most innovators are intense observers" (2016, p. 61). Great innovations are a result of keen observation and asking the right questions. Considering the work of these leaders in business, much can be correlated to the plight of MSC churches who have found themselves in decline. A few significant questions remain. What questions can the leaders of the church ask to get the right answers? Following this question, what will need to be done to lead the church from where it is (in steady decline) to the next phase in its growth? Lastly, are there common characteristics among churches who have made a significant turnaround?

Ongoing Cultural Change Within Local Communities

In his book, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence,* Livermore describes cultures as fluid rather than static (Livermore, 2015). The author cites multiple examples showing how the norms, expectations, and even ways of relating within cultures change over time. These changes affect the values shared within each society (Livermore, 2015).

Examples of Change Elements Affecting Societies

As technology advances, transportation becomes increasingly easier. Studies suggest the increasing ease of large-scale mobility has a heterogeneous effect on cultures according to their access to transportation such as railroads and aviation (Hoshino & Zhu, 2017; Okoye et al., 2017). Hoshino and Zhu suggest the heterogenization of societies affects what they value and is expressed by the observances of holidays and celebrations (2017). Okoye, Pongou, and Yokossi evidence the mixing of cultures affects how individuals within societies relate to one another (2017). This can have a direct effect on societies' foci, interests, and values.

The immediacy of access to information also has a significant effect on societies (Livermore, 2015). Societies experienced relatively little change when the primary form of communication was face-to-face communication. Written words and the printing press (both on papyrus and paper) allowed for a broader and more consistent method of delivering information (Ennis, 2002). In modernity, people all over the world can have access to events and news as it actively occurs. The plights of displaced peoples, border encroaches, popular clothing and food trends, technological innovations, market variations, even youths' sports teams' scores can be shared instantly regardless of geography. The ease of access to information has a blending effect on societies (Livermore, 2016). Livermore contends that how organizations respond to (and embrace) cultural variations can highly influence their competitiveness in their given markets (2016).

Operating on similar premises, Lingenfelter considers the importance of religious organizations' learning how to relate to their societies in a multi-cultural manner (2008). He argues that churches and religious organizations have historically, and individually, tended to focus their efforts on a singular cultural group, usually the one they have immediate proximity to

(2008). As cultures have blended and as transportation has become increasingly easier, it has become more important to be able to understand and relate to varying groups who may hold different presuppositions (Livermore, 2015). Ed Stetzer argues that the churches who do this well tend to be more effective at attracting the millennial generation in the United States (Stetzer et al., 2009). Likewise, he finds that churches whose homogeneity is not consistent with the community who surrounds the churches have decreasing effects at attracting the millennial generation (born 1981-1996), Generation X (born 1965-1980), as well as the current generation of youth who have not been named yet (Stetzer et al., 2009).

These kinds of cultural changes also affect the philosophical and worldview assumptions of the people who make up societies. At times, these have led to entire shifts and developments in philosophies such as the 18th Century Enlightenment and contemporary Post-Modernism. The worldview shaping assumptions of these philosophies affect what people value and the things that drive communities (Anthony & Benson, 2011). It affects the way societies view those who are outside of them as well as those inside them. Hiebert elucidates how cultural assumptions affect societies' interactions among genders, among economic classes, and ethnic backgrounds (Hiebert, 2008).

For this reason, Lingenfelter encourages the leaders of churches to be aware of the varying needs and values in their communities (2008). This allows churches to understand how they can operate as bridges between the needs, aspirations, and values of communities and the gospel. Carson challenges that churches must "strive simultaneously to grapple with all the turning points in redemptive history, even while they recognize that expectations for cultural location demands that certain biblical emphases must have a higher priority than others" (Carson, 2012, p. 85). He argues churches must continually maintain an ongoing cultural awareness and

they must be ready to adjust the application of their mission (that is, how they do ministry) to their current cultural context. For example, churches who exist in a violently oppositional culture, such as northern Syria, relate very differently to their community as compared to a church in the American southeast whose location is a storefront in a local mall. Carson argues that as churches who have endured violent opposition from their host cultures and then see these host cultures change to be a more welcoming atmosphere for churches; the way these churches relate to their host communities change. The way they express the gospel and practice their faith varies (Carson, 2012).

Since community values and practices change, churches need to adjust their methods of ministry to continue to effectively relate to their host cultures. Churches need to wrestle over how they operate as bridges between their communities and the gospel. It seems reasonable to consider church attendance and community engagement as indicators of their effectiveness and health. With a majority of SBC churches' attendance in steady decline, churches need to consider how well they understand the makeup of those who make up their host communities. What are the questions their communities are asking? How are the unchurched and dechurched expressing their search for hope? What values do they hold? It is possible, even likely, churches whose attendance are in a consistent decline are answering important questions about life but not the questions the people who make up the community are asking.

Church Analysts and Leadership in Local Churches

Churches who were once growing and are now in decline might quickly say they are ready for the next chapter in their life and growth. The question might be asked, why have they not taken the leap into their next chapter? Why do they continue to hesitate? William Bridges (2017) says that beginnings depend on endings. The problem is no one likes endings (Bridges &

Bridges, 2017). His research shows the art of leading change successfully is not in the change itself. Rather, the art of leading change is in the (psychological) transitions people must make to bring about change. Change leads to the end of traditions, the end of habits, the end of a norm (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). These once brought satisfaction and fulfillment to their adherents. Great leaders know how to honor the past and celebrate its passing without staying stuck in it (Bridges & Bridges, 2017).

Leading Change: Relating the Past to the Big Picture

To move forward into the next chapter of success, Bridges says people need to know several vital factors. They need to know the purpose, the big picture, the plan, as well as where they fit in the plan (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). These factors help move Covey's (2001) middle 60 percent of a group to where they need to be most effective. It helps move the right people to the right places on the bus to work symbiotically to bring about their progress (Collins, 2001).

Leading Change: Churches' Cultures and Beliefs

John Kotter (2012) suggests that the biggest impediment to creating change is culture. Organizations change their cultures by adopting new values or expressing old values in ways that are more meaningful to those who hold them than previous expressions can (Sampson, 2011). To help people let go of cultural practices that keep them stuck in the past and prevent them from aligning with the present reality, Bridges and Bridges' research demonstrates leaders do better to sell problems rather than solutions (2017). The authors help readers understand when people are sold on a problem, moving to a solution becomes increasingly easier.

"People do what they believe is most valuable" (Yperen, 2002, p.77). When beliefs are expressed as actions that align with one's current reality, problems are easily resolved. When organizations' beliefs do not align with reality it leads to conflict. It may be reasonable to

consider churches who are in decline are declining as a result of a simple misalignment with reality. The ways they believe are most effective to minister to families may no longer be the most effective. Inaccurate cultural assumptions can become prisons for leaders that also diminish ministries (Lingenfelter, 2008).

Stephen Sampson (2011) reasons that a proper understanding of culture and the gospel mission are essential to any church. Having a right understanding of one without the other leads to distortions of both (Chester & Timmis, 2008). When people can have a clear vision of both they can function cooperatively much like the key and the engine to an automobile. Together, they can roar the car to life and propel it forward.

Change is inevitable (Kotter, 2012). Transitions are critical (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). Wise navigation is vital (Yperen, 2002). Successfully moving the core (the middle), moves the enterprise (Covey, 2009). Right people, in the right places, doing the right things makes good enterprises great (Collins, 2001). If the leadership of churches who are in decline wholeheartedly agree with each of these substantiated propositions, questions remain. What questions might the churches' leadership ask that would lead them to the right answers? Subsequently, what are the essential elements to leading the churches from their states of decline to positions of unprecedented growth?

<div align="center">**Related Literature**</div>

An investigation of the theoretical framework has helped define the problem as it relates to The Bible. Examining the theoretical framework has helped further clarify the problem by assessing the work of leading organizational theorists as well as church specific organizational leaders and theorists. The following section reviews contemporary research relating to the problem and further drills down to reveal a gap in the research. This section considers national

surveys, a broad range of regionally specific research from varying religious entities, as well as some relevant internationally based research.

National Statistics

Barna says 87% of pastors report their churches are "just somewhat effective (or less) at reaching out to unchurched people" (2017, p. 152). The Barna Group suggests that many Americans are increasingly identifying themselves as spiritual but not religious. Fourteen percent of self-identifying atheists and 28% of agnostics claim no faith and no religious affiliation but still identify themselves as spiritual (Barna, 2017). The research group also finds 88% of those who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious and also identify with some religious faith have not been to a religious service in the past six months (Barna, 2017). The group does not identify potential causes for decreasing attendance in many churches. The research does not identify questions unchurched people are asking about life, hope, and faith. Barna does suggest that individual faith is growing increasingly personal and less a matter of community and interpersonal relationships. Only eight percent of the spiritual but not religious groups say they talk with friends often about spiritual matters. Forty-eight percent of them claim they rarely have conversations about spiritual matters. Seventeen percent claim that they never do so (Barna, 2017).

Barna finds good news for church attendees in the United States. Seventy-eight percent of all Americans claim to pray sometime during the week. Thirty-eight percent claim to attend a church service during the week. The group also finds that only 17% attend a Sunday School and 18% attend a church-sponsored small group (Barna, 2017). The Barna Group offers helpful insights into the trends among Americans. They do not, however, identify factors that affect church attendance among unchurched and dechurched. Additionally, while these studies are

helpful, they do not account for regional or local community variations. For example, researchers might wonder what influential factors differ between cities such as the most churched major U.S. city, Chattanooga, TN (59% churched), and the most unchurched major U.S. city, San Francisco, CA (60% unchurched) (Earls, 2017).

Stetzer identifies 2 important delineating categories among younger unchurched Americans (primarily comprised of the millennial generation). These 2 categories can help have a conversation and conducting research about churches who are in decline. Stetzer finds 22% of the group he studies have never been part of a local church (Stetzer et al., 2009). He identifies 62% of his respondents as dechurched (Stetzer et al., 2009). These were regular attendees, often weekly attendees, during a period of their lives but at the time of the study, they no longer identify themselves as attendees to any church.

Stetzer identifies four important markers among young unchurched and dechurched segments of American communities. First, there seems to be a strong desire to experience life events together. They equally want to share their perceptions and experiences with others. The researchers argue one of the primary factors young Americans seek out is communal connectedness where they are welcomed as part of an in-group (Morgan, 2006; Stetzer et al., 2009). Second, the sample group marked a desire to deal with difficult issues and sharing meaningful information. Stetzer articulates that they would "rather be in over their heads in life as opposed to kicking around in the shallow end" (Stetzer et al., 2009, p. 68). It is interesting to consider that this group desires communal interconnectedness but is also hesitant to have conversations about faith with other members of their in-group (Barna, 2017; Stetzer et al., 2009).

Thirdly, the researchers say the group wants to make decisions that make a positive difference. The author illustrates the growth in popularity of recycling, buying fair trade products, and sponsoring children in need has grown significantly because of this group's desire to make responsible decisions leading to a positive impact on the world (Stetzer et al., 2009). Fourth, the researchers find the group desires intergenerational connectedness (Stetzer et al., 2009). They desire to learn from those who have experienced what they are going to face. The group wants to have mentors from older generations who challenge them and help equip them to live responsible and successful lives (Shaw & Kolbaba, 2015).

These factors can be very helpful to inform a study concerning the decline in church attendance. Stetzer urges readers to understand that these findings are only generalizable to young Americans and not the population. He also reminds readers these findings are general to the whole population within the age group, but they cannot relate to every individual within this range. Stetzer notes while the research group attempts is to generalize a population for understanding, the age group tends to have a strong disdain toward being defined according to generalizations (2009).

Recent Canadian Research and Related Literature

Haskell et al. (2016) compared the characteristics of growing and declining mainline Protestant Canadian churches. They find growing churches are more likely to expend their resources on youth programs and have contemporary styles of worship services. The authors define youth as those who are forty-five years of age or younger (Haskell et al., 2016). Hadaway (1990) argues churches who are theologically conservative also tend to create a receptive environment for young people which, he proposes, is important to lead churches to grow beyond plateaus in attendance. Hadaway's research of the unchurched suggests "evangelism appears to

be the only programmatic activity that retains a meaningful relationship with church growth when statistical controls are in effect'' (Roozen & Hadaway, 1993, p. 185). These studies each maintain that evangelism is not limited to programmatic strategies such as F.A.I.T.H. Evangelism or Evangelism Explosion. Likewise, evangelism is not limited to evangelistic preaching (D. Millard Haskell et al., 2016; Roozen & Hadaway, 1993). The researchers do not explore how growing churches' evangelistic efforts relate to the questions unchurched and dechurched people are asking. The studies simply verify that attempts are being made to reach them and that making these attempts has a positive effect.

Elkington states that after 1960 Canada quickly became a nation of people who believe in God but do not belong to any particular local congregation (Elkington, 2011). His survey attests that Canadians do not attend church because they believe that they do not need to (Elkington, 2011). The researcher's findings are helpful to verify unchurched and dechurched do not feel a need to attend church. Elkington does not dig further to explore why nonattenders do not feel church attendance is important to them. It may be because the respondents do not believe they can find what they are looking for through church attendance.

These research studies helpfully inform readers about the church attendance trends in Canada. They also help readers understand some of the contemporary factors affecting church attendance. While these are very helpful, the writers do not make efforts to show whether their findings are relevant to MSC churches in other regions, such as Florida, who face similar issues of decline.

Recent Studies of U.S. Protestant Churches

Martin (2015) studied five United Methodist Churches in Western Ohio who made turnarounds in their attendance. His research revealed a strong synergy among the leadership and

laity of turnaround churches (Martin, 2015). He also observed that each church maintained an outward focus.

Gladwell's research agrees. He discovered the churches who are converting nonattenders to regular attendees share two common factors. He concluded churches who are growing have already developed an infrastructure that supports growth (Gladwell, 2002). This includes proper leadership. Bruce et al. help describe a supportive infrastructure by including six important measures. They described these churches as having clear plans for spiritual growth, providing a sense of belonging for attendees, actively welcoming new people, empowering leadership, as well as a providing a clear vision that keeps the church looking to the future (Bruce et al., 2006).

Gladwell also noted these churches have a group of enthusiasts who are regularly being renewed by the introduction of new enthusiasts (Gladwell, 2002). He described the enthusiast group as those who are actively involved in the evangelistic and discipleship ministries of the church. The group includes both ministry volunteers and those who actively promote the church throughout the host communities through planned activities as well as informal interactions. Gladwell asserted the enthusiast group within the churches are an essential element for every growing church (Gladwell, 2002). Drucker agreed from an organizational perspective saying organizations thrive by turning customers into fans (P. F. Drucker, 2008). Fans (enthusiasts) strengthen organizations.

Robert Allen Brooks produced similar findings while studying Assembly of God churches in Tennessee. He argued an outward focus and effective transformational leadership practices by church leadership correlated highly with church growth (Brooks, 2018). While studying transformational leadership practices, Brooks' research offered an interesting supposition. He claimed leaders with years of in-service experience do not have a higher

likelihood to lead growing churches than those who do not have years of experience. His reasons

for most leaders, twenty years of experience only means one year of experience repeated twenty

times (Brooks, 2018). During his study of transformational leadership and growing churches,

Brooks concedes Christian influence is waning in Tennessee (Brooks, 2018).

Hadaway, studying leadership among turnaround churches, found turnaround churches

tend to occur with "a new lead pastor, and it tends to occur rapidly if it is to occur at all" (C.K.

Hadaway, 1991, p. 191). He surmised one of the primary roles of pastors leading churches to

growth is being a catalytic motivator. They lead churches in the right direction and can motivate

lay members to do the necessary work (C. K. Hadaway, 1991). Hadaway also finds 73% of

successful revitalizers have either dominant or influential temperament traits (or sometimes both)

and they are more likely to be extroverts (C. K. Hadaway, 1991).

Stroh, like most other researchers, found the most common element among turnaround

churches is a new pastor. Stroh found nine of ten churches in his study of Wisconsin Lutheran

churches experienced growth after the coming of a new lead pastor (Stroh, 2014).

Thom Rainer's study reported similar findings. He identified 211 churches who were

plateaued or in decline and broke away from their attendance trends. He found only 13 of his

reported breakout churches did not have a new pastor as a primary growth factor (Rainer, 2010).

Recognizing these findings, Penfold studied Evangelical churches in the Rocky

Mountains who became turnaround churches. He focused on the qualities of the small minority

of churches who did not have a new pastor as a primary growth factor. He found these leaders all

had a strong faithfulness to Scripture, confident humility, acceptance of responsibility,

unconditional love for people, persistence, an outwardly focused vision, and a desire for a lasting

legacy (Penfold, 2011). Penfold offered little discussion about the details of their outward-

focused visions and how either the pastor or the laity related to unchurched and dechurched in their host communities.

Royster (2016) studied the relationship between pastoral leadership behavior, church growth, and membership longevity. He studied pastors who started churches with fewer than 20 attendees. He found the churches who grew significantly had pastors with three common behaviors. They regularly and personally engaged relationally with their attendees. They focused their efforts on discipleship and evangelism. Royster said they also practice inclusivity and transparency in their dealings with others. A critic could argue inclusivity and transparency are not behaviors, rather, they are qualities of behaviors. None the less, these pastors shared these common qualities and behaviors.

It is also worth noting the interpersonal interactivity of pastors of churches with 20 or even 100 people is very likely to be different than churches whose attendance average higher numbers such as 300 or 1000. Royster also noted leaders' ethics, honesty and fairness trumped short-cut processes, and actions as related to long-term, significant growth (Royster, 2016). His study evidenced these qualities and behaviors affect attendance, but the researcher does not go into much detail about why the behaviors have their effects. It did not, for example, consider why pastors' interpersonal behaviors were attractive to nonattenders who became attendees. He did not consider how leaders' interpersonal behaviors positively affecting attendance correlated to nonattenders' decreasing likelihood to discuss faith with their peers and friends (Barna, 2017). An exploration of the psycho-social factors that lead to nonattenders' desire for interconnectedness and community may be a valuable consideration. These factors may help researchers understand why pastors' relationality is important in converting nonattenders to attendees.

Steve McMullin (2013) contended the decline in church attendance is due to the social secularization of Sunday mornings. He argued the repealing of the laws keeping stores closed and events planned around the Sunday morning timeframe has been the primary factor affecting church attendance (McMullin, 2013). He evidenced a correlation between the two. 32.2% of his respondents no longer engage in the church because of other activities occurring at the same time or their general business of life (McMullin, 2013). The author fails to prove that secularization has been the cause of the decline in church attendance. There is a reasonable possibility that the increasing options for how people might spend their time on Sundays only grew after they did not believe the church was relevant to their lives. It is possible McMullin's findings of the secularization of American communities may be the most noticeable effect of people disengaging from the church rather than the primary cause of their disengaging.

Additionally, McMullin's theory places the problem outside of the control of churches and their leaders, making churches helpless victims of this societal change. This theory disagrees with Cloud's argument that leaders are ridiculously in charge of their outcomes (Cloud, 2013). It also does not consider the affective needs that unchurched and dechurched people may have. It is possible, for example, that families who miss church because of their children's athletic events may believe these events are more beneficial for their children and their families than church attendance. This may mean such experiences are offering answers to questions and needs in a more effective way than many churches.

Pew Research estimates one-third of millennials have either disengaged from church or were never engaged to begin with (Lipka, 2015). A slightly larger percentage attend only sporadically. It may be reasonable to consider, many people who disengage from church or never considered becoming involved in a church do so because they don't recognize churches as

relevant to their current station in life. Churches may have created their own cultures with their own expectations and requirements that are arguably good for creating unity and cohesiveness but are also obtrusive to the spread of the gospel message throughout the host community. An increasing desire to adhere to churches' inner cultures may have decreasing effects on church attendees' recognition of the changes occurring in their host cultures. In such cases, churches may have growing difficulty relating to their host communities. Likewise, the surrounding communities may consider church attendance as decreasingly relevant to expectations for lives.

Catholicism had mass all over the world in Latin only (Benofy, 2010). They, to preserve their traditions and values, required seekers to learn the Latin language to have an opportunity to understand the Gospel. A linguistic gap became an ongoing problem for the Catholic church that prevented people from understanding the Bible. To guard doctrine, the Catholic church failed to meet people where they were. They did not answer the questions people were asking. They did not recognize how people were expressing their search for hope. They, in both a literal and a figurative sense, were not speaking the language of the cultures.

In some contemporary Protestant churches, there is the popular idea one should dress up for the King (Shelly, 2013). They argue God is worth one's best, so attendees should wear their best when they come to gather with God's people. To wear less than their best is argued to be disrespectful toward God. For this reason, attendees might be looked down upon if they come to church but do not wear such respectable attire as suits and ties.

While it may be reasonable to consider attendees would want to wear their best for God, this is only a human construct. Jesus, for example, never wore a suit and tie. Those who expect attendees to wear a suit and tie to honor Jesus, oddly do not consider wearing the kind of clothes that Jesus wore as a way of honoring Him. Their goal is not to maintain a practice because Jesus

did it. Rather, they do it because it makes sense to them according to their cultural framing (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Millennials do not tend to wear suits and ties often so it is likely that many do not own them either (Sanders, 2007). If this is the case, then Millennials would be unwelcomed to attend some churches to hear the Gospel unless they begin shopping at the right stores first. These man-made rules (social norms adopted by the Christian subcultures) may be the things that get in the way the most for the churches who want to influence people from their host communities to become church attendees (Sanders, 2007). The expectation for some churches might be that people must come to Christ but on local churches' redefined terms.

While exploring The Bible, readers may discover God came and spoke the local contemporary language and he used their common colloquialisms. He dressed in a way that was consistent with the time and made sense to the people. People may feel the church is irrelevant to their lives because the church's attention is not on meeting their needs, knowing them, having compassion for them, or being aware of what is important to those who make up their local communities. What are churches to do? It may be reasonable, to begin by asking the right questions and observing how the unchurched are expressing their search for hope.

It is important to note that Royster, like other researchers, identifies his terms relative to church size according to the practical needs of his study. There are no definitive studies that establish clear delineations for church sizes according to a body of objective research. Terms such as small, medium, large, or mega-churches seem to relate to a given study, their communities, or their sizes in relation to other churches. In some studies, churches of 400 attendees in rural communities might be identified as large churches. In other studies, they may be identified as medium-sized. In each of the studies in this review, the range for medium-sized churches varied from 100 to 1500 depending on the study. Some do not make efforts to define

these terms at all. Royster's study, for example, uses the terms large and small concerning churches but does not define what qualifies them as either large or small (2016).

Using the term medium-sized church (MSC) according to their use in another scholarly study would effectively be borrowing another researcher's term based solely on their subjective usage. This would be arbitrary and would only add a façade of scholarly depth to the discussion at hand. In keeping with these researchers' practical usage of terms such as the term medium-sized church (MSC), this study employed this term for the sake of having a meaningful discussion. This research study used the term medium-sized church (MSC) to describe those with an average weekly attendance within the ranges of 300-1000.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

For many churches, the reality of their circumstances and their perceptions about their circumstances are not in alignment. It is important to recognize reality for what it is. It does not acquiesce to leaders' desires, commitments, or demands (Collins, 2009). Reality can be the undoing of leaders who do not recognize it for what it is because of their commitment to some other idea (Covey, 2009).

Long-time members grow in their concern as they observe the trending decline in both attendance and involvement in many SBC churches in Florida. Their continuing hard work and commitment seem to have a decreasing effect on some members as well as their local communities. As leaders exhaust themselves by doing what they think is best, they may wonder if there is anything, they can do to change the course of decline for their churches.

This review explored precedent research among Christian and preeminent leaders in the fields of leadership, business leadership analysis, and local church leadership analysis. The goal of this literature review was to explore salient points of concern for MSC SBC churches who

seek a viable solution to their ongoing decline. The topic of church decline has received a fair amount of attention from scholars. It has been studied on broad international and national levels. Small churches have been studied in international contexts. Some research exists studying small churches in specific contexts. Megachurches have been studied. The delimitations and contexts of the existing studies do not validate them as fully generalizable to MSC churches in Florida who are experiencing an ongoing decline. The Bible clarifies God does not intend for the church to be a shrinking organization. MSC churches in Florida who are experiencing declining attendance arguably do not want to be in decline. The existing research is helpful but not definitively applicable to their cases. This research study aims to close this gap in the research.

It is a worthy study to consider how local churches can understand the reality of their surrounding culture. Specifically, it is important to discover what questions the local church leadership can ask to best address the needs, understandings, and values of their host communities about the local cultures. By understanding how people are currently searching for hope, churches can point the unchurched to the best solution for their search for hope.

Profile of the Current Study

The research project consisted of a qualitative analysis of four subject churches using three focus groups (FG) for each of the participating churches (PCs). The first set of FGs explored the perceptions and opinions of nonattenders who lived in the immediate communities of the participating churches. The second set of FGs groups focused on studying the churches' ministerial staffs. The third set of FGs explored the perceptions and understandings of regular attendees and volunteers from each PC. The goal of the FGs was to identify any factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and

de-churched persons. The details of the research study's qualifications and methodology is

discussed in detail in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this multiple case study, a qualitative analysis was conducted by interviewing subjects in focus groups of fifteen participants or less. The design included an in-depth analysis of four intentionally selected local churches averaging between 300-1,000 regular attendees. The participating churches were selected based on the following inclusion criteria. Selected churches had experienced ongoing declines in their regular attendance and then experienced significant turnarounds in their attendance. Additionally, the researcher identified generative common practices, qualities, and characteristics shared among the subject churches that stimulated the reversal in their attendance trends.

Research Design Synopsis

This section covers the details of the research process and procedures. It includes the aims, processes, concerns, and the reasoning for each part of the study. The section included sociological and psychological ethical concerns, participant selection processes, and the considerations involved in the development of each phase of the research study.

The Research Problem

Many medium-sized churches in Florida have experienced years of growth followed by years of decline in their average attendance and involvement. Few of these churches had been able to turn their trending declines around to experience growth. It appears some once growing churches no longer recognized how to best reach their communities and how to minister to the needs of the families in the surrounding communities. National studies have been done as well as several in local regions around the United States(Bond, 2015; Earls, 2017; C. K. Hadaway, 1991; Hudson, 2017; Lipka, 2015; Rainer, 2010; Stetzer et al., 2009; Stroh, 2014). A research gap seemed to exist concerning possible common characteristics, qualities, or practices of

conservative Southern Baptist (SBC) churches in Florida who had experienced a turnaround in their attendance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, was to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and de-churched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church nonattenders. At this stage in the research, regular attendance and engagement were defined as at least twice monthly attendance at a local SBC church.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What is the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the needs of families in the communities surrounding medium-sized SBC churches (defined as those whose average weekly attendance is 300-1,000) and the people within the church?

RQ2. What is the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the primary values held by families in the communities surrounding medium-sized SBC churches and the people within the churches?

RQ3. What are the salient relational competencies that the people in medium-sized SBC churches need for the church to effectively lead families in their communities to attend their churches?

RQ4. Are there ministries the identified churches are providing to their communities that are having negligible or no measurable effect on the community?

RQ5. Are there ministries churches can offer that would best minister to the contemporary circumstances of the families that live in the churches' surrounding communities?

Research Design and Methodology

This research study employed a qualitative (QUAL) design. The study did not include a theory being tested. Rather, it focused on the exploration of a question concerning specific contemporary phenomena (Roberts, 2010). The goal of the study was to develop a theory that

could be tested using quantitative methods. The focus group (FG) process involved open-ended questions as a way of understanding perceptions as they relate to the phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Using open-ended questions during interview processes allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and seek clarifications as the needs arose.

Unlike the generally educated audiences who take interest in discipline-specific scholarly journal articles, the participants in this research study may not have been aware of and used terms according to a discipline-specific standard of use. For example, some volunteers in churches thought of themselves as very welcoming. They may have defined the term and exercise their understandings by being more cordial to their guests than they normally were as they saw the same people in other contexts. By doing so as a group, they might have believed their guests felt more welcomed at their churches than at any other place.

The guests, on the other hand, may have felt as though the people welcoming them were acting hypocritically by being nice to them inside their churches but acting otherwise when they saw them in everyday life. They may have defined the volunteers welcoming actions as putting on an artificial show for other religious people by being nice to guests. They may argue if the church volunteers really cared about them as people then the volunteers would be openly welcoming to them in other contexts as well. They may have interpreted the volunteers' attempts at being welcoming as the opposite of welcoming. They may have thought of them as being exclusivist by showing they did not want to be known to associate with the guests when they were outside of their churches in public settings. Each group then was very concerned with the concept of welcome, but both were defining the expression of the term differently.

Researchers often find it difficult to understand a subjects' perceptions and the variations in definitions of terms by quantitative measures such as online surveys. A QUAL methodology

allowed the researcher to probe further to gain deeper and more acute insights. The researcher was able to collect data through FG processes, by observing attendance records from the subject churches (Creswell, 2014).

The problems which churches in decline face may be simple but they may also be multilayered and complex. The solutions, likewise, may be simple but undiscovered or they may be elusive because of their multilayered complexities. Focus groups, studying and observing both the leaders and volunteers inside the organizations as well as studying the perceptions of those outside the organizations helped clarify areas of possible confusion. Clarifying areas of possible confusion helped researchers formulate a picture of the causative factors relating to the problem. QUAL measures helped the researcher discover relevant themes (Creswell, 2014). Likewise, good interpretations from the analysis of QUAL research helped the researcher formulate a viable theory (Roberts, 2010).

The percentage of SBC churches that were in ongoing decline and are experiencing a significant turnaround seemed to be a small minority of churches (Bruce et al., 2006). Random samplings from church members or SBC ministers yield limited helpful results. Instead, a small purposive sampling according to participants' church involvement produced better insights for the study (Roberts, 2010). Case studies of some of these churches produced the best means of exploration according to the research aims (Creswell, 2014).

Case studies can yield uniquely helpful insights since the phenomena deal directly with possible themes relating to their context-bound cases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Case studies allowed the researcher to employ inductive reasoning by performing a careful comparative analysis of the collective data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The researcher related the findings of each case to the other subjects' cases to identify similarities.

Case Studies allowed the researcher to observe and study the churches in their natural settings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The researcher identified common factors as they were observed concerning their applications considering their whole contexts. Accurately categorizing, organizing, and interpreting data required the analyst to have synthesized the data in such a way that it created a faithful and factual picture of the cases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Similar case studies have been performed in similar studies in the recent past. A research team used a case study process to compare the traits of growing and declining mainline protestant churches in Canada (D. Millard Haskell et al., 2016). Studying the missional church model in Canada, Elkington (2011) studied the habits of church attendees and how their involvement relates to those who do not participate in any church. A study of five United Methodist Churches in Ohio followed the same protocol as the study this researcher proposed (Martin, 2015).

Brooks studied a similar topic using case study methods (2018). Research exploring turnaround churches among the Lutheran churches in Wisconsin also provided a precedent for using QUAL case study methods to explore the problem (Stroh, 2014). Shelton (2015) studying seven Baptist churches in Texas, Bond (2015) studying SBC churches in Arkansas, and Penfold (2011) researching Evangelical turnaround churches in the Rocky Mountains also employ standard case study methods to explore the problem of attendance decline in church attendance. These representative studies showed precedent for the use of a QUAL case study approach for a similar study focusing on SBC churches in Florida.

Setting

The individual Florida SBC churches that participated in the research study have been identified in this stage of the research. Each participating church (PC) was situated in different

cities and different regions around the state of FL. Each staff (S) and member (M) group met in rooms inside the PC where people commonly gather for meetings. Nonattender (NA) FGs gathered in areas near the PCs where social interaction was considered socially normative. The researcher traveled to participating churches.

Meeting with Ministerial Staff

Meetings were pre-arranged with the ministerial staff for a set day and time during the mid-mornings. This allowed the researcher to arrive, meet the staff to develop a rapport and set up his equipment. It also allowed for plenty of time for the researcher to meet with M groups during their lunch hours. One group, the group coded as -MHM, -met during an evening at a participant's home where they normally gathered for small group bible studies and discussions.

The interviews with the ministerial staff were in rooms of their choosing on location at each associated church. The room was the same room they most usually used for other meetings. It was familiar to them, convenient for them, and allowed the researcher to see them interact in a normative manner. Their regularly used meeting rooms also helped provide for an emotionally and psychologically normative atmosphere for the participants.

The subjects' chairs were prearranged generally in a circle equidistant apart around tables where all the participants could see one another and the researcher equally. The researcher met with four to ten staff people in each interview. A recording device was set up to video record the FGs along with a Bluetooth microphone positioned in the center of the circles. The positioning was according to the directions the participants gave their answers so the researcher could best see and hear their full responses. The researcher gave a copy of the questions to the subjects to help them remember the questions and know what questions were upcoming during the FGs.

The researcher confirmed the lights were on, the chairs were arranged, and the air conditioner was set to a normatively comfortable setting between 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit before the participants' gathering. The researcher also confirmed appropriate restrooms were readily accessible as well. Additionally, he provided light refreshments during the meetings to encourage participants to be at ease, comfortable, and readily cordial. The FGs took about one and one-half hours including one ten-minute break in the middle.

The researcher explained how the participants' answers and all data were protected before the beginning of the study. Each participant signed an informed consent form verifying their willful and voluntary involvement in the study. Their participation was kept confidential and pseudonyms were used if personal references were made in the research publication. The researcher reminded participants they may share expectations for input with others but to seek permission before sharing other subjects' comments after the focus group was over.

Meeting with Nonattenders in the Local Community

At least a week before the meeting promotional signage was put up at a local café who agreed to host the FG. The cafés promoted the event through means such as their Facebook pages. The ad and signage offered a free beverage for the first ten participants who signed up to simply share their opinions at the predetermined times at a predetermined café. The day of the week was set as the same day the participating churches set their staff and member FGs. This was for the researcher's convenience to avoid making multiple trips to the remote locations reducing the amount of travel by minimizing unnecessary trips.

Participating local churches agreed to meet during the mornings to allow the researcher to meet nonattenders in the local communities during afternoons and early evenings. This also allowed the researcher to meet with member FGs during their normal lunch breaks helping those

who worked during the day. The researcher had a goal of getting a minimum of four and a maximum of twenty participants by advertising for ten and allowing for up to twenty to register. All the meeting information was given on the promotional material. The promotional material also clarified the specific meeting spots and the time of check-ins. The check-in spots included copies of the ad and the words "start here" prominently placed for all participants to easily locate.

Nonattenders gathered around a preset table either off to one side or near the back of the location. The meeting spaces were situated in spots that were easily visible but far enough from the cash register and order locations that the FG conversations would not affect other walk-in business. The researcher reminded all participants their information would be kept private and secure although only minuscule information such as their names were collected. Their names and any personal details were not be used in the research study. The researcher also offered access to see the final product at the end of the study for all participants. Each nonattender meeting location was within a 4-minute drive of a participating church. The FGs lasted no longer than one hour at each location and most were completed in under 40 minutes.

Meeting with Church Attendees and Volunteers

A pastor for each participating church selected four to ten participants who regularly attended their church to meet with the facilitator on the same day as the staff FG met. The meeting rooms were rooms often used by church members and had some level of familiarity with the participants. This allowed the participants to feel as comfortable as they normally might at any given time, they attended church classes or meetings. The room layout was the same as the layout described for the ministerial staff interview. The facilitator provided candies and drinks for the FG participants.

The FGs lasted no more than one hour. The researcher assured participants their answers and all data would be protected. Their participation was kept confidential and pseudonyms were used for all individual references made in the research findings. The researcher reminded participants they may share expectations for input with others, but they should seek permission before sharing other subjects' comments.

Background Data Collection

To understand the context of each of the participating churches, some preliminary data were collected regarding each one. Each church reported their weekly Sunday morning worship service attendance records for the previous seven to ten years. Each church reported its counting process as well as who is included and not included in their weekly records. Some churches, for example, count all children who are in the preschool area as part of their worship attendance. Others count these children in their small group attendance. Some count them for both, reflecting two units for each child. Some do not count young children at all claiming they are not old enough to engage in purposeful worship.

Whether attendees such as children who are in a preschool area are counted or not is not an important issue for the sake of the study. The researcher simply needed to establish their accounting systems were the same as they were before their turnarounds. If there had been changes, the researcher would need to be able to account for any variations to maintain a consistent metric. The researcher made sure perceived growth was not simply a matter of changing the way participants are being counted yielding an illusion of growth in attendance.

The researcher, for example, was aware of one Florida church who produced artificial growth in this way. A pastor began counting their second-hour children's small groups as part of their worship attendance and small group attendance. He justified they were active in small

group gatherings and participating in worship and the children should get credit for both. The following year he added in the first hour of children's small groups making the same argument. It produced a slight positive numerical bump in the overall attendance for both years. Had the church not employed this form of counting, it would have shown two years of declining attendance which would have followed their trend from the previous seven years. Such churches were not included in the research study.

Churches counting practices of the PCs differ from one another as the researcher expected. The variations did not affect the final research findings since each church's counting system is consistent with itself over time. Each system, while varying, was able to validate real decline and real growth for the churches. The researcher confirmed each church maintained a consistent and fair standard for counting according to their systems. Their growth was confirmed with respect to expectations for counting. If their systems were consistent there should be observable changes in attendance that once showed each church's decline and then each one's growth. Since their counting systems have not changed and the numbers evidenced both a decline and then an incline then it is reasonable to consider the accounting represented the actual state of attendance trends in their churches.

The researcher also gathered data from www.city-data.com and www.census.gov to account for each church's host community's populations and community growth patterns. Pastors self-reported the state of development for the immediate areas surrounding their churches. Some were reported to be in relatively undeveloped areas such as wooded rural locations or surrounded by miles of large farms. Some were among newly developing residential communities. Some were also among fully developed neighborhoods with little transience. Some were near retail and business areas where they were surrounded by shops and office space. Some

were in economically declining areas where residents had been vacating, retail was moving away from, and industrial organizations had moved into. The churches' neighborhoods' stages of development and decline may be a significant factor for church growth (Rathge & Goreham, 1989; Webster, 2000).

Participants

Four churches served as the cases for inclusion in this study. The following inclusion criteria governed the selection of each case. The participating churches in this study were purposefully selected according to their growth trends, some pertinent demographics, and their locations. Each of the participating churches was conservative SBC churches. Their statuses with the SBC were verified through the www.sbc.net database. Their statuses as theologically conservative were determined according to the churches' own self-assessments as well as their statements of faith. The standard for conservative, SBC theology in this study was according to their adherence to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (*The Baptist Faith and Message*, 2000).

Each of the participating churches was active churches that had existed long enough to have had attendance that grew to an average ranging between 400-1,500. Then participating churches also had experienced at least four years of ongoing decline. For this study, four years of decline constituted their declines to be a pattern. It is also enough time for the pattern to become noticeable to those who are aware of attendance patterns.

One could argue one or two years of decline might be due to any number of minor issues. If a church turns its short decline around after one or two years, it is arguable the decline may not be a trend. These timeframes may have been caused by any number of uncontrollable circumstances such as road closures due to major roadwork or major facilities

repairs causing short-term displacement. Such incidents would not qualify as transferable to other populations concerning social factors of growth and decline. Four years also allowed churches in such circumstances to have made their appropriate course corrections and not qualify as churches that were suffering an ongoing decline.

The participating churches must also have had no church splits, had no known moral failures among its pastoral leadership, or any similar events leading to a sudden reduction in worship attendance. These factors would be limited to any time within six months before the four-year period. A church split that occurred many years prior, such as forty or fifty years before growth and decline might be very difficult to establish as causative. This is especially true if the split was followed by the growth necessary to qualify for the study. The researcher has found no research studies that suggest church splits, moral failures among the ministerial staff, or similar events are transferable factors among churches that were in decline except among those who experienced the same maladies.

Participating churches were from different regions throughout the state of Florida (FL). They included the panhandle and near the northeast coast. They were also in central FL and southeastern FL. These reflected a large diversity within the population of FL.

Churches were selected somewhat according to Florida's population dispersion but was not limited to large populations in large cities. This helped ensure the participating churches were adequately representative of the state. The variation was helpful as it was adequate for transferability of the research findings (Galvan & Galvan, 2017).

Three distinct groups were selected for three focus group meetings for each of the representative churches. Each group was determined according to their relationships with the representative churches. The researcher sought to understand any relevant themes or

important variations within and between the three groups. The focus groups consisted of nonattenders, ministerial staff, and regular attendees/members.

Nonattending Participants

The researcher anticipated the nonattending group to be the most difficult to gather for focus groups. Rather than having influential relationships within the church, these groups were gathered because of their lack of association with the churches. These participants lived in the immediate local areas surrounding the churches. The host café's group Facebook advertising was limited to their local clientele. It was reasonable to consider any response to the advertisement to be from a range of about a ten-minute radius around the church. Local advertising in cafés also likely helped as a limiter. It is reasonable to consider those who saw the advertisement in the local café and were willing to return to participate in the focus group at the café would be local to the café as well. The cafés were, in turn, local to the PCs. A free beverage was considered attractive to a person who lived locally to the café and frequented it. It would be hard to imagine a participant would have been willing to drive a long distance only for a beverage.

The nonattender focus groups were simply according to the first twelve to fifteen who were willing to register for the focus group. No other factors such as age, gender, income, or race were considered. None of these except ages were noted by the researcher as they were not relevant to the study. It is important to note the researcher did record 3 participants ages as part of their voluntary responses to FG questions. For example, one participant noted at her young age (mid-twenties), it was hard to handle the economic demands of life as she worked toward beginning her career (MHNA6).

The researcher was interested to see how churches that were in decline and had turned

around their attendance trends around compare demographically to their immediate

communities. The researcher wanted to explore whether demographic similarity with their

local communities helped churches effectively engage with their immediate communities.

Likewise, he explored whether churches demographically representing those who were in

their communities whose attendees might have wanted to help/serve might be significant.

Maybe churches demographically representing what those in their local communities aspire

towards may help the churches' attendance. The demographic factors were not limiting factors

for participation in the nonattender focus group.

There was a possibility that focus group responses from the participating churches'

ministerial groups or regular attendee and volunteer groups may have led to bias with the

nonattender groups' input. For this reason, the researcher studied the nonattender focus group

separately among each of the three focus groups for each of the participating churches.

Collecting data from the groups within the churches and collecting data from the groups from

outside the churches separately helped guard against perceptual bias or incidental influence

over each group's types of responses.

Ministerial Staff Participants

Ministerial staff participants must have been employed with a participating church.

Each must have been on staff for at least one year. This allows for the ministers in each focus

group to have a reasonable awareness of their churches' cultures, characteristics, qualities, and

practices. The focus group consisted of three to ten staff members per church site. The

ministers could fill any ministerial staff position as they were all professionally and

theologically leaders in their respective churches. The members of this group may have likely

had some of the most pronounced understandings of the qualities of their churches, the needs

in their churches, as well as potential strengths or weaknesses within the churches. They

maintained the formal responsibility to lead their people as they grew as disciples (Chester &

Timmis, 2008). This responsibility implied the responsibility to know and maintain an

awareness of their people to lead them from where they were in their spiritual formations to

their growth in their Christlikeness (Pettit, 2008).

The ministerial staff participants were not be selected or rejected according to their

ages, ethnicities, or other variables. These demographics were not noted for the sake of the

study and did not operate as delimiters for participation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This group

was selected solely according to their professional relationships with the participating

churches.

Regular Attendee and Volunteer Participants

The focus groups made up of regular attendees and volunteers were purposively

selected by their pastors. The pastors were asked to select four to ten volunteers who

represented the demographics of their church considering each church's age groups,

ethnicities, and socioeconomic factors. The intent was to select participants who, as a

collective group, reasonably represented their churches.

These participants must have been members during their church's period of decline as

well as during their turnaround period. The researcher counted on each participating church's

ministers to select broad and representative ranges of participants. It was assumed that the

minister was most likely to have the necessary knowledge and relationships with the church

attendees to be able to both adequately select the participants and have the participants

willingly accept to be part of the study. It was assumed that the minster most likely had strong

understandings of who was active as both attendees and volunteers in the life of their

churches.

General Participants

These three groups (staff, members, and nonattenders) as they related to each participating church help paint a portrait of the characteristics, qualities, needs, and aspirations of both those inside the participating churches and those who made up their immediate local communities. Observing some of the participating churches allowed the researcher to gain first-hand experiences with each church. Observation allowed the researcher to record information about the church to verify and further understand responses given during focus groups (Creswell, 2014). The researcher would be able to identify factors that seemed normative for each church and possible oddities.

The researcher recognized his presence and an atmosphere of similar people within each group (ministers, attendees, and nonattenders) may have biased the participants' responses. It was reasonable to consider each group may have wanted to give responses that put their groups or themselves individually in a positive light (Creswell, 2014). The researcher encouraged honesty. He reminded participants of their names and the participating churches' names would be replaced by pseudonyms. The participants would neither gain nor lose anything according to the content of their responses.

As a way of developing rapport and encouraging honesty, the researcher illustrated with a short story such as follows. Consider a mother who takes her infant to the pediatrician for a check-up. Her infant has not slept well for several days and cannot keep food down. She is concerned but she wants to be a good mother. When she talks with the doctor, she speaks very highly about how the infant is doing. She does not mention the issues with sleep and nutrition to avoid being considered a bad parent. The doctor seems impressed and they go

home. However, the infant still does not sleep or eat normally.

The goal of this research is simply to discover any positive or negative factors influencing church attendance and involvement. Since the responses are kept confidential, no person or group would look good or bad by the results of the study. The aim was not to help them look good or bad. Rather, the aim was to recognize any benefits or problems. The findings may hopefully help make their communities better, however. The researcher's high opinion was no more valuable than a doctor's high opinion of the mother in the illustration. The aim was wellbeing. After the illustration, the researcher asked the participants to help him uncover and explore any relevant symptoms concerning the problem.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers actively attempt to identify their personal, social, political, or philosophical biases that may affect how they collect and interpret data by being self-aware in their reflexivity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This researcher put up safeguards to guard against personal biases however, he is aware all researchers work with some degree of bias. This researcher's concern about the problem has been borne out of personal experiences.

At the time of the study, he had been an SBC minister for over twenty years. He served in one medium-sized Florida church experiencing many years of decline and the only church that saw growth in his area of ministry oversight during his time there. He has also served one church averaging over 1000 in attendance and it had experienced several years of decline before they turned their trend around to eventually become one of the largest churches in South Carolina. He has served as a church planter in Central Asia working with a few small churches with less than 100 regular attendees, as well as many house churches throughout the region who had attendance ranging between four and sixteen. He has also served a megachurch with over 5,600 members in

Virginia who experienced several years of slow and consistent decline.

The researcher has also worked with many churches around the nation as well as around the world as a coach and trainer for pastoral leaders, volunteers, and church planting teams. He also consulted with many churches including within the state of Florida concerning leadership development, discipleship strategies, and developing positively influential relationships with their communities. As a result of interacting with churches and pastors, the researcher believed most conservative, SBC churches that were experiencing ongoing declines had shifted their foci from doing whatever it takes to reach their communities and make disciples to maintaining a reputation they earned or believe they had earned around their communities or within expectations for internal circles of influence.

The researcher explored and sought to understand the factors that led churches from stages of decline to renewed growth to find out any commonalities between churches of similar backgrounds who accomplished attendance turnarounds. He hypothesized that he would find common elements associated with mission drift, the industrialization of local communities, and divergence between socioeconomic as well as ethnic backgrounds among the church attendees compared to their immediate surrounding communities. This research sought to either verify or invalidate this hypothesis. Equally as important, the researcher discovered whether there were other common positive or negative factors among participating churches that may affect church attendance in other similar churches.

The researcher has an ongoing relationship with one of the four PCs. The researcher has known the lead pastor for over a decade as well as most of the staff and several members for about a year at the time of the study. Because of the nature of this study, this ongoing relationship is believed to have little if any effect on the results of the study other than the

researcher experiencing a generous willingness by the staff to volunteer and help the researcher with the study. The long-time relationship allowed the researcher to know the staff and members were being honest without worrying about pretenses and without having to test whether the staff was trying to share their strengths and weakness in their most positive light. Rather, it seemed, the staff felt very comfortable to be openly honest in the discussions. All relationships predating this research were fully disclosed in both the research report as well as at the beginning of the focus group meetings. The researcher compared the data from this church with the other churches and did not find it to be an outlier, leading to the conclusion that bias had a minimal impact on the data collected.

The researcher avoided selecting churches only according to known personal relationships he had within the churches. This was an easy task as the number of churches that fit the qualifications was very small. By selecting churches according to their being spread across the Florida population, he avoided what some researchers call backyard research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

The researcher expected he would be able to develop a good working relationship with information gatekeepers at each participating church (Creswell, 2014). Most, if not all medium-sized churches have multiple office staff who have access to attendance records and usually one person who is ultimately responsible to maintain the records. These often work according to the direction of their supervising ministers such as an office administrator or executive pastor. The researcher requested the administrating pastor allow the office staff person responsible for the records to share nonpersonal information such as attendance and membership records with the researcher. He tried to make sure the pulling and sending of the records were able to be done at a time that was convenient to the person accessed the records to avoid reducing their regular work

productivity. The researcher only contacted the records keepers one or two times so the records they collected took less than a few minutes and no more than five minutes to access using their church organizational systems software.

By having an administrative authority grant the help of an office staff person, the office staff person did not feel the obligation to gain permission from the administrator when she needed to pull more than one series of records. Likely the staff person did this kind of work every day for various groups and purposes already. He or she likely did not consider the request(s) to be obtrusive, out of the ordinary, or the kind of thing they may consider questionable or concerning. By acting under the permission of an uninvolved third party, an administrator, both the records keeper and the researcher had a seamless and easy ability to share information.

It can be assumed the minister responsible for education, discipleship, and missions' ministries likely had a significant sense of concern over any ongoing decline in attendance and likely wanted to know how to maximize opportunities for continued growth. The researcher offered to present his findings as a mutually beneficial opportunity to both the ministers and the PCs. The researcher shared the research problem and purpose and related it to each ministers' church. He shared he was doing the study at his own expense and no charge to the churches and he would freely share all his findings with the participating churches for them to use and benefit from. It is believed that the benefits from gaining the information strongly outweigh the costs of participation for the churches as they only had to contribute a short amount of time, access to general information, and a relatively small number of opinions. The researcher likewise benefited by being able to more comprehensively study his topic of interest and complete his research. The relationships were mutually beneficial with no significant cost or downside on the

parts of any participants.

The researcher took an active part in the research study by leading the focus groups, developing the research questions and FG questions. He also directly interacted with ministerial staff, church attendees, as well as nonattenders who lived in the immediate community. When it was possible, he also informally observed church services and the interactions of attendees, ministers, and guests.

He also collected, organized, and analyzed the research data from the focus group interviews. To make sure the data were collected and organized thoroughly and accurately, he employed the services of a professional data analysis software. He was familiar with NVivo software, which is one of the oldest, most respected, and most capable software in the industry. The researcher also referred to other professional researchers for tips and advice when using the software to make sure he was using it in the best ways he could to organize the data.

Ethical Considerations

Every stage of this research needed to maintain the highest ethical standards. There was not be a time when any participant was in any form of danger or potential jeopardy greater than the relative degree of danger any person would be in by going about their everyday lives in those locations, which they consider to be their home locations. Likewise, the likelihood of emotional or psychological harm or distress was no higher than the participants might experience in their everyday lives as they went about their normative practices and ways of life.

The data about individuals that were collected were general information and none was private information that could have been used to harm or embarrass the participants in any way. The researcher did not request gender, ethnicity, race, education level, or personal finance data.

No minors were used in the collection of data. No specially protected groups were sought out such as crime victims, prisoners, or people suffering from any form of a disease.

All participants were given a printed Informed Consent form to keep for their records and a signed copy was retained by the researcher. There was no pressure on any person to complete the focus group or share any information or opinions the participants did not want to share. During the focus groups, the facilitator ensured there is no debate, argument, or shame about any responses to any questions. The researcher guided the discussion allowing each person to share their opinions as they wanted, and the participants focused their interactions toward the researcher rather than toward one another. This helped alleviate possible emotional concerns over disagreement or argument. The researcher has led a few thousand small group discussions and was very comfortable with guiding productive and inclusive discussions.

All participants were aware of the research problem, purpose, and research questions. All participants also had constant access to all interview questions. They were also made aware of the researcher's background with the problem.

Only the researcher had access to any personal information collected for the study. Pseudonyms were used for all participating churches and individuals. Pseudonyms were selected and associated with participants at random and did not have any kind of formulaic similarity to their real names. Four lists of four and five-letter codes were developed using two letters to associate the participants to their locations. The third and/or fourth letter in the pseudonyms reflected the FG they participated in, and the last letter or number was an individual differentiation given to each participant. For example, STNA2 was a participant from ST PC's area, NA defined them as part of the NA group, and 2 is the randomly assigned individual indicator of the person in the NA FG.

The participating churches were each given two-letter pseudonyms and none of the churches' names who are participating were used. Each participant was given a name consisting of a single letter or number with no reference to the names they gave the researcher ensuring each person a guarantee of confidentiality with the published results of the study. Other than the researcher and those who are in the specific focus groups, no other person has any way to identify any participants.

The researcher did not collect any personal contact data from any group such as phone numbers, home addresses, or email addresses. The researcher had the addresses, telephone numbers, and an email address for each participating church as well as the email address for the records keeper. This data is usually generally accessible and in most cases, they were collected from the churches' web pages or www.sbc.net according to the data the churches have shared and expected to be made accessible to the public on www.sbc.net. While this data were readily available on the internet, the researcher took measures to make sure no data were shared or made known in any way by him or anyone associated with the research study to maintain maximum privacy and participant confidentiality for all participants. All data were stored on the researcher's password-protected hard drive and backed up by an undisclosed and password-protected cloud source.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Considerations

There were no significant negative implications for any person or group for participating in this research study when compared to those associated with any other similar events that occur in the participants' everyday lives. Ministers shared their ministerial experiences, perceptions, and opinions as they might on any other day in any other setting. Church attendees attended church and talked about church attendance as they might at any other time when they were

attending church. Nonattenders shared their opinions as they might on any other day at any other time.

This research study was performed according to the highest ethical standards according to the rules and expectations of the Belmont Report and the requirements of the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. The Belmont Report (1979) included three principles applying to all research involving humans and human societies. They are respected for persons, beneficence, and justice.

The Belmont Report (1979) requires all forms of study and research to respect all people who have the capacity for self-governance, as well as all others who have any form of diminished capacity and are therefore vulnerable. These include children, elders, as well as prisoners. All participants were given a printed version of the Informed Consent form for their records and a signed copy was retained by the researcher. A copy of the Informed Consent form was attached as Appendix F to the final report. The Informed Consent form informed participants of any ethical issues related to the research as it relates to the participants' freedom from coercion, protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and absence of any conflicts of interest (Zikmund et al., 2012). The form also contained assurances of the nondisclosure and confidentiality of all data, notes, or records concerning participants. It also provided the contact information of the researcher including an email address and phone number.

Participants were reminded their participation was according to expectations for free wills and they would be allowed to stop at any time during the focus groups without the loss of any benefit. Assurance of privacy and confidentiality would be protected using randomly assigned pseudonyms. No real names or contact information related to personal data. Only digital forms of the data were kept after the completion of the study. It was stored on the

researcher's password-protected hard drive and backed up on an undisclosed and password-protected cloud service.

Participants were treated with respect and protected from harm in every part of the research according to the standard of the Belmont Report (1979). The Belmont Report requires researchers to maximize benefits and reduce possible harm (1979). The Informed Consent form (Appendix F) informed all participants they were free to participate or decline participation at any time before or during the interview process without any form of consequence. Additionally, they were informed they would be free to answer or decline to answer any questions for any reason according to expectations for desire and comfort.

According to the Belmont Report's third principle, participants were selected in three purposive groups according to either their status as a ministerial staff person alone, their regular attendance at a participating church, or their willfully choosing to be part of a focus group at a café located conveniently close to a participating church (1979). Any forms of risk and benefit were equally distributed (*The Belmont Report*, 1979). The identification of any participants is known solely by the researcher and those who also participated in the group forum at the same time as them. All others can only know participants as randomly assigned pseudonyms and associated according to a local participating church for the comparison of possible geographic variables, however, each church was also given a pseudonym for their maximum protection.

All research was conducted under the approval of Liberty University's IRB. This board confirms the maximum protection of all participants and populations as it relates to the research and any possible outcomes. Every effort was made to conform to all IRB requirements to maximally protect the privacy and wellbeing of all participants and populations involved both

directly and indirectly with this study. A copy of Liberty University's IRB letter of approval can be found in Appendix J.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

All quality research is dependent upon a good research plan. Even the best researchers, trying to solve the most critical problems can fail in their endeavors by using inadequate procedures. One might argue research procedures become the pathways and signposts which lead to solving difficult problems. Along the way, one might further argue excellent research plans and processes are what develop average researchers into excellent researchers.

This section informs readers of the researcher's data collection processes, the instrumentation used for data collection, and the rationale for their implementation. The researcher studied the problem using carefully selected case studies. The participating churches and their host communities were studied by interviewing three focus groups per participating church. The researcher informally observed the Sunday morning worship services of some of the PCs when possible, including the regular systems and programs they employ before and after the services. Data collection also included collecting focus group data from some nonattenders who lived in the host communities.

Collection Methods

Case study research is a form of qualitative (QUAL) research. QUAL research is one of three general research approaches (Roberts, 2010). The other two sister approaches are quantitative (QUAN) and mixed methods studies (MM). Each has strengths lending each to be particularly valuable in different contexts.

QUAN research involves testing theories by studying the relationships between defined variables (Creswell, 2014). As its name suggests, it measures quantities, or numbered data,

derived from instrumental measures (Roberts, 2010). QUAL research is equally scientific, but it is fundamentally different. Rather than testing a theory, it aims to understand persons, groups, or phenomena to develop a hypothesis or a theory (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, QUAL can be used to validate a theory (Creswell, 2014).

QUAL methods involve collecting data through various methods including observation and interviews. While QUAL methods rely heavily on numbers, they also include the use of words since not all data can be adequately quantified (Creswell, 2014). These studies involve understanding complex studies (Roberts, 2010). QUAL methods may study a phenomenon which could not be adequately understood without including factors such as the culture, history, surrounding circumstances, ethnic distinctions, as well as other demographic data. Mixed methods employ the use of both QUAN and QUAL methods (Creswell, 2014).

This researcher used QUAL methods to study the research problem. The nature of the problem required a naturalistic design rather than an experimental design (Roberts, 2010). It involved an inductive analysis of an ongoing set of phenomena with an intent to develop a testable hypothesis (Creswell, 2014). To understand the problem, the researcher depended on the focus group interviews and data were supported by informal observation. As is normative in QUAL research, the researcher was part of the investigative instrumentation (Roberts, 2010). The researcher collected a wide range of data including social demographic data-driven by their relevance to the problem rather than a proposed theory (Duque, 2009). The study included purposive sampling rather than some form of random sampling, as is indicative of QUAL methods (Duque, 2009). The research aim was to generate an exploratory understanding of a phenomenon to develop a hypothesis that could be tested in later studies using QUAN techniques.

Instruments, Protocols, and Procedures

The researcher planned to use two forms of QUAL instrumentation in the research project. One instrument, the case study, functioned as an umbrella design instrument for the other instrument. The case studies were performed by collecting data from multiple focus groups. Focus groups were selected as the research tool according to its instrumental efficacy relative to the project. The focus group instrument, including the focus group questionnaire was validated according to implementation in similar scholarly research studies (Creswell, 2014).

The Case Study Design

There is a broad range of techniques that fit under the umbrella of QUAL methodologies. This research focuses on only one type, case studies. Case studies are the best method to understand one person, situation, or small group of people in great depth (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The project involved an in-depth study of a small group of churches who were atypical. These churches were achieving aims that many other churches would like to experience but are not. The intent of the study was to research and identify whether there are thematic social and relational qualities, characteristics, or practices shared among these exemplary churches.

The case study format allowed the researcher to study the churches in their normative and natural settings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Case studies can offer insightful perspectives since the atypical phenomena deal directly with possible themes relating to their particular contexts (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Case studies allowed the researcher to apply inductive reasoning by performing a comparative analysis of the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The researcher was able to relate the findings of each case to the other participating cases to identify any similarities. Case studies are not generalizable to broader populations, but they can offer beneficial and transferrable insights to similar churches in similar circumstances (Slevin & Sines, 1999).

Four churches served as the cases for inclusion in this study. The inclusion criteria were discussed in the participants' section of this chapter. A summary of the parameters for inclusion incorporated being an SBC Church located in Florida. The churches must have averaged between 300-1000 in regular worship attendance at the time of the study. Each church's attendance pattern must have reflected a consistent decline followed by a trending increase in worship attendance.

Focus Groups

For each participating church, the researcher conducted group interviews in focus group formats. Focus groups were organized according to three distinctive groups. Each set of three focus group interviews were in comfortably familiar settings at or near each of their associated participating churches. The groups were gathered according to their roles and relationships with each of the participants' churches. Each participating church involved an interview with four to ten of their ministerial staff people. Another set of groups was made up of four to eleven regular attendees and volunteers of the participating churches. The third group sets were made up of five to fifteen nonattenders who lived in the churches' local communities but who were not regularly involved in or attending any church.

Conducting interviews in a focus group format allowed participants to interact with one another. The participants were able to build on one another's thoughts and ideas. Hearing one another's responses may have helped participants consider responses they might have otherwise forgotten or overlooked which they felt were important (Yin, 2015).

Focus group participants were also able to directly interact with the researcher (Creswell, 2014). The researcher had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to clarify or expound on any of their responses. Reciprocally, if participants were unsure whether their responses

accurately reflected their intentions, they were able to interact with the researcher as the data

recipient to make any clarifications or additions to their responses. This format allowed for

greater confidence in the dissemination of the participants' responses (Yin, 2015).

The researcher collected general demographic data describing the local church context

and surrounding area, but no personal data were collected about participants such as

socioeconomic factors, ethnicity and race representations, or population densities. The researcher

collected social data including social habits, social perceptions, and general life practices from

various research groups including local community websites and regional research studies.

Psychological factors such as emotional and perceptual data were collected through focus group

studies. The data were then be categorized, synthesized, and interpreted to create a full cognitive

portrait of each case (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The researcher comparatively analyzed the cases

searching for significant common themes.

The researcher is responsible to accurately provide validation for which common themes

are and are not significant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). For example, the researcher may

hypothetically find all participating churches have parking lots as an insignificant factor. He may

also hypothetically find some characteristics of their parking lots such as distances from the main

worship centers or how they are organized and utilized to be significant to their growth trends.

By conducting three focus groups for each case study, the participants were

encouraged to provide their perceptions, share relevant information, and explain how they

gained their perceptions (Creswell, 2014). Interview questions allowed the researcher to

guide the discussions and dig into streams of information that were relevant to the problem

(Roberts, 2010). It was important to note the responses were limited to individual perceptions

which may or may not be accurate or transferable. Using focus groups rather than individual

interviews helped the researcher guard against any likelihood of an individual's

misperceptions which could skew the research results. Likewise, performing multiple focus

groups further helped guard against skewed results because of individual misperceptions.

Multiple focus groups may have also helped uncover some broad sweeping misperception

that might be endemic to the problem. By performing three different focus groups for each

case study, the researcher could identify if such misperceptions existed.

Focus group interviews processes. Participating churches were selected and recruited

with the help of local SBC associational directors. A sample of the initial contact letter to the

associational directors was attached in Appendix A. A letter requesting their assistance was sent

to every SBC associational director in Florida. A follow-up telephone call was made ten days

after the initial contact letter has been made. The follow-up telephone call was made to every

associational director who has not responded to the initial request for help. A script of the

telephone request can be found in Appendix B. Appendix A and Appendix B state, the researcher

would happily share any detail and openly answer any question asked by the associational

director or any potential participant.

Once a list of churches was collected, they were organized on a spreadsheet including

names, ministerial staff, and contact information for each person as the researcher collected the

data. The researcher also added attendee and nonattender names to this list. Each participating

church had its own spreadsheet. A master spreadsheet served as Sheet 1 including the church

name, address, email, phone number, and an associated pseudonym. Only the researcher has

access to this sheet. An associated sheet has all similar data except the names that were replaced

with pseudonyms and contact information were redacted.

Once the contact data were collected the researcher mailed an initial request to the ministers (referred to as S in the study) of each potential participating church. A copy of the initial contact letter requesting their participation can be found in Appendix C. Ten days after the initial contact letter the researcher followed up with a personal telephone call. A follow-up letter was sent to every potential ministerial staff representative who had not responded to the initial letter of request. A follow-up letter to ministerial staff can be found in Appendix D.

The researcher began each focus group by thanking them for being part of the study. He reminded all participants they were under no pressure to answer any question and can quit at any time and he appreciates all input they are willing to offer. He briefly explained the purpose of the study as well as the impetus. He shared the research study was part of his doctoral dissertation. He added the resulting data may help some local communities and local churches have an increasingly positive and beneficial relationship with one another. All that was required of the participants was their willingness to share their honest opinions, perceptions, and experiences. The researcher ended the introduction by reminding participants their names would be kept strictly confidential. At the end of the focus groups, he associated each participant's data with a pseudonym to ensure their privacy and right to confidentiality. No one, other than the researcher, would be able to connect their names to their data. A written form of the instructions and informed consent confirming agreement to the IRB was given to each participant. Consent forms were signed and retained. A copy of the instructions and the Informed Consent agreement can be found in Appendix F.

The interviewer distributed a copy of the interview questions to each participant and instructions. He asked each question in order. The participants received a copy of the questions along with their invitation to join the study as well. The researcher informed the group he would

allow them to respond in any order they wanted, and he would allow ample time for each person

to respond. Additionally, respondents were reminded they were under no pressure to answer any

questions they did not want to answer for any reason.

The researcher's contact information was distributed to each participant. If they would

like to follow-up later by adding additional thoughts later, they are welcomed to. If they wanted

to offer insights they did not want to share with the group, they were likewise welcomed to. They

were able to contact the researcher at any time by cell phone, email, or written correspondence.

Participants had already received a written form of the interview questions at the time of

the initial contact. A copy was distributed to each participant during the introductory comments

at the beginning of each focus group meeting. The research then began asking each question to

the participants in the order listed. A copy of the interview questions for the ministerial staff can

be found in Appendix G. Appendix H is a copy of the interview questions for regular church

attendees and volunteers. Nonattender questions can be found in Appendix I.

Validity and reliability testing. These FG questions have been collected according to

national research questionnaires by Barna Group (2017), Hadaway (1991), Roozen and

Hadaway, (1993), and Stetzer's research team (2009). Questions were also derived from local

research studies including Bond (2015), Bruce et al. (2006), Hudson (2017), Martin (2015),

Penfold (2011), Royster (2016), and Shelton (2015).

The included FG questions were tested and revised according to an expert panel. Four

ministers of consistently growing churches were selected to form the expert panel. They had also

completed some terminal degree study verifying they understood the rigors of good research

studies. The expert panel was selected by the researcher. Each reviewed the questions in an

editable Word document allowing them to make comments and suggestions. The researcher

edited the FQs and returned the revised questions to the entire panel for further consideration. The researcher continued this cycle until the expert panel uniformly agreed to the validity and reliability of the research questions.

Field tests were conducted among two churches who were either too large or too small to fit into the research study and were within an hour of driving time for the researcher. The field test data were collected and organized according to their associated questions. Each question and the associated answers were organized together and sent to the expert panel for further validity and reliability testing. The researcher and the expert panel conducted a further set of edits. This field testing was repeated using the most recently revised interview questions until no changes were suggested by the expert panel or the researcher. If any changes had been suggested the researcher would have conducted further cycles of revisions and field testing until no edits are suggested and all questions met the expert panel and research supervisor's unanimous and complete approval.

Document Analysis

Some informal documents and data analysis were involved in evaluating the inclusion criterion for potential participating churches. The information was easy to both gather and understand for both the researcher and readers. The researcher used data from sbc.net and flbaptist.org to verify participating churches were actively part of the SBC. These websites were also used to gather churches' contact information, including their websites.

The researcher used each church's websites to collect ministerial staff's names and email addresses. The researcher also collected data concerning worship times. Additionally, the researcher used the churches' websites to observe participating churches' ministry programming, events, and any advertised data relating to interactions with their host communities.

The researcher collected data from each participating church with the help of a ministerial staff person or office staff person. Drawing from the churches' organizational software, the researcher was able to collect information such as their average attendance numbers and membership numbers. The researcher was also able to collect annual attendance trends over many years for each church.

Cursory informal documents analysis was for the purpose of collecting the necessary data for the study. This included the information necessary to identify the churches that fit inclusion in the study. The researcher did not perform formal document analysis on the documentation collected from the participating churches or the information gathered from publicly accessible web sites regarding the churches such as city-data.com and sbc.net.

Sampling procedures

Transferability, reliability, and validity of the research findings hinged on the participants involved in the study, how and why they were selected, and how accurately they represented broader populations (Creswell, 2014). Since this research study seeks to understand a distinct and atypical group, completely random sampling techniques, valuable to QUAN studies, would not likely lead to a greater understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Rather, random sampling would more likely help researchers understand typical qualities rather than atypical population metrics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This study's samples involved purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants according to their relationships with the research problem. For example, in this researcher's study, he intended to study established churches who had experienced multiple successive years of ongoing declines in their worship service attendance averages then experienced significant and consistent turnarounds in their attendance. It was important for the researcher to purposively select

churches' ministerial teams as participants to understand their perceptions, insights, practices, and qualities. Likewise, studying regular church attendees as participants led to better insights than studying the perceptions of irregular attendees, as they did not have the same level of understanding of the inner workings of the churches, their visions, their goals, or their ministries.

Minister focus group sampling. Each of the three focus groups relating to each participating church involved a different participant selection process dependent upon their relationships with the problem. Each ministerial focus group was from homogeneous samplings. Each ministerial participant was selected according to their particular role with the research problem (Jager et al., 2017).

Attendee focus group sampling. It would have been impossible to interview every member and participant of every participating church. It is very likely the churches cannot locate every member of their churches. Likewise, a completely random selection of all members and participants would be both difficult and likely unreliable. Members who have not attended a participating church in two years, for example, were probably not very likely to participate in a research study involving the church. Members who only attended a few times per year may not be in touch with the guiding values the participating churches strived to maintain. For such reasons, a different form of purposive sampling selecting only regular attendees proved more beneficial to the study.

The researcher used snowball sampling as the preferred method of participant selection (Noy, 2008). He recruited an influential and knowledgeable minister or team of ministers from each participating church to recruit volunteers. They were able to select participants who understood and embodied the values of their churches as a whole and adequately represented the members who help shape and maintain the character of each PC.

Nonattender focus group sampling. Nonattenders were the most challenging group from which to draw a representative sample. The researcher used intensity sampling as the preferred method of participant selection. The researcher ensured his sample did not include attendees. These could have skewed the results of collected data about such subjects as nonattenders' perceptions about the church. Intensity sampling allowed the researcher to select potentially "information-rich participants who manifested the problem most intensely" (Patton, 1990).

Data collection summary. Four Florida SBC Churches averaging 300-1000 in attendance were studied using a qualitative case study methodology. The churches represented atypical phenomena among churches. To qualify for the study, they must have experienced at least four years of successive decline attendance. They must also have experienced a significant turnaround in their attendance trends becoming numerically growing churches again.

Three subsets within the populations were evaluated according to their relationships with the research phenomenon. Ministers, regular attendees, and nonattenders were each interviewed in focus groups. The researcher also informally observed some of the churches' regular worship services including some of their practices or processes occurring immediately before and after their Sunday morning worship services. Publicly available data from religious organizations that collect demographic data were also collected to help identify churches who fit the inclusion parameters of the study. Information was also collected from various other respected demographic research groups relating to the host communities such as local government websites, www.city-data.com, and www.census.gov for the same purpose.

The researcher observed these data sets seeking to discover significant themes. The researcher wanted to learn whether there were common themes relating to these churches' practices, qualities, or characteristics among their attendees, their programming, or their

leadership teams. If common themes were discovered, they could be valuable for consideration for other similar churches.

Data Analysis Methods

Once data were collected, they were codified and organized, the researcher used one of the leading data analysis software tools to explore variations among possible categorizations. The researcher used NVIVO software to help in the analysis process. To reduce the possibility of user error or overlooking important considerations, the researcher employed the skillsets of a few other professional researchers who were familiar with NVIVO qualitative analytic software.

Data were collected for each participating church and each compared using various lenses. These include area economic factors, uses of space and ministry volunteers, uses of volunteers before and after worship services, facilities' conditions and stylistic factors, as well as the welcome process and guest follow-up techniques. They also included factors such as the types of ministries the participating churches used, those they may have stopped using, and those they may have recently begun. These were also considered according to the churches' stated visions, values, and goals.

Each church was also compared according to similarities and differences between the characteristics of local churches and their surrounding communities. The researcher observed whether there were themes according to distinctive shared qualities between the individual churches and their surrounding communities. Likewise, he explored whether there were distinctively divergent qualities among the local churches and their host communities.

Examples

Church growth and decline is not a new topic of study. Many churches, groups, and communities have been studied in places around the United States and the world. Many of these

studies have involved comparative analyses of case studies. One such study explored seven

Baptist churches in Texas who were in decline and began growing again (Shelton, 2015).

Another study uses similar methods researching five United Methodist churches in western Ohio

which experienced similar attendance conditions (Martin, 2015). Hudson also engages in a

similar study (2017). His methods also utilized quantitative methods as well, making his study a

mixed methods research study.

These samples represent several studies focusing on either church attendance decline or

growth. These representative studies offer some parallel findings. For example, each finds

common leadership qualities represented in the ministerial staff teams of the sample churches

who were experiencing growth. They also find other conclusions that varied with each study

depended on the varying characteristics of their host communities and circumstances. These

studies, while helpful and informative, do not prove to be reliably generalizable to conservative,

SBC churches in Florida. The researcher performed the research study to close this gap in the

research.

Transcription and Initial Memo Making

During each focus group interview, the researcher made notes according to his

perceptions and observations on a notes list organized according to each participant's name. A

timestamp was made alongside each note to be able to associate it with the video and audio

recorded data. After each focus group, the researcher made his final notes at the bottom of his

field notes.

After each set of three focus groups were completed, the researcher transcribed all audio

recorded data using voice-to-text software. The researcher both listened to the audio recordings

and read the voice transcriptions to ensure accuracy. Each voice transcription was formatted into

word documents. Participants' responses were color-coded with a color representing each person to easily identify each participant's data. The researcher's initial field notes were added to the research data document using color to denote the researcher's input.

Organization and Coding

The researcher began the data organization process by systematizing the data according to an initial set of codes. The researcher added to and edited the initial codes list as he worked through the data and develop further emergent codes according to the language and response types of the participants (Noy, 2008). The initial coding system required three complete passes through the transcribed data. During each pass, the researcher added highlights and underlines along with associated codes to the right-hand column of the transcribed data (Yin, 2015). These first three passes were intended to apply descriptive coding to the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). An index of all codes is attached in Appendix K.

During the first pass, the researcher asked two key questions and coded the transcripts accordingly. First, what was the content saying or what does the content represent (Lofland et al., 2005)? The purpose was to identify core content, which was coded with the term CORE, later to be further coded into values and needs lists. This data identified foundational meaning. Other related data that referred to the CORE content were such as illustrations, examples, explanations, or revisions.

The second question the researcher ask during the first pass was about what each part was an example of (Lofland et al., 2005)? These forms of data included examples and illustrations referring to CORE data. These were according to the participants' words and allowed the researcher to better understand the meaning participants associated with their CORE statements. These data were coded as IL.

During the second pass through each set of transcripts, the researcher considered two other organizational questions. He used the data to explore what is going on throughout the conversation. This data established the flow and direction of communication. He was able to code whether other focus group members were communicating in agreement with the transcribed statements or offering alternative or rebuttal content. This helped encapsulate the researcher's understanding according to his deductions. The researcher code this information using BP referencing the global context or big picture. This content may include emotional or physical forms of communication. Further coding included perceptions of optimism, pessimism, antagonism, and the like. If, for example, a respondent was generally talkative but became quiet during one portion of questioning, these notes were added here.

The researcher also explored contextual and interpersonal content during the second pass. He asked what was happening during each given part of the interviews (Lofland et al., 2005). For example, if an outside interruption changed the course of the interview, it was noted during this time. If a respondent became emotionally expressive, it was noted here as well. If participants engaged in dialogue with one another and the banter was positive and supportive, questioning, or in disagreement memos were made during this time and the data were coded as such using emergent codes.

The third pass through the transcribed data involved asking what kinds of events or meanings were at issue here (Lofland et al., 2005). The intent during this third pass was to find foundational or philosophical foundations underlying the content. These were coded as AR. These included any forms of evidence offered by or referred to by the respondents. The researcher aimed to understand why the respondents say what they say and believe what they

believe. It included perceptions as well as possible suggestions about how their perceptions and ideas came to be.

There was one last question the researcher asked during this first phase. As a further way of understanding the philosophical and foundational meaning behind each response, the researcher asked about what was trying to be conveyed (Lofland et al., 2005). This was important because it may not be fair to assume that all who communicate are good at conveying what they intend to say by what they say. This involved considering the totality of each CORE response, how it was clarified using illustrations and explanations, as well as how the respondents built on or referred to other respondent's input. The result was a good understanding of what respondents intended to say according to the sum of their explanative efforts. These data were coded as COMM, referring to respondents' intents according to their communication.

Identifying Themes and Patterns

After the researcher applied descriptive coding to the data, he began the analytical coding process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). During this phase, the researcher sought meaningful themes in the data and reorganized the data accordingly (Creswell, 2014). This began by searching for patterns in the data (Patel, 2014). The primary characteristics the researcher searched for included six factors. First, he searched for similarities, things that happen in the same way or meaning that was held in parallel with others (Patel, 2014). Next, the data were organized according to differences. These included things that happened in predictably different ways (Patel, 2014).

The researcher also coded for word and phrase frequency noting how often or seldom responses occurred (Patton, 1990). It was helpful to organize data according to sequencing to recognize any value in ordinal responses noting support, degrees of value, or forms of repetition

(Patton, 1990). Likewise, correspondence was coded as a way to analyze data according to their relation to other activities, events, or data (Slevin & Sines, 1999). Similarly, it was helpful to code for causative factors in the data identifying datum that yielded causation of other data including emotions, explanations, and the like (Slevin & Sines, 1999).

Focusing the codes

A second element in the analytical coding phase included focused coding (Patel, 2014). During this phase, the researcher searched for the most frequently appearing and most meaningfully significant codes. This phase of coding included categorizing data based on thematic or conceptual similarities (Patel, 2014).

The third element in the analytical coding process involved axial coding (Patton, 1990). The researcher connected how categories related to each other. This coding involved ordinally valuing properties to create data categories and subcategories. It also involved drawing connections between the various categories (Patton, 1990).

Finally, the researcher applied theoretical coding. This final aim was to analyze the coded data towards discovering any central themes. Organizing any central themes or CORE categories led to the identification of or development of the salient research findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Analysis validation

After data have been coded and analyzed, the researcher tested for validation. The researcher submitted and discussed all findings with the expert panel and the ministerial staff focus groups to overview the findings. The researcher validated his findings according to the practices of the focus groups' and expert panel's practices. The data agreed with the participating

churches' practices since the data were an extrapolation of the qualities and characteristics underlying their successful efforts.

Summary of the Data

The CORE needs and values of all groups are summarized as follows: Family and Relationships were referenced most with 266 unique references. Needs and Values related to the cost of living and economic security were referenced 97 times. Faith (82 references), Education (64 references), health and wellbeing (50 references), and the ability to enjoy life (48 references) were cumulatively referenced 244 times. It was significant the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th highest CORE codes combined were reference 9.3% times less than family and relationships by all groups. Other important values and findings were coded and explained in chapter 4.

Table 2

Summary of Nodes According to Coding

Name	Files	References
Family & Relationships	42	266
Economy Finance, Budget, Provision	23	97
Faith	31	82
Education	28	64
Health & Wellbeing	17	50
Enjoyment of Life	13	48
Job & Career	13	41
Materialism & Entitlement	14	35
Hobbies	5	9
Awareness of Participating Church	3	4
Unaware	3	20
Heard of OR Generally Aware	4	19
Very Familiar	3	9
Opinions About Church(es)	0	0
Community, area needs	34	126
Personal Relevance in Teaching and engagement	29	80
Ministry Programming	27	72
Friendly, Welcoming, Inviting Atmosphere	15	57
Politics, Social Power, Divisiveness	15	45
Effective Leadership	11	27
Desirable Qualities in a Church	3	7

Trustworthiness

Truthfulness is a critical element for any research study. Readers should critically evaluate the researcher's data and claims asking whether they can be trusted. Do the findings validly support the researcher's claims? Has the researcher done a thorough job collecting and analyzing all relevant data? Qualitative researchers generally use the term "trustworthiness to refer to the concept of validity" (Roberts, 2010, p. 161). The credibility factors involved in this researcher's study are repeated throughout this chapter. This section

serves as a summary of these factors.

The researcher guarded against inadvertently inserting personal biases throughout the study. By following the objective standards of the approved study, he was able to search for and collect data according to the framing of the research and not additional personal biases. Likewise, transcription, coding, and analysis was according to number of references made by participants and the subject matter as reported by participants. After analysis and conclusions were formed the researcher submitted his findings to members of the staff focus groups for their confirmation. The researcher sought to find whether the analysis and conclusions of the study accurately reflected and fit their contexts and responses as they reported them.

Credibility

Proper research and research findings accurately describe the topics they study. This research study involved iterative data collection processes to ensure the reduction of bias and to better understand the phenomena according to multiple data collection approaches (Creswell, 2014)**.** These included case studies focus group interviews, observation, and the evaluation of some quantitative data.

The interview questions underwent the evaluation of an expert panel (Patton, 1990). They also underwent field testing to further increase research credibility (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). All findings were further verified by both an expert panel and the ministerial staff representing the participating churches.

Case study participants were selected according to their relationships with the phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The participants were selected according to objective preset protocols. These ensured the participating churches were not selected according to the convenience of the

researcher. Likewise, these ensured the participating churches were not selected according to a preexisting relationship with the researcher, which may have allowed for bias (Yin, 2015).

Dependability

The participants, settings, and protocols sections of this chapter explained the detail of the selection processes and research contexts. The researcher used multiple focus groups and multiple forms of questions as a means of data triangulation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). These multiple and varying techniques increased the dependability of the findings by verifying the data according to the consistency of the findings through the multiplicity of data collection approaches. The research findings were agreeably thematic as observed by both the researcher and the ministerial staff participants.

Confirmability

Following the descriptions in the participants, settings, and protocols sections, other researchers should be able to replicate this study in similar contexts and find similar results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The data were summarized, explained, and illustrated using tables for readers to make sense of the data and the research findings. The researcher will also be happy to make all data that is not confidentially protected under the ethical requirement of Liberty University's IRB and the Belmont Report (1979) available for review upon request.

Transferability

As is true in qualitative research, this research project was not generalizable to any population (Slevin & Sines, 1999). The findings may, however, be transferable to other churches in similar contexts. The beneficial and common qualities and characteristics are identified among churches who were in decline and then were consistently growing at the time of the study may be transferable to other churches of similar size, governance, and

theological positions. They may be transferable to other churches as well. While the research was limited to churches who average 300-1000 in weekly worship serve attendance, some or all characteristics or qualities may be transferable to larger or smaller congregations as well.

This research did not consider other theological persuasions outside of conservative, SBC churches. Likewise, the research did not consider other church governance or leadership styles. While the study's findings may be beneficial to other church leadership or governance models and other theological convictions, the study offers no precedent for transferability in this manner.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has overviewed the detail and processes of the multiple case study, a qualitative analysis that was conducted by interviewing subjects in focus groups of fifteen participants or less. The design included an in-depth analysis of four local churches that averaged between 300-1,000 regular attendees. The participating churches were churches that had experienced ongoing declines in their regular attendance and then experienced significant turnarounds in their attendance. The researcher identified many generative common practices, qualities, or characteristics that were shared among the subject churches that positively influenced the reversal in their attendance trends.

This chapter has covered the details of the research process and procedures. It included the aims, processes, concerns, and the reasoning for each part of the study. The section included sociological and psychological ethical concerns, participant selection processes, and the considerations involved in the development of each phase of the research study. The next chapter discusses the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, was to identify factors that positively and negatively influenced church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church nonattenders. Regular attendance and engagement were defined as at least twice monthly attendance at a local Southern Baptist church. The pertinent findings and the focus group response data were analyzed and summarized in this section.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Initially, the researcher sent a letter (Appendix A) via email to every associational, regional, and state representative and strategist for the (Florida Baptist Convention) FLBC requesting input regarding the identification of churches who might fit the research parameters. The researcher followed up by calling (Appendix B) every representative and strategist who had not responded to the initial email. After emailing with or talking with every FLBC state associational, and regional representative as well as strategist throughout Florida, a total of six churches were identified fitting the parameters of the study.

Initially, the researcher was surprised to only identify 6 prospective participating churches throughout the state of Florida. Many churches fit the size parameters. Many had experienced ongoing attendance declines. The factor regarding current and consistent growth in attendance was the primary factor that made inclusion in the study difficult. The researcher, knowing Florida fit into what is known colloquially as the Bible belt and boasted one of the highest populations by state in the U.S., assumed he would easily identify at least 15 to 20 potential participant churches. This initial and incidental finding raised questions regarding the condition of churches across the state of Florida. He also wondered whether this condition was

common among other states as well. The researcher did not pursue this initial observation further as it did not directly apply to the focus of the research study.

Needing between 4 and 6 (Participating Churches) PCs for the study and only identifying 6 created a potential challenge. The researcher sent letters (Appendix C) via email to each of the 6 potential PCs. He re-sent an exact copy of the email again one week later. The researcher followed up with a second form of email contact (Appendix D) to each potential PC. Two churches declined participation in the study. The pastors each cited they were too busy to give enough time and energy to the study. Four agreed to be part of the study.

The researcher emailed a copy of the (Focus Group Questions) FGQs for S, M, and NA groups (Appendices G-I) along with an approval form for the lead pastor to sign permitting the researcher to perform research on the church premises and with both PC staff and attendees (Appendix L). Each pastor returned the permission form digitally using docusign.com. Docusign.com is a respected online legal document sharing and signatory software often used by real estate agents, lawyers, bankers, and a wide variety of others.

Dates and times were arranged with PC pastors to perform the S FGs. Each pastor selected M FG participants who were familiar with the ministries and histories of their churches. A total of 86 participants from 4 areas around Florida participated in the study. 21 were PC ministerial staff. 31 were active PC members. 34 were nonattenders from the immediate communities surrounding the PCs.

The participants each received written instructions and a copy of the FGQs and an informed consent form. Each participant signed the Informed Consent (Appendix F). Each FG was conducted according to the format laid out in chapter 3. Data were recorded by the researcher by handwritten note taking and supported by video/audio recording for verification.

The data were later transcribed into word documents. The responses were organized in multiple formats for analysis. They were grouped first according to geographic region. Second, they were categorized according to like roles (S FGs, M FGs, and NA FGs). Next, they were reorganized a third time according to each FGQ. Finally, they were regrouped again both by each FGQ and according to like roles. They were grouped to be analyzed in hopes of identifying any salient similarities or differences between the NA and PC groups. The data were organized using NVIVO Qualitative Analytical Software. Codes were developed along with nodes for comparative purposes to identify salient themes in the data. The results of this comparative analysis are presented in this chapter and supplemented using figures and other graphic aids.

Demographic and Sample Data

In this section, demographic data were explained regarding the 4 PCs and each of the 3 FGs which were conducted either at or near each PC. Only the pertinent data to the research study were collected regarding each participant. For SFGs, how long each staff person had been on staff at the church. For each MFG participant, the how they had attended the church and what their roles were as volunteers at their churches. These were collected to confirm their regular activity as PC attendees. (Nonattender Focus Group) NAFG participants recorded generally how far they lived from the FG locations to confirm they were part of the PC's surrounding communities.

Each PC represented a different ministry context throughout Florida from very affluent (ST and MH), middle income (CM), to very poor (FB). ST and MH were coastal and semi-coastal. CM was in south-central Florida and FB was in the upper central panhandle. ST was in a large metropolis, CM and FB were small rural communities, and MH was in a medium-sized suburb near a large metro city. Each PC was in decline and each one reached a point where the

church came very close to folding. Each one, at the time of the study, had been growing

consistently and facing significant space issues because of the number of people coming to their

churches. Each one took measures in different ways according to their leadership and their

contexts to meet people where they were in their communities to lead them to growing

relationships with Jesus through their churches. Each one found ways to identify good methods

to build relationships with people that brought them into their churches. Each one was

continually evaluating and looking for better ways to be the church for their community.

Each church had previously experienced ongoing decline and faced a recent time of

significant hardship. Both FB and CM were very significantly affected by Hurricane Michael, a

category 5 hurricane. The hurricane caused financial hardship to their entire regions as well as

"member fatigue" according to FBSS. FBSS used the term to describe the stress members

endured while trying to volunteer to meet needs following the natural disaster as a church for

their communities. At the same time, the volunteers who were trying to help others were dealing

with the same circumstances in their homes and with their families. FBSS explained people were

simply exhausted physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and economically.

CM Snapshot

CM went through a decline during an extended time while also going through the

transitions of 3 lead pastors. The first served for 18 years and experienced significant growth.

The second was in place for 22 months. The church lost a lot of people under his leadership and

had to remove him as lead pastor. When the pastor at the time of the study came to serve the

church (having served 4 years at the time of the study) it was in financial distress and there were

deep relational wounds among the people causing disunity. He led the church through a time of

healing and restoration.

MH Snapshot

MH's founding pastor left to plant a new church. Many attendees who attended the church because of their fondness toward the founding pastor dwindled over the next year. They declined from the mid 500's to under 200 in 10 months. When the second pastor took leadership, he led the church into further decline. They shrunk to under 90 regular attendees over the next 14 months. The third pastor, leading at the time of the research study, led the church to a regular attendance of over 700 over the next 15 years.

ST Snapshot

ST almost closed its doors 5 years before the research study. Attendees and staff reported strong disunity between staff members as well as between staff and members. Some staff refused to attend worship services while on staff. The intensity of division because varying groups clamored for power led many attendees to leave ST according to STSG, STSM, and STM2. With regular expenses quickly outpacing income, the church discussed whether it was time to disband. In what long-time staff member STSJ and long-time member STM1 described as a last effort, they called the pastor at the time of the study on a 1-year trial basis. In the past he had served the church as their minister to students. This was during their most fruitful years prior to him becoming the lead pastor. Over 5 years under his leadership unity had been restored, they became debt-free, they grew from 2 locations to 3 locations with 4 different groups (defined by ST as campuses) as wells as multiple Sunday morning services at one location. At the time of the study, they were developing their 5th local campus with plans to launch it in 2020. STSG explained the church, at the time of the study was stronger than it had ever been normatively

seeing at least 6 people baptized each month and new guests coming as well as returning each week.

FB Snapshot

FB was in a slow decline and an aging congregation. There had been no significant disruptions due to staff misalignment over the last 2 decades. The lead pastor at the time of the study had been on staff for 17 years. Other staff members in the FBFG had been on staff 16, 17, 18, and 30 years. Their turnaround was, in part, a result of their strategic response to the natural disaster, Hurricane Michael. The church came together feeding the entire community including the entire police force and medical services for 10 days. They spearheaded working together with local businesses, government agencies, and outside help to meet the immediate needs of the people in their community. As their church and community recovered, the church continued its fervor to care for its community. The slow decline transitioned after 2018's category 5 hurricane and the church was seeing more people baptized each year than the previous year and their budget was stronger than it had been in decades. The church was launching new ministries to its community and reinforcing those making the most significant impacts. They were giving far more to their community by way of intentional ministry than they ever had before. It is worth noting, FB was not in 14 years of consistent decline. Rather, it had some years of growth followed by some years of loss. The church did experience 5 years of consistent decline immediately before the 3 consistent years of growth which the church was continuing in during the time of the study.

Each of the NA FGs was gathered with no regard for race, gender, faith, or socioeconomic status. Each NA volunteered to be part of the FG while at local places where social connections were normative. The researcher sought out local cafés as common meeting

spots. The local café near ST was less than 2 blocks from the PC. The local café near MH was just under 1/3 miles from the PC. Neither CM nor FB had local cafés.

The researcher, with the help of a local, was able to gather 10 participants at a very popular local park near CM. The park was located directly across a 30-yard wide river from the PC. Locals volunteered to share their opinions while watching manatees swim and with the participating church in the background.

The FBNA group offered the researcher a very pleasant surprise. There was no local café in the community. The researcher prayed before entering a local favorite BBQ restaurant to eat lunch about one quarter mile from the PC. He was frustrated because he had found no way to gather a NA group for the FB area. Every possibility was too far away from the PC to ensure the respondents were part of the PC's local community. The researcher was considering he would have to return to the location at another time to gather a NAFG.

To his amazement, the researcher and his wife met an off-duty waitress at the restaurant who was there for lunch seeing her friends. After learning why, the researcher was in town, she voluntarily offered to gather a group on his behalf. She, seeming to know every person in the local restaurant by name, went from table to table asking if they would like to join a focus group. Within 8 minutes 11 people moved from their tables to join the researcher at a large table near the middle of the room. More participants would have joined the FG but there was no more room for people to be able to eat their meals around the participant tables. At least 4 potential respondents returned to their tables. A few around the room listened to the focus group proceedings but none of the FG participants seemed to mind. It seemed to add an air of excitement to what they were contributing.

Table 1

Demographic Summary of PCs

	CM	MH	ST	FB
Lead Pastor Years on Staff	4	15	5	17
Years of Consistent Growth	4	15	5	3
Number of S in FG	3	5	8	5
Number of M in FG	11	5	4	11
Number of NA in FG	7	10	8	9

Data Analysis and Findings

The RQs in this study were intended to identify any salient socially relational factors that might influence church attendance and engagement among people and families in the immediate communities hosting the study's PCs. Each FGQ was related to one or more of the 5 RQs guiding the research study. Each response or set of responses were categorized in multiple ways to observe themes related to word and topic frequency in the responses. NVIVO qualitative analytical software aided the researcher in tabulating and organizing terms and responses. Each set of responses were grouped by region and analyzed. They were also grouped according to alike roles (staff, attendee, or nonattender). Responses were additionally grouped and evaluatively analyzed according to each FGQ. Finally, all responses were grouped according to both alike roles and FGQ for a comparative analysis.

After the responses were dully grouped, they were coded and organized by nodes with the aid of NIVIO analytical software. Once responses had been coded and structured according to their like nodes the researcher was able to see similarities and differences within responses according to word count, the number of references, and the number of references coded to the manifested themes.

The first RQ sought to identify the awareness of similarities and differences between the needs of families in the communities surrounding the PCs and the expressed needs of those who

make up the PCs. The second RQ explored the level of awareness of PCs regarding the

prioritized values of both people in their host communities and withing their churches. RQ3 was

intended to investigate notable relational competencies held by those who make up the PCs

regarding their host communities that helped them effectively lead families in their communities

to attend the PCs.

The fourth RQ was to reveal ministries the churches offered that had little or no

measurable effect regarding the host communities. More than exploring whether ineffective

ministries or ministries with decreasing rates of return existed at the PCs, this question sought to

understand whether the growing PCs had some vehicle for identifying effectiveness regarding

their ministries. Likewise, this RQ explored whether the churches had a normative and

intentional methodology for refining, altering, or transitioning ineffective ministries.

By knowing whether they have ineffective or negligibly effective ministries, it was

reasonable to consider they had some form of system, some way of knowing about their

effectiveness. If they were aware of ministries' effectiveness, the researcher could explore why

they perceived the ministries to be so. He could also learn about what they did, if anything,

regarding the discovery of ineffectiveness or declining effectiveness.

RQ5 was used similarly to RQ4 to consider whether there might be ministries the PCs

might offer or are seeking to offer to their host communities to increase their effectiveness at

reaching new attendees. RQ4 considered ministries' past track records. RQ5 considered their

plans regarding their ministries' futures and projections. This question sought to understand if or

how the growing PCs evaluated and sought out new opportunities and methods for ministry to

best minister to the families living around the PCs. This study was not designed to be predictive.

Rather, it sought to explore current and previous processes employed by the PCs regarding past

ministries, current ministries, and future ministries and how they went about their exploration

and ministry selection processes. It also drew some theoretical conclusions regarding ministry

adoption and orientation with regards to PCs' host communities.

Table 2

Summary of Nodes According to Coding

Name	Files	References
Family & Relationships	42	266
Economy Finance, Budget, Provision	23	97
Faith	31	82
Education	28	64
Health & Wellbeing	17	50
Enjoyment of Life	13	48
Job & Career	13	41
Materialism & Entitlement	14	35
Hobbies	5	9
Awareness of Participating Church	3	4
Unaware	3	20
Heard of OR Generally Aware	4	19
Very Familiar	3	9
Opinions About Church(es)	0	0
Community, area needs	34	126
Personal Relevance in Teaching and engagement	29	80
Ministry Programming	27	72
Friendly, Welcoming, Inviting Atmosphere	15	57
Politics, Social Power, Divisiveness	15	45
Effective Leadership	11	27
Desirable Qualities in a Church	3	7

RQ1

RQ1 asked, what was the level of awareness for active church members concerning the

similarities and differences in the needs of families in the communities surrounding medium-

sized SBC churches (defined as those whose average weekly attendance is 300-1,000) and the

people within the church? To study RQ1, the researcher investigated FGQs from each of the 3

categories of FGs. The relevant FGQs included Staff FG Q2, Q3, and Q4 as well as Member FG

Q2, Q3, and Q4. Nonattender FGQs included Q1, Q2, Q3a, and Q4a. (See Appendix M for a

chart relating RQs to FGQs.) A comparative analysis led to the emergence of 5 principle

findings.

Table 3

Chart Relating RQ1 with Focus Group Questions

	Staff Qs	Member Qs	NonAtt Qs
RQ1	2,3, 4,	2,3, 4,	1,2,3a,4a,

RQ1 Finding 1

Each PC seemed to be aware of the primary needs and their characteristics regarding

various sub-groups making up their host communities. The PCs adjusted their forms of ministry

according to what they had found to be most effective for the sub-groups. They also seemed to

recognize and act on ministry areas that cross over among various sub-groups. For example,

STM1 explained "there are two extremes in our community. We have very affluent

people who own yachts, private planes, and multi-million-dollar homes and people

who live in small, run-down trailer parks and homes. The latter have a hard time

paying bills. They are two very different groups of people. Both are concerned

about their families and friends."

STM2 added ST was among the most influential groups in the city and ST attendees also

had the same broken hearts as everyone from every segment of life. The variations between the

needs of people in their church and people in the host community were relatively similar.

CMMC shared that the needs of those in the PC and the community were also the same.

Participant CMMC added, "both struggle with their marriages and family dynamics. People are

not fully engaged in their marriages. People seem to be looking for something." CMME built on

the comment explaining, "we know they need Jesus, but they come (to CM) because of some

other need first." Likewise, FBMA argued the PC wrestles with the same issues as the host

community because the PC "reflects the community."

Regarding awareness of needs, staff FGs contributed understanding as well. STSM said

their PC worked to be in places to "listen to the needs in our community. We listen so we can

meet the right needs." The staff of each PC seemed intentional about ministering to the right

needs. CMSD explained CM surveyed its community to identify needs. They found the

prioritized needs of their host community were: 1) Financial security, 2) Education (they worried

about their kids being in good schools), and 3) Housing. Housing was reported to be very

expensive in their area. The PCs showed high awareness regarding the reported needs of their

host communities.

RQ1 Finding 2

According to the NAFGs, there seemed to be a high concern for individual and family

security. Security defined for this study included paying bills, providing for needs, and being

prepared to face the future. Both wealthy and poor people in every group seemed to have a

similar drive for security regardless of their economic positions. This was a constant similarity

among all groups.

Figure 1

Needs Among All FGs
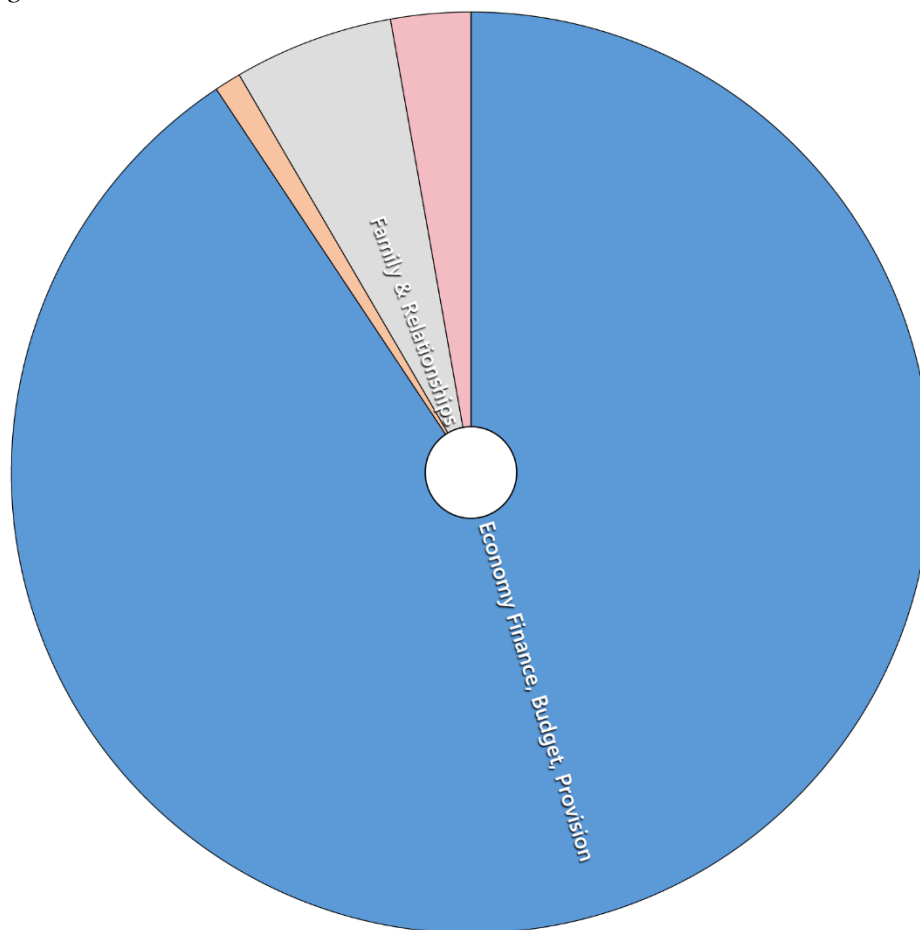
There were some differences in the ways in which needs were described among some

groups. Every FG in the study regarded the need for education with a high emphasis. There

seemed to be differences in how education was defined among PCs and their host communities

in every group. Picking up on clues from the context in conversations and the direct verbiage

during S and M FGs, the PCs seemed to describe needs for education regarding growing in

understanding as well as teaching facts about faith. NAs seemed to be more concerned with

themselves or their children being adequately prepared for the future with reference to education.

The PCs seemed to put a strong emphasis on understanding, education and biblical understanding as a method of caring for people.

NAs seemed to put less emphasis on broad scope understanding in education, although it was regarded as important. Their greatest priorities concerning needs included having healthy and productive family dynamics and investing time and resources in the happiness and wellbeing of their children first. They prioritized the need for healthy relational dynamics with their spouses second and extended family as well as close friends third. NAs showed regard for education, but their stated priorities suggested they saw education as a means to an end more than an end unto itself. They did not seem to be motivated to know more or have a greater understanding unless it affected the meeting of a need or they saw it as increasing security for their lives and the lives of their loved ones (immediately or in the future).

NA, M, and S participants seemed to regard NA's attention toward religious education and faith understanding as like other family hobbies such as their children's sports. NAs may have considered the practice of faith and church attendance as a means to an end. Many may have considered it as one of multiple good options along with sports, time together at home, work, and formal education as ways to have or maintain healthy family dynamics and relationships. MHNA3 for example, explained, "people do not want to feel guilty for having other things going on in life that gets in the way of going to church sometimes."

Education, when weighted according to the number of references from all FGs, was the 4th most common need among all participants (having 64 total responses). The definition for education was very broad, however, and respondents did not communicate a general need for education or educational opportunities for themselves or their children and siblings as though they lacked opportunity or resources. 39 of 64 responses were PC staff and attendees discussing

needs concerning discipleship ministries. 2 of 64 respondents were collegiate students whose stated needs were focused on completing assignments and upcoming deadlines.

Many others discussed varying general educational needs. FBNA5 explained many people in the FB host community needed better education because they have grown up in difficult circumstances and often did not know there are better ways to do things. MHNA6 expressed a need to finish her GED to find better employment. Others discussed the competitiveness regarding grade school education. MHSR expressed people around the MH community were "very serious about what school their kids go to." MHSR shared there were multiple good options in the area. Each family seemed to want to be known as a (given school name) family as a matter of family and community pride.

RQ1 Finding 3

97 responses, comprehensively among all FGs discussed economics, finance, budget, and/or basic provisions as a high need. This rated as the 2nd highest grouping of responses among all FGs. It may be worth noting 62 of the 97 responses were from NAs.

At and around MH (an affluent area) for example, people experienced economic difficulty. MHNA1 attributed the difficulties to the high cost of rent and "high-income earners making it difficult for lower-income earners and average people to make a living because they drive the cost of living up." MHMF suggested there were increasing numbers of nontraditional families such as grandparents raising grandchildren because neither parent could take responsibility for raising the children. She added there were single-parent homes who struggled financially. MHNA7 lamented "Amelia Islanders (and adjacent and affluent community) were pushing the middle and low class farther out of the area." MHNA10 agreed, sharing that rent was very high and people in the area "work two or three jobs to pay bills."

Each PC had active provision ministries. Some provisions ministries were solely sponsored by the PC. Others worked with other groups to meet needs in their areas. They provided ministries such as feeding the poor. FB created and maintained a community thrift store. All the proceeds from the thrift store went to support another provision ministry for local women in need. FBMB shared, "we saw needs and we felt responsible." FBME followed up saying "together they find a way" to meet people's needs.

RQ1 Finding 4

Health and wellbeing were the 5th most referenced need or concern among all FGs with 49 responses. 25 of 49 responses (51%) directly referenced mental and emotional wellbeing rather than physical health. One respondent referenced health and wellbeing as a priority defining health as maintaining athleticism. It was significant to note she worked at a local fitness center.

Figure 2

Needs Referencing Health and Wellbeing
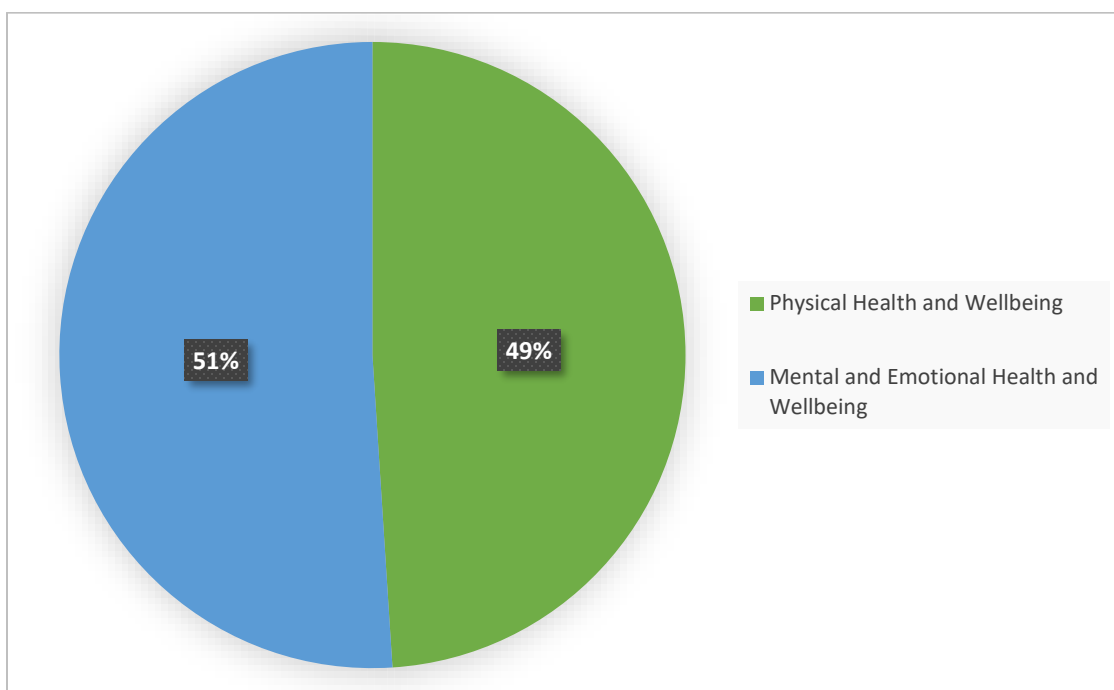
In FB's context, the most common responses fitting the health and wellbeing category were regarding substance abuse. According to multiple references both from FB and FBNA groups, drug abuse was very common and a significant need in their area. The PC ran a local home helping male addicts overcome their addictions. FB was also in the process of opening a similar home for women. This seemed to be a significant need for the FB community and one the PC was putting a high degree of their resources toward ministering to.

RQ1 Finding 5

Difficulties with jobs or finding jobs/careers were the 7th most referenced prioritized needs. 8 references expressed concern about future uncertainty or beginning a new career. MHNA8 was a 25-year-old who was concerned over what she would do with her life (referencing a career path). FBNA3, a 22-year-old, expressed uncertainty about the future. Other references were like CMNA1's desire for career advancement and MHNA1's wanting to "do a good job at work." While job/career was commonly referenced by NAs as well as Ms, no PCs discussed any form of ministry purposed toward this concern.

RQ1 Summary

As FBMB stated, "The community generally has the same needs as those in the church because our church reflects the community." There was a strong awareness as well as a correlation of needs by NAs and people attending the PCs. PCs seemed to continually evaluate their communities and were regularly considering better ways to meet the needs of people in their host communities. The FGs most common needs or desires were for healthy relationships. MHMI said people longed for "connectedness. A place to belong. Even though they may not articulate it, people have a high need to find belonging." STM2 pointed out they have

multimillion-dollar homes for sale around them because the relationships of those inside them fell apart.

RQ2

RQ2 asked what was the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the primary values held by families in the communities surrounding medium-sized SBC churches and the people within the churches? RQ2 was explored by referencing FG Q5 and Q6 from both S and M groups. Q3 and Q4 from the NA groups informed RQ2. After coding and analysis, 5 prominent themes emerged. By the sheer number of comments, family and relationships were a far greater priority than any other factor for all groups. Family and relationships were referenced 266 times in total. 200 of these were from NA groups. Two observations were worth noting. Family and relationships were referenced almost more than the next three most common code sets combined. (Economic: 84, Faith: 63, Education 54, totaling 201 comments among all respondents.) Also, the 266 were individual and unique references. If a respondent referenced family 5 times in one response, for example, these 5 were counted as a single reference. A word count including familial and relational terms would have included a much higher number of references. A simple word count, however, would not have provided as clear of a picture as some respondents simply used the terms often.

Most relational responses were in reference to raising children. Many were also about having or maintaining healthy marriages. Many others referred to caring for and having good relationships with loved ones such as ailing parents, in-laws, and the like. The comments also included enjoying reciprocally encouraging and beneficial friendships. The following word cloud illustrates the recurrence of relational themes while priorities were discussed during all FGs.

Table 4

Chart Relating RQ2 to Focus Group Questions

	Staff Qs	Member Qs	NonAtt Qs
RQ2	5,6,	5,6,	3,4,

Figure 3

Relational Theme Frequency
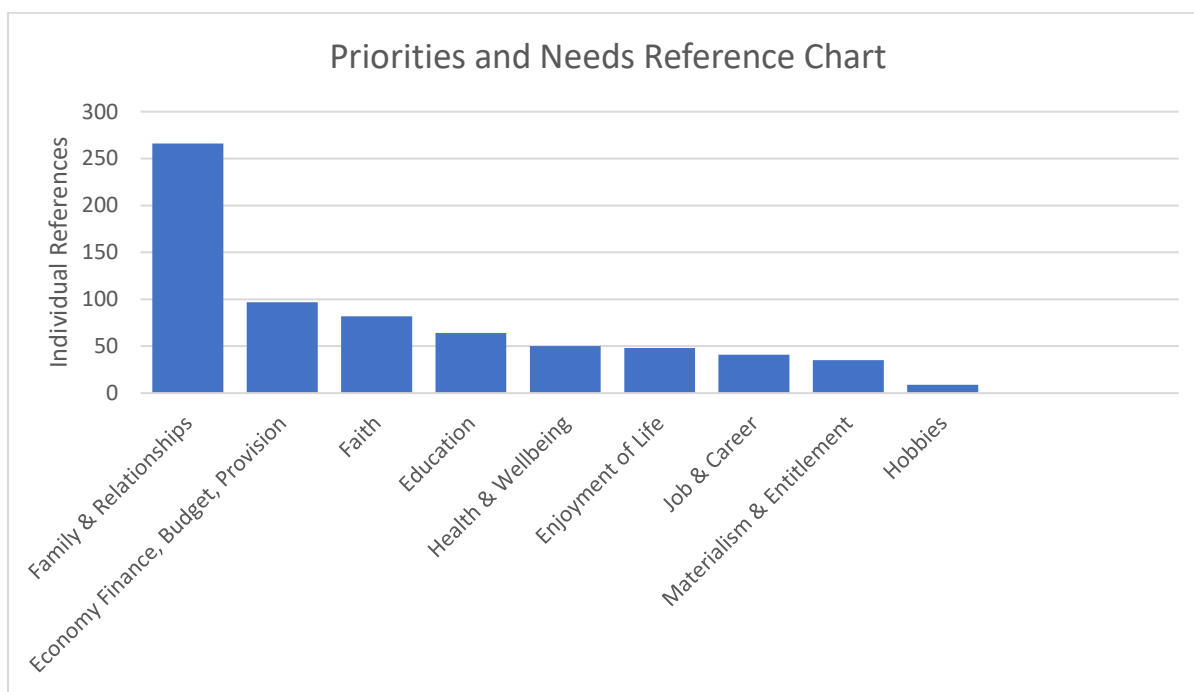
RQ2 Theme 1

The PCs recognized family relationships were the highest priority for their communities. More specifically, having and maintaining strong relationships with their children was a high priority and something both Ms and NAs wanted most. CMMA explained they came to CM because of their daughter. He said CM had many great ministries and offered a lot for people but it was his daughter's desire to attend that led to their family's commitment to attendance and regular involvement in the life of CM. STM1 explained her church was highly social, much like

her community. She added, "people want to share life together." CMMB summarized CM's ministry priorities to church attendees as "relationships, get-togethers, and fellowship."

RQ2 Theme 2

NAs values and needs both rated family and relationships consistently as their highest stated priority. Interestingly, when the FG participant was taken out of the equation by asking about the priorities of others in their communities, they were as likely to express priorities regarding economic stability and materialism as much higher priorities. That is, the FG participants expressed family as a high priority for themselves and jobs or materialistic priorities as higher for other people in their community whom they may not know personally.

Similarly, some NAs in each FG expressed concerns that many churches were too oriented toward money. They offered criticism saying many churches seemed to want more people so more people would give to church programs. M and S groups, in the same way, tended to believe NAs were too oriented toward money. MHSM said people usually want "more money, more and higher quality stuff, and more enjoyment of life."

It appears groups saw the same issue of materialism in other groups. They saw it as an issue for others who were like them (others in the community or other churches). Not one respondent in any FG responded as though they saw it as a priority for themselves. When the discussion of priorities included themselves and loved ones, NAs tended to use softer terms such as a desire for career advancement with a lower degree of materialistic priorities. Personal material priorities such as vehicles or homes were generally in the context of other priorities in expectations for cases. For example, buying a car was to have transportation to work and get their kids where they needed to be. Building a home was to suit the needs of growing families.

Staff, like M and NA groups, identified materialism a priority in their host communities. All groups identified the priority negatively and did not associate themselves with it. None of the participants considered themselves to be materialistic. Only a few considered materialism a priority among expectations for families. The only mentions of materialism regarding church attendees were regarding some other church members in other churches or their church but not in their social circles.

RQ2 Theme 3

NAs expressed they wanted to spend most of their resources, energy, and time on family, relationships, personal/family wellbeing, and the enjoyment of life. PC Ms also described family and relationships as their highest verbalized priority for themselves, others in their churches and as a ministry focus. S groups shared with consistent agreement that faith, family, career advancement, and hobbies all seemed to be high priorities for those who make up their churches and communities.

The additional priorities shared by staff, other than family and relationships, according to both their responses and the responses of M and NA FGs, did not seem to exist as individual priorities. Faith, family, career advancement, and hobbies seemed to be intertwined with one another. Almost every response referring to hobbies included family-oriented hobbies such as children's sports. Career advancement often related to providing for their families' wants, needs, and future stability. Enjoyment of life came up often and was also regularly intertwined with conversations around faith, family, career advancement, and hobbies.

After a comment about kids' sports CMSD said he believed people in his community have developed an unhealthy priority on family. "Families have become idols for people," he added. Regular family scheduling such as kids' sports and school extracurricular activities were

perceived as competition with church ministries among all PCs. The competition against the PCs

seemed to be events or options where parents were able to engage in some form of

encouragement or support role for their children. Parents and children both seemed to be

increasingly opting for these over PC programming according to the perceptions of M and S

groups.

FB, for example, adjusted their programming to help families make time for both school

extracurriculars and church programming. They attempted to remove the need for choosing

between one or the other for parents and children. It seemed, according to S and M perceptions,

the competition negatively affected the PCs' attendance and member involvement.

It was important to note, with regards to this study, each PC staff group recognized

family and relationships as a high priority among members of their communities. The priority of

family relationships was considered both a virtuous value as well as an adverse value in the way

it was expressed in their communities. The perception of adversity seemed to be because NAs, as

well as many Ms, seemed to pursue the priorities of family and relationships in ways that drew

them away from church attendance.

The PC's Primary Priorities According to A FGs. Attendee participants (M) all

believed their churches were known for two primary values. They believed they were known for

Scriptural authenticity relating to teaching, preaching, and programming. They also believed

their churches were highly relational. They used terms such as *welcoming, kind,* and *servant-*

hearted often as they described the qualities of their churches. They also believed their churches

were actively meeting needs in their host communities such as feeding the hungry.

Regarding relationality, one participant described his church's outreach ministries as

"endorphin evangelism" (STM2). He explained their evangelistic efforts began more with

relationships than information. As a personal testimony about the welcoming relationality of his church, another FG participant said, "I chose this church because of its multiple outreach programs" (FBMD).

Attendees and Staff at each PC believed family relationships and particularly having and maintaining strong relationships with their children was a high priority and something both members and nonattenders wanted and needed. STM1 described ST as highly social, mirroring its host community. She shared sentiments such as "people want to share life together" (STM1). FBMA voiced "when people come, and they come back again a second time and people in the church ask about them and their kids because they remember them. That means the world to them because you remember, and you care. They are looking for that."

The PC's Primary Priorities According to S FGs. Like M FGs, PC staff believed their churches' highest values were Scriptural authenticity and reaching out to their communities in effective and meaningful ways. MHSD said MH was best known for "expository preaching, missional living, and maintaining a high view of Scripture." STSE said ST was "a church for the city." STSC described STSE's comment further by explaining each campus (4 in total) had its own personality that fits according to the immediate communities hosting them. He shared one campus was known as the coffee church. Another was the church that was in the schools. They sought to be where their target audience was, living life alongside them in meaningful ways. In a similar vein, CMSP described CM as a "family-oriented, friendly, redneck church, blue-collar church." Each S seemed to regard their church as being strategic about understanding the people and families who make up their community. The also seemed to believe they were striving to meet people where they were in life and in their communities to lead them to transformative relationships with Jesus.

RQ2 Theme 4

The enjoyment of life was referenced 45 times by all FG participants as a driving priority. The enjoyment of life as a theme was referenced in a multiplicity of ways. Many reported they simply wanted to enjoy life. Others described this value as "enjoying good health, having no real needs, and having a good family" (STNA3). Many also expressed concern over whether they would be able to enjoy life in the future. CMNA3, for example, expressed worry about whether he would be able "to pay bills and enjoy life" in the future. FBNA8 shared concern about him and his wife's ability to retire comfortably and whether their health care would be adequate for them to enjoy life as they would like. STNA2 expressed a similar concern wondering if he would be able to continue to "take care of himself" and his spouse.

The enjoyment of life seemed to be a driving factor affecting the way individuals used their resources, time, and energy. The enjoyment of life seemed to be a common interest among respondents and something they spent significant time worrying about. It was apparent to the researcher the PCs recognized people's concerns regarding the enjoyment of life. They likewise factored it into their methods of ministry. ST reportedly sent a local gourmet coffee truck (Buddy Brew) to serve specialty coffees to teachers at schools in their area regularly. ST covered the expenses for teachers' coffee simply to help local teachers have a better day and to remind them ST wanted to help them enjoy their lives. FB reported they hosted multiple medical ministries to help people in their community alleviate worry about their ability to enjoy their lives soon.

RQ2 Theme 5

It might not be a surprise to many that participating church S and M groups referenced faith often as an overarching value. Faith was referenced among all focus groups as a high value 78 times making it the 3rd most often referenced value in the study. 62 of the references were S

and M participants. 16 of the 78 references were made by NAs. Only 1 respondent (MHNA8) verbally said she did not believe faith was an important factor in her life (nor involvement in faith practices through church involvement or attendance). Others, whether they attended a church or not considered faith and church attendance to be both valuable and important. FBNA8 added a caveat. Being Jewish, he clarified his belief that attending either a church or a synagogue was very important. He explained these institutions "maintain the moral fabric of society" (FBNA8). FBNA6 remarked, "everything churches do matters."

RQ 2 Summary

The purpose of RQ2 was to investigate the alignment and awareness of the prioritized values held by PC churches and their communities. The PC's seemed to understand the values of those who make up their host communities. Each PC shared some form of ongoing evaluation they used to measure and understand both the needs and values of their communities. Every PC and its surrounding communities most referenced family and relationships as an important value. Their other priorities, in order according to the regularity of FG responses were financial stability, faith, education, health/wellbeing, enjoyment of life, job/career, materialistic wants, and hobbies. Significantly, family and relationships were referenced as a highly motivating value almost more than any three other stated values combined.

RQ3

RQ3 asked what were the salient relational competencies that the people in medium-sized SBC churches need for the church to effectively lead families in their communities to attend their churches? To study RQ3, the researcher investigated FGQs from each of the 3 categories of FGs. The relevant FGQs included Staff FG Q1, Q7, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q13, and Q14. Member FGQs included Q1, Q7, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q13, and Q14. Nonattender FGQs included Q6, Q7, and Q8.

(Appendix M charts all RQs with their associated FGQs.) A comparative analysis revealed 7 salient factors regarding the relational competencies of the PCs.

Table 5

Chart Relating RQ3 to Focus Group Questions

	Staff Qs	Member Qs	NonAtt Qs
RQ3	1,7,9,10,12,13,14	1,7,9,10,12,13,14	6,7,8

RQ3 Factor 1

PCs purposed to meet people in their host communities where they were physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially to bring them to a clear understanding and opportunity to respond to the Gospel. MHMA emphasized they did not plan a lot of events at MH to encourage those who were part of the church to be actively involved in the community to serve as lights and minister among people in the community. MHMB added, "the church's goal is to equip people for ministry and to be involved in the community where we can be a light." FBMB said FB "is mostly outside the building. We come together to get plays from the quarterback and go back out." MHMD explained MH had a goal to equip its people for the work of ministry. MHMC stated the PC had little outreach programming. Instead, they equip their members to share the Gospel as they go about living their everyday lives. MHME articulated "We expect people (in the church) to be actives part of the community to serve and live as light."

CMMD stated when CM members are out, "they recognize they are the church. They carry out the mission wherever they are." STSH expressed "we go to them by being involved in and part of the community." STSG later added they looked for problems to solve and ways to help the community in real and practical ways. STSM surmised ST had an "incarnational model of ministry." STSG echoed STSM by saying "we want to understand our community and do life in it."

RQ3 Factor 2

Each PC met needs as a vehicle for showing authentic love to build meaningful, fruitful relationships that reveal the Gospel in clear and practical ways through the context of met needs. Each met needs relating to poverty in their areas, but each put most of its ministry emphasis on developing, nurturing, supporting, and helping promote healthy and Christ oriented relationships. For example, FBMA, described people from their generally impoverished community saying when it came to drug and alcohol-related issues, abuse, and the like, "people often do not ask for help. They need someone to recognize their need and reach out to them."

Responding to a question about what they believed the greatest needs were in their community MHMG said, "families need marriage counseling, help dealing with relationship issues, and training/encouragement as parents." STM1 voiced, "families need support being healthy families." STM4 described his affluent community confessing "there are not a lot of deep, open relationships within the community. People are afraid to reveal their needs, so they keep them hidden by not getting very deep or opening up in relationships." He argued people hid their hurts behind their resources (luxury cars, private airplanes, sailboats, multimillion-dollar homes, and the like).

PC's Intentionality Toward Belonging and Hospitality. MHMI adduced people were generally looking for "connectedness, a place to belong." He added, "Even though they may not articulate it, people have a high need and want to find belonging." MHMG asserted "people are looking for others they can relate to. They want people who are similar in their ages, stages of life, interests, and the like."

Similarly, 100% of those who shared qualities they would look for in a church if they were to go to church revolved around either hospitality or age-graded ministries. Respondents

included other values as well, such as biblical teaching and good relationships among small groups (Sunday School, Life Groups, Home Groups, etc.). While other values were iterated, significantly, every person sharing a quality they would desire in a church said something relating to hospitality or age-graded ministries. It is worth noting this only includes those who offered responses to NAFG Q6. Three participants, for example, responded they did not know, which was categorized as *no response* for this study.

Examples included the following: FBMA would have wanted to find, "a welcoming place." MHNA2 said, "a good vibe, friendliness." MHNA3 wanted "friendly people, acceptance of strangers, good doctrine, and community involvement." MHNA4 emphasized "atmosphere, how the church treated guests, honesty, and genuineness" among attendees. FBNA7 would have wanted to find "deep love; people who want to know you."

Staff groups shared examples of how their churches tried to communicate hospitality and welcome. FBSG commented "we have a few rows of drug addicts who are in recovery. They are loved like rock stars. One is an atheist. He is very new and uncomfortable, but he is still coming!" STSH urged "everybody is on the (ST) greeting team. Everybody is on the outreach team." STM2 confessed ST used to primarily have great academic programming. Missions and ministries were focused abroad and outside of their geographic areas. He added the church was well-balanced at the time of the study. They "invest heavily in the local community with a high emphasis on hospitality."

RQ3 Factor 3

PCs regarded their resources, including their facilities as a tool for ministry to show hospitality to their communities. Members of MH were encouraged to give up their seats for guests. Some stood in the back of their worship center. Some went to an overflow room where

they watched a livestream of the service from a large projection screen. MHMD expressed while it was an inconvenience, they felt thankful to get to give up their seats for guests.

Financially, each PC invested heavily in its local community. MHSN explained MH paid off its mortgage and immediately rerouted 100% of that portion of its budget to missions. The primary beneficiary was the host community. All participants in the STM focus group all agreed they used to put most of their energy and resources toward academic programming and their missions were almost entirely international efforts. At the time of the research study, ST was investing heavily in its local community with a high emphasis on hospitality. They supported schools through giving supplies to classrooms, giving backpacks with supplies to the children of whole schools at the beginning of each year, hosted lunches for teachers on teacher workdays, sponsored meals for families in the community through local schools' counseling and advising departments, and the like.

Perceptual Variation between S and M groups. There were 14 responses to Member Q12 regarding what they believed the biggest wins for each PC over the last few years. 7 responses (50%) referred directly to PC facilities with statements about paying off building debt, building new structures, or initiating building campaigns. It is noteworthy that each mention of debt and structures were tied to how it helped fulfill the vision of the given PC. For example, MH moved all its mortgage budget to missional giving and support. FB was building a multi-purpose building to serve needs in the community no other group was meeting. Following a hurricane, there was a lot of need. Also, they had overseen the sports programming for the city for many years. FBSS reported the city was required to take back over when the ACLU got involved creating legal problems for both the church and the city. Several years later the city had

to stop providing kids sports opportunities. FB intended to provide them to the community again on their own property and under their own name.

Interestingly, of 26 total responses from staff about the PCs' biggest wins, only 6 involved finance and buildings. 2 of the 6 comments were explanations that they got to pay for the needs of another church and help rebuild a church that had been destroyed by Hurricane Michael. If these 2 comments were categorized as missional rather than financial or structure-oriented then only 4 of 26 (15.4%) comments about their biggest wins related to finance or structure compared to 50% of the M groups' references. Most S responses about their biggest wins over the last few years revolved around baptisms, developing leaders, and bringing on key staff to further develop discipleship ministries.

Figure 4

References to Facilities and Debt Payoff When Discussing Biggest Wins
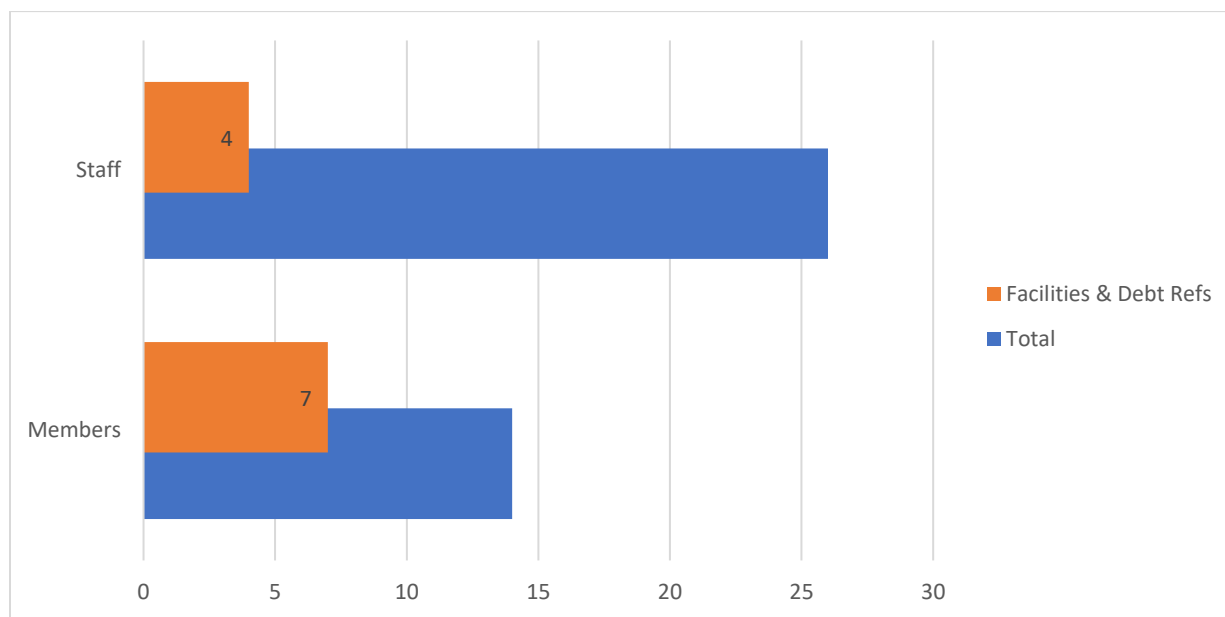
RQ3 Factor 4

PCs each seemed to share highly collaborative and complimentary relationships between PC staff and PC attendees. Individuals in each M FG quoted their PC's vision as a form of

response during the FGs suggesting it is something they are familiar with and agree with.

Member groups only spoke in support of and in encouraging ways to each PCs' leadership. S

groups likewise spoke highly of the church attendees.

The closest any individual came to any form of criticism regarding their current Ms or Ss

was FBME saying he believed their staff was overworked and would have liked to see them

delegate more. He clarified by sharing his lead pastor willfully delegated authority and ministry

but "he still tries to do too much himself." Others reiterated the sentiment. CMMC likewise

called his staff "very unified." He believed they had the right focus and called them the

"strongest (team) we have ever had." CMMC declared the staff made stability and ongoing

expansion easy. CMSR also said the church held "high trust toward (CM's) leadership."

STM1 attributed ST's turnaround to their lead pastor's leadership. As a long-time

member, STM1 confessed, "when (the lead pastor) came to ST there were people on staff who

would not attend the church. It was on the verge of closing. Now the church is thriving, and we

are opening new campuses."

Decline and Relational Misalignment. The consistent alignment and commitment

toward the PC's visions were significant to the strength of each PC. Each group attributed

misalignment between staff and attendees regarding vision and values as detrimental to each PC

during their times of decline. Each went through some form of trial which contributed to each

PC's earlier decline.

STM2 described the period of misalignment at ST as marked with a "lack of

transparency." The participant said it led to increasing "conflict about the direction of ST."

STM2 believed the staff clamored for an autocratic control of the church and "without a sense of

ownership of the church, the body of the church declined strongly. It led to political conflict and

the church almost died." CMMD said, "pastors got out of sync with the church." CMMB called the period a result of "a few bad hires relating to staff." Every S and M group except FB believed their church almost had to close their doors permanently because of misalignment between the staff and attendees.

RQ3 Factor 5

PC's seemed to strive to maintain a balance between ministering to the needs and the wants of the people in their communities. While none verbalized Paul's wording in 1 Corinthians 9:22 about being "all things to all people," each group seemed to describe their churches' provision ministries as though Paul's phrase was their aim. FBMC correspondingly shared they strived to be the kind of friend to others that a friend would like to have through their ministries. The relational aim of PCs seemed to include more than having one-sided benefactor-like relationships with people in their communities. They wanted to share mutual relationships with those in their communities. They seemed to consider programmatic ministries as tools for developing relationships.

STSH exclaimed, "lots of things bring people in the door. Relationships keep people." MHMF shared her belief that being too focused on what goes on in their church services and programming and not attentive enough to what goes on in the community around the church results in "churches missing their purposes." STM3 said such focus results in "superfluous practices."

CM staff agreed they strove to earn a reputation in their surrounding community such that they were valued and wanted as a vital part of their community. CMSD remarked, "we want that our community would grieve if we were no longer here." STSG spoke of their course correction regarding ST's relationship with its community saying, "now we do stuff for the community."

He stated ST attendees used to "essentially run over the community." At the time of the study, they partnered with local businesses. For example, one campus only served coffee from the local coffee shop less than a block from the campus. Another campus only served coffee from the most popular local coffee brewery in its downtown area. They wanted to support local businesses and promote them from within ST. STSG summarized, "our neighboring businesses feel like we make their businesses more successful now." Mutual relationships seem to be very important to each PC.

RQ3 Factor 6

Every FG brought up hypocrisy and attitudes of moral superiority as deal breakers for churches when relating to guests. STM4 described legalism as holding strong disdain toward other people's sins. He added people in some churches may overlook the sins they struggle with while looking down on the sin others may commit, which church members might not struggle with as much. "They expect people to fit into their mold" (STM4). Similarly, FBML believed people from the FB community might believe they would not relate to the church well. "People would likely say they would not fit in here" (FBML). FBMB added the PC was making strides to relate with nonattenders. "Perceptions, whether accurate or not, prevent many from giving the church a chance" (FBMB).

STNA8 claimed, "my way or the highway attitudes make it difficult to reach people." STNA5 admitted she used to think churches were all "overly judgmental and legalistic". The participant had come to think otherwise. She added that by her observation churches only tried to appeal to a limited group, particularly "those who already think a lot like those in the church" (STNA5). Each group mutually agreed hypocrisy and attitudes of moral superiority made beneficial relationships between churches and their host communities difficult.

RQ3 Factor 7

FG responses indicated a possible misalignment about a relationship between hobbies and church attendance. There was a total of 9 responses suggesting hobbies such as children's sports and hunting were reasons people may not have attended church. Of the 9 responses, 100% were from S and M groups. In the study, no NA participants suggested their or their families' hobbies were a reason they did not attend church. This is a significant variation between the responses of NA groups compared with S and M groups. This variation may not be adequate, however, to suggest S and M groups' understanding was misaligned with NA groups.

CMMC noted in his rural church, their regular attendance decreased consistently every year during the hunting season. He said he generally knew who would most likely not be in attendance because a given attendee was hunting. He also said they saw a noticeable drop in attendance during certain kids' sports seasons. Respondents in every S and M FG brought up kids' and youth sports as a reason they saw families not attending church during certain seasons. Their claims seemed to be warranted even though they were not represented as reasons for not attending by NA FGs. S and M Groups may have heard such reasons regularly enough that it was something they had come to expect. Likewise, NAs may not have had conversations about why attendees might have missed church with the same regularity as church attendees and staff. Therefore, they may not have shared the same awareness as S and M group participants.

RQ3 Summary

RQ3 revealed 7 factors concerning PC relational competencies regarding their host communities. It seemed most important to S and M groups they shared mutual relationships with people in their host communities in which they were able to effectively lead people to know Christ and attend church. Each PC had some form of evaluation to test whether they were

accomplishing their goals and pursuing their visions through their ministries. Relational

mutuality seemed very important to every FG.

RQ4

RQ4 asked, were there ministries the identified churches were providing to their

communities that were having negligible or no measurable effect on the community? Studying

RQ4, the researcher investigated FGQs from the 3 categories of FGs. The relevant FGQs

included Staff FG Q2, Q8, Q11, and Q13. Member FGQs included Q2, Q8, Q11, and Q13.

Nonattender FGQs included Q5. (Appendix M charted all RQs and the associated FGQs.)

Comparative analysis suggested 6 considerations regarding ministry effectiveness for PCs.

Table 6

Chart Relating RQ4 to Focus Group Questions

	Staff Qs	Member Qs	NonAtt Qs
RQ4	2, 8,11,13,	2, 8,11,13,	5,

RQ4 Consideration 1

Each PC regularly evaluated ministries to test for maximum effectiveness concerning

their goals and visions. Each PC began, ended, and adjusted ministries accordingly. FB, for

example, began Discipleship Groups. MH was beginning to build a new worship center and age-

graded ministry spaces. All PC staff groups believed ongoing effectiveness required strong

evaluative systems. They also argued bringing about necessary change to ministry approaches

helped lead to turning points in the PC's ministries. Each seemed to think their changes in

effectiveness were not just a result of arbitrary ministry adjustments. Motivations to change and

strategy (how and why changes were enacted) followed accepted plans based on clear visions

and willful alignment to the visions. Their visions did not seem to be just wistful words. Rather,

they were meaningfully targeted orientations for all members, staff, programming, and ministry efforts.

RQ4 Consideration 2

The kinds of ministries each church provided for its host communities varied widely. Each PC had evaluated what the greatest needs were for their communities. S FGs sought to meet community needs by maximizing their resource allocation. MH did so by doing a formal survey of their community. Next, they looked at the resources accessible to them and searched out whether they were able to adequately meet a given need. Then they explored how they could best do so.

FB, for example, was in the second poorest county in Florida. They put a lot of effort toward meeting basic provisional needs such as food, housing, drug rehabilitation, as well as medical care (including a medical clinic and a dental bus). They also worked together with other local aid organizations (both state-funded and non-profits) to maximize their ability to combat many of the struggles correlating with the impoverishment of their community.

FB's reputation and location helped them become the hub for hurricane response groups (including FEMA) after category 5 Hurricane Michael's landfall. The members of the church came every day to serve as often as they were able. This seemed significant to the community members as they knew the FB attendees had the same needs and endured the same tragedy. FBMC said the entire police force would show up to eat meals because it was the only place to find food. Grocery stores gave all their perishables to the church, having lost electricity, to distribute it before the food reached its expiry date.

Similarly, CM members shared they met needs better and did ministry more effectively around their community after adjusting ministry programming according to the vision of their

church. CMMD said members worked to establish priorities for their time and for their family activities to maximize faith and family for both expectations for families and those in their community. CM aimed to continue to grow in effectiveness by solving problems other local ministries were not adequately solving. FB endeavored to be "a place for people to build healthy relationships, support one another, and encourage one another by pointing one another toward Christ" (FBMB).

FQ4 Consideration 3

Regarding ministries, the PCs suggested they wanted to offer more than just a place to attend. They seemed to think their churches, however, were places easy to show up to with no greater expectation. Some members discussed ways churches often missed opportunities for connection and engagement with nonattenders. They shared there were generally low expectations for nonattenders when they came to churches as guests. CMMB considered it a fault when churches did not find ways to get guests "plugged in and doing more than only attending." FBMB lamented many churches were "more focused on seating capacity than sending capacity." The M FGs seemed to perceive nonattenders wanted to be part of something important more than just attend a musical and teaching time about God. They seemed to want to be part of transformational ministries where people get to see God at work around them. STSM added, "people want to feel useful and part of something."

RQ4 Consideration 4

To avoid minimizing effectiveness by experiencing decreasing rates of response, PCs seemed to have begun a strategic order of focus geographically for their ministries. They each adjusted their ministries to their immediate host communities as parts of their turnaround efforts. Each PC seemed to emulate the semi-concentric circle model illustrated in Acts 1:8.

MH's rerouting 100% of its budget for mortgage payments after paying it off to ministry (primarily local ministry) was one example. FBMB added to a parallel conversation saying, "our church is mostly outside the building." STMs all agreed they used to put most of their energy and resources toward academic programming and their missions were almost entirely international efforts. During their turnarounds, they rerouted their efforts toward investing in their local communities.

ST's minister to students explained the church's youth group had recently adopted 114 families in the local area to provide entire Thanksgiving meals for whole households. Instead of providing the meals directly as ST, as a way of supporting the schools they were investing in, they gave the meals to the schools' administration to distribute. They wanted to make the principals and guidance counselors the heroes of the story rather than promote the good things the church did for others. The minister to students clarified that they did promote the accomplishment within ST. He argued that kind of thing had become the church's norm. They set others up to win. As a result, they had seen doors for ministry open that, he claimed, they never dreamed could happen. He added they had access and opportunities in the local schools regularly that no other church or organization had. He went on to share many other things the church did for schools such as renovating a teacher's lounge, volunteering in classrooms, providing meals, supplying gourmet coffee to teachers, and the like.

Each PC seemed to put a strong emphasis on local, age-graded ministries and had regular representation in local schools (through Good News Clubs, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, serving, hosting, and the like). Each PC also seemed to have a clear plan and goals relating to their involvement in local ministries and schools. CMMC shared CM had ideas for years about

ministries but with no focus. At the time of the study, "with focus, we went from (being involved in) one school to now being in 5 schools. Now, schools ask us. They call us" (CMMC).

RQ4 Consideration 5

Evangelism had been elevated to a priority and released from a singular program in all 4 of the PCs. Each PC emphasized evangelism was a high priority, but none had formal evangelism programs. Each employed various programs in the past but found them to have life cycles. CMSP said once they began to have decreasing results, the decreases grew quickly, and attendee involvement decreased along with it. The PCs had no data showing whether decreased program involvement led to decreased effectiveness or if decreased effectiveness influenced decreases in involvement.

None of the PCs had traditional evangelism programs involving memorized Gospel scripts at the time of this study or a planned night of the week to visit guests in their homes. Still, each S and M FG argued evangelism was a high priority for their churches. FBMC claimed, "outreach and evangelism are a top priority of the church. We meet needs to share the Gospel." It is also worth noting every S and M FG named individuals who had been saved recently through ministries at their churches. They also named individuals they were praying for regarding salvation.

RQ4 Consideration 6

The participating churches each transitioned from a state of ongoing decline and at the time of the study were experiencing ongoing and consistent growth. Each of the churches, as a result, have had to make plans to deal with their growth and put plans in place to help make room for new growth. Each S FG expressed both concern and frustration over the difficulties associated with their growth. Each seems to have spent significant time evaluating and

developing plans to ensure their growth was not halted by their infrastructures. Along with each

PC bringing on new staff to accommodate for ministry development, each also had plans to grow

their facilities.

MHMK claimed MH was out of space. The participant explained there was not enough

space for more people to come to either of their Sunday morning worship services and there was

not much room left in their overflow room. MHMK added there was also not enough space for

youth and kids' ministries or small groups to meet on campus. "Everything has outgrown its

space. The kids' classes are too crowded" (MHMK). MH was in the planning stage of updating

its age-graded ministry spaces, build a new worship center, and double their parking space.

ST was working to launch its fifth campus to alleviate space difficulties. They had two

services on their largest campus as well as a third group meeting in their second-largest space at

the same time as the second service. ST was also regularly updating its ministry spaces. At the

time of the study, the church was beginning to completely revamp its largest K-5th grade ministry

spaces which were at its original campus location.

CH was in the process of launching a second Sunday morning service at the time of the

study. It was also in the design stage of developing a new welcome center, adding small group

meeting spaces, and updating the front entry of their church to make it more welcoming. Months

before the study CH finished an addition adding small group spaces and built a new office area

to make room for new staff. Their next step was going to be updating their children's ministry

areas.

FB was beginning its second year of small groups meeting in attendees' homes to

alleviate on-campus space difficulties. The church expected to double the number of groups

meeting in homes during 2020. The church was also getting ready to begin building an activities

ministry space to house a family life center, sports ministries complex, and a few other ministries. Their aim with the structure was to support the ongoing growth of age-graded ministries while meeting needs for their community.

Each PC seemed to be dealing with difficulties involving ongoing growth. Each sought ways to most effectively minister to the needs of their attendees and their communities according to their near future growth plans. They sought to build healthy ministry connections and deal with the problems associated with growth in ways that built confidence among their attendees and increased their ability to show hospitality toward their host communities.

RQ4 Summary

Each PC had developed its own systems for evaluating and adjusting their ministries to avoid decreasing rates of return from their methods of ministry. Each PC regularly tried to find better ways of doing what they did for their communities as well as their ministries to their attendees. Each PC's vision and plan were developed according to a Scriptural standard, the resources (including people, time, gifting, circumstances, as well as finances), and a balance between the values and needs of both their attendees and their host communities. Each had experienced times of significant distress and were committed to doing whatever it took to move forward in what they believed their callings and purposes were.

RQ5

RQ5 asked, were there ministries churches could offer that would best minister to the contemporary circumstances of the families that lived in the churches' surrounding communities? The intent of RQ5 was not to promote any program nor method of ministry programming. This study did not aim to evaluate any ministry program nor promote any program. The intent was to raise questions about PCs' current programming (at the time of the

study) in a way that might lead to increased effectiveness in future programming. Additionally, the intent was to consider qualitative social factors relating to ministry programming.

To explore RQ5, the researcher investigated FGQs from the 3 categories of FGs. The relevant FGQs included Staff FG Q1, Q3, Q4, Q7, Q10, Q11, and Q12. Member FGQs included Q1, Q3, Q4, Q7, Q10, Q11 and Q12. Nonattender FGQs included Q1 and Q2. (Appendix M charted all RQs and their related FGQs.) A comparative analysis led to 4 relevant observations regarding ministries the churches could offer to maximize ministry effectiveness to their communities.

Table 7

Chart Relating RQ5 to Focus Group Questions

	Staff Qs	Member Qs	NonAtt Qs
RQ5	1,3 ,4,7,10,11,12,	1,3 ,4,7,10,11,12,	1,2

RQ5 Observation 1

The responses from FG Q5 among S and M groups raised a few questions about the PCs and their priorities concerning their family ministries. Was there a way for the PCs to do ministry in a way that built on the family unit, encouraged family units to grow together, and for parents to be able to be involved in their children's interests beyond an educational or classroom orientation? Similarly, were there ways to do ministry that could build faith and families by meeting families around their desires to spend more time together as families?

According to staff and member FG responses PCs claimed to promote the strengthening of healthy family dynamics. When their ministries competed with children's sports, band, and the like, staff groups observed both parents and children seemed to be increasingly opting for programs such as band and sports according to S and M group responses. It seemed evident families often made decisions based on what they believed was best for their families,

particularly, their children. In essence, the question of family priority raised by RQ5 was whether there was a way for ministry to families to happen in a way that built the church and built families while not seeing families' desires to spend time together and do things together regularly (such as sports or band) as competition to ministry?

RQ5 Observation 2

Each PC claimed more non-church programs were competing for the time of their age-graded attendees and their families (sports, clubs, etc.). They seemed to be wrestling through how they might leverage those competing influences as opportunities for ministry rather than responding to them as problems or competition. All four PCs sponsored youth sports teams (soccer, baseball, etc.). They recruited coaches from within their churches along with team parents and offered financial sponsorships for teams. The churches saw the efforts as sending missionaries into the (sports) fields.

FBMD remarked that outreach and evangelism was the top priority of FB. "We meet needs to share the Gospel" (FBMD). It seemed important to the PCs that they actively met needs for people in their host communities as well as for attendees in their fellowships. 3 of the 4 seemed strategic about which needs they sought to meet to ensure good rates of return. The other church, FB seemed less discriminant about what ministries they invested themselves in and focused more on simply being active meeting real needs and providing opportunities for members to be involved in ministries leading to life change for participants. Multiple FB attendees noted FB was a place that welcomed people starting new ministries and trying new things to meet needs to communicate the Gospel to their community. They regularly innovated in their attempt to meet needs. They seemed to consider their approach as an ongoing experiment in

ministry. FBMA asserted FB was "a supportive church that helps people start ministry programs."

CMSD argued CM evaluated their programs to see if they were accomplishing their goals. "We do less, but what we do, we do with excellence" (CMSD). The leadership did not want members inside CM's building every day. Rather, they "want them out and involved in their mission field" (CMSD).

RQ5 Observation 3

Each PC used resources in different ways according to the needs they identified in their communities. The PCs adjusted their resourcing annually according to their ability to accomplish their aims. Every ministry was regularly evaluated and adjusted to maintain its effectiveness. They seemed to strategically resource ministries according to their effectiveness and the PC's ministry priorities. Resourcing priorities were oriented toward reaching their host communities with the Gospel, developing strong families in faith, and developing confident and competent attendees. MHMB said, for example, "65% of our budget goes to missions and missional ministry. That means there is not much to go toward things like microphones and the like." The participant explained he was a sound technician volunteer for MH.

RQ5 Observation 4

The PCs worked to maintain ongoing alignment with the missions of their churches. Likewise, the PCs worked to make sure their ministries strengthened the church regarding their missions. STM3 said, "outreach is and should be an ongoing trial. Doing whatever it takes to reach people." MHMB said MH's goal was to "equip people for ministry and to be involved in the community where we can be lights." FBSD said, "our people are involved doing kingdom work, not just sitting in pews." He went on to say, "We expect members to be highly involved in

the work of ministry." STSM shared, "Sundays go well because on Mondays through Saturdays we can find the church doing ministry around the community. The staff is also doing ministry around the community. The lead pastor expects us to be involved in the life of our community." STSH added their pastor wants people out of their offices. "He will ask why we do not have appointments in the community. He will ask why we do not smell like sheep. Shepherds do" (STSH).

RQ5 Summary

RQ5 was not intended to promote any specific church program nor was it to evaluate any ministry programs. The question was intended to raise questions about the PC's current programming (at the time of the study) in a way that might lead to increased effectiveness in future programming according to clues gathered from FG responses. RQ5 was also aimed to consider qualitative social factors relating to ministry programming. Finally, the FQ was focused to identify general and salient qualities as PCs attendees as they related to their host communities and families.

It seemed evident that the PCs strived to be in the world and not of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Their responses revealed they regularly sought to better understand their host communities and meet them where they were to lead them to faith. They figuratively sought to speak the language of their host communities while not using their language to speak the same messages as their host communities. They regularly seemed to ask; how could they better communicate the Gospel in a way that was relevant to their communities?

Evaluation of the Research Design

The structure of the research study offered helpful strengths to the evaluability of each PC regarding social factors relating to their growth. 3 different focus groups for each of the 4

participating churches allowed the researcher to understand each group's position as well as compare how each different group responded. PC staff, overseeing and leading in the life of the churches offered significant insights as to their professional lives revolved around the health of their churches' relationships with their host communities. Member FGs added helpful insights as the volunteers and longtime members of the churches. They, as representative families involved in the churches, were able to consider the ministries from non-staff and actively involved perspectives. Nonattenders offered perspectives about the PC's host communities as well as the PC churches while likely having little or no felt need to make the churches reflect positively to the researcher. The NA groups were very helpful to compare the perspectives of the S and M groups.

PC locations provided helpful strengths to the study as well. While the PC locations were widely diverse, the growing churches which were once in ongoing decline shared many parallel responses. Having a wide variety of variables in each host community helped the researcher better consider the findings might not be limited to their immediate communities. The PC's communities included a large metropolis, a small panhandle town, an eastern suburb to a large city, and a semi-coastal agrarian community. Economically the churches ranged from very affluent to very poor by Floridian standards. There were also wide ranges of ages, educational backgrounds, career paths, and the like.

During analysis, a few weaknesses were revealed with the research design. The researcher made observations and found answers to the RQs according to the design. The findings raised a multiplicity of new questions regarding churches who were in decline and then began growing consistently. Some of these are given in chapter 5 under the heading, Further Research. There is far more to discover about the participating churches declines and growth.

Another weakness with the QUAL design is the focus groups did not allow the researcher the ability to verify whether the NA FGs adequately represented their communities. A follow-up QUAN survey might help support NA FG's representation of their host communities. It was also difficult for the researcher to adequately verify whether M groups adequately represented the membership of their churches in the same manner. The researcher was not able to randomly select a member grouping. He had to trust the staff selections of the members of the PCs. Staff were asked to select members whom they believed accurately represented the membership of the churches, understood the life of their churches, and knew the recent history of their churches. It seemed to the researcher the staff selected substantial and well-founded members for the FGs but there was no way of verification.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Many medium-sized churches in Florida experienced years of growth followed by years of decline in their average attendance and involvement. Few of these churches had been able to turn their trending decline around to experience growth. It appears some once growing churches no longer recognized how to best reach their communities and how to minister to the needs of the families in the surrounding communities. Studies have been done on a national basis as well as on several local regions around the United States. A research gap existed concerning possible common characteristics, qualities, or practices of conservative Southern Baptist (SBC) churches in Florida who had experienced a turnaround in their attendance.

This research study compared the focus group responses of three sets of focus groups from four participant churches as well as their host communities. Cumulatively, the study involved 12 focus groups. The churches were SBC churches in Florida who had experienced ongoing attendance declines, underwent turnarounds, and at the time of the study had been experiencing ongoing annual growth in attendance. The primary goal of the research was to identify social and relational factors influencing church attendance and engagement among people making up the participating churches' host communities. The evaluation was according to the perceptions held by pastors, regular church attendees, and church nonattenders.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, was to identify factors that positively and negatively influenced church attendance and engagement among unchurched and de-churched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church nonattenders. Regular attendance and engagement were defined as at least twice monthly attendance at a local SBC church.

Research Questions

The following Research Questions guided this study:

RQ1. What is the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the needs of families in the communities surrounding medium-sized Southern Baptist churches (defined as those whose average weekly attendance is 300-1,000) and the people within the church?

RQ2. What is the level of awareness for active church members concerning the similarities and differences in the primary values held by families in the communities surrounding medium-sized SBC churches and the people within the churches?

RQ3. What are the salient relational competencies that the people in medium-sized Southern Baptist churches need for the church to effectively lead families in their communities to attend their churches?

RQ4. Are there ministries the identified churches are providing to their communities that are having negligible or no measurable effect on the community?

RQ5. Are there ministries churches can offer that would best minister to the contemporary circumstances of the families that live in the churches' surrounding communities?

Research Conclusions

Research conclusions were drawn according to the findings related to the five RQs guiding this research study. The findings were extrapolated by the comparative analysis of the participants' responses to focus group questions (See Appendices G-I for Focus Group Qs). The findings detailed in chapter 4 were summarized below.

RQ1: Needs and Awareness

Each (Participating Church) PC had a good understanding of their communities' needs as reported by S, M, and NA focus groups (FG). The PCs also shared many needs in common with their host communities. Each PC strived to meet needs in its host community. They seemed strategic as they met needs that mattered to people in their communities and attacked problems they could solve or at least could make significant contributions towards. They implemented

their strategies to lead people to salvation and to attend their PCs. The primary needs FGs

expressed generally revolved around family and relationships either directly or indirectly.

RQ2: Values and Awareness

The purpose of RQ2 was to investigate the alignment and awareness of the prioritized

values held by PC churches and their communities. The PCs seemed to understand the values of

those who made up their host communities. Each PC shared some form of ongoing evaluation

plan they used to measure and understand both the needs and the values of their communities.

Every PC and its surrounding community most referenced family and relationships as the most

reported important value. Their other priorities, in order according to the regularity of responses

were financial stability, faith, education, health/wellbeing, enjoyment of life, job/career,

materialistic wants, and hobbies. Significantly, family and relationships were referenced as a

highly motivating value almost more than the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th most stated values combined.

RQ3: Relational Competencies

The PCs endeavored to meet the people in their host communities where they were both

literally and figuratively. They sought to understand and connect with them according to the

places they frequented, according to their cognitive understandings, according to their emotional

and physiological states, and socially. They worked to bring people to a clear understanding of

faith and offer opportunities for them to respond to the Gospel.

RQ3 revealed several factors concerning the PCs' relational competencies regarding their

host communities. It seemed most important to S and M groups they shared mutual relationships

with people in their host communities through which they were able to effectively lead people to

know Christ and attend church. Each PC had some form of evaluation to test whether they were

accomplishing their goals and effectively pursuing their visions through their ministries. Relational mutuality seemed very important to every FG.

An Important Note Regarding Active Versus Passive Invitation

The researcher did not find any NA participants who were unwilling to attend a church at least one time if they were invited by someone whom they considered a friend or a family member. This may be an important relational competence that could be transferable to other churches in similar circumstances. The researcher observed among M groups that participants believed their friends and co-workers knew they were wanted and welcomed at the members' churches. They did not actively invite their friends and coworkers to attend their PC expecting they knew an unspoken and open invitation was in place. One might say, they were passively invited but not actively.

NA groups from all 4 PC areas all agreed they would be willing to visit the PC or another church if they were invited by someone whom they considered a friend. Multiple respondents who were aware of the existence of a PC said they had not visited because they had not been invited but they would like to or would be interested in visiting the church. Many NAs who were aware of the existence of a PC may not have visited because they did not recognize they had been invited. That is, they may not know they had an open invitation along with members who were silently hoping the NAs would take them up on the invitation. It may be fruitful for members to take opportunities to personally and actively invite the guests they would like to have come to their churches.

RQ4: Measurable Effectiveness in Ministries

Each PC developed its own systems for evaluating and adjusting their ministries to prevent decreasing rates of return from their methods of ministry. Each PC regularly tried to find

better ways of doing what they did for their communities as they also ministered to their

attendees. Each PC's vision and plan was developed according to Scripturally consistent

standards, the resources (including people, time, gifting, circumstances, plus finances), and a

balance between the values and needs of both their attendees and their host communities. Each

PC experienced times of significant distress and was committed to doing whatever it took to

move forward in what they believed their callings and purposes to be.

Staff from CM criticized their ministries saying they believed they were "not sticky

enough" (CMSD). They reportedly had many guests who visited a few times but did not take the

next steps to get connected formally with the church through membership and service. CMSP

added people visited often but they did not stay long. CMSR contributed they had "lots of guests

but little retention."

Still, CM was experiencing growth rather than a decline during the time of the study.

This may be because they are doing a good enough job to experience growth. Their growth could

be because they were continually dissatisfied with current effectiveness and were searching for

ways to be more effective. It is reasonable to consider any church might have both strengths and

weaknesses. Even the healthiest churches may find ways they could still be better. CM was far

better than it was, but they did not believe they had arrived at a good enough place to coast in

ministry. They continued to search out areas they could strengthen to become more effective.

A Possible Gap Regarding Market Saturation/Awareness by Target Audience

There was a gap in awareness between the NA groups and the PCs. This may be

transferrable to other similar churches. It was not concerning actual ministry programming but

rather it related to the awareness of the churches by their surrounding communities. It seemed

that every S and M group generally believed their churches were well known around their host

communities. NAs, when asked if they have had ever heard of or if they were aware of (given PC name), often were altogether unaware of the PC's existence.

48 NA participants offered responses about their awareness of the PCs. 9 were rated as very familiar by being able to generally describe a PC and/or had visited the church on multiple occasions. Some said they had attended a PC in the past as a youth. 19 participants had heard of a PC or were generally aware of one. They were able to identify two or less general facts such as roughly where it was located (such as across the street from a local school) but they knew little or no more about the PC. Many respondents, 20 (41.7%) reported they were altogether unaware of the PC's existence.

Figure 5

Nonattender Awareness of Participant Church
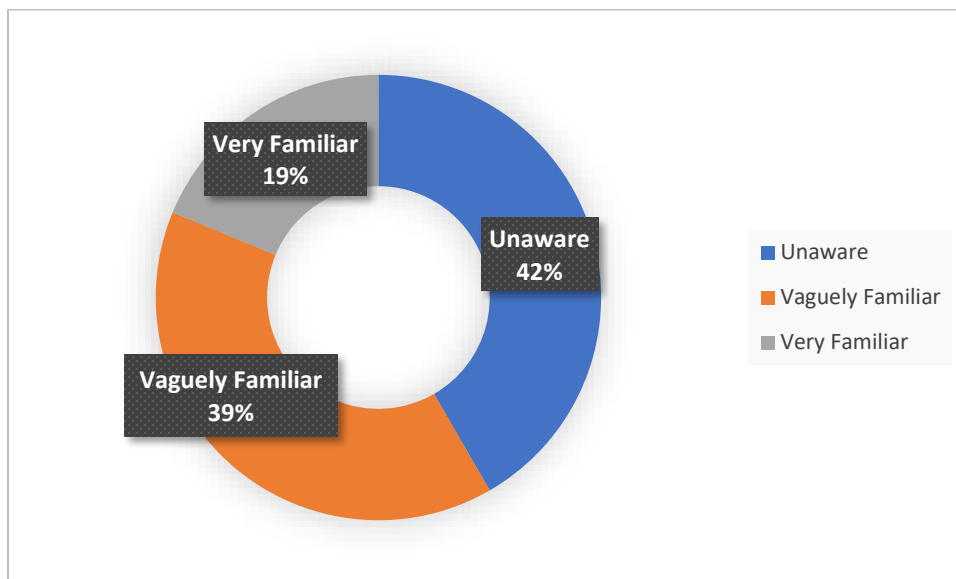
This seemed very significant considering the proximity of the NAFGs meeting places to the churches. The ST NA group met less 200 yards from their original campus and just one street over. The CM NA group met at a local park overlooking a manatee observatory directly next to the PC and with the PC's building viewable from the FB NA meeting location. MH understood

their low name recognition as they underwent a name change less than 2 years before the research study. They expected many knew them better by their old name. Their FG was the greatest distance from the PC, about 2 miles from their campus.

FB was the exception. They were one of the largest buildings on the most prominent street in the center of their small community. Its prime location, long history, and large physical presence made them very easy to identify for locals.

M and S groups expressed consistent perceptions about their churches being known in their communities, but their perceptions may not have been well-founded. Discussing MH, MHSN said, "there is a Facebook group of over 50,000 people for the region. When someone posts a need (even large organizations), very often, someone in the community tags our church because they know we will want to know about the need, and we are a church who wants to help."

Participants may consider groups of around 50,000 people as seeing MH promoted regularly by community group members. It may also be likely that only a small handful may read the content of the social media posts and see the church referenced. It is there and plain to see for all who are looking for it but would be easy to overlook tucked in an endless scroll of data surrounding it.

The researcher has observed this phenomenon many times before traveling to train ministry staff and volunteers in churches around the eastern side of the US and multiple countries. Many seemed to think their church was better known than it was. Adequate research has not been done to confirm if the researcher's observation was a result of bias from his previous experience or if the observation during the research study confirmed his previous informal observations. This study was not an adequate survey of the participating churches

communities, but it did seem consistent enough among each group that the pastors and members believed their churches were better known than they seemed to be according to NA FGs.

RQ5: Opportunities to Increase Ministry Effectiveness

RQ5 sought to consider qualitative social factors relating to ministry programming. The RQ was focused to identify general and salient qualities among PC attendees as they related to their host communities and families. It seemed evident the PCs strived to be in the world and not of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Their responses showed they regularly sought to better understand their host communities and meet them where they were to lead them to faith. Figuratively speaking, they sought to speak the language of their host communities while not using their language to speak the same messages as their host communities. They regularly seemed to ask how they could better communicate the Gospel in a way that was relevant to their communities.

Family and Relationships was the most stated priority. There may be opportunities for churches to help people find and learn how to enjoy relationships involving encouragement, building one another up, challenging each other to be all that God created them to be, to not settle for less, and to thrive in relationships. This is something most people among S, M, & NA groups expressed most as a need.

STM4, for example, shared it was hard to move beyond the superficial in relationships in ST's community. Fostering this perception on a larger scale, social media has become mainstream for young people, millennials, Gen X and many others. It is easy to connect in superficial ways but finding depth in relationships and developing healthy relationships may be a high priority and a high need for many people. This may be a need that is going unmet and could contribute to growing expressions of emotional distress such as anxieties, depression, and the like.

Research Limitations

The nature of this study of moderate-sized churches may affect the findings'

transferability among other churches and ministry settings. The delimitations of this study

include the following:

1. This research was limited to theologically conservative Southern Baptist Churches.

2. This research was limited to churches averaging 300-1000 in average Sunday morning worship attendance.

3. This research was limited to churches that experienced significant growth leading to at least 400-1200 in average attendance between 10 and 20 years ago.

4. This research was further limited to churches who had been in a consistent and steady decline for at least 4 years resulting in at least a 20% reduction in average attendance.

5. This research was limited to churches who had no recent church splits, no known moral failures among its pastoral leadership, or any similar events leading to a sudden reduction in worship attendance of 20% or greater within six-months.

Further Research

A question this study raised but did not answer: Is the enjoyment of life a factor churches

should or do consider as a significant factor for the direction and implementation of ministries

and programs? The enjoyment of life could be written off as selfish and not a worthy factor

relating to ministries by many churches. The PCs claimed they were driven to lead people into

increasingly deep and meaningful relationships with Jesus and His church by meeting them

where they were in their journeys of life. Their concerns about their enjoyment of life may be an

important factor to consider. This study did not intend to study this topic particularly and may be

worthy of further exploration.

Another possible topic for further research might be conducting a comparative analysis

between churches' perceptions of how well they are known by their communities and how well

they perceive they are recognized by their host communities. Might there also be consistent

variations among these perceptions and variances? Might any consistencies in these perceptual variations correlate in some way with the growth or decline of attendance in churches?

Another possible research study: Are families increasingly opting for non-church-oriented options to support and encourage healthy family dynamics? What do families get from non-church-oriented options that they do not get more so from church programming? Are there benefits families believe they gain from kid's sports that they cannot or do not gain from church attendance? Are there experiences or qualities some churches could provide for families? If so, what salient factors or programs would be most important for churches to provide for families who would otherwise opt for alternative programming? Would providing these experiences or offering these qualities help further the Gospel (or dilute it)?

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APPENDIX A
INITIAL LOCAL ASSOCIATIONAL DIRECTOR CONTACT

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is a Multiple Case Study Identifying Factors Influencing Church Attendance and Engagement With Unchurched and Dechurched Families. The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church non-attenders.

During my early data gathering stage I identified you because of your role (Associational Role) as one who will likely have an interest in church growth and attendance. My first question for you is whether you might be willing to recommend pastors of churches within the (Name of the Local Association) or within the Florida Baptist Convention who may be good candidates for the study. I am looking for pastoral staff whose churches 1: experienced consistent declines in their attendance for at least four years, 2: experienced a turnaround in their attendance trends, and 3: are recommended by you as a local associational director as a good fit for the study.

Please let me know if you would be willing to share some names of pastors and churches who might meet these criteria. I am very happy to answer any questions about the study. Thank you for considering my request. If you choose, please respond by email to jwaters9@liberty.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration! Have a great day.

Sincerely,

Jason R. Waters
Doctoral Student at Liberty University

APPENDIX B

ASSOCIATIONAL DIRECTOR FOLLOW-UP TELEPHONE CALL SCRIPT

Greetings (Director's Name),

My name is Jason Waters. I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and a Florida Baptist minister. You may have received a short letter from me a few weeks ago. I am conducting research on Southern Baptist churches who were once in decline and are now growing. My aim is to identify any common characteristics or qualities these churches may share. The findings could be very helpful to these churches as well as every church who wants to experience similar growth. Dr. Tommy Green suggested you may be a great resource for helping me identify a few churches who fit the research parameters because you have the best pulse on the churches in your association. Would you be willing to help me identify any churches who may fit the study parameters in your association? I will not ask more of you. Once they are identified I can reach out to each one personally to request their help.

(Wait for a response, share any details about the study as requested by the associational director.)

(Director's Name), here are the parameters for the study. 1: They must be a Southern Baptist Church. 2: Each church must average 300-1000 weekly attendees. 3: Each must have experienced at least 4 consecutive years of consistent decline. 4: Each must have experienced at least two years of consecutive and consistent increases in the attendance of their worship services.

(Offer researcher's email address for the director to send a list of churches' contact information) (Be ready to take the names of the churches down by hand if the information is shared immediately over the telephone. Look up each churches' contact information using sbc.net or flbaptist.com.)

(Director's Name), thank you very much for your kindness and your help. Once the study is complete, if you would like, I will be happy to send you a copy of the findings.

(Collect Associational Director's email address if he/she gives an affirmative response).

Thank you again, have a great day. Goodbye.

(End telephone connection.)

APPENDIX C

INVITATION FOR MINISTERIAL STAFF TO PARTICIPATE

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is a Multiple Case Study Identifying Factors Influencing Church Attendance and Engagement With Unchurched and Dechurched Families. The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church non-attenders.

If you are Southern Baptist Minister and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group hosted at your church and with your church's other ministerial staff. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the focus group meeting. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this letter and will be given to you before the focus group begins. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the focus group.

Please contact me to schedule the focus group meeting time and location by emailing jwaters9@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Jason R. Waters
Liberty University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX D

INVITATION FOR MINISTERIAL STAFF TO PARTICIPATE CONTACT 2

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This email is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group hosted at your church and with your church's other ministerial staff. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the focus group meeting. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this letter and will be given to you before the focus group begins. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the focus group.

Please contact me to schedule the focus group meeting time and location by emailing jwaters9@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Jason R. Waters
Liberty University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX E

INVITATION FOR CHURCH ATTENDEES TO PARTICIPATE

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church non-attenders. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, an active member of [Insert Participating Church Name], attend at least 50% the church's primary weekly worship services and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group. It will be hosted at the church and you will be with a few others who, like you, have been suggested by one of the ministers at the church. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the focus group meeting. Your name or other identifying information will not be requested as part of your participation and any personal information will remain confidential.

To participate, go to [webpage] and click on the link provided to review the focus group consent document. The focus group will plan to meet on [insert time/date] in room [insert Room Number/Name] at [Insert Participating Church Name]. Please contact me if you have any questions about the focus group meeting by emailing me at jwaters9@liberty.edu.

A consent document is attached to this letter. One will also be given to you before the focus group begins. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the focus group.

Sincerely,

Jason R. Waters
Liberty University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP INSTRUCTIONS AND INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT FORM
A Multiple Case Study Identifying Factors Influencing Church Attendance
And Engagement with Unchurched and Dechurched Families
Jason R. Waters
Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study to understand the perceptions and opinions regarding the needs and values held by people who make up the local community and how a church's relationship to these may or may not affect church attendance. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either 1: a minister at a Southern Baptist Church that was once declining in its average attendance and is now growing, 2: you are a regular attender of a church that was once declining in its average attendance and is now growing, OR 3: you are not an active member or regular attender at any church. Also, you are at least 18 years of age. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jason R. Waters, a student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this multiple case study involving several churches and communities around Florida is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church non-attenders.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Meet at the focus group location at the pre-arranged time. The group will take about 5 minutes to hear a short introduction and instructions by the researcher. The group will be able to ask any questions anyone would like to ask (both at this time and any time during the focus group meeting.
2. You will be asked to respond to questions asked by the researcher according to your own perceptions and opinions. You will not be required to answer every question, only those you would like to offer your input on. The more you share, the more helpful your insights will be for the study. This should take around 30 minutes. The researcher will video and audio record all responses to capture full responses. Only the researcher and no one else will see or hear these recordings. They will be kept confidential and are only to assist the researcher in gathering full responses.
3. Next, the researcher will express his thanks for your participation, and you will be on your way! This closing should take no more than 2 minutes.

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

Benefits:
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the possibility that one or some local churches who want to be a positive influence in their community may become increasingly aware of the needs and/or values of people making up their local community and better relate to or meet the needs of those who make up the community.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study other than the researcher's providing candy/bite sized snacks and/or coffee/beverages during the focus group meeting.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a nondescript pseudonym such as Respondent 7. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked and encrypted hard drive for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or any participating churches. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, the focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Jason R. Waters. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at jwaters9@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Troy Temple, at twtemple@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX G

MINISTERIAL STAFF FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Ministerial Staff Attendance and Engagement Questionnaire (SFGQ)

Focus Group Questions:
1. What would you say your church best is known for?
2. What does your church do, if anything, to interact with the surrounding community?
3. What would you say are some of the most pressing needs for families in your church today?
4. What would you say are some of the most pressing needs for families in your host community today?
5. What would you say are two or three top priorities of people in your church today?
6. What would you say are two or three top priorities to people in your host community today?
7. What would you say are two or three things nonattenders might identify as qualities they might look for in a church if they considered attending a church?
8. What are some things you think churches make a big deal of that you believe are not a big deal?
9. What would you say might be the opinion of your church as held by most nonattenders in your community?
10. What is one thing you feel your church is best at?
11. What might be one thing, if any, your church is not great at but should be?
12. What are two or three of the biggest wins for your church in the last few years?
13. What are two or three of the biggest trials your church has faced?
14. Does your church have a specific strategy for reaching people in your host community?
    a. If so, what is it?

APPENDIX H

CHURCH ATTENDEE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Church Attendee Attendance and Engagement Questionnaire (MFGQ)

Focus Group Questions:
1. What would you say your church best is known for?
2. What does your church do, if anything, to interact with the surrounding community?
3. What would you say are some of the most pressing needs for families in your church today?
4. What would you say are some of the most pressing needs for families in your host community today?
5. What would you say are two or three top priorities of the people in your church today?
6. What would you say are two or three top priorities of the people in your host community today?
7. What would you say are two or three things nonattenders might identify as qualities they might look for in a church if they considered attending a church?
8. What are some things you think churches make a big deal of that you believe are not a big deal?
9. What would you say might be the opinion of your church by most nonattenders in your community?
10. What is one thing you feel your church is best at?
11. What might be one thing, if any, your church is not great at but should be?
12. What are two or three of the biggest wins for your church in the last few years?
13. What are two or three of the biggest trials your church has experienced?
    a. Follow-up: How long ago was that?
14. Does your church have a specific strategy for reaching people in your host community?
    a. If so, what is it?

APPENDIX I

NONATTENDER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Nonattender Church Attendance and Engagement Questionnaire (NAFGQ)

Focus Group Questions:
1. What would you say are some of the most pressing needs or difficulties for you today?
2. What would you say are some of the most pressing needs for people or families in your community today?
3. What would you say are two or three of your top priorities right now?
   a. Follow-up: What are your top hinderances, if any, that keep you from achieving your goals or dreams right now?
4. What would you say are two or three top priorities of the people in your community today?
   a. Follow-up: What would you say are the top hinderances, if any, that keep people in your community from achieving their goals or dreams today?
5. What are some things you think churches make a big deal of that you believe are not a big deal?
6. Hypothetically, if you were to visit a church with a friend, after leaving the church, if you thought you might like to go back sometime, what qualities might that church have that would make you feel positively about it?
7. What is your opinion of churches in general?
8. What is your opinion, if any, of (Name host church)?
   a. If any: Why?

APPENDIX J

IRB Letter of Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 15, 2019

Jason Robert Waters
IRB Exemption 3884.111519: A Multiple Case Study Identifying Factors Influencing Church
Attendance and Engagement with Unchurched and Dechurched Families

Dear Jason Robert Waters,

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

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,
> achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual
> or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
>
> > (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably
> > place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial
> > standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued
exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a
new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether
possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at
irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX K

INDEX OF CODES

Code	Definition	Example
MH	Participant Group 1	The Researcher met with staff at MH
FB	Participant Group 2	The Researcher met with staff at FB
ST	Participant Group 3	The Researcher met with staff at ST
CM	Participant Group 4	The Researcher met with staff at CM
S	Staff	The Researcher met with S at MH
M	Member/Attendee	The Researcher met with M at MH
NA	Nonattender	The Researcher met with NA near MH
Letter/Number	Individual Participant	STM1 (Participant Group 3, Member, 1
RQ	Research Question	RQ1
FG	Focus Group	MHFG Participant group 1 Focus Group
Priorities	Values according to respondents	NAs prioritize family.
Need	Needs according to respondents	NAs suggested future security is an ongoing need.
ED	Education	Ss value education
CORE	Main Subject Content	Primary values are CORE content.
IL	Example, Illustration, reiteration	Content beginning with "such as"
BP	Big Picture, nonlinguistic forms of response	Social cues such as eye rolling, or head shaking to affirm or disagree with other respondents.
AR	Evidence	Evidence supporting a claim
COMM	Intended meanings	After a response another respondent saying that is what she was trying to say.

APPENDIX L

Permission to Conduct Research on the Premises

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is a Multiple Case Study Identifying Factors Influencing Church Attendance and Engagement With Unchurched and Dechurched Families. The purpose of this multiple case study, a comparative analysis, is to identify factors that positively and negatively influence church attendance and engagement among unchurched and dechurched persons and families as perceived by pastors, regular church attendees, and church non-attenders.

I am writing to request your permission to [conduct my research at [Church name,/Business name.]—OR—[contact members of your ministerial staff] —OR— [to invite locals to join a focus group held at your place of business for me, the researcher to [purchase coffee/purchase beverages/etc. for focus group participants] to invite them to participate in my research study.

The data will be used to better understand how growing Southern Baptist churches assess their local communities' needs. It will also be used to better understand the variations, if any, between what locals in the community who do not participate in church activities say their needs and values are and the perceptions of those same needs by people who are actively part of a local and growing church. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to jwaters9@liberty.edu. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jason R. Waters
Doctoral Student at Liberty University

APPENDIX M

Charts Relating RQs and FGQs

Chart Relating RQs to FGQs

	Staff Qs	**Member Qs**	**NonAtt Qs**
RQ1	2,3, 4,	2,3, 4,	1,2,3a,4a,
RQ2	5,6,	5,6,	3,4,
RQ3	1,7,9,10,12,13,14	1,7,9,10,12,13,14	6,7,8
RQ4	2, 8,11,13,	2, 8,11,13,	5,
RQ5	1,3 ,4,7,10,11,12,	1,3 ,4,7,10,11,12,	1,2

Chart Relating NAQs to Staff Qs and Member Qs

NAQs	**SQs**	**MQs**
1	3,4,	3,4,
2	3,4,	3,4,
3	5,6,	5,6,
4	5,6,	5,6,
5	1,2,8,9,10,11	1,2,8,9,10,11
6	7,9,1,2,10,11,14	7,9,1,2,10,11,14
7	1,7, 8,9	1,7, 8,9
8	1,2,9,10,11,12,13,14	1,2,9,10,11,12,13,14