

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN CONFLICT AND
CONFLICT RESOLUTION METHODS OF RURAL
AFRICAN AMERICAN PASTORS

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Darrell W. Rowe

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, phenomenological by design research aimed to identify the conflict resolution methods utilized by African American pastors who serve in rural locations and shepherd a flock of one hundred or fewer congregants. The study also sought to understand the background, origin, and perceived effectiveness of resolving congregational conflict from the specified demographic. As the shepherd of the flock, the pastor has the inherent responsibility to resolve conflict within the church. The church experiences conflict from numerous external sources; however, this research sought to address conflict within the congregation. This study collected data through the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument. 71.4% of the research participants revealed the conflict resolution method of accommodating as the most commonly identified in the specific demographic. Structured open-ended question interviews determined the background, origin, and perceived effectiveness of the conflict resolution methods of the researched demographic. The results revealed that the research participants established and patterned conflict resolution methodology from their mentors in the ministry. The methodology was based on Scripture and the traditions passed on in the ministry from mentor to understudy. The patterns revealed a direct relationship between the methods of pastors and the methods of their respective mentors in the ministry. The influence of serving as an apprentice under a senior minister served as the most valuable educational experience, along with a reliance on Scripture, which formed the foundation of the conflict resolution method. The research participants equated longevity of service as an indicator of effective conflict resolution skills as a leader. Conflict resolution skills have become more commonplace in the seminary school curriculum due to overwhelming feedback from recent seminary graduates.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, rural, African American pastors

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Dedication

To my parents, Troy & Ella Mae Rowe

And my sister Susan. In honor, and loving memory of.

Acknowledgments

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have received a tremendous amount of support, inspiration, and assistance. First, I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Gary Bredfeldt, whose expertise, guidance, and encouragement have been invaluable while on this journey. I would like to thank all the faculty and staff at Liberty University who have played an integral part in my educational journey and spiritual maturation.

To the seven senior pastors who took time out of their busy schedules to discuss their own pathways, I thank you for participating in this research study.

This graduate journey could not have happened without my wife, Pamela's unwavering love, support, and commitment. While at Liberty University, she has aided me in managing family and school obligations while helping me discover the art of time management. She has willfully been onsite technical support and software support, discussion partner, and traffic director, preventing me from making wrong turns along the way. She never faltered in believing and supporting me.

I give God all praise, honor, and glory for enabling this journey. Without His grace and mercy, none of this would have been probable or possible.

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List of Abbreviations

East Texas Regional Baptist Association (ETRBA)

Holy Bible King James Version (KJV)

Holy Bible New International Version (NIV)

Liberty University (LU)

Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI)

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG)

African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)

Church of God in Christ (COGIC)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

The concept of conflict has various meanings: disagreement, clash, friction, strife, and struggle. Conflict, a fundamental part of everyday life, has not bypassed the church and the pastors who shepherd a flock. The Bible gives good examples of conflict and conflict management. The New Testament documents that interpersonal disputes existed between Barnabas and Paul and between Paul and Peter, but these were carefully handled and fashioned out without allowing it to lead to dissension in the Church (Olayemi, 2019). As one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery, the African American church stands without challenge as the cultural womb of the African American community (Langley & Kahnweiler, 2003).

Conflict, both interpersonal and structural, is a reality in the African American church, where the flock's shepherd is responsible for managing conflict effectively in the church's stewardship. No leadership model currently exists to eliminate disagreements or clashes of personality in the church. The tension from conflict can be healthy and beneficial to growth if dealt with scripturally and appropriately. The response to conflict can lead down a path of healthy resolution or one of many detrimental conclusions. The detriment level can range from hurt feelings to divided congregations, church splits, legal implications, and public embarrassment for individuals and the church.

The conflict resolution methodology and leadership example of the pastor set the tone for conflict management within the entire congregation. Conflict management and effective strategies for conflict resolution have increasingly become a staple within the curriculum of seminary programs. A vast majority of rural African American pastors enter the pastorate

through a divine "calling" without receiving formal higher theological education, such as attending seminary; therefore, the source and methods of conflict resolution skills reveal a gap in the literature.

The United States South as a region is known as the Bible Belt. The ministry is the only class of Black professionals where the majority of the practitioners do not have graduate training. Teaching-preaching is done by Black Church pastors with seminary degrees and those with no higher education but who read the Bible independently. In the latter case, the pastor feels that, if needed, God will inspire him or her to understand the basic message of the text to be preached (Mamiya, 2006). This phenomenological study sought to address that gap in the literature by identifying the conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors and determining the origin and development of the conflict resolution skills relating to pastoral effectiveness.

Background to the Problem

“As long as human beings interact with one another, there will always be conflict” (Bredfeldt, *Conflicts in Acts*, 2018). Conflict is a part of life; as a congregational pastor, relational conflicts will inevitably occur, requiring conflict resolution skills. Addressing conflict is one of the most challenging things pastors must do. There has been little preparation or practical training in Bible colleges or seminaries for conflict resolution; most leaders are ill-equipped to deal with the strife that arises in their congregations (Chu, 2011). Conflict management and resolution skills have become recognized within many leadership programs, significantly advancing in formal seminary educational curriculums. The problems exist where conflict within the church requires those who are pastoring congregations to acquire the ability to resolve conflict effectively.

Theological Contexts of Conflict

The issue of conflict traces back to the fall of Man. When Adam and Eve committed the original sin ushering death into the world (The Holy Bible: New International Version [NIV], 1985, Gen. 3:19), conflict entered the human experience as well. The issue of conflict is documented throughout Scripture, which does not hide from the issue of conflict; instead, it provides countless examples of conflict resolution methods and styles to resolve human conflict.

Conflict in Christian ministry is not a new phenomenon. Conflict existed in the early church and was usually resolved quite well. Luke documents the conflict between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews. The conflict involved the feeding of the widows. The non-Jewish widows were overlooked during the distribution of food. The complaint was brought before the Apostles, who subsequently resolved the conflict by developing a plan to re-distribute food. Part of the plan was to choose seven spirit-filled men to place in charge of implementing the plan and caring for the church's needs. The church elected seven men, and the Apostles ordained them; in this manner, they were appointed to their work. The Christian worldview recognizes Acts 6 as the first calling of deacons in the church. The resolution to the issue, and the path to achieving a successful outcome, is an often-lamented biblical example of conflict resolution (NIV, 1985, Acts 6:1-7).

The early church experienced conflict over doctrine. Paul traveled to Antioch and discovered Peter had yielded to the circumcision party's pressure, therefore going against what he knew to be correct. In Antioch, Peter would typically take his dinner with the Gentiles until some certain men arrived. Peter succumbed to the pressure of these men and began to take the approach that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised. The hypocrisy demonstrated by Peter caused other Jews to be led astray, including Barnabas. Paul wrote, "When Peter came to

Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong” (NIV, 1985, Gal. 2:11). Paul’s approach in this manner offered a slightly adjusted conflict resolution methodology than offered by Matthew. The Apostle Matthew wrote, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you." (NIV, 1985, Mat. 15:18). The magnitude of the conflict's implications required a more aggressive resolution methodology. The Scriptural examples of successful conflict resolution serve as the presumptive foundation of the conflict resolution approach utilized by rural African American pastors.

God's purpose for conflict is to accomplish redemption. Every conflict is an opportunity to work out our salvation according to God's redemptive plan (Van Yperen, 2002, p. 107). Conflict in the church and a scripturally based approach to conflict resolution is the responsibility of the shepherd of the flock. The pastor sets the tone for conflict and conflict resolution within the congregation.

Historical Context of Conflict in the African American Church

In America, the Black church evolved from the greatest atrocity ever perpetrated against a people by the United States of America's founders. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, people were kidnapped from the continent of Africa, forced into slavery in the American colonies, forced to work as indentured servants, and labor in the production of crops such as tobacco and cotton (Slavery in America, 2009). The philosophy of oppression towards the new colonies' enslaved Black people began with denying access to the Gospel. In the early colonies, because of a custom stating that a Christian could not be held as an enslaved person, a concerted effort was launched to prohibit exposure of the Gospel to this class of people for fear of conversion would translate into emancipation. Woodson wrote, “for should the slave be liberated

upon conversion; the plans for development would fail for lack of a labor force” (Woodson, 1921, p. 20).

A fear for allowing access to the teachings of Scripture to this enslaved population were the biblical truths located within Scripture. Passages such as, "So God created mankind in His Own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (NIV, 1985, Gen. 1:27). The doctrine of the "image of God" is a doctrine where God's progressive revelation is revealed as a result of biblical theology by tracing the understanding and true meaning of the theme scripturally. Education in the doctrine emphasizes that humanity's existence in God's image is particularly relevant for understanding who people are. Many commentators have rightly noted that humanity's renewal, according to God's image in Christ, accomplishes what God originally intended for Adam and Eve in Eden (Kilner, 2015, p. 274). The clarity of understanding of the doctrine upon a body of believers is a responsibility of Christian educators and pastors. The implications of misunderstanding, or intentional misrepresentation, of all people being created "in the image of God" have been responsible for some of the most horrendous atrocities in recorded history. Despite America's founding on the principles of the Bible, after the Revolutionary War, the New U.S. Constitution acknowledged the institution of slavery by counting enslaved people as three-fifths of a person. The involuntary enslavement of a group of people is just the beginning of the atrocities associated with this passage of Scripture.

During the decades of slavery in the American South, Black people meeting together was a constant source of concern for slave owners. The establishment of the Black church provided a sanctuary for enslaved people's cultural development to evolve. "The church" has long been at the center of Black communities in African American history. It has established itself as the most significant source of Black religious enrichment and secular development (McMickle, 2002).

Sociological Context of Conflict

In slave society, Black preachers played an essential role in the community: they acted as seers interpreting the significance of events, as pastors calling for unity and solidarity, and as messianic figures provoking the first stirrings of resentment against oppressors (Gilbert, 2020). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, evangelism entered the American landscape with a much broader dissemination of the Gospel. This pattern established revivals within the Christian community, which led to Christianity's mass adoption by the slave population. The pattern contributed to the emergence and development of the African American preacher. The revivals brought with them a familiarity with the enslaved Africans' culture and the opportunity to reclaim some African culture remnants in a strange new world (Gilbert, 2020).

The Black preacher developed a history of proclaiming a message of hope and change that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, educational level, or family background, could find solace. The church's people served the public's immediate human needs, from meals to medicine and housing to hope. Smaller, more rural congregations often do not possess the financial ability to sustain a full-time salaried pastor. The social responsibility of committed shepherds, coupled with the financial considerations, led to the bi-vocational preacher. The pastors shepherd the church while maintaining self-sustaining full-time employment. The bi-vocational pastor concept continues throughout rural Black congregations.

When segregation was the law of the land, Black churches served as important spaces for racial solidarity and civic activity, and faith more broadly, was a source of hope and inspiration (Besheer, Cox, Diamant, & Gecewicz, 2021). Through the evolution of the Black church, the external struggles remained solidly focused on these crucial issues; however, gradually, internal conflicts began to dominate the landscape within the church.

Theoretical Concepts of Conflict

In the modern landscape of the church, conflict serves as the catalyst for declining church attendance, declining church growth, church splits, and other detrimental consequences. The Apostle Paul wrote about God and the landscape of the church when he instructed the Ephesians, “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to His eternal purpose, which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (NIV, 1985, Eph. 3:10-11).

The care of the church and the management of conflict within the flock resides with the flock's shepherd. The current need for ethical pastoral leadership in the church is crucial to the church's survival. Unresolved church conflict is destroying pastors and churches, which brings no glory to the kingdom of God.

Early Pastoral Leadership

Early Black preachers learned to read, despite fierce opposition to educating the Negro. The ability to read and teach the Gospel propelled the preacher into a role of prominence within Black culture. In the early church, the preacher became instrumental in decision-making for community members. In the modern African American church, the traditionally based power of the pastor requires the shepherd to develop the ability to manage conflict within the flock. The spoken Word in America's Black pulpits has long been esteemed for its persistent calls for justice, church reform, moral and ethical responsibility, and spiritual redemption. The issues of pastors and conflict management detract from the historical mission of the church. The pre-survey presumption is that most rural African American pastors entered the ministry through the "divine calling" and did not attend seminary. In numerous circumstances, a familial lineage

exists as a catapult into the ministry, which creates the opportunity for conflict management skills to follow the path of tradition.

Conflict in the African American church dates back to its origin. George Liele was ordained on May 20, 1775, becoming the first ordained African American Baptist preacher in America. He planted the first African American Baptist Church in North America after his ordination, a church still in existence today (Hildreth, 2018). Throughout the African American church's early history, the preacher emerged as the inspirational leader, role model, mentor, and spokesperson for the community. Liele preached the Gospel through extraordinary circumstances. He was born into slavery; however, he earned his freedom from his master through his fiery sermons and his methods of preaching the Gospel. After the death of the slave owner who granted Liele his freedom, a coalition of proponents for slavery attempted to capture and re-enslave Liele. Liele remained jailed until he was able to produce documentation proving his freedom. Liele chose to address his conflict by fleeing the country. He achieved passage on a British vessel fleeing the country as part of the withdrawal after the Revolutionary War. Liele landed in Kingston, Jamaica, and planted a Baptist church that he built with over four hundred members. George Liele is rarely recognized in the history of influential Black ministers, though he was instrumental in planting churches and leading people of color to Christ in two separate countries (Holmes, 1964). In this era, the generational evolutions of conflict trended to a more united internal force versus an overwhelmingly known external force.

Conflict Management

Conflict in and of itself is not necessarily destructive. The Bible teaches that we are all created unique and special. God made man all perfect, having our uniqueness. God has a unique plan for everyone as we are all individual members of the body of Christ. The author of Psalms

described our uniqueness, "For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (NIV, 1985, Psa. 139:13-14). Because of the uniqueness inherent in every human being, people will have varying opinions on every facet of human experience establishing the pathway for the inevitability of conflict.

The biblical foundation of the doctrine of the authority of Scripture is necessary for those in leadership positions within the church, particularly the flock's shepherd. The authority of Scripture must constantly be refreshed in the minds of believers and defended by skeptics. The shepherd is commissioned to preach the Word of God. Paul wrote, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction" (NIV, 1985, 2 Tim. 4:2). The commission to preach the Word or hold any leadership position within the church, authority does not reside with the shepherd or any auxiliary or board of the church; instead, it is commissioned by the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture does not change with the times, the culture, the nation, or the ethnic background involved; it is and remains the unalterable authority of God (Henry, 1979). It is not an authority that can be successfully challenged or overthrown; instead, it is the ultimate authority of God. It is not merely a suggestive authority; rather, it is the obligatory authority of God (Henry, 1979). For the church leader, this fundamental doctrine on the authority of Scripture should be in a shepherd's quiver available for use at any time where the defense of the authority of Scripture is required. The enforcement of the obligatory authority of God in the church resides with leadership in general, the senior pastor more specifically. The obligation of being a peacemaker and the obligatory enforcement of the authority of Scripture empowers the pastor with the tools for biblical conflict resolution within the church.

Statement of the Problem

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (NIV, 1985, Mat. 5:9). Pastors are called by God to be the under-shepherds of a flock, to bring back the scattered, strengthen the sick, and bind the injured (NIV, 1985, Eze. 34:1-16). Shepherds are to feed the flock (NIV, 1985, John 21:15-16). Shepherds are managers of God's household (NIV, 1985, 1 Tim. 3:4-5), assigned to ensure everything is done in a "fitting and orderly way" (NIV, 1985, 1 Cor. 14:40) for the greater glory of God (NIV, 1985, 1 Pet. 4:11) (Berkley, 2008, p. 27).

One facet of being a shepherd is the call to become a peacemaker and successfully manage conflict within the flock. The Scripture in Matthew calls for the flock's shepherd to be peacemakers, as opposed to the philosophy of peacekeepers. A Christian worldview definition of a peacemaker is someone who is actively seeking to reconcile people to God and to one another (Ezell, 2014). "Christ is the reason many enter the pastorate; conflict is the reason many leave" (Poirier, 2006, p. 10). Church congregations are experiencing decreased attendance, and many are closing entirely for failing to thrive in today's modern world. On the surface, church conflict appears to be a strong contributing factor (Bixby & McClintock, 2016). A casual review of the data suggests that conflict resolution is a new and rapidly developing field as a subject matter in seminary education. The rural African American pastorate comprises leaders who were "called" to the ministry through inspirational means rather than being afforded the opportunity for formal higher theological education, including, but not limited to, attending seminary. This research intends no contrariety between pastors who attended seminary versus those who did not; instead, to understand the origin and methods of conflict resolution styles and perceived effectiveness among the study participants. The study results sought to provide pastors with a better understanding of the dynamics of effective conflict management practices and the influence of

their leadership methodology on the congregation. The results of the TKI provided the research participants with a greater understanding of the dynamics of the issue of conflict resolution and methods to improve the identification of their specific methodology. The demographic referenced in this research are rural African American senior pastors with a congregation of less than one hundred on average weekly attendance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors to understand the background, origin, and effectiveness of conflict resolution methods in the rural African American church. The phenomenon of conflict has been defined as “the tension an individual or group experiences because of perceived differences between him or herself and another individual or group” (Tjosvold, 2006). Conflict resolution can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute (Shonk, 2021).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the common conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors?

RQ2: What is the background and origin, as perceived by rural African American pastors, in developing a conflict resolution approach?

RQ3: What impact has conflict, as perceived by rural African American pastors, had on the rural African American congregation?

RQ4: How effective do rural African American pastors believe they are with conflict resolution?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

Based on the researcher's knowledge of the targeted research pool, the research assumed that the majority of rural African American pastors were not educated through formal means like attending seminary. Their learning is rather by means of non-formal educational activities such as seminars or continuing education classes and self-education through personal studies.

Researchers have determined that certain conditions make assumptions unnecessary (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Successful pastors possessing conflict resolution skills is one such condition. This phenomenological qualitative study contains elements of transferability. Transferability is established by providing evidence that this research study's findings could apply to other situations, demographics, and populations.

For this research, the following assumptions exist:

1. Conflict management is an essential skill of pastoral leadership.
2. Conflict exists in every church.
3. It is possible to determine a pastors' conflict management style using the Thomas-Kilmann MODE Instrument.
4. It is possible to analyze the origins and perceived effectiveness of the conflict management style of rural African American pastors.

Delimitations of the Research Design

The study's nature among ministry leaders within the rural African American church may impact its generalizability to other ministry settings and populations. The delimitations of the study include the following:

1. The study was delimited to African American senior pastors serving predominantly African American congregations.

2. The study was delimited to African American senior pastors serving in rural locations.
3. The study was delimited to African American rural congregations with less than one hundred average weekly attendance.
4. The study participant pool was drawn from a group of pastors who serve churches as members of a regional association of Baptist churches.

Definition of Terms

1. *Conflict*: The research focused on congregational conflict, defined as a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires, may occur when those religious and spiritual beliefs are unaligned (Sande, 2007, p. 29). The conflict referenced in the research was derived from a theological perspective.
2. *Conflict Resolution*: Conflict resolution can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute (Shonk K., What is Conflict Resolution and How Does It Work? 2020).
3. *Conflict Management Styles*: The Thomas-Kilmann theory of conflict management styles represents a widely accepted theory of five possible conflict management styles: avoiding, accommodating, compromising, competing, and collaborating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976).
4. *Rural*: This research defines rural as a non-metropolitan area, any population, housing, or development not in a metropolitan area (USDA, 2019).
5. *African American*: The dictionary definition of African American is "an American of African and especially of Black African descent" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). A Black person is described as "of or relating to any of various population groups having dark pigmentation of the skin "or" of or relating to African American people or the culture (Sigelman, Tuch, & Martin, 2005). This research may substitute the proper noun Black for African Americans.
6. *Small Church*: This research utilizes the phrase "small church" in the context of an established traditional brick and mortar church with an attendance of one hundred or fewer in average weekly attendance. An ordained minister must shepherd the church, whether full-time paid, bi-vocational, or volunteer. The general attributes of a church include a recognized creed and form of worship, a formal code of doctrine, a distinct religious history holding regular religious services, including instruction for the young (Government, 2016).

7. *Pastor*: An ordained and licensed shepherd of a Christian congregation who possesses all the rights and entitlements of an official clergy member, including the legal qualifications to perform rights of marriage ceremonies.
8. *TKI*: Thomas-Kilmann Instrument

Significance of the Study

This research sought to identify the conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors. The research also strived to understand the origin and perceived effectiveness of the specific demographic conflict resolution methods. The limited precedent literature available illuminated the significance of this study by demonstrating a gap in the literature.

Summary of the Design

The proposed instrumentation for this study included the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument and a researcher-created interview. The purpose of the survey served to identify the conflict management styles of rural African American pastors. Interviews are one of the primary sources of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher conducted zoom-based interviews with each participant.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The study aimed to determine the role of conflict in the church and the pastor's modes/methods of resolving them effectively and efficiently. The study was phenomenological, as it focused on the attitude of pastors towards conflict resolution. The following review examined the precedent literature related to the theological and theoretical framework relevant to conflict management skills in rural African American pastors. The research examined the historical foundation, cultural experience, and evolution of the rural African American pastorate. The research goal was to discover the origins and development of the philosophies of conflict management utilized by this specific demographic.

The adverse effects of conflict within the church congregation and the pastoral leadership in resolving conflict provided the foundation for the study and assisted in the analysis of the findings. All Bible verses in this research were quoted in the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise specified.

Theological Framework for the Study

Conflict is inescapable and is both good and necessary because it elicits different points of view, clears the air, and makes it possible to resolve extraordinarily complex issues (Osterhaus, Jurkowski, & Hahn, 2005). There is solid evidence ($p=0.0060$) to suggest that those educated in handling conflict and those who have not received such education do not share the same difficulty in trusting God when in a conflict situation (Oppenshaw, Nel, & Louw, 2018). The church is an extraordinarily complex organization in which all kinds of aspects play a part, and people deal with each other in all kinds of relationships (Westert, 2006). The flock's shepherd must effectively possess the capacity to nurture these relationships and manage conflict in an

effective, scripturally based, educationally enhanced perspective. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (NIV, 1985, Mat. 5:9). Pastors are called by God to be the under-shepherds of a flock, to bring back the scattered, strengthen the sick, and bind the injured (NIV, 1985, Eze. 34:1-16). Shepherds are to feed the flock (NIV, 1985, John 21:15-16). Shepherds are managers of God's household (NIV, 1985, 1 Tim. 3:4-5), assigned to ensure everything is done in a "fitting and orderly way" (NIV, 1985, 1 Cor. 14:40) for the greater glory of God (NIV, 1985, 1 Pet. 4:11) (Berkley, 2008, p. 27). The theological problems identified emphasize the need for education in conflict for a Christian community is from a theological and not only sociological perspective (Oppenshaw, Nel, & Louw, 2018).

Conflict

Church conflict can arise over differences of opinion, disagreement with leadership, or instances of blatant sin. These three categories of church conflict often overlap, compounding the necessity of practical pastoral resolution skills. Conflict in the church takes on a unique dynamic based on the shared beliefs of congregants. Congregational leadership has a higher standard in conflict situations as it seeks spiritual benefits for all stakeholders (Susek, 1999, p. 136).

One simple definition of conflict is "a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires" (Poirier, 2006, p. 24). Interpersonal conflict, also known as dyadic conflict, refers to conflict between two or more interacting individuals as a manifestation of incompatibility, disagreement, or differences between the parties involved in a conflict (Rahim, 2011). The Rahim Conflict methodology suggests that in addition to interpersonal conflict skills, the need for organizational conflict management involves the diagnosis of and intervention in conflicts at the interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup levels and the strategies used to handle these conflicts (Rahim, 2011).

The pastor of a flock of believers has interpersonal conflict resolution methods to explore and develop through self-evaluation and Scripture. The need extends for exploration into intragroup and intergroup strategies to address conflict issues within the church. Leaders are called to be peacemakers and not peacekeepers. Peacekeepers attempt to sweep things under the carpet, while peacemakers' endeavor to sweep issues out the door (Susek, 1999, p. 126). An essential element of congregational life is discipleship, or disciple-making (Matt. 28: 19), and the literary research highlighted that the absence of conflict education is commonly omitted in discipleship courses. It is strongly proposed that the handling of conflict needs to form an integral part of the discipleship process and experience. (Robinson, 2006, p. 119).

Types of Church Conflict

Church conflict comes in an infinite array of disguises and origins. With the uniqueness God created in each individual when congregants gather, the same individuality begets conflict. Conflict can begin with benign issues such as the color of new paint in the sanctuary, assigned parking spots, and many other issues that can provide swift resolution with good pastoral leadership. Conflict can also manifest itself in extreme cases where strong spirit-driven pastoral leadership coupled with Scriptural conflict resolution skills is necessary to navigate the tumultuous church-dividing conflicts of the modern church. Identifying conflict in the church is difficult as conflict in itself is complex. Seven types of conflict presented by Norman Cook Everist in her book *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Everist, 2004) offer a thirty-thousand-foot view of the pastor's responsibility to a church relating to conflict management.

Intrapersonal Conflict

Conflict occurs in our innermost being, particularly among Christians. Intrapersonal conflict is singular. The conflict we as human beings cause for ourselves. Differing levels of spiritual maturity guide how Christian's deal with conscience and choice issues, which directly affect how we feel about ourselves, and the internal conflict generated. Sin has a way of accompanying conflict. The church pastor bears the responsibility of recognizing the sin and creating the atmosphere for appropriately resolving conflict with God's well-observed. Leadership and the message provided by the shepherd of the flock should relate to how parishioners address intrapersonal conflict.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is a conflict between two people; the Bible illustrates examples of interpersonal conflict. One of the most straightforward and earliest examples of interpersonal conflict is the relationship between Cain and Able (NIV, 1985, Gen. 4: 1-16). In the congregation, relationships often create conflict that may have stemmed from generations of familial hostilities that no one can trace. This phenomenon or a reasonable facsimile is common in rural churches in the South, particularly those founded generations past.

Conflict Over Beliefs

Conflict can quickly arise out of different beliefs within the congregation. One of the most significant challenges for pastors is successfully resolving conflicts which may arise out of change. Congregants are traditionally resistant to change and any efforts toward implementation of change. The modern African American church struggles with primary belief and doctrinal issues, which have created conflict to the magnitude of church splits, lost memberships, and no glory for the kingdom of God. Among these most controversial issues in the rural African

American church include the issue of homosexuality in the church and women in the pulpit. This research is not intended to argue either side of these issues, only to acknowledge that these issues create conflict, which leads to division within the body of Christ. The resolution of issues of this magnitude and the direction of leadership chosen by the pastor could have lasting implications on a congregation and the church as a whole for generations to come (Everist, 2004, p. 16).

Conflict over Facts

Congregations can develop conflict over facts or truths in the church. A prime example is worship music. The music in a worship service is one of the foundations of the African American church. The music, the rich history, the traditions, and the countless noted artists who have originated in the church are too vast a subject for this research. Given the vastness of the topic equates to the feelings surrounding the worship music. Worship music represents a conflict with the magnitude in which church splits have occurred. In the rural areas of the South, musicians are in short supply. The severe shortage of resolute Christian musicians has created an atmosphere where musicians tend to avail their services to the highest bidder. Changes in worship leaders can be the source of conflict, where the pastor's leadership can be the determining factor in the successful resolution of this potentially devastating conflict.

The modern technology available in small rural African American churches has witnessed an incremental change in the AV aspect of church service. The COVID-19 pandemic forced churches to adopt alternative avenues of dissemination of the Gospel. Technological advances and the cost of modernizing the church have become another source of conflict within the congregation.

Conflict over Values

Values permeate the ways we interpret life and relate with one another (Everist, 2004, p. 19). In the Christian worldview, the goal is to live a Christ-like life as an example to others. In the course of decision-making on a daily basis, values are the driving force determining the course of action chosen. People created with their individualities and personalities will naturally place differing values of worth on decisions in the church. The author of Proverbs addressed values when he wrote, "Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool: (ESV, 2002, Pro. 19:1). To highlight a few, conflict in the congregation can arise from conflicting values concerning money, parenting, and church auxiliary agendas.

Conflict over Goals

The direction and leadership of the pastor are instrumental in resolving any conflict, jeopardizing the church's mission as a whole and the mission of each auxiliary created within the church. The one mandate Jesus gave His believers located in the Great Commission reads, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (NIV, 1985, Matt. 28:19). There reside varying methods in which parishioners may go about disciple building in the church. Each method supports advocates and proponents, offering the propensity for conflict. Each auxiliary in the church has a goal, an agenda, and a feeling of prioritization over other auxiliaries. The pastor has the responsibility to ensure interpersonal relationships, or any other contributing factors of conflict, are resolved in a manner that does not detract from the church's mission.

Conflict over Means

The resources available for different programs, projects, or auxiliaries within the church offer opportunities for monumental conflicts within the church. Conflict makes us territorial (Everist, 2004, p. 21). Every auxiliary ministry leader within the church believes the auxiliary they chair is the most important and deserves specific special considerations. Far too often, money issues are a proxy for the deeper question of what is valuable or important (Lincoln L., 2017). Most churches have a finance department that is in charge of the funds. The construct and tradition of the finance department coupled with the senior leadership, spearheaded by the pastor, make up the church's stewardship. The finance committee's conflict is an issue that has divided congregations, destroyed long-standing relationships, led to hurt feelings, and brought no glory to the kingdom of Christ. The stewardship issue provides an opportunity for pastoral leadership and skills in biblically inspired Scripturally backed conflict resolution skills. The acquisition of these leadership skills has infiltrated seminary curriculums to train young pastors on the necessity of familiarization with this skill set.

The African American church is likely, as any other church, to experience conflict over the logistics of the church, such as funds, and its allocation, values, beliefs and desires, power, and space (McKinney, 2005). Over time, the African American church has rarely fallen into severe controversy over the dogma of the Gospel. The current conflicts in the church have challenged pastors to take a position on the issues and lead the church. The current issues creating conflict include women in the pulpit and the omnipresent homosexuality issue. The pastoral methodology of leadership has, in countless instances, led to divisions within the church.

Theology of Conflict

The existence of conflict in the human dynamic dates back to the introduction of sin into the world by Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden. When Adam and Eve took the forbidden fruit, they were explicitly instructed not to do it. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (The Holy Bible: King James Version, 2016, Gen. 2:17). The decision to eat from the forbidden tree directly conflicted with God's instructions.

James's Bible book gives a blunt but helpful summary of the reason for conflicts and their solution: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (NIV, 1985, Jas. 4:1). To lift the burdens of conflict from humanity, we must heal "the lusts that war" in the human heart, meaning sin (Stark, 2014). The Scriptures urge Christians to follow God's moral and spiritual laws because that is how to resist sin and the conflict that ensues and escape from it. James continued his teaching by saying, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (NIV, 1985, Jas. 4:7).

The Christ-spirit that Jesus expressed caused people to recognize that sin did not have power over them and enabled them to give it up in favor of God's goodness (Stark, 2014). The theological foundation of conflict management and reconciliation through forgiveness is the model that pastors understand conflict management strategies and their significance.

Old Testament Theology of Conflict

The conflict grew after the fall with the relationship between Cain and Abel. Genesis chapter four accounts Cain allowing his anger and jealousy to turn to rage, as he subsequently murdered his brother Abel. The first documented case of murder in Scripture. In the Old

Testament, the Hebrew word for conflict is *rib*, meaning a physical or verbal battle, indicating the presence of strife or a quarrel between two people (Van Yperen, 2002, p. 95).

The perspective of conflict is essential for a complete analysis of the phrase. Job endured his trials and tests of conflict from an internal faith perspective. In one day, Job lost his sons and daughters in a collapsed house (NIV, 1985, Job 1:18), his sheep were struck by lightning (v.16), and his flock of camels were taken from him, and his servants killed (v.17). Job was told continuously to curse God for the tragedies which had befallen his life by his friends. Job's wife even encouraged the cursing of God. During his suffering, she told Job, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (NIV, 1985, Job 2:9). Job endured his conflicts, and his faith and steadfastness in God overcame his conflicts.

The Old Testament provides another perspective of conflict resolution in the book of Ruth. The relationship between Ruth and Boaz epitomized conflict. Boaz faced an ethical decision when he attempted to fulfill his role as kinsman-redeemer to marry Ruth. In the hierarchy of the times, there stood one in higher standing than Boaz, who had first right to stand as kinsman-redeemer, purchase the land, and the right to marry Ruth. Boaz chose the ethical route of assembling the elders and bringing the case before the community tribunal. The issue was placed before those involved, and God blessed the end result of Boaz's ethically appropriate conflict resolution approach.

King David, a great warrior for God, was not without bouts of conflict. The relationship he shared with Saul epitomized conflict. David and his acquisition of Bathsheba epitomize the darker side of sinfully inspired conflict resolution skills. David's perspective of conflict originated from the lustful desire to have the wife of another. David, who lusted for another man's wife, another man who was a soldier under David's command, purposefully devised a plan

to have him killed. The man was Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba (NIV, 1985, 2 Sam.11:24). David ordered Uriah to the front of a battle and had the troops withdraw, thereby allowing Uriah's execution. David then married the widowed Bathsheba. The method of conflict resolution employed by David in the case of Uriah has adapted over time and remains in the human dynamic in contemporary times. Resolution has to do with issues and is associated with solution, accommodation, or settling of a problem, controversy, or dispute (Ford, 2008).

New Testament Theology of Conflict

The early church faced great conflicts. One of the most excellent examples of conflict resolution documented in Scripture is Acts chapter fifteen. The Apostle Paul was conflicted by many questions and debates encountered in forming the early church; in Acts chapter fifteen, the conflict was over circumcision. The Jews believed that the law of Moses required circumcision of the Gentiles, while the gentiles who were converted by faith in Jesus Christ were not circumcised. The Jewish faction believed that if the Gentiles were not circumcised, they would be unclean, therefore, could not receive salvation. Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, returned from the Apostle's first missionary journey only to be confronted with the conflict. During Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas found success in converting the gentiles. Paul and Barnabas took the issue of circumcision to the Apostles and Elders of the church. Paul presented the case before the Apostles and shared the Gentiles' conversion experiences during their missionary journey. Paul recorded, "The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul talking about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them (NIV, 1985, Act. 15:12). Paul shared his experience with Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, illustrating that Cornelius did not have to be circumcised to receive salvation. The apostles and elders met to consider this question (v.6). During the deliberation, James, the half-brother of

Jesus, added proof from Scripture to lead the group to an agreement and subsequent resolution to the problem by not requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised but provided a list of requirements for appropriate Christian behavior.

The theological reference for conflict resolution domiciliates in the Gospel of Matthew. Chapter 18, verses 15-20, clearly explains the proper procedure for dealing with someone who has sinned against a person. Sin often causes a chain reaction. When someone in a Christian leadership position sin, it affects more than the one person they sinned against. The leadership in the church who is a source of conflict creates a challenging dynamic for the church.

The New Testament provides multiple references for Christians to demonstrate living at peace with one another. In the Christian worldview, believers are instructed to love one another (NIV, 1985, John 13:34, Rom. 12:10), to settle differences among ourselves (NIV, 1985, 2 Cor. 13:11), to be patient, kind, and tenderhearted toward one another (NIV, 1985, 1 Cor. 13:4).

Theology of Forgiveness

The theology of forgiveness is one of the foundations of the Christian faith. "Christians are the most forgiven people in the world; therefore, we should be the most forgiving people in the world" (Sande, 2007). Christians in churches around the country each week pray, and daily recite the Lord's prayer in Matthew chapter six. The passage reads, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (KJV, 2016, Mat. 6:12). In his letter to the believers in Colosse, the Apostle Paul provided all believers with the Christian rules for holy living. Among those rules, Paul addressed the issue of forgiveness. He wrote, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (NIV, 1985, Col. 3:13). In the African American church, the doctrine of forgiveness was taught in every facet of church life, beginning early and prayerfully through spiritual maturation.

Forgiveness is a complex theological concept and a complicated and nuanced reality. The introduction of forgiveness in the human dynamic dates back to Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden. Forgiveness is more than a mere reaction to sin and enmity: it finds its impetus and extent in the positive mission of God (Coutts, 2013). From the early days of the church, "forgiveness of sins" has been the center of faith in the Christian worldview. However, God introduced forgiveness in the human dynamic with Adam and Eve, notwithstanding consequences for their actions. Forgiveness is one of those things that can be hard to grasp. In the Christian worldview, it is reasonable to equate forgiveness with a feeling or emotion; however, forgiveness is actually an act of the will through the power of the Spirit (Newberger, 2009). The philosophy of forgiveness of sins and the action itself is documented throughout the New Testament; however, the earliest known occurrence is written in Mark chapter one, verse four, "John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin" (NIV, 1985, Mk. 1:4).

Old Testament Theology of Forgiveness

The Old Testament theology of forgiveness shows the system of sacrifice as a vessel for the forgiveness of sin. The sacrifice system derived from God's covenantal relationship with His chosen people when He delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. In the Old Testament, God gave Moses two stone tablets. He wrote the ten commandments instructing the Israelites on how to behave on these tablets. Anyone caught violating these commandments was stoned to death. The law of Moses changed with the arrival of Jesus Christ. Moses' law changed; instead of stoning for sins, God granted us forgiveness through His Son, who redeemed us, giving us new life.

The Old Testament has extraordinarily little to offer regarding interpersonal forgiveness. The obvious example is the story of Joseph. The story of Jacob's youngest son Joseph is an Old

Testament lesson in the theology of forgiveness. Joseph was sold into slavery by his older brothers. Genesis chapter 37 begins the story of Joseph. The well-documented and famous story of Joseph ends with forgiveness and reunification. In 1957, C.S. Lewis wrote, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive" (Lewis, 1952). David addressed the issue of forgiveness when he wrote, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit" (NIV, 1985, Psa. 32:1-2). The theology of forgiveness is a teachable dynamic and the responsibility of the flock's shepherd. Forgiveness is a critical dynamic in the conflict resolution process.

New Testament Theology of Forgiveness

Forgiveness and reconciliation are similar in some respects, yet they are not the same. The Bible teaches Christians in numerous passages to forgive others. Forgiveness is an integral aspect of Matthew 6: 7-15, where Jesus taught us how to pray. The sign of salvation and God's forgiveness to humanity is Jesus dying on the cross. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (NIV, 1985, 2 Cor. 5:21).

Christian scholars have researched the topic of forgiveness. Richard Swinburne writes, "I suggest that a victim's disowning of a hurtful act is only to be called forgiveness when it is in response to at least some minimal attempt at atonement such as an apology." According to Swinburne, "apology is the public expression of one's repentance" (Swinburne, 1989).

The theology of forgiveness in the New Testament teaches that receiving forgiveness from God mandates extending it to others. The teaching is illustrated throughout the Gospels (NIV, 1985, Mat 6:12-15, Mk 11:25,26, Lk 11:2-4).

Theology of Reconciliation

Reconciliation involves forgiveness; however, it goes a step beyond forgiveness. When forgiveness takes place in a relationship, there remains the question of the status of the relationship. For a relationship to move forward and thrive and for true forgiveness to take place, reconciliation must occur. Forgiveness could come from only one party of the conflict, while reconciliation must be a joint effort between both parties to mend the relationship. Reconciliation in the Christian worldview relates to the relationships between God and man or man and man. We often have to patiently and carefully "correct, rebuke and encourage" (NIV, 1985, 2 Tim. 4:2). The apostle Paul instructed Timothy to rebuke sin, correct bad theology or thinking, and encourage faith. This is the essence of biblical leadership and reconciliation (Van Yperen, 2002, p. 223). The theory of reconciliation dates back to the Old Testament. It represents a standard mantra for God and Israel's people throughout the entire journey through the Old Testament of Scripture. "To make peace, the church must embody the principles and practices of reconciliation made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is a way of life. To do this, the church must recover the biblical community. The redemptive church will learn to practice reconciliation as a way of life." (Van Yperen, 2002, p. 22).

The Apostle Paul preached to the ministry of reconciliation. Paul wrote, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (NIV, 1985, 2 Cor. 5:17-18).

Old Testament Theology of Reconciliation

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (NIV, 1985, Jas. 5:16). In the

Old Testament, the word reconciliation is the Hebrew word *kapar*, pronounced kaw-far. One of the most theologically significant words in the Bible. In addition to reconciliation, *kapar* translates into English words such as forgive, purge away, merciful, and a few others (Williams M., 2015). A commonly translated word for reconciliation in the Old Testament is *Kapar* (NIV, 1985, Lev. 6:30; Dan. 9:24) which means to obtain forgiveness and hence reconcile (Walvoord, 2007).

New Testament Theology of Reconciliation

Reconciliation has its Biblical foundation in the atonement of Christ. The historical breakdown of the term atonement means a condition without tension (Williams M., 2015). Christ dying on the cross removed the tension between man and God. The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (NIV, 1985, Rom. 5:10).

The relationship between Paul and Mark illustrates a Biblical example of reconciliation. Paul and Barnabas conflicted over the previous history of Mark's behavior, quarreled, and separated over the issue of Mark deserting them in Pamphylia during Paul's first missionary journey. During his later years, Paul recognized that Mark had matured through the years and had become a faithful servant of the Lord. Paul sent a request to Timothy from a Roman prison. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (NIV, 1985, 2 Tim. 4:11).

Summary of Conflict

Conflict is the result of unwarranted and unfilled desires. It is unwarranted because the desire is for personal pleasure and self-promotion, not for understanding or seeking God's will (Van Yperen, 2002, p. 94). In the leadership realm, primarily within the church, the pastor

manages the congregation's strife. To manage strife, conflict resolution methodologies are in the hands of the congregational leader. Biblically inspired conflict resolution methodology requires a Scriptural understanding of the theology of conflict and an understanding of the Scriptural basis for conflict resolution. The growing tide of new ministers identifies a need for more conflict resolution training in seminary. A casual observation of the literature of the feedback from new pastors contributes to the expansion of conflict resolution methodologies in curriculums of higher Christian education. Limited research posits the absence of a formal system may be due, in part, because a practical means of handling conflict is not taught as a core value in most African American churches, especially rural churches (Newberger, 2009).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Conflict and its study of resolution have gained widespread attention throughout the theologically based academic community, particularly in church leadership. Many scholars have argued that conflict management, and particularly conflict resolution, is an important predictor of a group. (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001; Mathieu & Schulze, 2006). These approaches apply to the church as an organization.

Models of Conflict Management

In the 1970s, Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann developed a model for conflict resolution. The Thomas-Kilmann model believes that everyone thinks differently and resolves conflict differently, but these differences can be minimized. Through their research, the development of the Thomas-Kilmann five modes for handling conflict became the standard of measurement accepted by psychology and academic communities. The Thomas-Kilmann theory is widely used to help evaluate how someone might react in a conflictual situation (Trippe & Baumuel, 2015). The theory describes an individual's behavior along two dimensions: (1)

assertiveness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy his own concerns, and (2) cooperativeness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. In the TKI model, a person will adopt one of five particular negotiating "styles": competitive, avoidant, accommodating, compromising, or collaborative, depending on what the person cares about most in a particular situation.

Competing

A leader subscribing to a competing conflict management philosophy only addresses one's concerns, even at others' cost. It is a philosophy of power, and the leader will unleash its unyielding power to achieve a favorable outcome for oneself. It is a power-oriented mode; one uses whatever power dynamic seems appropriate to get a favorable outcome for oneself (Trippe & Baumuel, 2015). One could argue David exemplified this style of leadership where 2 Samuel chapter 11 records King David utilizing his power as commander in chief to send Uriah the Hittite to the front of a battle to have him killed to acquire his wife, Bathsheba. Scripture records that David was successful in his competing conflict management philosophy (NIV, 1985, 2 Sam. 11:27).

Accommodating

According to Thomas and Kilmann, accommodating is the opposite of competing (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976). The accommodating leader possesses a high element of self-sacrifice. An accommodating leader would sacrifice their problems or beliefs to help someone else. This approach offers a quick and reasonable solution for both parties, but it does not explore the conflict in-depth (Cioarta, 2020). Accommodating is unassertive and cooperative. An accommodating leader has an element of self-sacrifice in this conflict-handling mode. An

accommodating leader would take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's orders or yielding to another's point of view.

Avoiding

The avoiding position of conflict management is almost self-explanatory. Instead, this type of leader would not take a position and avoid the issue (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976). The avoidance could hide under the façade of putting something off for a more appropriate time or other tactical delays. Not responsive to another party's needs, nor interested in achieving a specific goal, refuses conflict (Cioarta, 2020). Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). An avoiding leader does not immediately pursue his or her concerns, nor those of any of the other parties involved. They may choose not to address the conflict by diplomatically sidestepping, postponing, or even withdrawing from an uncomfortable situation.

Collaborating

Collaborating requires an in-depth inquiry into an issue to understand the critical needs of each party involved. This approach requires a leader to seek creative answers to interpersonal issues and achieve growth for all parties involved. This happens when both parties are working together to satisfy the concerns of each party. They explore the situation to find a creative solution to meet both needs (Cioarta, 2020). Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative. According to the study's authors, collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, resolve issues that could create conflict over financial resources, or confront and try to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem. (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007).

Compromising

The compromising leaders fall midway between competing and accommodating. This type of leader is a fence straddler who tries to find a solution that appeases both parties. It is the middle ground between competing and accommodating, which offers a quick and reasonable solution for both parties, but it does not explore the conflict in-depth (Cioarta, 2020).

Fiedler's contingency model of leadership shares conceptual similarities with the Thomas-Kilmann theory. The model suggests there is no one best leadership style; instead, a leader's effectiveness depends on the situation. Fiedler argues that leaders should consider several environmental or situational factors before deciding on the appropriate leadership style: task-oriented or relationship-oriented. Leaders would be very unlikely to be successful if they cannot match their personal leadership style to the situation's demands (Fiedler F., 1967). Fiedler's model has application within church leadership as well as industry. Pastoral and congregant relationships share environmental factors which require an appropriate leadership style.

Fiedler believed that people's natural leadership styles are fixed and cannot be changed easily. The most effective way to handle the situation is to change the leader based on certain situational factors or change the situation to suit the leader (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987).

Blake and Mouton's two-dimensional model of conflict in 1964 remains a foundation for much of today's research on interpersonal conflict styles (Volkema & Bergmann, 1995). The two dimensions of the Blake and Mouton model are (a) concern for self-interests (assertiveness) and (b) concern for the other party or the relationship (cooperativeness). The two dimensions are incorporated into a variety of questionnaires, the best known of which are Hall's (1969) Conflict Management Survey, the Thomas-Kilmann (1974) Conflict MODE Instrument, and Rahim's (1983) Organizational Conflict Inventory (Volkema & Bergmann, 1995).

Sources of Conflict in the Church

Conflict occurs in the church as in any other organization involving human beings. The phenomenon of conflict in the church is unfortunate as this is where Christians are taught to love thy neighbor (Westert, 2006). The challenges, differences, personal motivations, and paradoxes within the church, when not resolved effectively, have the propensity to escalate into a protracted conflict continuum. Conflict can arise at any time within a congregation and needs to be understood and handled theologically (Oppenshaw, Nel, & Louw, 2018, p. 1). Church conflict comes in varying degrees, from minor incidents to issues that blow up and result in entrenched positions where communication is no longer possible. Decisions of every sort within the church offer opportunities for conflict.

Westert believed conflict in the church, and its rapid escalation is unique (Westert, 2006). Church conflict has a unique dynamic due to the emotional investment of the organization members. When conflict occurs, sides are chosen quickly among the church's congregants. The church is an extraordinarily complex organization in which all kinds of aspects play a part, and people deal with each other in all kinds of relationships (Westert, 2006). Westert outlines three factors that can cause a conflict to escalate quickly in the church. The first factor is that the church is a diverse group of people. The second is based on the church as a normative organization, and finally, the church has everything to do with cooperation.

The Church as a Diverse Group

The church represents the coalition of a specific community of believers represented therein. The younger and older congregants and the relationships within generational differences; those who are mature in Christ versus those who are beginning their Christian journey, and those who full-time participate in different facets of the church organization versus those who attend

casually are just a few of the dynamics within the church organization. In the African American church, tradition is the source of countless conflict areas in a diverse group. The strength of the phrase "the way we have always done it" generates conflict with every decision made within the church. Effective leadership, specifically the shepherd of the flock's conflict management leadership style, plays a crucial role in Scripturally addressing conflict within the church.

The Church as a Normative Organization

Normative organizations are characterized by the use of identitive power, the power to make people identify with the organization as its primary source of control, and by high commitment on the part of participants (Brager, 1969). The church is categorized as a normative organization based on the primary source of control and the participant's commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Westert believed in a normative organization, more specifically, the church. A fundamental difference of opinion about something does not mean that you need to condemn the opposite view's adherents as persons or fellow Christians (Westert, 2006). The point is that we strive for unity and truth in the church. That striving quickly brings about tension.

The Church and Cooperation

The church exists through its volunteers' cooperation, and everyone has their own set of motives for serving (Westert, 2006). The different factions within a church environment compete for their agendas. The choir director has a motivation vastly different from a deacon board member versus the women's auxiliary. Communication in various groups within the church takes a great deal of care. All those involved in a conflict are part of the church. Paul wrote, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ (NIV, 1985, 1 Cor. 12:12). Conviction, emotion, relationships, and "my

opinion" and "the truth" are then all intricately connected. The care exercised and the responsibility to deal with conflict effectively reside in the church's leadership, specifically, the conflict management model set by the flock's shepherd.

Summary of Church Conflict

Scripture describes God as our Good Shepherd (NIV, 1985, John 10:1-18). God is the One who tends the flock, ensures the sheep have new fields to graze, and clean water to drink. He oversees their safety in the middle of the darkest night and comforts them with His rod and staff (NIV, 1985, Psa. 23:4).

The church's environment allows the propensity for a conflict to spread and become destructive. The leadership methodology of resolving conflict is the shepherd's responsibility to the flock. Congregations, in general, are biased towards conflict avoidance, peacekeeping, and reconciliatory measures frequently at the expense of long-term resolution. Pastors' skills in conflict management should be grounded in Scriptural conflict resolution examples provided in the Bible.

Related Literature

This portion of the literature review was to provide the reader with a critical review of the various subtopics related and relevant to the subject matter of this researcher's project. The reviews organization involves this researcher's in-depth survey of the study's relevant aspects that framed and informed the research. The related literature review was divided into two major sections, the history of the African American church and the evolution of the African American pastor.

History of the African American Church

The religious beliefs and practices of the masses of African Americans today are still heavily African. They are part of a living religious stream that began in Africa, not in Europe as many have supposed (Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years*, 2004, p. xvii). The early influence of African traditional religion and culture on the belief and practices of those enslaved in America is not difficult to research.

African American sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, expressed an opinion that remains popular among scholars concerning the African American church's African roots. He wrote, "From what has been pointed out concerning how the slaves were stripped of their cultural heritage, we may dismiss such speculations as the one that their Baptist and Methodist worship was due to their African background" (Frazier, 1963, p. 8).

African American scholar W.E.B. DuBois shared in the African American church's belief in African roots. In 1915 DuBois offered insight into the African roots of black religion. He wrote, "the Negro church of today bases itself on the sole surviving social institution of the African fatherland, that accounts for its extraordinary growth and vitality" (DuBois, 1970, p. 113).

Historically, the Black church in America is the country's most transparent picture of what it looks like to worship God and serve his people while being on the margins of society. Like the early church and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, the Black church was formed under intense persecution (Moore, 2020).

The inception of the Black Church

History records that in late August 1619, the *White Lion*, an English privateer commanded by John Jope, sailed into Point Comfort, a coastal port in the English colony of Virginia, and

dropped anchor in the James River. Virginia colonist John Rolfe documented the ship's arrival and "20 and odd" Africans on board. His journal entry is immortalized in textbooks, with 1619 often used as a reference point for teaching the origins of slavery in the United States (Ponti, 2019). Many scholars believe African slaves came to America already possessing faith because they had such a strong sense of spirituality (Moore, 2020).

The date of 1619 was formally adopted as the first landing of enslaved people on the North American continent; however, before 1619, hundreds of thousands of Africans, both free and enslaved, aided the establishment and survival of colonies in the Americas and the New World. They also fought against European oppression and, in some instances, hindered the systematic spread of colonization (Guaso, 2016, p. 9).

During the initial years of slavery, the North American colonists' prevailing thought was to deny the Gospel to the captured Africans and bound them into slavery. A widespread rumor prevailed that if Africans did indeed have souls and became Christians, they would be eligible to receive manumission (Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years*, 2004, p. 23). The enslavers in the colony of Virginia specifically denied the enslaved person a right to gather. Simultaneously, their counterparts in the North took a more humane approach to slavery and disseminating the Gospel. In these early times, believers were pushed to worship solely in their homes and in secret while living in fear of their lives (Moore, 2020). By the time of the revolutionary war, over a million slaves were inhabiting the colonies of the land to become the United States (Jernegan, 1916). Even though religious principles served as the foundation of settling the colonies, and religion was a thought which influenced individuals, denominations, missionary societies, and political organizations, for the first one hundred years post-1619, most African slaves died without ever knowing the Gospel (Jernegan, 1916).

Conducting church gatherings during slavery grew because the slave teacher would sneak out to listen to the white-only worship service, hear the Christian message, come back at night, and gather with others in secret to share the Gospel with his congregation. An association credited with large-scale dissemination of the Gospel to the enslaved Negro was the Missionary Society of the Church of England, established in 1701, "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" (SPG). From 1702 to 1785, this organization sent numerous missionaries, catechists, and schoolmasters to the American colonies to promote the conversion of Negro slaves. (Jernegan, 1916, p. 510). This organization was unsuccessful in effectively spreading the Gospel to the Negro enslaved people or the indigenous natives.

In 1730, John Wesley traveled to Georgia to find success in bringing the Gospel to the Black enslaved people and the Indigenous peoples, just as the (SPG) attempted some thirty years prior. Wesley achieved little success in his efforts and subsequently returned to England. (Miller, 2021). In 1739, George Whitefield began a missionary journey through the colonies of the newly formed America. Whitefield was the most famous religious figure of the eighteenth century. Newspapers called him the "marvel of the age." (Miller, 2021). Whitefield was a preacher capable of commanding thousands on two continents through the sheer power of his oratory. He preached at least 18,000 times to an estimated 10 million hearers in his lifetime. Whitefield's powerful preaching created what is referred to as the "Great Awakening" in America's colonies. The awakening brought forth a more aggressive platform for the formation of the Black church.

In 1758, the first recorded Black congregation was organized on William Byrd II's plantation in Mecklenburg, Virginia. Byrd was a self-proclaimed aristocrat, though his British colleagues did not revere him as such since he was born in the American colonies (Wright &

Tinling, 2009). William Byrd II ranks as the most well-known gentlemen-planter of pre-Revolutionary America, partly for his achievements and status.

Together with comparable groups, these efforts brought the Gospel and Christianity to the Black enslaved people and established the first Black churches.

Foundations of the Black Church

The first documented African American church was established by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1787 (Bragg, 1915). The church was also the first denomination founded, The African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Black church is the oldest, most continuous, and most influential institution in the African American people's history. It functioned as a laboratory out of which the African American people and African American culture were created. It is where our ancestors learned to read and write and where they learned to worship a liberating God (Gates, 2021). In the 18th century, there were no schools in the southern states of America that admitted Black children to their free public schools. Fearing that black literacy would prove a threat to the slave system, Whites in the South passed laws forbidding enslaved people to learn to read or write and making it a crime for anyone to teach them.

In the years leading up to the civil war, the Black church grew. In the Southern states beginning in the 1770s, increasing numbers of enslaved people converted to evangelical religions such as the Methodist and Baptist faiths (Maffly-Kipp, 2001).

During the Antebellum period and after the Civil War, Black churches, not just in the North but throughout the nation, offered African Americans refuge from oppression and focused on the spiritual, secular, and political concerns of the Black community. Following emancipation, the church continued to exist at the center of Black community life (Sambol-Tosco, 2004).

Emancipation from slavery in 1863 posed distinctive religious challenges for African Americans in the South. The Southern rural pastor faced immense challenges during this period. Issues such as reuniting families, finding employment, shelter, and a means of survival while trying to learn what it meant to live as a free person rather than property in the United States became a responsibility of the church leaders.

The African American Pastor

Since slavery, a host of the most influential political figures among African Americans have been clergy members. The preached Word in the Black church is rooted in a history of persistent calls for justice, social reform, moral and ethical responsibility, and spiritual redemption (Ware, Daymon, & Williams, 2019, p. 271). The African American pastor, Black preaching, and the Black church have been essential to Black life, serving as realms of leadership and authority that Black people as slaves did not have externally but could themselves occupy within the space of the church (Hill, 2019).

The preaching tradition of the Black ancestors did not spring into existence suddenly. It was the period after the civil war that black preachers, those who believed that God had called them to speak his Word, polished their "chanted sermons," or rhythmic, intoned style of extemporaneous preaching (Maffly-Kipp, 2001). It was developed during a long and often quite disconnected series of contacts between the Christian Gospel and African men and women caught up in the Black experience of slavery and oppression. (Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 1979).

Early Black Preachers

Four critical environmental factors attributed to slavery bear tremendous sway on the Black church's evolution and the Black preacher. First, it was common for Black preachers to preach sermons before all or predominantly white congregants. This was attributable to the fact that

large numbers of Black people were not permitted to gather to hear Christian preaching (Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 1979, p. 3). Richard Allen, the father of the African Methodist Episcopal church, did his earliest preaching to primarily White audiences.

Lemuel Haynes was an early Black preacher who was also a war veteran. Haynes served with the American colonies in the Revolutionary War. Haynes also would be classified as what mainstream today refers to as biracial. Haynes was abandoned by his natural parents, his African father, and "a white woman of respectable ancestry" (Jaffe, 2014). Haynes' legacy is instrumental to the history of the African American pastor. Haynes was the first Black pastor ordained to any congregation, he was the first Black man to receive a degree, and he was the first Black man to be internationally published (Tague, 2020). His story is lamented in both Black and American Christian history. His triumph over conflict is thoroughly documented in the writing of his life and worthy of any historian's attention.

Another factor contributing to this cultural phenomenon is that slaveholders believed the enslaved were no better than animals and not worthy of soul-saving endeavors. Owing to the acceptance of the theory that Blacks were not human, Black people were prohibited from attendance at worship or instruction (Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 1979, p. 3).

The ethics of Christianity created another factor contributing to the resistance to the exposure of the Gospel. Some slaveholders often contemplated the issue of slavery as not being Biblically sound. These slaveholders feared that the enslaved people, who became their brothers and sisters in Christ, might somehow arrive at the notion that enslavement was reprehensible.

These combined factors contributed to Black preachers speaking in front of predominantly White audiences for fear of Black people's congregation. All of this affected the history of Black

preaching because it worked against the establishment of large congregations of Black people (Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 1979, p. 4).

Education of the African American Pastor

The beginning of slavery in this country also ushered in the era of discrimination in education. Through the 1700s and early 1800s, statutes and ordinances prohibited teaching the Black person to read or write. The prevailing sentiment was that if the Black person could become literate, it would become a vessel for enslaved people to set themselves free, speak out against their owner, gain power, and escape to the North seeking freedom.

The Catholic missionaries were instrumental in bringing the Gospel to the Negro and the endeavor to bring literacy to the Negro community. Missionaries once again played a significant role in the education of African Americans because they taught them how to read and write on Sundays (Williams H., 2005, p. 21). Most states, particularly in the South, even had Anti-Literacy Statutes, which imposed penalties like fines, hard labor, or even death to people who taught African Americans who were slaves or free to read (Dominguez, 2016). These policies were instrumental in prohibiting a smooth path to the Gospel for the slave population of early America and the reading of Scripture by Black preachers.

The prohibitions, restrictions, and denial of education inspired many Black preachers to strive for education and empower those in the community to learn to read and write. The impact of educational achievements and the legacy of Lemuel Haynes served as inspiration for those who dared to seek education.

Rural Environment Impact

After the civil war and the reconstruction era, the South exerted its supremacy again by enacting segregationist policies known as "Jim Crow" laws. Due to Black Codes, Southern Black

people had to make their living working the land. The sharecropping system offered little in the way of economic opportunity. The vast majority of African Americans were confined to the South, at the bottom of a feudal social order, at the mercy of slaveholders and their descendants, and often violent vigilantes (Wilkerson, 2016).

The conflict of oppression, segregation, and Jim Crow led to what historians' call "The Great Migration. Between 1915 and 1970, an exodus of more than six million African Americans moved out of the South to cities across the Northeast, Midwest, and West (Wilkerson, 2016). This demographic shift changed both the North and the South. The Southern states suffered significantly because of the massive reduction in the labor force.

Though the Great Migration shifted the demographics of this country, a vast number African Americans remained in the South. Many rural Black communities established during the segregationist South remain. These communities have churches with histories that span well over one hundred years. This researcher attends a church founded in 1889 in the rural South.

Rural churches in America face a harsh reality of challenges as they seek to continue ministry in their communities. The continued population shift from rural areas to urban centers drains rural churches. The population shift contributes to an aging membership and a lack of young people in rural churches, resulting in declining attendance and fewer funds available. A shortage of money and resources often means a church cannot provide various programs and activities. A phenomenon currently occurring in the rural South is dissolving churches due to natural attrition. The older congregants pass away with no new members joining the church; therefore, the church ceases to exist. The vast amount of real estate listings for abandoned and foreclosed churches for sale around the country is a testament to the phenomenon.

Depleted or dwindling resources in a church naturally affect the leadership in the church. Many rural areas face rapid turnover in the clergy, even in denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a governing body that appoints pastors to specific congregations. Rural churches often have difficulty keeping a minister. They also find it increasingly difficult to find competent part-time or bi-vocational pastors (Brown, 2010). A leadership crisis also may develop because fewer people are available to develop and train as church leaders. These factors may contribute to younger members of the clergy tending to shy away from rural pastorate opportunities.

The totality of these factors leaves rural congregations at the mercy of substandard, unethical leadership from the pulpit, which may exacerbate church conflict. The South's history's residual effects on African Americans and the structural racism of education suppression have not escaped access to higher Christian theological education, particularly access to attending seminary. Those who attend and complete seminary training usually have more lofty ambitions than serving in small rural congregations. This factor also contributes to the attrition of adequate pastoral leadership in these small rural communities.

Rural Pastors and Bi-Vocational Careers

A common aspect of the rural pastorate in the African American church is the necessity for pastors to be bi-vocational. Bivocational, best described, means a minister who has two vocations. He has a church, and he has another job (Chandler, 2014). Bivocational ministry is not a new occurrence within the rural African American church. It is common for pastors to maintain employment in rural environments simply because of financial logistics and the necessity to provide for one's family. Most congregations are simply not large enough to maintain a full-time

salaried pastor. The dynamic of having to maintain outside employment while pastoring a church provides more opportunities for evangelism than the role of a traditional full-time pastor.

Lifeway Research developed a list of six advantages for pastors who lead in a bi-vocational capacity (Rainer, 2016). The list epitomizes the long-standing tradition of the bi-vocational pastor in the rural South.

The first advantage of a bi-vocational pastor maintaining secular employment is that it regularly places pastors in the middle of secular culture. The secular environment allows opportunities for evangelism to people who are unchurched. Pastors have the unique opportunity to shine as a beacon of light for the kingdom of God by demonstrating what living a Christ-like life looks like to the secular world. Combining these factors avails the bi-vocational pastor opportunities for conversion and church growth.

The second advantage of bi-vocational pastoring is that the pastor maintains a societal view rather than living exclusively in the church around Christians continuously. Maintaining secular employment allows relatability between the pastor and the congregation.

The third advantage of bi-vocational pastoring is that the limited budget of a small rural church may be allocated to expand staff in other areas of the church. Scripture documents God's commands to His people to care for others. The bi-vocational pastor who is financially self-sufficient can broaden the church's budget to allow for appropriate stewardship of the church's finances.

The fourth advantage of bi-vocational pastoring is the freedom provided by maintaining a secular career. The bi-vocational pastor who is not dependent upon the church for personal financial stability has the freedom to view issues within the church from a lens of objectivity not afforded to full-time salaried pastors.

The fifth advantage of bi-vocational pastors is that the secular skillset possessed could provide skills advantageous to the church. Peripheral skills such as leadership skills, business skills, ethics, and conflict resolution skills provide a platform for the pastor to utilize these skills within the church to bring glory to the kingdom of God.

The sixth advantage of bi-vocational pastors involves the empowerment of congregants to become involved in the ministry. The opportunities afforded all congregation members significantly improve the church's culture and provide a basis for spiritual maturation.

The bi-vocational pastor is a staple within the rural African American church. Unfortunately, becoming a full-time salaried pastor has become a primary goal of young ministers. The goal tends to cause the small rural church pastorate to become a stopgap, or a resume builder assignment, only until a more profitable opportunity presents itself.

The research suggested by Rainer suggests that bi-vocational ministry is a clear and definitive trend in church life (Rainer, 2016). The trend continues and becomes more prevalent in the rural Southern African American community. Bivocational pastors participating in this research study represent the majority of the pastoral research demographic.

The Pastor in Conflict

Pastoral leadership is one of the most crucial and sacred positions within the Church; to shepherd a flock of believers is not only a calling but a privilege. In the Apostle Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, he wrote, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (NIV, 1985, Act. 20:28). For those in pastoral leadership, the journey begins with one's life conforming to the standards of 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The Scripture makes a bold proclamation that says, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." (NIV, 1985, 1 Tim. 3:1). The passage continues with a list of requirements in which

one's life must conform to the minimum requirements to become an overseer. In many instances, along the road of service, the passage's fundamental tenants become infiltrated by the world's sins. In a position of ordained trust, pastors far too frequently violate the Biblical tenants of church leadership and fall from grace at the hands of morality failures.

The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to his student and protégé Timothy, wrote: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task (NIV, 1985, 1Tim. 3:1). In Greek culture, "overseer" described a presiding official in a civic or religious organization. The word overseer in Greek culture is the term elder in the Jewish community; these terms are interchangeable. The qualifications Paul listed for an overseer are located in 1 Tim. 3: 1-7. Paul felt the Church's forward movement required the steadfastness of the progression of the Gospel in the hands of proper ethical leaders of the Church; therefore, he reiterated the qualifications for elders in his letter to another of his protégé Titus. To Titus, Paul presented a list of qualifications and prerequisites, found in Titus 1: 6-9, for those who desired to become elders in the Church. The list of qualifications parallels the list Paul provided Timothy. The only circumstance that differentiated the two was accommodating the different situations Timothy and Titus were ministering.

The pastor has recognized a call from God and has been set apart by the Church. As a leader, the clergy has accepted the marching orders of his/her faith and the Church. Although still subject to all the usual limitations and frailties of life, as are others, the minister must live up to higher expectations than most. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (NIV, 1985, Jas. 3:1). The warnings are present in Scripture for those who seek the office. The requirements and guidelines remain equally well presented in Scripture, yet pastors

violate these fundamental requirements of the pastorate and morally fail. The minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is called to adorn the doctrine of God. The pastor's life and conversation, every word, and deed should reflect the glory of God. The clergy must be a person of integrity, compassion, and love.

Pastoral Ethics

The ethics of a pastor involve answering to a higher authority than a supervisor in a corporation. When a pastor's malfeasance violates the fundamental tenants of an overseer's duties, victims feel the effects, spouses, congregants, the Church as a whole, and sullies the pulpit. The present crisis in ministerial ethics is both a reflection of our times and an influence on our society, ethical failure in the pulpit affects the pews (Trull & Creech, 2017, p. 11).

Clergy malfeasance is a broad category and, like the sociology of deviance, criminology, psychology, theology, and individual professional proscribed acts. Clergy malfeasance defines as "the exploitation and abuse of a religious group's believers by the elites of that religion in whom the former trust" (Shupe, 2007, p. 5). French Sociologist Emile Durkheim theorized clerical malfeasance as normal, ubiquitous, and a social and psychological fact (Durkheim, 1966). The theory offers that clergy malfeasance occurs in a systemic or structured context and is not merely the result of a few bad apples in the barrel. The nature and structure of the Church support an environment conducive to malfeasance.

Shupe offered five assumptions that build on the theory of the church structure as ideal for pastoral malfeasance:

1. First and most importantly, religious institutions can be understood as hierarchies of unequal power.
2. Second, as a result of the first assumption, those in privileged positions have a greater moral persuasion power.

3. Third, churches represent a unique hierarchy in which those occupying lower status in the organization are encouraged to trust the leader's benevolent intentions, fiduciary reliability, selfless motives, and spiritual insights.
4. Fourth, the trusted hierarchies in the Church provide unique *opportunity structures* for potential exploitation, abuse, and mismanagement of church resources.
5. Fifth, the nature of the Church's trusted structural hierarchy provides opportunities and rationales for such deviance (Shupe, 2007, p. 6).

Boundaries

One of the typical agents of the invitation for moral failure opportunities derives from the breach of boundaries. As the pastor of a congregation, maintaining appropriate boundaries with congregants and others can be challenging and at times perplexing, but as one researcher wrote, "maintaining boundaries is critical to effective ministry and personal health" (Schmitz, 2010, p. 1). In the contemporary era, the breaches of ethical behavior that typically come to public awareness are sexual misconduct and financial misappropriation. The problem of sexual boundary transgressions is more frequent than we would like to believe; and secondly, there are many types of transgressors, and the most prevalent type is one with whom we can all identify (Celenza, 2007). The public is generally unaware of the less egregious boundary violations, which may ultimately lead to more appalling breaches that result in personal harm, hurt, and loss to congregants and pastors equally, and compromise congregant's spiritual growth (Schmitz, 2010, p. 113).

People relate to one another; was created for a relationship with God, each other, and the earth under our care. Amid each relationship are boundaries. The pastor's ethical position determines if the tenants of a pastor's position adhere. Too often, the crossing of boundaries is

the catalyst that leads to pastoral moral failure. The morality of the pastor guides understanding and maintaining boundaries and respecting the boundaries of those engaged.

Those who subscribe to the Christian worldview, believers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, come into the Church looking for answers and guidance. Believers are attracted to the message of grace and hope the pastor preaches. Pastors have the privilege and responsibility to facilitate believers' search for purpose, meaning, and, ultimately, salvation (Schmitz, 2010, p. 113).

One particular area of vulnerability is the issue of intimacy. In ministry, pastors are invited into the most private, intimate parts of their congregant's lives. These concerns have often never been shared with anyone, increasing the intimacy of the reveal, and exacerbating the vulnerability to abuse.

Pastoral Sexual Morality Failure

The Old Testament tells a cautionary tale of the sexual misconduct of the priest Eli's sons, who "lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting" (1 Sam. 2:2). Early Christian teachings promoted the idea that God favored human sexuality only in the context of marriage. A Christian ethic evolved that God "set parameters for sex within the proper context of marriage." When practiced apart from the context of a loving marriage, the sex act all too readily becomes an expression of self-gratification, infidelity, or exploitation (Ferro, 2005, p. 8). The subject matter advances the propensity towards pastoral sexually related mortality failures.

Although much of the media's coverage of clergy sexual misconduct has focused on Catholic priests, sexual misconduct occurs among the clergy of all faiths more frequently than most people realize. Clergy sexual misconduct, from child abuse to parishioner affairs, permeates society, affecting nearly every religious institution. (Short, 2004).

The reality of clergy sexual abuse of adults, primarily women, at the hands of male pastors is a more complicated issue to understand than children's abuse. There is an assumption that if both parties are adults and there is no physical coercion, the relationship is consensual. Researchers refuted this argument by stating when persons with power, including social workers, counselors, pastors, seminary professors, and administrators, attempt to seduce into sexual relationships those over whom they have power; the relationship cannot be defined as consensual (Renzetti & Yocum, 2013, p. 95).

The Process of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Case studies of clergy sexual misconduct and those who provide care for those affected by clergy sexual misconduct have observed patterns that characterize this misconduct (Poling, 1999).

One pattern that emerged from the research was using the term "grooming" to describe the leader's behavior that functions to develop a close relationship with a trusting congregant. Grooming includes expressions of admiration and concern, affectionate gestures and touching, talking about a shared project, and sharing personal information (Garland D., 2006). Grooming is essentially seduction in a relationship where a religious leader holds spiritual power over the congregant.

The second pattern emerging from the research found "trust" as a catalyst to clergy sexual misconduct. The pattern suggests that a congregant trusts her religious leader, and she allows him to say and do things to her, she would not allow a man in a normal friendship to say or do (Flynn, 2003). These reports refer to the first sexual behaviors as boundary crossings that start just over the edge of inappropriateness. The breach of boundaries is a constant in the path to clergy sexual misconduct. The pattern starts subtle and graduates. The clergy's position of power

and the trust a congregant has in him because of that pastoral role causes victims to doubt their own ability to discern the intent of the action when she would have been clear about its intent if it occurred in a relationship with someone else (Garland D., 2006).

The results of clergy sexual misconduct vary across a vast spectrum. The research revealed that some pastors started a new congregation in the same town or city, splitting the old congregation as loyal congregants followed them to the new Church. Some relocate and are hired by existing congregations, some unaware and some with knowledge of his past behavior. In other situations, he could be forgiven and continue to lead the same congregation. In congregations with central denominational governments and other religious organizations, superiors may choose quietly to relocate a pastor, suspend him for a period of time or permanently, or require him to receive the restorative psychological treatment condition process (Hidalgo, 2007).

Pastoral Morality and Power Abuse

A pastor holds an influential position. The pastor has recognized a call from God and has been set apart by the Church. As a leader, the pastor has accepted the marching orders of the faith and the Church. People place confidence in the leadership and counseling services provided. They respond with gratitude to the pastor's services, visitations, and affections. These should never be used for personal gain or aggrandizement. The abuse of power comes when a pastor uses the entrusted vulnerabilities in a congregant and exploits them for personal gain.

Nineteenth-century British Catholic historian Lord Acton famously wrote, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Wills, 2000). In the Church, when a minister receives ordination into the clergy, they are subject to all the usual limitations and frailties of life, as are others; however, the minister must live up to higher expectations than most.

Recalling the qualifications outlined by the Apostle Paul for overseers and elders of the Church, pastors who morally fail in maintaining the original qualifications outlined in Scripture. Paul wrote that an "overseer, must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not a lover of money" (NIV, 1985, 1 Tim. 3: 2-3). Utilizing the power of the pastor's position for personal gain is a direct violation of at least one of the fundamental qualifications of being an overseer in the Church as prescribed by Paul. Pastors and church leaders need to realize that leadership is the exercise of power in real life; it is the skill of using power effectively (Stetzer, 2019).

Pastoral Morality Financial Abuse

The pastor's fiduciary care and the financial structure of the Church lend to opportunities for financial transgressions at the hands of unethical pastors. When people misunderstand where power comes from, they will misappropriate power use. In the case of church leadership, power comes from God, who places faithful members in leadership positions within the church body.

Legal Implications

One aspect often minimized in the research into pastoral malfeasance is the possible civil and criminal implications. Texas and Minnesota represent the only two states where the sexual assault statute directly lists clergy and the relationship with parishioners as a specific category of actors (offenders). Texas Penal Code Section 22.001 Sexual Assault states if "the actor is a clergyman who causes the other person to submit or participate by exploiting the other person's emotional dependency on the clergyman in the clergyman's professional character as spiritual advice" (Westlaw, 2017). Minnesota shares a similar language in its statute (MN Statute 595.02). These states model the type of legislation many advocate groups are spearheading and

petitioning state jurisdictions to pass similar laws to aggressively prosecute pastors for criminal sexual offenses committed while under the cloak of pastoral leadership.

The Restoration Process

The pastor responds to the divine calling of shepherding a flock of Christ's believers and receives the ordination before God to be elevated to the position. The restoration of a pastor who fails morally is eventually in the hands of who appointed him, Jesus. Frequently pastors who fail morally must attend programs designed to address specific moral issues such as sex addiction or other "sins of the flesh." The forgiveness of a congregation or community often takes on unique dynamics.

Those working with ministers who have faced forced resignation from ministry for moral failures have seen that if those in the ministry do not get their innermost needs met in their personal relationship with God, with their spouse, and close friends, will inevitably begin to crave praise from those they lead (Wilson & Hoffman, 2007).

Pastors serve an influential position in the lives of those they lead. The pastor's position is to serve in humility and in full recognition of the authority under which they served. (Wilson & Hoffman, 2007). Moral failure is a breach of confidence perpetrated against all of the pastorate's principles of standing and honor deserved. The damage created by a pastor's moral failure affects the victims and the congregation, the church, and the community. Researchers have emphasized the importance of preventing moral breakdowns that lead to boundary infringements, leading to moral failure.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

Conflict resolution skills represent a crucial characteristic, attribute, trait, or skill of successful pastoral leadership. The rural African American pastorate comprises leaders who were

"called" to service through inspirational means rather than attending seminary. The problem surfaces that pastors of this specific demographic have not received formal leadership training in conflict resolution methodology. Apprenticeship and under shepherding provide the path to the pastorate in rural communities. This research sought to understand the origin, background, and perceived effectiveness of these pastors' conflict resolution methods.

The literature revealed that similar research existed on conflict resolution methodology among clergy members. Previous literature reveals numerous aspects of conflict resolution methodology have excluded this specific demographic from researching this crucially necessary pastoral skill.

Profile of the Current Study

Chapter One of this dissertation outlined the researcher's concern into the conflict resolution methods of rural African American pastors. The literature review in Chapter Two provided relevant sources in conflict resolution and established a foundation for the research demographic. Chapter Three examined the research methodology proposed by this researcher.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research study intended to explore the phenomena of conflict and the conflict resolution methods of rural African American pastors; the study simultaneously sought to discover the methods, origins, and perceived effectiveness of conflict resolution skills within the specified demographic.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

Conflict represents the inevitable circumstance that occurs when humans interact. Conflict, both interpersonal and structural, is a reality in the African American church. Contemporary social issues, such as female leadership in the church, homosexuality, church splits, nontraditional interpretations of Scripture, and cross-faith ecumenical activities, have elevated the need for conflict management skills among church leadership. The flock's shepherd is responsible for managing conflict effectively on behalf of the church. Peter wrote, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be" (NIV, 1985, 1 Pet. 5:2). No leadership model currently exists to eliminate disagreements or clashes of personality in the church. The tension that comes from conflict can be healthy and beneficial to growth if dealt with correctly. Conflict can be detrimental to a congregation in most churches, including the rural African American church. Church declines often result from unaddressed church conflict; ineffectively dealing with anxiety within the church grows into interpersonal conflicts that eventually impact the congregation. Conflict resolution skills represent a crucial characteristic, attribute, trait, and skill of successful pastoral leadership. The rural African American church is often shepherded by pastors who were "called" to service through inspirational means rather than attending seminary. The problem

surfaces that a substantial number of pastors in this specific demographic have not received formal leadership training in conflict resolution methodology. Limited research exists to determine the origins and perceived effectiveness of the conflict resolution methodology used by rural African American pastors.

The importance of conducting a study on conflict resolution skills within the specific demographic is to emphasize the necessity to address the phenomenon of conflict within the congregation to minimize church decline, church splits, and other adverse consequential effects of conflict within the congregation.

Purpose Statement

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors to understand the background, origin, and effectiveness of conflict resolution methods in the rural African American church. The phenomena of conflict will be defined as “the tension an individual or group experiences because of perceived differences between him or herself and another individual or group” (Tjosvold, 2006). Conflict resolution can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute (Shonk K., 2021).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the common conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors?

RQ2: What is the background and origin, as perceived by rural African American pastors, in developing a conflict resolution approach?

RQ3: What impact has conflict, as perceived by rural African American pastors, had on the rural African American congregation?

RQ4: How effective do rural African American pastors believe they are with conflict resolution?

Research Design and Methodology

The research followed a qualitative study method and a phenomenological research design. The purpose of the phenomenological approach was to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how the actors in a situation perceive them. In the human dynamic, this typically translates into gathering in-depth information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions, participant observation while representing it from the research participant's perspective. This research utilized a survey instrument and personal interviews conducted via zoom calls. The rationale for using the phenomenological research method was to explore conflict phenomena in a hermeneutical context. The method allowed the researcher to illustrate Scriptural truths on its history, origin, development, and effects on the modern church. The phenomenological philosophy provided a path to evaluating, researching, and subsequently understanding practical approaches to human behavior, explicitly resolving, or managing conflict. A person doing phenomenological research is interested in the way that consciousness grasps an object or event as something, as it is meant (Vagle, 2018).

The goal of researching conflict and the philosophy of conflict resolution phenomenologically was not to get inside other people's minds but to contemplate the numerous ways conflict manifests and appears in and through our being in the world. The term phenomenology is a compound of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*. It signifies the activity of giving an account, giving a *logos*, of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 5).

The phenomenological research method chosen by this writer was best suited to examine human behavioral consciousness that grasps the concept of conflict. The historical origin of the

phenomenological discipline belongs to Edmund Husserl. Husserl introduced the philosophy of phenomenology to Western Civilization at the turn of the twentieth century with the publication of *Logical Investigation* in 1901. Husserl is credited as the father of phenomenological research design. He believed that a phenomenon was the "thing itself," not a generalization, an approximation, a representation, or a deduced outcome (Vagle, 2018, p. 23).

The nature of phenomenological research based on Husserl asserts consciousness's relationality as intentionality. Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable (Groenewald, 2004). The process informed what constituted a phenomenon to Husserl. "Husserl felt that we do not 'reason' phenomena, rather we live them." (Vagle, 2018, p. 24).

The concept of conflict as applied to this specific demographic provided an opportunity to examine concepts of conflict resolution as applied to the church and pastoral leadership. The historical foundation of the phenomenological method involved both a description and interpretation path to discovering the nature of conflict among rural pastors and churches. The phenomenology research method took on robust literary quality and focused on concrete and relevant situations such as conflict situations in the church. A concrete human situation that fits well within the discipline is the phenomenon of conflict.

Setting

The majority of rural African American pastors enter the pastorate through a divine "calling." Higher formal education, including attending seminary, are often not prerequisites to appointment as a senior pastor. In a substantial number of rural church congregations, the path to the pastorate follows the lay pastor or apprenticeship path to the pulpit. A "called" minister usually serves as an understudy to a senior pastor who mentors and prepares the minister for

service. When the minister is deemed prepared, and a pastoral opportunity presents itself, the minister may compete for the position; if chosen, the minister is officially ordained into the ministry and appointed shepherd of the flock.

The understudy path to pastoral service offers opportunities for leadership traits, philosophies, and approaches to congregational shepherding to pass down through generations. A crucial aspect of leadership is conflict resolution skills. Combining the path and passed down methodology results in one of the most devastating words for the church's future, tradition. The study seeks to understand the background, origin, and effectiveness of conflict resolution methods in the rural small African American church.

The study resides within the Bible Belt region of the country, specifically the rural northeast region of Texas. The region consists of small, often familial structured African American churches of many denominations. The churches are rich in history, many having been in existence for well over one hundred years. The members of these churches are ancestors of those who chose to remain in the South during the Great Migration period. Pastoral leadership often travels a familial lineage contributing to traditional leadership methods passed down within the specific demographic.

Participants

The research participant pool strived for seven senior African American pastors serving in the small rural African American church. The study participants had the technological capabilities to engage in text, email, and video conferencing. Considering current Covid-19 protocols and out of an abundance of caution, potential participants were not delimited based on virtual church services versus physical church attendance. An invitation to participate was presented to pastors within the desired geographic location to recruit the requisite committed

participants to assemble the participant pool. The invitations created utilized the provided templates in the Liberty University IRB checklist.

The purpose of using the phenomenological research method was to explore the phenomena of conflict and leadership methods of conflict resolution in the hermeneutical context. The method allowed research into Scriptural truths on the history, origin, and development of conflict and conflict resolution effects on the modern church. The phenomenological philosophy provided a path to evaluating, researching, and subsequently understanding practical approaches to resolving conflict.

The natural setting for the sampling pool resided within the church, though the senior pastor is the focal point of the research. Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell J., 2018, p. 180).

The sampling pool was not limited by gender, education, or seminary completion, the narrow specifics of the intended demographic created commonality through the church's traditional historical religious background. The conflict phenomena in the small rural African American church share a commonality in conflict resolution methods adopted by pastors of these churches.

Role of the Researcher

As the human instrument in the study, the researcher shared familiarity with the research participant pool. The familiarity derived from mutual relationships with the targeted research pool. The researcher attempted to identify reflexively with the participant pool regarding their conflict resolution methods with these concerns in mind. Identifying the participant pool

benefitted the research by familiarity with the pool's biases, values, general background, history, and culture, shaping interpretations formed during a study (Creswell J., 2018, p. 183).

Reflexivity in the role of the researcher requires addressing two specific points, past experiences, and how past experiences shape interpretations (Creswell J., 2018). The researcher witnessed the effects of conflict and the methods of conflict offered by senior pastors in varying situations resulting in various outcomes. The past experiences serve as the nucleus of the investigation into conflict phenomena. The pastoral experiences in conflict, coupled with courses in conflict and Scriptural resolution methods, serve as the foundation of the research questions. The researcher brought no assumptions and presented an unbiased approach to the results of the questions.

Ethical Considerations

During all phases of the research, ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality guided the research direction. A confidentiality disclaimer dedication was included on the initial invitation and re-emphasized during the interviews. All references to people or church names utilized pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, confidentiality, and research integrity.

During the creation of the research prospectus, research of any kind or implementation of any phase of collecting data for research did not commence until the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is a federally mandated body whose purpose is to ensure the ethical treatment of research subjects (Bredfeldt, Program Handbook: Doctor of Education in Christian Leadership, 2021, p. 23). The researcher received approval from the IRB to conduct the study on January 22, 2022.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data collection derived from research material from three specific sources: the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument, a survey questionnaire instrument, and an interview. The survey questionnaire questions blended into the zoom interviews. The total time commitment for participation was approximately forty minutes. The time frame included a twenty-minute allowance for the Thomas-Kilmann MODE Instrument and a twenty-minute allotment for the zoom interview, which includes the survey questions. Due to the pandemic, the data collection procedures in this research were via electronic means, email, text, and zoom. All collection procedures and protocols followed strict documentation procedures to ensure validity to the study. The data collection steps included setting the boundaries for the study through sampling and recruitment (Creswell J., 2018, p. 185).

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission requirements and application checklist served as the format for the data collection methods utilized in this research study. The survey instruments followed the appropriate source-provided templates, except the Thomas-Kilman Mode Instrument (TKI). The TKI provided instructions for the administration and appropriate protocols for the authorized use of the survey instrument. The protocols and procedures for administering the instrument adhered to the authorized user consent of the TKI organization.

Collection Methods

In good qualitative research, researchers draw on multiple sources of qualitative data to make interpretations of the data (Creswell J., 2018, p. 186). The proposed research concluded and made interpretations based on three sources of data collection: the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Management MODE Instrument, a survey questionnaire, and an interview.

Instruments and Protocols

The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) assessed an individual's behavior in conflict situations, a situation in which two people's concerns appear to be incompatible (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). The assessment described a person's behavior based on two primary dimensions present in conflict situations, assertiveness, and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her concerns, and cooperativeness is the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. The two dimensions of behavior are utilized to define the five methods of dealing with conflict. The five conflict-handling modes are: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. There is only one question in the assessment, followed by thirty pairs of responses where the participant chooses from (A) or (B) and takes fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). Upon completion of the TKI, the instrument provided a user profile that identified the conflict-handling modes each research participant engages in. The result of the instrument provided valuable data in the process of collection and survey for the writer's research.

The protocol involved in utilizing The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI®) involved purchasing the assessment for groups rates. Each purchased assessment was valid for one group member's report. Before completing the purchase, the quantity field was changed to reflect the total number of seven participants in the study. After the purchase checkout process, TKI provided this researcher and all seven research participants with the personalized link via email, which was sent to participants so they can complete the assessment according to the researchers' specifications and timetable (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). By purchasing the assessment, the application requires acceptance of the terms and conditions of the Thomas-

Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI®). All costs related to the purchase, terms, conditions, implementation, and utilization of the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument; the ethical handling of all data gathered resided entirely with the researcher.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the primary sources of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher used zoom calls to interview each participant. The interview participants were selected based on criteria sampling. All participants were African American rural pastors who shepherd a congregation of one hundred or less in average weekly attendance. Each interview was conducted via zoom calls due to Covid-19 protocols and the participants' safety. The virtual nature of the interviews was practical when direct observation is tenuous; it allowed participants to provide historical background while allowing the researcher control over the line of questioning. The interviews involved semi-structured and open-ended questions intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants on the phenomena of conflict and their respective approaches to conflict resolution as church pastors, emphasizing the research questions of this study. The limitations of the interview format included the possibility of indirect data filtered through the lenses of the research participants.

The survey questionnaire (Appendix B) administration occurred during the zoom interview. The survey questionnaire comprised sub-questions of the four research questions to provide a pathway for determining specific themes in the gathered data. The impact of the sub-questions was vital to the research as it provided a foundational basis for achieving the purpose statement. The order of the data collection methods minimized the propensity of indirect data filtering through the participants. A qualitative researcher plans to develop and use an interview protocol

for asking questions and recording answers during a qualitative interview (Creswell J., 2018). An initial offering for interview questions represents the data in Appendix A.

The order of the questions began with structuring a foundation for the interview. Questions one through three allowed the participants to provide important historical information by providing data vital to the survey's final results. Questions four through seven go directly to answering the research questions in the study. Questions eight and nine allowed the pastors the opportunity to understand conflict resolution methodology in their own words and thoughts. Question nine intended to combine academic concepts of conflict resolution methods with Scripturally based teachings on conflict. One component of a qualitative approach to learning is that understanding is achieved by encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own terms (Dilley, 2004). Question ten allowed the survey participants to engage with the subject matter.

Surveys/Questionnaires

A questionnaire was part of the data collection process of this study. Questionnaires are associated with quantitative research; however, they can be effectively utilized in qualitative research (Bredfeldt, Program Handbook: Doctor of Education in Christian Leadership, 2021). The questionnaire in this study reflected a demographic survey to describe the sample group more accurately and stratify responses from the research study participants when reporting the study results. The questionnaire consisted of four sub-questions; each question elicited support for the four related research questions attached as Appendix B.

The questionnaire qualified the data from the participants' engagement with the TKI and the interview questions. Combining the analysis of the interviews with the qualitative questionnaire was designed to validate the data.

Document Analysis

The intent of the data analysis is to make sense of the collected data (Creswell J., 2018). The proposed study generated data from three specific sources: the Thomas-Kilmann MODE Instrument, an individual interview, and a brief follow-up questionnaire. The TKI is an instrument that analyzes the participants' responses and generates an individual report identifying each research participant's conflict-handling mode. The TKI report of each research participant became a vital catalyst for the research's totality to achieve a deeper meaning of the philosophy of conflict resolution in the church from its pastors.

The protocols for the interviews and questionnaire predated the actual data collection efforts commenced. The interviews took place through Zoom calls, and a permanent video record of the interview was maintained to analyze the data and provide dependability in the research. The transcribed data of the interviews was input into the MAXqda computer assisted qualitative analysis program, which yielded the themes and subthemes utilized to subsequently answer the research questions.

Procedures

Each step of data collection procedures in this study followed the Liberty University IRB Application Checklist. The initial applicant pool derived from the East Texas Regional Baptist Association (ETRBA), representing a coalition of approximately forty-six churches in the region. With permission from the association facilitator, the pastoral roles of the member churches were made available to the researcher. The pastoral roles provided the platform to elicit participants in the study. The appropriate permission requests followed the supplemental templates recommended by the IRB.

The data collection methods in the study included a three-source systematic application of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument, an unstructured, open-ended question-based interview with each study participant, and a qualitative questionnaire. The rationale for administering the TKI was to allow the survey demographic to engage in self-reflection on methods of conflict management.

The interviews occurred after the survey participants completed and received the conflict-handling mode profile from the TKI. The rationale was that the instrument results and the bearing on the participants have a direct relationship with the research questions. The data revealed this was a correct assumption. The participants had time to evaluate their positions in the ministry with conflict management from an unchartered perspective. The rationale for the qualitative questionnaire in a phenomenological study reflects that data will be obtained about how the participants “think and feel in the most direct ways” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative phenomenological study is a process that requires sequential steps to be followed from the specific to the general and involving multiples levels of analysis. The research followed a six-step sequential data analysis process introduced by Creswell (Creswell J. , 2018).

Analysis Methods

Step 1

Organize and prepare the data for analysis. The organization and preparation of the data included transcribing the interviews and the questionnaire results and cataloging the results of the TKI.

Step 2

Read and evaluate all the data. A basic understanding of the data collected is simply to read and reread over all the material over the course of several days. Step two aimed to grasp the thirty-thousand-foot view of the data and allow the researcher to reflect on the overall meaning.

Step 3

Begin the coding process. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks, or text images segments, and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Cite Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The coding process involves taking the data from the interviews conducted, the questionnaire, the Thomas-Kilmann (TKI) results, and segmenting phrases into categories. The research will use a qualitative computer software program for the coding process; specifically, the MAXqda (www.maxqda.com) was selected. The basic premise of using computer-assisted programs versus hand coding is the amount of time involved for the researcher and the ability to locate stored data efficiently.

Step 4

The coding process is designed to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis (Creswell J., 2018, p. 196). The research generated four distinct themes in the research. Theme one answered RQ1 and showed the background and origin of the conflict methods used by rural African American pastors. Theme two answered RQ2 by utilizing the data from the TKI to conclude the common conflict resolution methods used by rural African American pastors. Theme three answered RQ3 by utilizing the data from the individual interviews to demonstrate the effectiveness of the conflict resolution methods employed by rural African American pastors. Theme four utilized the information gathered from the ATKAI for a

self-evaluation of their respective conflict resolution methods through a comprehensive evaluation of the TKI Instrument, these conclusions generated the answers to RQ4.

Step 5

From the development of the theme clusters the decisive step was to advance the descriptions and themes established in step four. The process includes winnowing the data, identifying common themes, and comparing them to the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential component of research. Qualitative research scholars emphasize the truth-value of qualitative research and list many means to achieve truth (Schurink, Schurink, & Poggenpoel, 1998). The phenomenological structure of the study is a means to contribute to the truth. The trustworthiness of the research started on the foundation of the consent forms and the IRB approval process. The study included utilizing three sources of data collection in the research to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility is the most critical factor in establishing trustworthiness. Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The criteria for evaluating trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, were established using multiple validity procedures. Multiple validity procedures enhance the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers of that accuracy (Creswell J., 2018, p. 199).

This researcher allowed the participants to read the interview transcripts and offer feedback on the contents prior to publishing. This process supported the validity of the research.

Dependability

Dependability includes the aspect of consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependability of the research adhered to academic standards through strict adherence to the standards of phenomenological qualitative research. The logic used to select people and events to observe, interview, and include in the study was presented. The strategy needed to ensure dependability and confirmability is an audit trail. The researcher was responsible for providing a complete set of notes on decisions made during the research process encompassing every facet of the research. A thoroughly documented audit trail enables an auditor to study the transparency of the research path.

Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The strategy needed to ensure dependability and confirmability is an audit trail. An audit trail is a complete documentation of all movements and thoughts during the research process. The goal is to base the interpretations strictly on the evidence gathered without any previous biases of the researcher. Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research and is concerned with the aspect of truth-value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yin suggested that qualitative researchers need to document their case studies' procedures and document as many of the steps of the procedures as possible. He also recommended setting up a detailed case study protocol and database so that others can follow the procedures (Yin, 2009).

Transferability

Transferability concerns the aspect of applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of transferability is to provide a robust description of the study participants and the research process, so other researchers can determine if the study is transferable to their setting.

Chapter Three Summary

The chapter described the proposed data collection and analysis methods in this qualitative phenomenological research into conflict and the conflict resolution methods of rural African American pastors. To better develop the understanding of conflict resolution methods of the study participants, the participants became aware of their respective conflict-handling modes through the results of the TKI. The results of the TKI were the catalyst for the study participants to self-identify their approach to managing conflict within the church.

This chapter describes the three methods of data collection utilized for this study. Triangulation was utilized in the study to corroborate and validate the data. The triangulation data will originate from The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument, a scheduled individual interview with each study participant, and a brief questionnaire. The IRB application checklist, including all supplemental documents, was created following the Liberty University IRB checklist. Liberty University IRB approval was obtained prior to the commencement of any data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This research study aimed to identify and determine the background, origin, and perceived effectiveness of conflict resolution methods that rural African American pastors serving in rural locations utilize.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Permission Request

Upon receiving IRB approval for the current research study, the first step in the process was to send an email letter to the President of the East Texas Regional Baptist Association (ETRBA) (see Appendix E), requesting to utilize the organizations' email list of pastors to solicit recruitment for the study. Approval was swift and encouraged based on prior conversations with the President regarding the research study.

Research Participant Selection Process

The study sought seven committed research participants to conduct the study. Forty-six research invitations were mailed out to the member pastors of the ETRBA (see Appendix C). Of the forty-six invitations, eight offered to participate in the study. The next step was the IRB Consent form (Appendix D); only seven presumptive research participants returned the signed Appendix D, constituting the desired research field with no room to lose one during the research process. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to the seven participants in the format of P1, P2, through P7.

TKI Assessment Instrument

The seven research participants were scheduled to take The Thomas Kilmann Conflict resolution MODE survey instrument. The proprietary TKI survey instrument provides an avenue

for research students to purchase group surveys in order to conduct research. P1 through P7 individually were invited to participate in the survey instrument through the researcher group purchase. P1 through P7 received a copy of their respective conflict management profile and interpretive report of the survey along with the researcher.

The research participants' profiles indicating each pastor's repertoire of conflict-handling modes in the survey are reported individually. Interpreting the profiles of the TKI is under the pretense that there are no right or wrong answers. All five modes are helpful in certain situations, and each represents a set of functional social skills.

Research Participant Interviews

The second data gathering instrument in this research was the oral interviews conducted with each of the seven pastors individually via consented recorded zoom calls. The interviews were purposefully the second step in the research to afford the participants' the ability to evaluate the TKI profile results prior to the interview with this researcher. The interviews were conducted according to the previously documented procedures, and the raw data was transcribed. The transcribed data from the interviews was downloaded into the MAXqda® from which themes emerged as they specifically related to the research questions.

Demographic and Sample Data

P1 through P7 all met the original delimitations of the study. All seven research participants were African American senior pastors who serve a predominantly African American congregation located in a rural setting with a weekly average member attendance of one hundred or fewer congregants. In addition to the qualifications mentioned earlier for participation in this study.

Table 1*Research Participant Extended Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Education	Seminary	Senior Pastor	Bi-Vocational
P1	Male	M.Div.	Yes	2yrs	Yes
P2	Male	Bachelors	Yes	19yrs	Yes
P3	Female	M.Div.	Yes	12yrs	Yes
P4	Male	Some College	No	30yrs	Yes
P5	Male	Bachelors	Yes	14yrs	Yes
P6	Male	Some College	No	5yrs	No
P7	Male	Bachelors	No	7yrs	Yes

The seven research participants represent approximately 89 years of senior pastoral service, with an average of 12.7 years of service for each. Of the seven research participants, four of the seven attended formal seminary school, while three graduated. Three research participants have earned Master of Divinity degrees, two earned bachelor's degrees, while the remaining two participants possessed some level of a college education. Six research participants were bi-vocational, possessing full-time careers in addition to pastoring a church. In contrast, only one research participant was classified as a full-time pastor, receiving a living wage package from the church.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data Analysis Procedure

Throughout the investigation, the researcher discovered pertinent data relevant to the research topics. In addition to the purpose, the researcher tried to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the common conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors?

RQ2: What is the background and origin, as perceived by rural African American pastors, in developing a conflict resolution approach?

RQ3: What impact has conflict, as perceived by rural African American pastors, had on the rural African American congregation?

RQ4: How effective do rural African American pastors believe they are with conflict resolution?

For the purpose of exploring the answers to the research questions, the researcher conducted seven interviews with research participants and analyzed the interviews by importing them into QDA software i.e. MAXQDA. The MAXQDA software tool was used to organize the data set; by using this software, the researcher was able to work more effectively with massive amounts of text and sophisticated coding schemes while maintaining an important level of analytical sophistication. As a result, all of the transcripts were imported into the MAXQDA software. The researcher utilized the seven step qualitative data analysis method created by Colaizzi (Colaizzi, 1978). The second phase began after the researcher had read and become acquainted with the data and had a general understanding of what is in the data and what is interesting about it. The coding process was instrumental in the identification of the themes and subthemes of this research.

Step One: Reading and Rereading the Transcripts

The transcribed interviews were read and reread numerous times over the course of several days to get the necessary information. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Tappen, et al., 2011). This verified that the statements of participants were accurate. The subject of the investigation remained the primary emphasis.

Step Two: Extracting Significant Statements that Relate to the Phenomenon

An important statement is one made by a participant that is intimately tied to his or her personal experience with the topic under investigation. It was taken with great care taken into consideration while collecting such statements from transcripts in order to maintain the context

of each in a statement (Tappen 2011). Each of the statements is contextualized by identifying each participant by their previously assigned P1-P7 number, in order to maintain anonymity.

Step Three: Formulating Meanings from the Significant Statements

This is referred to as formulation of meanings, it is illustrated in Table 2 as the process of giving meaning to the relevant sentences. The coding process was instrumental in the recording of significant statements.

Table 2

Formulating meaning from significant statements

Formulated Meaning	Participant Statements	Location of Significant Statements
Accommodating approach led to less conflicts.	I do not think there are a lot of conversations on how to teach individuals how to deal with conflict management. We teach you how to preach, we teach you how to baptize, but we do not allow you to sit in those conversations in no room so can learn how to deal with the conflict from various personalities and everything like that. So, that I would say would be the kind of the downfall on my end of not being exposed to how to handle that because you know, I'm from Detroit and you know, I'm still young, so they're still like this little young cutthroat part that you want to do that, but you really can't because you know, these are God's people and you have to handle them a certain way.	P1
Deacons are independent for solving conflicts	The deacons at the church, they are like, if something comes up, a lot of, actually most of them, whenever something comes up, a lot of times it does not even reach me. The deacons manage it, and I am comfortable with them handling it because they know me. The first thing they are going to do is go to the Bible. Well, you know the pastor, what does the Bible say?	P2
Secular and biblical approach is effective	It is more, yes, it is effective, but it is more appropriate and proper, not only for life within the body of the church, but for life in the secular world as well. Because we have to coexist outside of the church walls. So if we put good practices into play inside the church walls, then we are putting good practices within that church member within that church body to go out into the outside world.	P3
Biblical standpoint is effective	I can say yes and no. Some days I was not as spiritual as I should have been. In other words, I was not prayed up good enough. I was not seeking the Lord like I should have been. I was doing some things I should not have been doing. That is another thing about a pastor, he cannot go in his feelings. He got to stand on the word of God. God says you should not lie, then you should not lie. He said I	P4

	should not cheat, steal, or bear false witness against your neighbor....all of the 10 commandments, which is true. The best thing to learn as being a pastor is to learn the 10 commandments and obey them.	
Successful conflict resolution approach	I would say, um, if I was going to be judgmental to myself, I would say it has been, um, very helpful, um, very resolving, um, during this era that we are in now, because what I have learned....a lot of people, um, sometimes just want something to gripe about.	P6
From atheist to God's child	Um, I was, before I came to faith, I even argued against there being a God. Uh, I did not believe in God. I did not think there really was a God, uh, I went to church. You know, my family took me to church when I was young. I went, but I was not listening. Could not wait to get out of the house and stop going to church. And that is what I did. But then shortly thereafter, I had an encounter with God, and it came down on me so heavy that it was like, it was like Paul, a Pauline experience.	P2
Guidance from mentor	I sat under my father in the ministry Pastor John Gentry over in Henderson. I sat under him for nine years before the Lord blessed me with Union Temple. I have been the pastor at Union Temple six years now, it is hard to believe it has been that long, praise, God.	P7
Guidance from family	I really did not want to do it. But it kept nagging and nagging at me. But it finally got me, man. I knew it was in my best interest to go ahead and get saved and, you know, do what God had called me. You asked me about my call. Well, mine was, I cannot say in a dream, but I mean, everywhere I went it seemed like the Lord was there. He was speaking with me, you know. I do not know how to explain it, but everywhere I went, man, if I was in a club or whatever, He was there saying, "Hey, you know you do not suppose to be here. I have something for you to do." I ignore it. But it is like your conscious, but I did my best and ignored it. So I knew I had a call over my life.	P4
Followed God's call	RESEARCHER: Okay. You received a divine calling? PARTICIPANT: Yes, I did.	P3
Seminary and classes	RESEARCHER: Okay. No. So did you attend seminary? PARTICIPANT: Yes, I did. But later on. Not when I first started.	P4
Seek guidance from holy spirits	PARTICIPANT: My path, I was 17 years old and the, the holy spirit was on me very heavily. Um, I ran for, um, I know at least a year and, every time I would go to church, it was just that overtaking of the spirit, just saying, hey, I need you. I am calling you. This is where you are supposed to be. And until I actually gave in and gave the pastor my hand and gave God my heart and said, hey, I will fulfill whatever you have for me to do. And it was at that point I felt the relief now after then, uh, for, as the pastorialship, that just fell into my lap, 18 years old, fresh out of high school. Um, do not know anything really do not even know how to preach.	P6
Observe the conflict and then act	PARTICIPANT: I will just say that under my apprenticeship, there was a lot of "my way or the highway" when dealing with conflict in that church. What I saw in my apprenticeship, and I think, even growing up, I did not necessarily feel like that was the way to	P3

	<p>resolve conflict. Because to me, it did not seem that we were resolving conflict, we were just putting the conflict over there. It just was not in front of us anymore. It was put over there in the corner because the leader said we were done with it. We were not necessarily done with it because we had not been allowed to hash it out and find resolution. Things that are put away without proper resolution tend to fester and grow.</p>	
Self-learned	<p>I am going to be honest with you, Minister Rowe. The thing is, is time itself. No one can teach you that because different pastors have diverse ways of handling things. And the reason I say time now, my younger, 10 years ago self, would be headfirst in there. Oh, man, a problem in the church. Let me go in and let me see what the problem is. But what I was finding out is that my dipping my head into it was really bringing it more abroad to the church and getting the church more involved when I should have been like, okay, let me let the deacons deal with this. So, it was a learning process for me. It, you know, it was not anything that somebody said, hey, pastor, this is how you do this. Cause I was never taught that. And not to take away anything from the African American church, you know, those type of things are never talked about. What we talk about coming up is, hey, this is how you preach. This is how you dress. Um, this is how you write out your sermon and or this is how you do, but we never, ever involved the conflict of it. So I was never taught that it was just something over time that I have to, you know, learn on my own.</p>	P3
Accommodating conflict	<p>PARTICIPANT: Um, and I think, and I think as a leader, it is especially important for us to really discern where these kinds of conflicts take place. Because if you are not careful, you will have a whole lot of people projecting their anger and their problems on you when really the problems are deeper than you or did not have anything to do with you. Uh, in my conflict with my deacon, he had an altercation with his wife and prior to the worship, my conflict happened after him. He had a conflict with his wife that, um, was before service and everything like that. So when he came into the meeting we had with the other deacons, um, I had to immediately pause like, hey doc, I am not your problem. And I am not going to allow you to project that onto me. You need to work that out with whoever you need to work that out with. And I, being a part of this new millennial, this millennial culture. One of the things that I love about it is the fact that, hey, we are able to see it and say, I am actually your friend. This is what you need to work on. And, um, you know, he did not really like that, but it was the truth that he really got over it. So we are back vibing like we once were. Were good.</p>	P1
Strong belief in bible's script	<p>I try to keep the peace. You know me, you know one of the gifts bestowed upon me is reasoning. Keeping it simple and Scriptural, and brief.</p>	P7
Following biblical and	<p>RESEARCHER: Would it be accurate to say that your approach comes from both a biblical and a secular perspective?</p>	P3

secular approach	PARTICIPANT: Yes, it does.	
Church conflicts similar to secular world	PARTICIPANT: At first, I could not believe that church people would be the way they are. Seemed like they say that you act a little better, but I found out they were not no different than anyone else. If you are not in the word of God, if you are not studying the word, if you have no faith and believing in what God is speaking to you or in His word, then you going to keep on doing what you are doing. There has to be repentance somewhere.	P4
Competing conflict style	RESEARCHER: Scoring high on the competing part, it says that you are pretty firm in the positions that you take. Is that fair to say? PARTICIPANT: That's correct, sir. Yes, sir.	P4
Approaching from a biblical standpoint	PARTICIPANT: That I would, 100%, because normally when I am talking to someone today to try to resolve an issue, or even when I am counseling someone, I say, well, let me tell you biblically what the word says and then I give my opinion. Now that is my solution.	P5
Avoiding conflicts	PARTICIPANT: Exactly. Because I knew well, I cannot say I knew, I just figured there would be some conflict. Because they would say, you know, "he is real firm. He does not believe in this and that." My belief is in the word of God.	P6
Taking conflict as challenge	PARTICIPANT: It did challenge me to a great deal. It made me realize when I was in situations like that, how I reacted then, and was not truly aware of it until now. The greatness of it, you know, like say when I challenge it with a spiritual sight versus an individual with sight.	P5
Deacons to resolve conflict	PARTICIPANT: Absolutely. and, I would have to agree with you, building a church as a senior pastor, what you want to do is always have that back and behind you, that looks like you when you are not there. So even if I am not present, my demeanor is still there. Uh, my personality is still there. So I have instilled in these guys over time, not just over overnight, but over time have shown them the way that I handle situations. And so those smaller situations are no need for me to, um, have a headache over it and try to prepare a message for Sunday morning. When I got sister, Susan, that is getting into it with sister Rebecca over here, when they can oversee the, the problem for me.	P6
Compromising approach	Your scores in front of me, out of the five TKI profiles: compromising competing, avoiding, collaborating, and accommodating, you scored high on compromising. So are you a real strong, almost 75% compromising? A. So many times, we as pastors spend too much time on matters that are not as urgent as they are given credit for. The Gospel is a simple message, therefore why should we as peacemakers complicate matters any further	P7
Understanding conflict situation	That is where I always come from when I oversee disputes or issues of any kind within the church. My congregants will tell you in a minute that pastor will sit you down and answer any questions or concerns about the church at any time.	P7

More division than unity	PARTICIPANT: So that is why it is interesting. How has it hindered the African American church? I think it has severely hindered us because it brought more division than unity. I would say that I think for most of the guys who find themselves scarred and hurt, wounded by the church is because of the conflict that they experience in that local context. Sadly, we are wounded by the people we claim to love us and love God. So, um, and this is why I try when people have come to me with conflicts and some, I try to be very delicate about my approach to that, uh, because I know for some that could be a deep wound and I do not want to be the cause of it being worse. If that makes sense.	P1
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Step Four: Creation of Theme Clusters and Emerging Themes

Significant statements containing comparable terms and their stated meanings were grouped together to form themes in order to better explain them. Table 2 shows the theme clusters identified by Colaizzi (1978) and Polit (2014), as well as Beck (214). Thematic clusters that were related to one another were followed which they are combined to form emerging themes such as 'a different setting produces a different result' the 'know-how' (Table 3).

Table 3

Theme Clusters

Formulated Meaning	Location of Significant Statements	Theme cluster
From atheist to God's child	P2	Journey towards pulpit
Seek guidance from family	P7	
Guidance from mentor	P4	
Followed God's call	P3	
Seminary and classes	P4	
Seek guidance from the Holy Spirit	P6	
Observe the conflict and then act	P3	Learning Technique of Conflict Management
Self-learned	P3	
More division than unity	P1	Views about Conflict in Church
Mismanagement of Pastor	P2	
Less members in rural churches	P4	
Division, the denominations in church	P3	
Conflict about church authority	P7	

Lack of knowledge is reason of conflict	P5	Dealing with Conflicts
Commonly exists in church	P6	
Everyone needs authority	P2	
Accommodating conflict	P1	
Strong belief in Scripture	P7	
Following biblical and secular approach	P3	
Church conflicts are same as secular world	P4	
Competing conflict style	P4	
Approaching from a biblical standpoint	P5	
Avoiding conflicts	P6	
Taking conflict as challenge	P5	
Allow deacons to resolve conflict	P6	
Compromising approach	P7	
Understanding conflict situation	P7	Learned Techniques and its Effect on Conflict Management
Accommodating approach led to less conflicts	P1	
Deacons are independent for solving conflicts	P2	
Secular and biblical approach is effective	P3	
Biblical standpoint most effective	P4	
Biblical referencing to resolve conflicts	P5	
Successful conflict resolution approach	P6	Impact of Conflict on the Rural African American Congregation
Ease in pastoring	P1	
Formal education about conflict management	P2	
Contribution to seminary	P3	
Resolve conflicts in a better way	P4	

Five interconnected themes emerged for the phenomenon of ‘the experiences of conflict and conflict resolution methods of rural African American pastors’ (Table 4).

Table 4*Integrating Theme Clusters into Themes*

Thematic clusters	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ journey towards pulpit ▪ learning technique of conflict management 	Theme 1. Background and origin of rural African American pastors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ views about conflict in church ▪ dealing with conflicts 	Theme 2. Common conflict resolution styles of rural American pastors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learned techniques and its effect on conflict management 	Theme 3. Effectiveness of conflict resolution of rural African American pastors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ views about TKI instrument 	Theme 4. Views about TKI instrument

Step Five: A Description of the Phenomenon

A description of the phenomenon was achieved by the integration of all of the findings. (Colaizzi 1978; Polit and Beck 2104; Polit and Beck 2104). A thematic review of the transcripts was conducted. Clusters and topics should recur on a regular basis. The researcher looked for and investigated any inconsistencies or differences in views and verified that they were interpreted correctly after combining the topic. The description was read and analyzed in order to determine the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

Step Six: A Description of the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon

The goal was to remove any redundant or overused descriptions (Colaizzi 1978, Shosha 2012). After a comprehensive study and removal of superfluous information, the fundamental structure of the phenomena was discovered. The findings and outcomes of the phenomenological research method investigated the phenomena of conflict and conflict resolution leadership strategies in a hermeneutical setting. The method enabled investigation into Scriptural facts about the history, origin, and evolution of conflict, as well as the implications of conflict resolution on the rural African American church. The phenomenological philosophy and its

outcomes gave a framework for examining, researching, and comprehending practical approaches to conflict resolution. During the data analysis, four themes emerged, and all of the themes are capable of answering the research questions of this study.

Findings

Figure 1

Four emerged themes

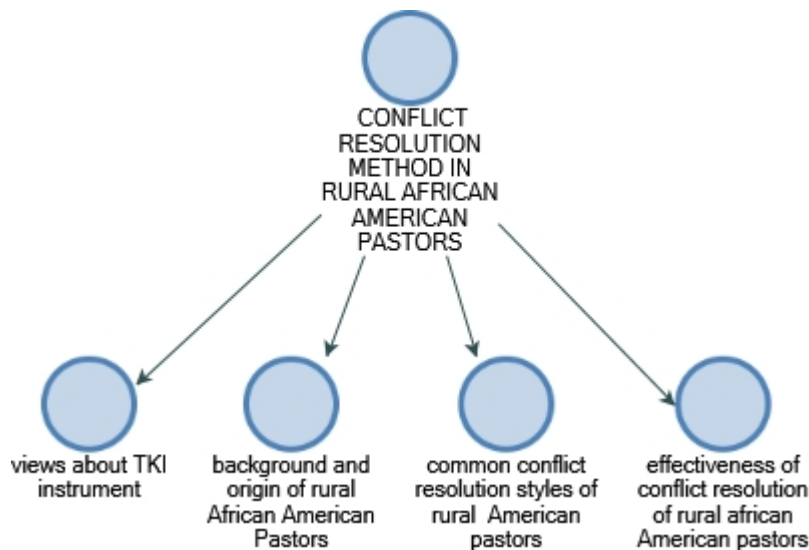


Figure 1 shows four emerged themes

Theme 1: Views about Thomas-Kilman Mode Instrument (TKI) Instrument

In this theme, the researcher investigated the participants' perspectives on the TKI conflict MODE instrument. The TKI gave research participants a better understanding of the dynamics of conflict resolution and strategies to improve the identification of their specific methodology. The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) evaluated an individual's behavior in conflict situations, which occur when two people's interests are irreconcilable.

The majority of the participants reported that after taking the TKI it created within a self-assessment to ponder over conflict management. It demonstrated how well they are doing or where they stand in dealing with the congregation. They claimed that they had to deal with the congregation on a daily basis, and as a full-time, bi-vocational pastor, they have to communicate with the congregation all the time, via text message, phone call, and in person. They have effective communication with the congregation, but when there is a disagreement, they must adapt a certain strategy to deal with it. Every church has conflict but dealing with the assessment the TKI provided them shown they can use this instrument to their advantage because it shows them where they need to be in terms of not becoming too embroiled and remaining scripturally grounded in resolving conflict in the church. One of the participants reported that

It was remarkably interesting, Reverend. It allows a person to kind of figure out who they are and what they think about themselves. And then it had a graph like 54% versus 45% on a scale. So it was pretty beneficiary to see where I was at” (P4). Another participant reported that “Uh, the test was remarkably interesting. It posed some questions it really made you think really hard to, uh, really had to take inventory of yourself (P2).

Participants indicated that this is a thought-provoking instrument, and that it was interesting to examine their responses while they were writing them. So they found it interesting, and it also helped them to think about how they lead the church. One of the participants (P1) reported that:

“Uh, it was pretty interesting because it is kind of just, I had to really sit down to really think through my answers on that study. So, I found it interesting, and it also helped me to really see myself about how I, how I lead my congregation in probably some other areas I, I could work on. Yes.”

Another participant contributed his thoughts in this regard, stating that because this instrument is extensive and detailed, it assisted them in assessing their skills and selecting the best technique to deal with conflict in church. Moreover participant added:

“It was pretty in depth, and it was a widespread questionnaire, and I do not think it just aimed at anything in particular, but it was kind of, uh, um, it taught me a lesson by myself too. I understand. Thank you for saying that. Let ask you this, with that in mind, when

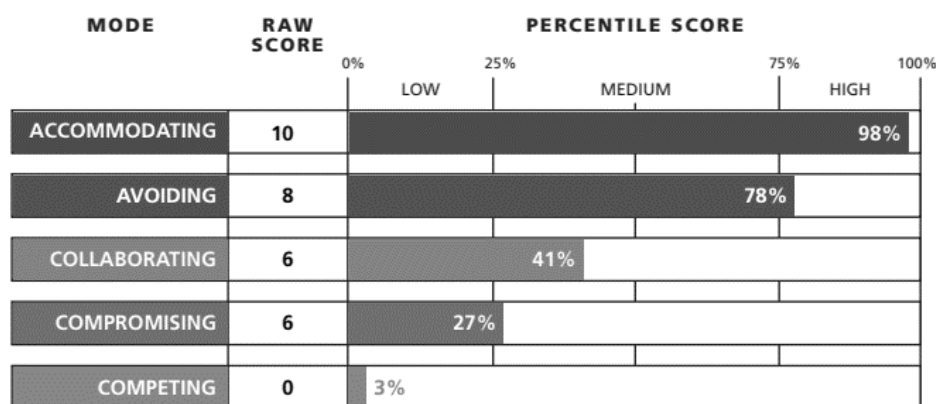
you look at an instrument like the TKI and it categorizes to an extent, does that help you as a pastor to get a different view from say, now the TKI is a secular instrument, however, it was based on a biblical foundation.” (P6).

The Thomas Kilmann Instrument (TKI) assesses an individual's behavior in conflict situations. The instrument describes a person's behavior along two primary dimensions, assertiveness, and cooperativeness in conflict situations. Assertiveness is how an individual attempts to satisfy his or her concerns. At the same time, cooperativeness is how an individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). These two dimensions of behavior can define five methods of dealing with conflict. The five conflict modes are competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Each research participant's individual conflict-handling profiles were reflected here.

P1. The profile of P1’s TKI scores illustrated in Fig. 2 indicates the conflict-handling modes used in the types of conflicts faced. The scores are arranged in descending order by percentile, with the highest score indicating the most frequently used conflict mode.

Figure 2

P1 TKI Profile



The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P1 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P1’s raw scores compared to those of a

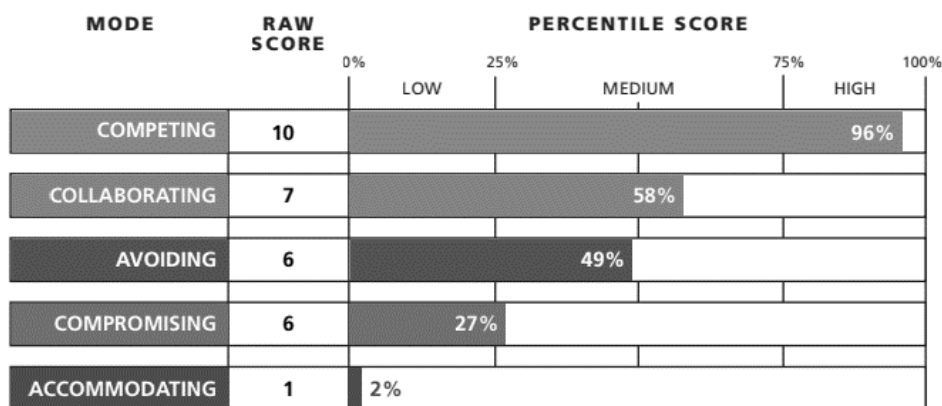
representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P1's percentile scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P1 on each mode.

P1's profile shows a score highest on accommodating as a profile. P1's raw score of 10 represents a percentile score of 98. This means P1 scored higher than 98 percent of the people in the sample on accommodating. On the opposite end of the spectrum, P1 scored lowest on competing, where the percentile score is comparable to the lowest scores on this conflict mode in the sample.

P2. The profile of P2's TKI scores, illustrated in Fig. 2, indicates the conflict-handling modes P2 uses in the type of conflicts faced as a congregation pastor.

Figure 3

P2 TKI Profile



The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P2 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P2's raw scores compare to those of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P2's percentile

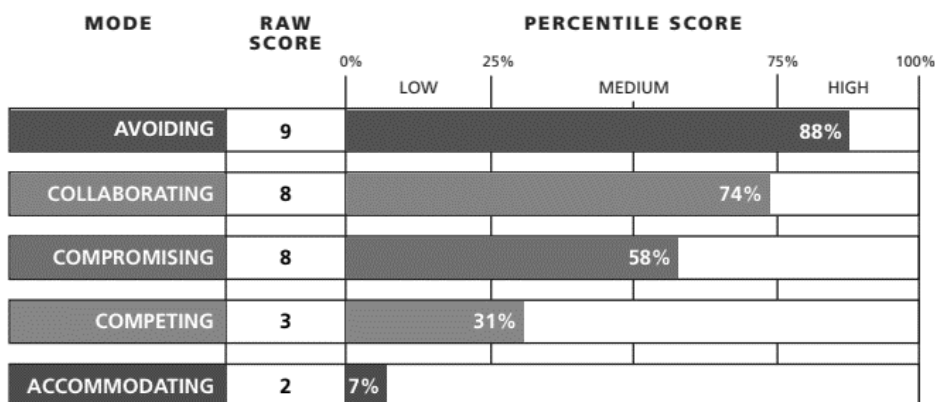
scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P2 on each mode.

P2's profile shows a score highest on competing as a dominant conflict-handling mode, where the raw score of 10 represents a percentile score of 96. This means P2 scored higher than 96 percent of the people in the sample on competing. On the opposite end of the spectrum, P2 scored lowest on accommodating, where the percentile score is comparable to the lowest scores on this conflict mode in the sample.

P3. The profile of P3's TKI scores, illustrated in Fig. 3, indicates the conflict-handling modes P3 uses in the type of conflicts faced as a pastor of a congregation.

Figure 4

P3 TKI Profile



The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P3 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P3's raw scores compare to those of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P3's percentile

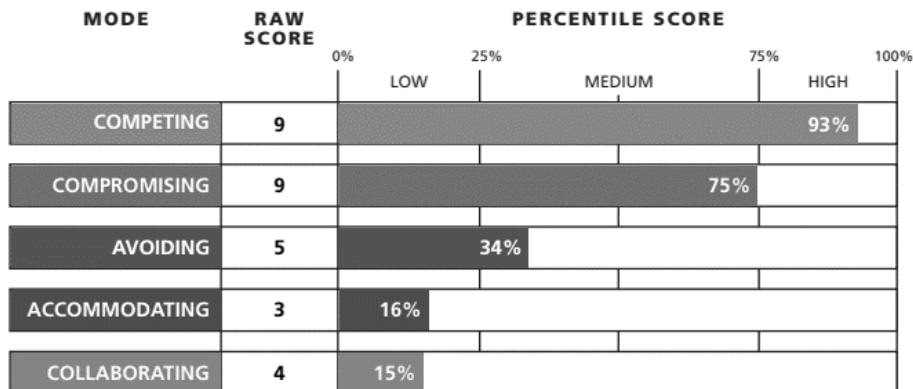
scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P3 on each mode.

P3's profile shows a score highest on the avoiding conflict-handling mode, where the raw score of 9 represents a percentile score of 88. This means P3 scored higher than 88 percent of the people in the sample on avoiding. On the opposite end of the spectrum, P3 scored lowest on accommodating, where the score is higher than only 7 percent of the sample.

P4. The profile of P4's TKI scores, illustrated in Fig. 4, indicates the conflict-handling modes P4 uses in the type of conflicts faced as a pastor of a congregation.

Figure 5

P4 TKI Profile



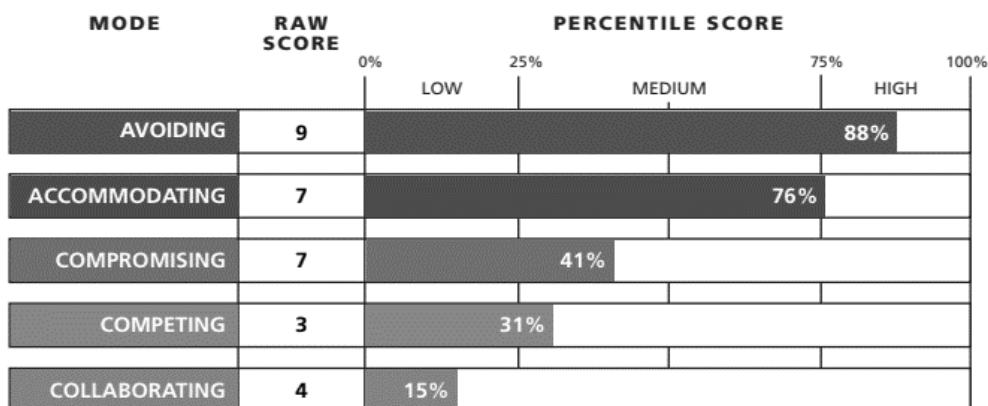
The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P4 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P4's raw scores compare to those of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P4's percentile scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P4 on each mode.

P4's profile shows the highest score in the competing conflict-handling mode, where the raw score of 9 represents a percentile score of 93. This means P4 scored higher than 93 percent of the people in the sample on competing. On the other end of the spectrum, P4 scored lowest on collaborating, where P4 scored higher than only 15 percent of the sample.

P5. The profile of P5's TKI scores, illustrated in Fig. 5, indicates the conflict-handling modes P5 uses in the type of conflicts faced as a pastor of a congregation.

Figure 6

P5 TKI Profile



The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P5 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P5's raw scores compare to those of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P5's percentile scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P5 on each mode.

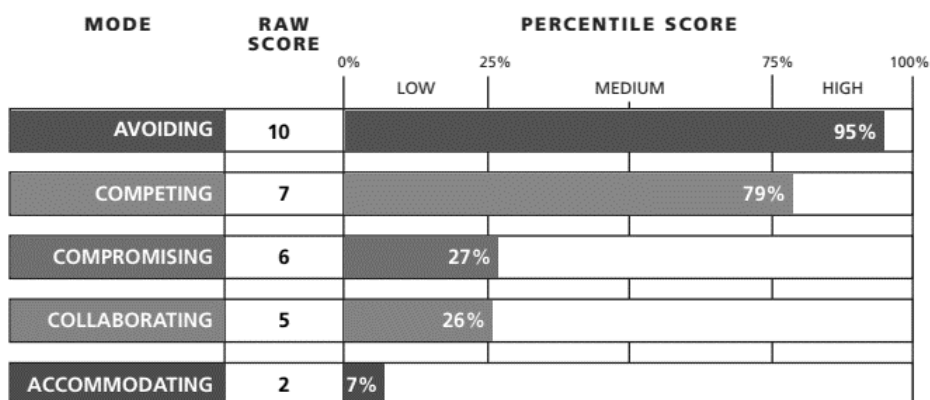
P5's profile shows the highest score on the avoiding conflict-handling mode, where the raw score of 9 gave P5 a percentile score of 88. This means P5 scored higher than 88 percent of

the people in the sample on avoiding. The opposite end of the spectrum revealed that P5 scored lowest on collaborating, where P5 scored higher than only 15 percent of the sample.

P6. The profile of P6's TKI scores, illustrated in Fig. 7, indicates the conflict-handling modes P6 uses in the type of conflicts faced as a pastor of a congregation.

Figure 7

P6 TKI Profile



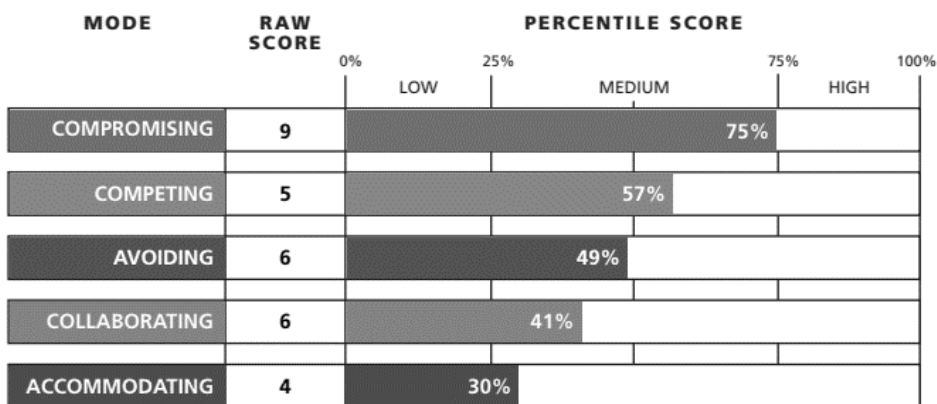
The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P6 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P6's raw scores compare to those of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P6's percentile scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P6 on each mode.

P6's profile shows the highest score on the avoiding conflict-handling mode, where the raw score of 10 represents a percentile score of 95. P6 scored higher than 95 percent of the people in the sample on avoiding. The opposite end of the spectrum revealed that P6 scored lowest on accommodating, where P6 scored higher than only 7 percent of the sample.

P7. The profile of P7's TKI scores, illustrated in Fig. 8, indicates the conflict-handling modes P7 uses in the type of conflicts faced as a pastor of a congregation.

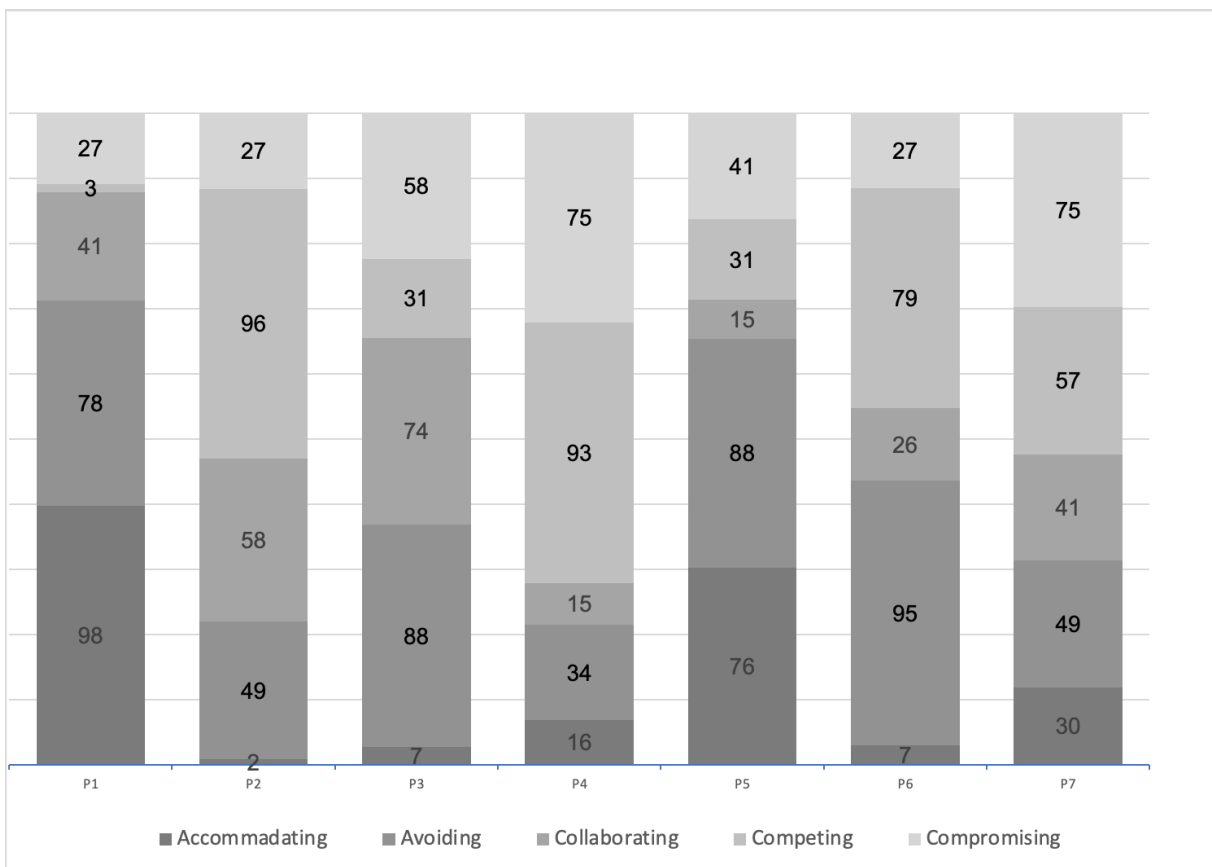
Figure 8

P7 TKI Profile



The raw score on each conflict-handling mode is the number of times P7 chose a TKI statement for that mode. The percentile scores show how P7's raw scores compare to those of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. P7's percentile scores show the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than P7 on each mode.

P7's profile shows the highest score on the compromising conflict-handling mode, where the raw score of 9 represents a percentile score of 75. P7 scored higher than 75 percent of the people in the sample on compromising. On the opposite side of the spectrum, P7 scored lowest on accommodating, where P7 scored higher than only 30 percent of the sample.

Figure 9*P1-P7 TKI Analysis****Theme 2: Background and Origin of Rural African American Pastors***

The theme explored the conflict resolution approaches of rural African American pastors in order to comprehend the history, genesis, and effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies in the rural African American church. It explained the origins and development of the dispute resolution theories used by this specific group. To understand the phenomenon of conflict management techniques used by African American pastors, it was necessary to investigate and investigate the origin and background of Pastors, how they were interested in pastor ship, and how they learned ways to deal with conflict situations.

Journey towards Pulpit. In this subtheme, pastors describe their experiences as they transitioned to the pulpit. There were conflicting accounts. Some participants were driven by family to become pastors, but the majority of participants reported being drawn by God's call and a divine pull. One of the participants reported that he was pushed towards pastor ship accidentally, he narrated his experience in his words as:

I will never forget it November 7, 1993, uh, I was sitting in my former church and, my pastor, who is gone home now, was out sick. One of the other ministers was taking over, who has gone home now too, and he extended the privilege of the church, and a still small voice came to me and said, JM come forth. And I did not understand what he said, come forth. And, and all I could see was myself walking, you know, in the Baptist church, I walked up and gave my hand to the, you know, how you have you to sit down at the time of when it, uh, opened the doors to the church, when it came to me, say, okay, make your approach or your, uh, what you want to state. And I told them that, well, whatever it takes me to get, and I turned around and pointed at the pulpit. I said, “whatever, it takes me to get to the pulpit, which is what I needed to do. And at that time, which was one of my brothers ,who’s also gone home, said, well, when Pastor Johnson comes back we will have you to come back to the front of the church and make that request. And at that point, that is when I started, uh, wanting to seek the ministry. I felt it in my heart that God was ready to use me, and I was ready to be used (P5).

All the participants reflected their accord when they are summoned by divine force. They were well aware that God had called them to serve. This voyage, however, was not without its hardships, and they discovered that God did not send them merely to serve the church, but also to work on their inner selves. “I did not attend seminary; I received a divine calling”(P1). One of .the participants said that he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and when he went to the church, he asked for help from the Holy Spirit and allowed himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and so the Holy Spirit lead him towards God's path.

My path, I was 17 years old and the, the Holy Spirit was on me very heavily. Um, I ran from the calling, um, I know at least a year and, and every time I would go to church, it was just that overtaking of the spirit, just saying, hey, I need you. I am calling you. This is where you are supposed to be. I actually, um, gave in and gave the pastor, uh, my hand and gave God my heart and said, hey, I fulfill whatever you have for me to do. And it was at that point when I felt the relief now after then, uh, for, as the pastorialship, that just fell

into lap, um, 18 years old, fresh out of high school. Um, did not know anything really did not even know how to preach, that how far the Lord has brought me. (P6).

The majority of participants reported that they were guided by mentors towards pastorship. One participant (P7) stated that a senior pastor was his mentor, and that he always taught him to be patient and wait on the Lord. Prior to accepting a church, he had numerous opportunities. His mentor taught him to interact with people from a Scriptural perspective and to always be prepared to deal with disputes using relevant Biblical Scripture from the Bible. One participant stated that he came from a religious background, although he was uninterested in church and its activities. His family was putting pressure on him, but he was nagging them. Then he found a man who directed him, and he introduced him to God's call, and from then on he found God not only at church but everywhere.

But it finally got me, man. I knew it was in my best interest to go ahead and get saved and, you know, do what God had called me. You asked me about my call. Well, mine was, I cannot say in a dream, but I mean, everywhere I went it seemed like the Lord was there. He was speaking with me, you know. I do not know how to explain it, but everywhere I went, man, if I was in a club or whatever, He was there saying, "Hey, you know you do not suppose to be here. I have something for you to do." I ignore it. But it is like your conscious, but I did my best and ignored it. So I knew I had a call in over my life (P4).

Learning Techniques of Conflict Management. In this subtheme, researchers looked on the conflict management techniques learned by pastors early in their careers. Participants reported learning conflict resolution from a variety of sources, although the majority claimed learning via seminary and classes.

When I first surrendered to Christ, I sat under Pastor Johnson for several years. While under him, I attended seminary. Even though the seminary school I went to was only a two-year program, it took me a while to complete the program because I was only able to attend a limited number of nights per week. But I did eventually complete the basic and advanced levels of study (P5).

One participant stated that he observes the disagreement and acts in accordance with the circumstances. Participants claimed that they had studied conflict resolution on their own and that they acted in accordance with the behavior of the opposition in order to find an appropriate solution to the conflict. Moreover he explained that:

Because I was never taught that and not to take away anything from the African American church, you know, those type of things are never talked about. What we talk about coming up is, hey, this is how you preach. This is how you dress. Um, this is how you write out your sermon and or this is how you doubt we never, ever involved the conflict of it. So I was never taught that it was just something over time that I have to, you know, learn on my own. (P6)

Theme 3 Common Conflict Resolution Styles of Rural African American Pastors

In this theme, the researcher has explored and discussed two subthemes: first, common conflicts found in African American rural church, and second, how do pastors deal with conflict in specific situations. Participants have reported multiple reasons for conflict situations in African American rural churches, which are discussed further below.

Views about conflict in church. In this subtheme participants have reported varied reasons for conflicts occurring in their church. One of the participants (P7) stated:

The biggest problem with a lot of these small churches around here is that everyone wants to be in charge, and no one wants to serve. I can see how classes for new pastors having to deal with these types of issues would be an advantage for young ministers starting out. (P7)

One of the participants (P1) stated that a major issue that has hampered them is that there is more division than unity in churches. Participant indicated that the majority of people came to the church with the conflict that they were offended by the church staff, thus pastor (P1) tried his best to be gentle in his response to that, since he knew that people who came to him would be hurt, and he did not want to add to their anguish.

I think for most, the guys who find themselves scarred and hurt, wounded by the church is because of the conflict that they experience in, in that local context. Sadly, we are wounded by the people we claim that claim to love us and love God. So, um, and this is why I try when people, um, have come to me with conflicts and some, I try to be very delicate about my approach to that, uh, because I know for some that could be a deep wound and I don't want to be the cause of, of it being worse. If that makes sense. (P1)

Another source of conflict in the church, according to the participant (P2), is the pastor's mismanagement. As a pastor or church leader, they are supposed to set a good example when it comes to dealing with dispute. People in the church have diverse points of view; as the leader of the church, the pastor is expected to comprehend other people's beliefs in order to manage conflict situations. He quoted that:

That's the biggest thing in the church. That is the division, the denominations, the different beliefs, you know, I am a Baptist, you a Methodist, that kind of stuff. That creates conflict in general. "Well, when we're not on the same page we're not going to have the same belief. (P2)

Another participant stated that people perish because of a lack of awareness. If they do not pursue the correct knowledge, they are in conflict. Because they do not really comprehend a lot of biblical vs traditional doctrine. Moreover he added that:

Oh yes, definitely. During my time at seminary one of the first things we learned was that the Bible says our people perish for the lack of knowledge. And if they do not seek the right knowledge, then that is a conflict. Cause they do not understand a lot of biblical versus tradition. Now that is what hurts us because we want to stand on tradition. (P6)

Strategies Employed by Pastors to Deal with Conflict. In this subtheme the researcher explored the strategies used by pastors to deal with conflicts that often occur in the church. One of the participants (P7) stated that whenever there is a conflict in a church, his congregants and he ensure that individuals are dealt with politeness and also that they understand that the pastor will listen to them and resolve their conflicts. He quoted that:

That is where I always come from when I handle disputes or issues of any kind within the church. My congregants will tell you in a minute that pastor will sit you down and answer any questions or concerns about the church at any time. (P7)

One of the participants stated that he employed a compromising strategy. Pastors frequently devote too much time to issues that are not as serious as they are given credit for. However, compromising was his favored way of conflict resolution. He believed that teaching conflict resolution skills is vital for young pastors who may attend seminary or those who study under someone else and learn their approaches. Specifically those who are so young when they enter the ministry without the benefit of life experience. Even the most gifted individuals face a significant deficit to overcome. Furthermore he added:

Being a young David and summoning up the courage to face Goliath is a bit different than an old southern Baptist congregation steeped in history. It is somewhat of the old school traditional methods versus the new modern approaches to the Gospel, especially since Covid-19. Now even our oldest members are educated in basic computer literacy and have computer setups in their homes. They are tech savvy enough to livestream service every Sunday instead of coming to church. Those are the time we live in know. (P7)

Another participant discussed that he used the accommodating technique and his approach to the deacon's problem was a little unique since he realized that sometimes disagreements are not what people react to; instead, they have other conflicts that they show to the church. As a pastor and a leader, it is critical for pastors to understand where these types of disputes occur. Because if they are not careful, they will have a large number of people projecting their rage and problems onto the church. Furthermore he quoted from experience that:

In my conflict with my deacon, he had an altercation with his wife and prior to the worship, my conflict happened after him. He, he had a conflict with his wife that, um, that was before service and everything like that. So when he came into the meeting we had with the other deacons, um, I had to immediately pause like, Hey doc, I am not your problem. And I am not going to allow you to project that onto me. You need to work that out with whoever you need to work that out with. And I've, um, being a part of this new millennial, this millennial culture. One of the things that I love about it is the fact that, hey, we are able to see it and say, hey, I am, I am actually your friend. This is what you need to work on. And, um, you know, he did not really like that, but it was the truth that he really got over it. So we are back vibing like we once were. Were good. (P1)

One of the participants believed, without a doubt, that the Bible is completely true. So, if it is one hundred percent true, then everything that contradicts it cannot be true. So the participant used to deal with disagreement while keeping in mind that he needed to avoid confrontation and change people's minds toward biblical script. "I try to keep the peace. You know me, you know one of the gifts bestowed upon me reasoning. Keeping it simple and Scriptural, and brief" (P7). Participants believe that church issues are the same as those in the secular world. Another participant stated that it does not necessarily imply that there is an avoidance of conflict. In a church setting, they have to deal with adults, and if they force the conflicting parties to find a resolution on their own, they will tend to find a resolution on their own rather than bringing in a neutral third party to perhaps point out some issues that they don't necessarily want someone else to bring to the forefront. One participant (P2) defined his strategy to deal with conflict as believing in competing conflict. He stated that he had a biblical foundation and that whenever someone confronted him with a conflict, it meant that he was encountering or disputing with the bible. That is why, when confronted with a conflict, he employs a competing technique.

And I looked at it as if they were approaching me, disagreeing with me, but they are really disagreeing with the Bible. So with that in mind is how I approached the questions. So therefore there was no, there, there, there was not any guilt. (P2)

One of the participants (P5) stated that he used to avoid conflict because he always wanted things to be smooth and knew it was an easier approach to go around circumstances or issues. He stated that he disliked a lot of controversy, therefore he attempted to keep things on a positive note. Furthermore he added:

Over time, I feel confident that they might have absorbed being taught from a scriptural standpoint. They knew how I felt and that I was firm in my position. Because of that, I

could see some conflict coming. So, if I went back, I knew there would be a lot of conflict. I declined to submit my resume for consideration. I declined to go back. Exactly. Because I knew, well I cannot say I knew, I just figured there would be some conflict. Because they would say, you know, “he is real firm. He does not believe in this and that.” My belief is in the word of God. (P5)

Theme 4: Effectiveness of Conflict Resolution of Rural African American Pastors. In

this theme, the researcher investigated the effectiveness of conflict resolution approaches used by African American pastors serving in rural areas. One of the participants described his experience of being posted as pastor of a church and witnessing people being harmed by the former pastor. As a result, it was not an easy place for him to work. People did not trust him because of their unpleasant experience with the previous preacher. Participants said that his accommodating style had influenced others to change their minds. He went on to say that they are not properly taught how to deal with conflict in their seminaries and trainings, so they must choose their own conflict management technique and assess its efficiency.

I do not think there are a lot of conversations on how to teach individuals how to deal with conflict management. We teach you how to preach, we teach you how to baptize, but we do not allow you to sit in those conversations in no room so can learn how to deal with the conflict from various personalities and everything like that. So, that I would say would be the kind of the downfall on my end of not being exposed to how to handle that because you know, I'm from Detroit and you know, I'm still young, so they're still like this little young cutthroat part that you want to do that, but you really can't because you know, these are God's people and you have to handle them a certain way. (P1)

Another participant (P3) stated that his biblical and secular technique was helpful for him since it is more appropriate and proper not just for life within the body of the church, but also for life in the secular world. Because they must coexist outside of the church. So, if they implement good practices within the church walls, they are instilling good habits within that church member and church body that will translate into the outside world.

That's another thing about a pastor, he cannot go in his feeling. He got to stand on the word of God. God says you should not lie, then you should not lie. He said I should not

cheat, steal, or bear false witness against your neighbor....all of the 10 commandments, which is true. The best thing to learn as being a pastor is to learn the 10 commandments and obey them. (P4)

One participant (P5) reported that as a pastor, he explained to the people that anything he says is referring to the Bible, and that he occasionally paraphrases the Bible's words for greater understanding to the people so that there is less conflict. He went on to state that he attempted to leave everything in a place where people could always say, "I manage things calmly and collectedly." He needs everyone to understand that he will only support what is biblically correct.

Participants reported that the addition of conflict resolution skills in formal education made it easier for pastors to choose a conflict resolution technique. One of the major subjects being discussed at seminary right now is conflict resolution. It is a new phenomenon in seminaries. There were specific conflict management courses, and it resulted from many pastors saying that they went through seminary, but then when they got out of seminary and were assigned or accepted into a church, they spent some time in that church as the pastor, and they always look back and say, I wish I had been a little bit more prepared for dealing with conflict in the congregation. This is a worthwhile effort to pursue in seminary.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The use of Phenomenology in qualitative research can be beneficial. The perspective of a single participant is taken into consideration rather than the researcher's own. Investigating other people's lives reveals previously undiscovered knowledge. Phenomenology is widely employed in study in sociology, psychology, health sciences, and education (Creswell & Miller, *Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry*, 1998). It was "interested in showing how complex meanings are constructed out of simple units of direct experience" using this method (Merriam,

2002). The researcher chose phenomenology to aid in the development of a thorough description of lived experiences from which "general or universal meanings are created" (Creswell, 1998, p. 53).

The researcher used a thorough and comprehensive qualitative data analysis method created by Colaizzi (1978) to identify and comprehend the experiences of Pastors in managing conflicts. The Colaizzi approach consists of seven steps: (1) read all of the interview content; (2) extract significant statements; (3) formulate meanings; (4) organize the collection of meanings into clusters of themes; (5) integrate the clusters of themes into an exhaustion description; (6) establish the fundamental structure of the study; and (7) validate the study's findings through participant feedback completes the analysis.

Colaizzi (1978) recommended scholars to be open-minded and adaptable throughout these processes. The quest for the essence and meaning of study does not have to include an exploratory step, but a thorough assessment of the subject meaning. These seven steps were implemented and detailed in this research, as is a description of how they were explored in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Conflict within any church body is inevitable. Unresolved or improperly addressed conflict within the congregation leads to declined attendance, church splits, and general discord within the body of believers. God called the leaders of the flock not only to minister to the flock but also to become peacemakers. A critical facet of pastoring a church is the leadership's ability to resolve conflict within the congregation effectively. The research focused on conflict and the conflict resolution methods utilized by a specific demographic, the rural African American pastor. The research conclusions, the answers to the research questions, and the implications of the study were included in this section, along with the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications regarding the research results.

Research Purpose

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors to understand the background, origin, and effectiveness of conflict resolution methods in the rural African American church.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the common conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors?

RQ2: What is the background and origin, as perceived by rural African American pastors, in developing a conflict resolution approach?

RQ3: What impact has conflict, as perceived by rural African American pastors, had on the rural African American congregation?

RQ4: How effective do rural African American pastors believe they are with conflict resolution?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Research Conclusions

The researcher sought to introduce the TKI Conflict Handling MODE to a demographic that would otherwise not know its existence or purpose. The exposure to the instrument, and the identification of a personal profile in the realm of conflict resolution methods, proved to be an invaluable experience for the participants. The instrument successfully created a self-reflection of conflict resolution methods which brought forth an awareness of the necessity of the skills required of a leader to resolve conflict within the congregation. The TKI assessment's insights enhanced the pastor's conflict management skills and ability to reconcile differences.

RQ1: What are the common conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors?

The TKI was the survey instrument in which to answer RQ1. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) assesses five conflict modes: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. These five behavioral choices are defined by two underlying dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. The five conflict-handling modes are different combinations of getting a person's needs met and getting the other person's needs met. After administering the TKI to the research participants, the results determined that the typical conflict resolution style of rural African American pastors was the conflict resolution style of accommodating.

The accommodating conflict mode has elements of self-sacrifice, selfless generosity, or charity (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). The characteristics of leaders in the rural African American church, who served as research participants, share similarities with the TKI accommodating definition.

The book of Nehemiah provides a case study in strategic leadership management.

Nehemiah was a royal cupbearer to Artaxerxes of Persia around 445 B.C. Nehemiah learned that the Jews who survived captivity were quite distraught because the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and its gates were ruined by fire (NIV, 1985, Neh. 1: 1-7). After great prayer, God commissioned Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He took leadership of the people of Israel, with the blessing and support of the King, to supervise the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Leadership involves the process of interaction between followers and the leader (Northouse, 2013). Nehemiah was a leader who addressed his followers' needs, values, and morals. Though Nehemiah utilized numerous leadership characteristics that exemplify effective leadership, among those was the TKI conflict resolution mode *accommodating* while leading and motivating the people to accomplish the mission of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah, an ordinary person in a servant's position, became a transformational leader when he learned of the sorrow of the exile survivor Jews in Jerusalem and Judah. By praying to God for discernment of His will, Nehemiah received God's calling to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. The additional strategies employed included those that define the transformational leader: providing a vision, idealized influence, and attending to followers' needs. During an opposition uprising against the wall rebuilding, Nehemiah shifted his leadership position by preparing for the safety and security of the Israelites. He split the workers into part-time repairers and part-time security officers, placing the rebuilding of the wall under tight security. The most valuable Christian leadership trait Nehemiah modeled was that he continuously prayed to God for guidance in all decision-making when confronted by conflict.

Using his leadership ability, including *accommodating*, Nehemiah witnessed the completion of his vision. The walls were restored in an astounding fifty-two days.

RQ2: What is the background and origin, as perceived by rural African American pastors, in developing a conflict resolution approach?

The oral interviews were the source for the conclusions reached in RQ2. The data from the interviews were compiled utilizing the Colaizzi method to identify and comprehend the experiences of pastors in developing a conflict resolution method. The raw data was introduced into the MAXqda qualitative data analysis software to code, organize, and analyze the research. The overwhelming amount of the pastors surveyed shared a methodology of conflict resolution based on the background of the Black church. The origin of the approach used was based on the influence of their respective mentors in the ministry. The path to the pulpit was a common denominator in the pastors' positions. The data revealed that most pastors became senior pastors through the apprenticeship system. The tutelage received as understudies directly impacted the formation of the pastors' conflict resolution methodology.

A biblical example of learning and sitting under a "father in the ministry" was Timothy. Timothy had the great privilege to serve as a protégé under The Apostle Paul. Timothy was of a mixed-racial background, his mother was Jewish, and his father was Greek. Scripture records the probability of Timothy learning of Christ from Paul during his first missionary journey (NIV, 1985, Acts 14: 1-7). Timothy grew up in a home where faith in Christ had been practiced first by his grandmother Eunice and mother Lois, who each became disciples of Christ, due to the teachings of Paul (NIV, 1985, 2 Tim. 1:5).

Paul watched Timothy for a considerable time and became impressed by the character and reputation he was building. Paul decided Timothy was worth his time and efforts, so he added him to his team along with Silas on his missionary journey. Timothy proved to be a faithful and diligent member of the missionary team. Paul took him under his wing, where he taught and

mentored him, and over some time, Timothy became one of Paul's most trusted. Paul sent Timothy on missions independently as he felt he was sufficiently prepared.

RQ3: What impact has conflict, as perceived by rural African American pastors, had on the rural African American congregation?

The research evaluations determined that the surveyed demographic all witnessed or had specific knowledge of church divisions, church splits, and extreme cases of conflict within the congregation. The researcher surmised the results of this line of questioning due to the familiarity of the surveyed demographic. The research proved this to be an accurate assessment. A consensus was that the shepherd is responsible for the tone of conflict resolution within the congregation. The foundation of the pastors' conflict resolution methodology remains utterly inspired by Scripture. The knowledge of the traditional beliefs on conflict resolution, which are widely accepted and practiced, primarily based on tradition, found that Scripture is the ultimate authority on the concept. The pastors believed that the majority of church conflicts that led to the detriment of the congregation were due to the shepherd's conflict resolution methods not following Scriptural guidance.

The foundation for the reliance on Scripture for concepts in conflict resolution rests on the authority of Scripture. The doctrine of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is rooted in the authority of God. This means all things that the Scriptures assert are true, both in the Old Testament, the Scriptures of Jesus, and the New Testament. The inerrancy of Scripture means that all things that the Scriptures assert function with the authority of God's Word for Christians. The pastors who subscribe to resolving conflict within the congregation by using relative Scripture believe in the ultimate authority of the word of God. "Scripture is God-breathed" (NIV, 1985, 2 Tim. 3:16), which means Scripture is God speaking and therefore has the final say in all matters. The issue is whether man chooses to submit to it or not.

RQ4: How effective do rural African American pastors believe they are with conflict resolution?

The benchmark behind the survey participants' answers in answering this RQ was longevity. The research included participants ranging from two years of service to forty years of continuous service to one congregation. In the pastoral community, pastors tend to move from church to church in search of their personal agendas. The surveyed participants rated themselves as effective in their ministries based on involvement, or lack thereof, in congregation divisional difficulties.

A thorough understanding of Scripture is vital to understanding pastoral leadership's effectiveness. The pastors who participated in the research study identified their respective conflict resolution methods derived from Scripture. To achieve effectiveness, there must be a proper application and implementation of Scriptural principles. Pastoral leadership must be effective in implementing strategies that quell conflict within the church congregation. The pastor of a local church must realize that the church's spiritual life is strongly associated to that of its pastor. The fact directly affects the conflict resolution tone for the congregation and the respect for the pastor addressing issues according to Scripture. The pastor is the minister of Christ; therefore, his ministry should center on the person and work of Christ whose character he must demonstrate. This is especially crucial in the area of conflict within the congregation.

Theoretical Implications

Conflict is often said to be functional for organizations, but most recommendations relating to organizational conflict still fall within the spectrum of conflict resolution. The church as an organization also falls into the empirical literature category of conflict resolution; however, Scripture remains the foundation for conflict resolution methodologies. The emphasis of this research has been on the resolution of conflict within the church as a broad base, with an

emphasis on a specific demographic, the rural African American pastorate, more specifically. Managing conflict involves designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions and maximize the constructive functions of conflict to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization (Rahim, *Empirical Studies on Managing Conflict*, 2000). Resolving conflict in the church environment remains the responsibility of the shepherd. Regardless of the methods employed, this research was determined to discover the origin and background of the methodology of the surveyed demographic.

An implication of this research includes the difference between conflict management and conflict resolution. It is essential to discuss the common factor between the two: conflict. When leaders of the church face conflict, the first decision is to separate the resolution of the conflict from the management of the conflict. Conflict resolution seeks to eliminate, or at least reduce, conflict within the church. Conflict management finds ways to find peace within the conflict that is amenable to all parties. Matthew wrote, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (NIV, 1985, Matt. 5:9), which was a foundational passage serving as a contributing factor in forming the conflict resolution methods of the survey group. The research implies that the focus of the pastors in the survey group collectively believed conflict resolution was a priority over conflict management from a biblical perspective.

Scriptural-based conflict resolution methodology is from a unique perspective than secular literature presents. Conflict can even cause us to doubt God's goodness, His will for our lives, or His love for us. However, God often uses conflict to refine our character, draw us closer to Him, and glorify Himself. Empirical secular literature offers methods of identifying and resolving conflict through various methods offered throughout the years. This study utilized a secular concept of identification of conflict resolution methods, namely, the Thomas-Kilmann conflict

management inventory, to offer the research participants a perspective of the concept of conflict resolution methodology never offered. The survey instrument offered the research participants the opportunity to identify their respective conflict resolution methods and helped form the path of determining the origins of their respective methods.

The impact on the theories offered in the purpose statement of the research suggested that the path to the pulpit had a significant impact on the development of their respective conflict resolution methods. The data revealed that 42.8% of the surveyed demographic attended seminary, while 100% of the research participants sat under a mentor until they displayed preparedness to advance to the senior pastor. The participants who attended seminary did so before conflict resolution became an addition to the curriculums in higher Christian education institutions.

The Bible is full of wisdom about how believers should oversee conflict. The data from the research proved that the majority consensus of the African American pastors surveyed responded that the Bible was the source of guidance when addressing conflict within the congregation. This research confirms and corroborates the previous literature on conflict resolution methodology among leaders, including the specific demographic surveyed in this research. The difference in the secular approach versus pastors in the church was the source and origin of the conflict resolution methodology.

This study diverges from and extends previous research by taking the concept of conflict resolution skills and applying them to a demographic that could be collectively removed from the research. The research previously discussed the obstacles to educational opportunities, particularly attendance in seminary, for the specific demographic surveyed.

The novel contribution of this research adds to the growing response of conflict resolution skills training, gaining ground as a subject matter in many Christian higher education institutions. The need for training in these skills has been a response offered by newly appointed pastors as a skill in which they desired more training and preparation during seminary.

This study shed new light on the theory of conflict resolution skills necessary in the church and secular corporate organizations. The consequences of leaders in corporate business exercising poor conflict resolution methods can lead to unpleasant work environments, lost revenue, failed businesses, legal implications, and many other difficulties in accomplishing a mission statement. The consequences of pastors shepherding a flock of believers exercising poor conflict resolution methods lead to decreased attendance, church splits, deep spiritual wounds, and division within the congregation.

Empirical Implications

The phenomenon of conflict and its devastating impact on the church among the survey participants was a known entity to this researcher. The data revealed emerging theme clusters, which were grouped to form themes to explain them better. Among those theme clusters identified through the data were the pastors' journeys toward the pulpit, the learning techniques of conflict resolution, and their origin in the participants' respective ministries. The method of resolving conflict within the congregation and the impact of conflict on the rural African American congregation is not a theory. These theme clusters directly form the foundation to answer the four research questions. The theme clusters were winnowed to reveal four themes relevant to the answers to the research questions. Those four themes were the background and origin of rural African American pastors, common conflict resolution styles of rural African

American pastors, the effectiveness of conflict resolution of rural African American pastors, and the results of the TKI instrument.

The practical implications were the background and history of the participants and their respective paths to the pulpit. The shared path served as the basis for establishing the use of traditional conflict resolution methodology. Tradition and the influence of mentors served as the primary catalyst for developing their respective methods of resolving conflict. A joint inference was the TKI allowing the participants to put a label on their respective methods of dealing with conflict in the church.

An observation revealed in the research through the analysis of the interviews was the desire to move the church forward by focusing more on Scripture rather than the tradition of Scripture. The constant evaluation and consensus of the survey group were that each of the five conflict-handling modes of the TKI could be effective depending on the circumstances of the conflict. A Scriptural reference to this phenomenon would be Pontius Pilot. Through his encounters with Jesus and his decisions as governor, Pilot exhibited all five of Thomas & Kilmann's modes of conflict resolution.

Practical Implications

A compelling claim to the research into the conflict resolution methods of rural African American pastors was the unanimous reliance on Scripture as a guide for developing a unique conflict resolution method. Before this research, no survey participant had previous knowledge of the Thomas-Kilmann conflict management instrument. The TKI allowed the participants to infuse academic approaches to conflict resolution, in combination with Scripture, to broaden their view of the subject matter. Identifying a conflict management style through the results of the TKI proved to allow the pastors to identify with their specific characteristics in conflict

resolution. It allowed a theory or a concept to provide the educational opportunity for the research participants to self-evaluate and grow from the experience.

The study addresses the problems surrounding conflict within a congregation of Christian believers and the methods utilized to mitigate conflict. The goal is to increase awareness for those shepherding the flock. The most practical implication possible would be a renewed and committed approach for pastors to increase the effectiveness in conflict resolution. The approach would hopefully lower the detriment of internal conflict that destroys congregations and brings no glory to the Kingdom of God.

The results of the survey study provided the opportunity the researcher expected. The TKI conflict management MODE instrument provided awareness and educational opportunities on the subject matter, which otherwise would become known or exposed to the survey demographic. The survey results allowed the participants to identify their respective positions on conflict resolution methodology. The TKI assessment provided insight into the research participants' typical response to conflict situations using one or more of the five conflict-handling modes or styles: competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, and compromising. These modes reflected varying levels of assertiveness and cooperation. By identifying alternative conflict resolution styles and how and when to use them most effectively, the TKI assessment helps people reframe and defuse conflict, creating more productive outcomes. The survey results show that 71.4% of the research participants fell into the TKI conflict handling mode style *accommodating*. The accommodating style supports the Scriptural foundation on which the pastors based their respective conflict resolution methods. King Solomon wrote, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (NIV, 1985, Pro. 15:1). The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, instructed, " Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of

your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up" (NIV, 1985, Eph. 4:29). Paul presented more evidence of Scriptural conflict resolution methodology in his letter to the Colossians where he lamented, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (NIV, 1985, Col. 3:13).

RQ4 questioned the survey participants perceived effectiveness in their respective conflict resolution styles. A Scripture relied upon to support the perceived effectiveness of the pastors comes from one of Jesus' twelve disciples, Matthew, who wrote, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God" (NIV, 1985, Mat. 5:9). The researcher's familiarity with the surveyed demographic provided an inside view of the standard Scriptural references concerning conflict resolution.

Research Limitations

Research Population

The initial applicant pool consisted of forty-six pastors who met the delimitations for participation in the study. The study sought seven pastors for this study. The pool of forty-six consisted of forty male pastors and six female pastors. Only eight pastors responded to the invitation; only two female pastors responded. One female pastor decided she did not wish to sign the consent form and withdrew from consideration for the study. These circumstances left a remaining field of exactly seven research participants. Due to the exact number of participants for the study, no room for error in the event of losing a single participant therefore jeopardizing the research. This researcher decided to proceed with the existing group; however, this created an urgency to accomplish the data-gathering portion of the research in a tight time frame to avoid losing a single research participant. The researcher would have preferred more female pastors

participating in the study as females in the pulpit are a significant source of conflict that affects the rural African American church.

The research limitations included in the study suggest that the specific targeted demographic of the research would have a direct bearing on the duplication of the study. A broader inclusion of categories for the targeted survey group would produce different results. The lack of female pastor participants in the study proved to be a significant limitation as the mere concept of female pastors serving in the pulpit is a controversial source of conflict among the surveyed demographic.

The fact that the research pool was targeted from one source, The East Texas Regional Baptist Association membership (ETRBA), proved to be a research limitation. The limitation manifested by the discovery of commonly shared ideals regarding Biblical doctrine and pastoral duties, such as conflict resolution, created some similarities in the response of the survey participants. The geographical location created a limitation in the research due to the shared regional geography of the research participants.

Further Research

The delimitations of the research population represented a particular demographic group as the research target. The sample demographic's specific nature exposed the literature gap, which was the foundation of the research. The Apostle Paul addressed conflict in the church in his first letter to the Corinthians. The premise was that the church that does not deal with sin among the congregants will open doors to more problems. The church is not called to be judgmental of unbelievers, but the church is expected to confront and restore believers who are unrepentant of sins such as those Paul described in 1 Corinthians 5:11. The process in which this occurs is through the leadership of the shepherd of the flock. Leadership can help avoid this by leading

like selfless, loving shepherds that are examples of servants rather than ones that lord over others as written by Peter. (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Considering the study findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, the researcher provides the following recommendations and directions for future research.

The first recommendation for a future study would be to build upon the findings of this research. Conflict resolution methodology is a growing field of study evidenced by additions to the curriculums of Christian schools and universities. Conflict is a significant factor in the decline in church attendance, splits, and even church closures. The effectiveness of the shepherd of the flock in conflict resolution skills is a valuable characteristic for a church leader. This research focused on rural African American pastors' origin, background, and perceived effectiveness. A study researching the involvement of pastors as sources of conflict and the detriment caused to a congregation would be a revealing study.

The second recommendation would address the limitations of the research. The selection pool in the research resulted from a specific group who share similar Scriptural philosophies and beliefs that are deeply steeped in Southern Baptist tradition. A future study of conflict resolution drawn from a broader and more diverse research population or increasing the survey sample size would further the study into pastoral conflict resolution methodology.

The third recommendation for further research would be constructing the same research in a new context, location, or culture. Broadening the conflict resolution skills of pastors would apply to any congregation and pastor who shepherd Christ's church. Any denomination could benefit from the survey, identification, and exploration of any pastor's method of resolving conflict within the congregation. Regardless of the location or culture involved in future

research, the premise that conflict resides in every church is a given; however, the methods in which church leaders resolve conflict within the organization would be the basis of the research.

The fourth recommendation for further research would be re-assessing and expanding the theory, framework, or model the researcher, addressed in the study. The theory of the research was to determine the conflict resolution methodology of rural African American pastors and the origin, background, and perceived effectiveness of the methods used to address conflict in the church congregation. The researcher utilized a phenomenological research method to study the phenomenon of conflict within the church congregation. To better equip church leaders with available tools to resolve internal congregational conflict.

Summary

The research aimed to identify the common conflict resolution methods used by rural African American pastors and understand the background, origin and perceived effectiveness of the conflict resolution methods utilized by this specific demographic group.

The survey instruments utilized in the research were the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument (TKI) and a zoom-based video interview, including a questionnaire. The results of the TKI identified that the conflict resolution method *accommodating* was the most often employed by the survey group by revealing 71.4% of the research participants recorded *accommodating* as the method utilized by the researched demographic. The survey instrument provided an educational and self-reflective journey into conflict resolution by the researched demographic. All seven research participants who volunteered for this study completed all requested segments of the data collection activities and were compensated appropriately, as outlined in the researcher's prospectus for participating in the research.

The method used in the research was a qualitative phenomenological study. The goal was to examine the phenomena of conflict and explore the methods of conflict resolution from the perspective of the rural African American pastor.

The study's results determined that the path to becoming a senior pastor directly influenced their respective conflict resolution methods in pastoring a church. All pastors participating in the study followed the traditional journeyman path to the pulpit by serving as an understudy to a mentor senior pastor, often called a father in the ministry. 42.8% of the survey group attended seminary; however, this was before conflict resolution became a part of seminary curricula. The approach to resolving conflict was a direct result of Scripture and the tutelage of their respective mentors. The perceived effectiveness of the learned conflict resolution skills of the survey group was based on longevity as a senior pastor and the lack of involvement in forced resignations or church splits. The survey group collectively believed their conflict resolution methods effectively served their respective congregations.

The study's value was identifying conflict resolution leadership skills through the TKI and the impact of the results on the participants. Academic conflict management training has only recently become part of the curriculum of institutions of higher Christian education, though it is rapidly expanding. The conclusion was the value of conflict resolution training in the curriculums of Christian schools and the effectiveness of similar training for veteran pastors.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

In each interview, the following standardized open-ended question offered an opportunity for data collection:

1. Give a brief description of your position in the ministry.
2. How long have you served as a senior pastor?
3. What is your educational level?
3. How has conflict in the church affected your ministry?
4. What is your approach to conflict resolution?
5. Describe your perceived accuracy with the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.
6. Can you identify your conflict management style and describe its effectiveness?
7. Explain how Scripture influences your conflict management style among congregants.
8. Describe how the Bible guides your approach to responding to conflict in the church?
9. Describe if the TKI affected your approach to conflict resolution in the church?
10. Describe your experience as a participant in the research study.

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire

1. After taking the TKI, can you identify your conflict management style?
2. What is the origin of your approach to resolving conflict within the church?
3. How effective has your approach to resolving conflict as a pastor brought value to your congregation?
4. What impact has conflict had on the rural African American church?

Appendix C
IRB Recruitment Letter

Dear Pastor:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree in Christian Leadership from Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to understand the origins, background, and methods of conflict resolution methods utilized by rural African American pastors, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be senior pastors, who serve a predominantly African American congregation, located in a rural setting. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a two-stage research process. The first stage is to complete an online survey instrument designed to determine the participants conflict management style; the survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. The second stage is a follow-up zoom-based interview call scheduled to last approximately 20 minutes. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information on participating in the research and to schedule the survey and interview. A consent document is attached to this email and contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email: [REDACTED] prior to scheduling interviews. Participants will receive a twenty-five (\$25) dollar Amazon® gift card for participating in the research study.

Sincerely,

Darrell W. Rowe

Doctoral student, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University
[REDACTED].

Appendix D

IRB Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study in conflict and conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors.

Principal Investigator: Darrell W. Rowe, Doctoral student, Liberty University

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be the Senior Pastor of a predominantly African American congregation set in a rural location. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research. The purpose of the study is to identify the conflict resolution styles of rural African American pastors. The goal is to understand how pastors manage conflict within the congregation and the origins of the methods used. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. The first task is to contact me for the link to the website to complete the Thomas-Kilmann conflict management assessment. Upon completion of the assessment, the participant and researcher will receive a summary report of the results. Once logged on to the site, the assessment takes 15-20 minutes, is self-explanatory, and easy to complete.

2. The second task will be to participate in a zoom-based interview with the researcher. The interview is scheduled to last 15-20 minutes and is intended to discuss conflict within the congregation and methods of conflict resolution. This interview will be recorded in efforts to accurately document and transcribe the data.

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are increased awareness of the various approaches to resolving conflict within the congregation, and the opportunity for self-evaluation in personal methods of resolving conflict and take a look at its effectiveness. "The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life."

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

Participant responses will be anonymous. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

1. 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.

2. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Each participant that completes both stages of the research will receive a (\$25) gift card from Amazon®. Each study participant will be asked at the end of the interview the method in which they would like to receive the gift card.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

The researcher conducting this study is Darrell W. Rowe. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. G. Bredfeldt, at [REDACTED].

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.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

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

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix E

ETRBA

East Texas Regional Baptist Association
PO Box 35789 • Tyler, Texas 75701

February 1, 2022

Rev. Darrell W. Rowe
[REDACTED]

Dear Rev. Rowe,

Your request to utilize the membership records of the ETRBA for your research project has been APPROVED.

As discussed, we request that these records only be used for the expressed purpose and they not be shared without additional discussion and approvals.

We wish you the best as you move forward in your educational pursuits.

Thank you for considering the East Texas Regional Baptist Association.

Sincere regards,
[REDACTED]

Logan Babineaux, D.Min
Special Assistant to the President

/lcw

For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go..... Joshua 1:9