

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

PASTORS WITH MISSION AND PURPOSE PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIC  
LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHURCH—  
A MULTI-CASE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Nancy Brown Smith

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative multiple-case study aimed to explore pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership at churches in Virginia. This researcher sought to understand the strategic leadership of pastors with mission and purpose ways of growing thriving churches. This research defined *strategic leadership* as “the capacity to learn, change, and have managerial wisdom” (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515) based on the Strategic Leadership Theory (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Declining church membership, attendance at services, or even closures is alarming (Felicetti, 2021), and this research may help churches facing such problems. A rationale for this study was to explore pastors' viable avenues that may help improve church membership or attendance at services for others growing God's Kingdom. Christian universities train individuals who are: *Champions for Christ* (Liberty University); *Strengthened for lives of purpose, services, and leadership* (Pepperdine University). Some individuals plant and grow various membership-size churches in the United States. Why do some churches grow extremely large numerically, and others do not? What are pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services? This researcher conducted a study at 11 purposively selected churches to try to answer these questions and others. Within the population, 19 participants through face-to-face interviewing provided essential data. The analyzed data revealed five themes as beneficial for how pastors may improve church strategies to grow thriving churches. This study's strategic leadership data analysis allowed for advancement to the leadership study field of churches and Strategic Leadership Theory.

*Keywords:* Strategic leadership, pastors, ministry leaders, mission, perceptions, church membership growth, church service attendance

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### Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to the loving remembrance of my grandmother. She instilled in others an insatiable desire for knowledge after graduating from college and working as an educator in the 1940s. I thank her; I stand on her shoulders, a legacy that lives on.

I also dedicate this research to the remembrance of my wonderful parents, who instilled in me a love of learning. I am grateful to them for accepting God's call to ministry, for giving *guiding words* to keep the family on the right track, not only academically but spiritually, and for ministering to others. Additionally, I am grateful for their commitment to always placing God first and becoming more like Jesus.

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to the loving memory of my brother, my *high school assistant principal*, who left to be with the Lord shortly before I could finish this. Your good guidance paid off.

Finally, I dedicate this research to my wonderful daughters. God adores you, and I do as well. Keep kindness in your spirit, brightness in your eyes, and a pen in your hand as you travel through life. My prayer is that you "Let God instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; Let Him guide you with His Loving Eye" (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Psalm 32:8). As the best daughters a mother could ask for, I thank you for understanding and being patient with me during my many years of working and then returning home to study.

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I thank God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the wisdom, stamina, and motivation required to accomplish this goal. Everything is attainable through God, and nothing is possible without His Grace. When Jesus Christ went to the Cross for us and rose with all powers, He demonstrated the greatest passion. I thank Him for the energy and love required to complete this doctoral study.

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**List of Abbreviations**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

*Liberty University Christian Leadership Doctoral Programs Handbook (LU Handbook)*

Great Man Theory (GMT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Interview Question (IQ)

Liberty University (LU)

Liberty University Institutional Review Board (LU IRB)

Research Question (RQ)

Strategic Leadership Theory (SLT)

Top Management Teams (TMT)

Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT)

United States of America (U.S.)

United States Postal Service (USPS)

Upper Echelons (UP)

Upper Echelons Theory (UET)

Virginia (VA)

Visionary Leadership Theory (VLT)

## **CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN**

### **Introduction**

For some time, understanding leadership has been a concern of scholars, with increased leadership theories being developed and explored (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020; Gaitho, 2019; Grandy, 2013; Ogochi, 2018; Pali, 2019). According to Drovdahl and Jones (2020), throughout history, the concept of leaders' character, competencies, and context shaped the understanding of leadership. Likewise, Ogochi (2018) indicated that the need for strategic leadership is more critical now for the church than ever before. Grandy (2013) related the Strategic Leadership Theory (SLT) to the church and indicated its importance for it. Additionally, a decline in church membership and individuals' attendance at church services is alarming and necessitates research (Fashant & Evan, 2020; Felicetti, 2021). Finally, Pali (2019) indicated that leadership importance for society varies. Thus, covered is an overview and foundational framework that orients the SLT to understand how it applies to the church based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders.

Provided is a backdrop to the research problem and a summary of the most relevant literature. Also included are the theological, theoretical, sociological, and historical contexts for this research and this researcher's relationship to the problem. Specified is a statement of the problem, which built a case for researching pastors' perceptions and strategic leadership for the church. The purpose statement provided the focus and intentions of this study. The assumptions and delimitations were the study's starting point and boundaries. Also, included are essential definitions and the significance of the study. This chapter concluded with the design summary.

### **Background to the Problem**

Many authors (Grandy, 2013; Jenssen, 2019; Jentile, 2021; Gaitho, 2019) addressed leadership and found similarities regarding critical decision-making and planning for organizations, including churches. Grandy (2013) wrote, “In extending a strategic leadership lens to the church setting, the contribution of the research was fourfold” (p. 617). Grandy (2013) indicated:

The contribution was built upon previous research to expand strategic leadership to the church; the research demonstrated how strategic leadership could balance and help with the long-time survival of the church; it illustrated how effective leadership is relational in the church; and that the church’s successful mission depends on more than financial measures. (p. 617)

Grandy (2013) denoted a need and an essential aspect to review strategic leadership and the church. Additionally, Gaitho (2019) indicated that “the role of religion in uniting and guiding humankind is one that cannot be ignored” (p. 8). More specifically, other authors (Atkinson & Rose, 2020; Bretherton & Dundar, 2020; Drovdaahl & Jones, 2020; Patton, 2017; Samimi et al., 2019; Threlfall, 2019) covered a plethora of information regarding strategic leadership thinking, effective leaders, ethical attributes, and church growth.

According to Jenssen (2019), “research on strategic leadership in the local church is limited” (p. 9). Nevertheless, strategic leadership ideas for business, adjusting for the particulars, can be used in the local church (Gaith, 2019). Literature is available regarding leadership, but there is still contention regarding the available information and what is still needed (Grandy, 2013). However, even with previous research (Ayers, 2006; Drovdaahl & Jones, 2020; Grandy, 2013; Pali, 2019), this researcher and others were left with many questions that required answers. Thus this study aimed to explore the church’s need for leadership (i.e., ethical and strategic). However, before providing the in-depth essence of a study of strategic leadership within the

church, literature on strategic leadership revealed that the topic is now readily studied among practitioners, scholars, and theorists (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020; Gaito, 2019; Jenssen, 2019; Vera et al., 2022). The literature reviewed indicated that strategic leadership should be as crucial for nonprofit organizations as for-profit ones (Grandy, 2013).

To understand strategic leadership and the church, this researcher needed to explore theories relating to them. Bonardi et al. (2018) cited Hunt (1991), indicating that “theories of strategic leadership are differentiated from supervisory theories of leadership in that the former is concerned with the leadership of organizations, while the latter focus on leadership in organizations” (p. V). In addition, when researching the church, Bretherton and Dunbar (2020) suggested that many facets of the church regarding growth warranted investigation. Bretherton and Dunbar (2020) predicted that “congregations which grow, or seek to grow, beyond 150 people will, by necessity, undergo significant structural reorganization” (p. 63). They also specified that congregations between 500 and 1500 members would require a small sub-division for membership involvement (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). Therefore, investigated further were strategic leadership and church growth.

With existing research (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020; Drovdahl & Jones, 2020; Grandy, 2013) and the data collected for this study, this researcher may use this study’s information to benefit other churches. This in-depth study allowed for a summation of strategic leadership information that may not be readily available to this extent, with a goal to benefit either small or even more significant churches. Elkington (2013) indicated that pastors were leaving the vocational ministry daily to do something else, which was detrimental for churches, showing declining attendance figures. Also, Cnaan and Scott (2021) wrote, “Scholars of faith traditions and congregational organizational behavior center their research on clergy” (p. 382). Likewise,



Grandy (2013) indicated that a gap existed and needed SLT research expansion to the church. Therefore, this researcher aimed to close the gap with new strategic leadership and church research with a review of existing research.

One way to understand strategic leadership and its benefits for the church was to conduct an in-depth qualitative multiple-case study. To help with the goal, this researcher presented historical elements leading to strategic leadership. Gaitho (2019) ascertained that “in Christianity, Jesus demonstrated various traits of servant leadership more so exemplified in washing his disciples’ feet. Servant leaders lead by example” (p. 9). Therefore, it would be wise to understand the church’s needs and how to accomplish them (Gaitho, 2019).

According to Drov Dahl and Jones (2020), the importance of a leader’s character, the skills to be a leader, and where one serves shape one’s understanding of leadership. This qualitative research study focused on exploring pastors’ processes of church strategic leadership. This study included understanding pastors’ and ministry leaders’ perceptions of strategic leadership, strategic goals, and how they carried out the strategic mission for the church. Consequently, this researcher explored the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders that could benefit pastors and add to the strategic leadership research field.

### **Theological Context**

The appropriate plan for pastors should be what the Bible indicates regarding leadership. In the Bible, there are biblical and theological foundations for leadership. Pastors must lead biblically (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Philippians 2:3; James 1:5; Psalm 25:4-5). For example, Moses was a great leader (Exodus 14:13), followed by Joshua (Joshua 1:10). Others were great leaders: Daniel (Daniel 2:48) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 7:1-3).

According to Patton (2017), “Nehemiah, a rather ordinary person in a servant position, became a transformational leader when apprised of the discontent of the postexilic Jews in Jerusalem and Judah” (p. 13). Nehemiah’s strategy is very much applicable today regardless of the type of organization (Muthuke, 2020). Likewise, Muthuku (2020) indicated, “Through prayer, Nehemiah actively engaged strategic thinking whenever he faced a challenging situation, and he involved the whole community in work (p. 71). Therefore, churches need good leadership processes like other organizations (Grandy, 2013). Also, according to Ruffner and Huizing (2017), “The integration of biblical principles with leadership theory has proven a monumental undertaking” (p. 37).

The church provides the means for people to not be in darkness but see the light. The Bible reads, “And He spoke a parable to them: ‘Can the blind lead the blind? Will they, not both fall into the ditch?’” (*Holy Bible: New King James Bible*, 1982, Luke 6:39). Threlfall (2019) indicated, “salvation may be conceived as coming ‘to the knowledge of the truth’ (2 Tim 3:7) and the effect of the proclamation of the gospel as opening ‘their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light’ (Acts 26:18)” (p. 555). The pastor is to strategically plan necessary ways to accommodate the people so that they see, understand, and come to know the ways of Jesus (Acts 26:18).

Drovdahl and Jones (2020) concurred, “Christian character is the consistency between Christlikeness in the inner and outer person” (p. 580). One must understand that after being appointed, leaning on the Holy Spirit should drive an individual as they have a job in the kingdom of God (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020). Drovdahl and Jones (2020) ascertained, “Kingdom leaders are followers of Christ whom He appoints with authority, equips, and sends to influence people to pursue the Father's will and who demonstrate the active indwelling presence of the

Holy Spirit in their lives and ministry” (p. 579). Also, the allegation is that pastors should lead according to the Spirit (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020). Drovdahl and Jones (2020) purported that equipped kingdom leaders have what they need to lead successfully. Additionally, “the importance of the Holy Spirit’s role in Christian leadership cannot be overstated” (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020, pp. 578-579).

Patterson (2018) indicated, “Christian leadership assumes a relational process in pursuit of a common purpose. It is a process which, while expecting obedience to Jesus’ commands (John 15:10), is devoid of coercive structures that require accomplishment” (p. 82). Likewise, Jenssen (2019) advocated that the church apply strategic business leadership. The literature focused on how nonprofit leaders, such as pastors, contribute to organizational outcomes as strategic leaders (Jenssen, 2019). Furthermore, pastors should understand who they are to change, teach, and lead others (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020).

According to Nielsen and Marrone (2018), needed desperately is a review of humility in organizations, and human virtue is vital for us all, including pastors. Also, Breedlove (2016) revealed that humility is essential for today's leaders. Pastors should understand virtue better than most, as additional authors (Ayers, 2006; Deborah, 2018) wrote about the importance of humility when it comes to individuals leading the church and other places. Accordingly, Ayers (2006) penned that Jesus is the supreme epitome of humility, and Paul’s appeal to the Philippians (*Holy Bible: New King James Version, 1982*, Philippians 2: 5-11) was to be like Him and not only know Jesus. The pastors and church leaders have that same mandate for God’s people (Philippians 2: 5-11). They must know Jesus and strive to be like Him (Breedlove, 2016).

Ayers (2006) asked, “Is there (or should there be) a connection between what a leader does and what his or her purpose is in doing it?” (p. 16). Likewise, Jaleha and Machuki (2018)

indicated that the applicable policies should lead to church improvement or growth of the Body of Christ. Pastors run churches like other organizations today but should have God as the Head (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Romans 8: 28-31). Thus, understanding effective leadership is fundamental for the church (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020; Gaitho, 2019; Grandy, 2013). According to Gaitho (2019), religion serves as the backbone of ethics, values, and morals, thus the cornerstone of societies” (p. 9).

According to Cnaan and Scott (2021), one must not forget that pastors require help. They indicated, “While many sources address selected members in workplace groups, especially in interdisciplinary groups, little is known about who is selected to assist congregational leaders” (Cnaan & Scott, 2021, p. 383). Required is information regarding the church and how it thrives (Cnaan & Scott, 2021). Schoeman (2020) indicated that since congregational life is complex, “the interaction and engagement with the environment may differ from congregation to congregation” (326). Thus, this researcher needed to interview an adequate number of participants to obtain a broad perspective of strategic leadership and the church.

### **Theoretical Context**

Reviewed was the theological basis for strategic leadership in the church, and also important is literature regarding its theoretical nature. According to Ayers (2006), “The great proliferation of ideas and methodologies that explore organizations and leadership over the past fifty years reveals that there is a wide variety of theoretical approaches that explain the leadership phenomenon” (p. 3). Boal and Hooijberg (2001) revealed that in the last 20 years, the study of strategic leadership has returned and changed tremendously. Conversely, strategic leadership relating to the church is relatively new (Grandy, 2013). In addition, some authors (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020; Fashant & Evan, 2020) addressed strategic leadership in nonprofit

organizations, indicating that strategic leadership should also benefit the church. Consequently, Fashant and Evan (2020) based their information on volunteerism in nonprofit organizations and conducted a mix-method to interview participants. So, how is strategic leadership imperative for the church? This question and others required answers, and this study provided some identifiable answers. Information is available about strategic leadership, but not enough about strategic leadership in the church (Grandy, 2013).

In addition, “existing definitions typically either reduce strategic leadership to the creation of meaning, vision, and setting the objectives of the organization or merely specify who strategic leaders are” (Samimi et al., 2019, p. 3). Notably, understanding early leadership theories would help with understanding strategic leadership. The Great Man Theory (GMT) (Mouton, 2019) and Upper Echelon Theory (UET) (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) have led to other theories, such as Transactional, Transformational, and Visionary (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). One aspect of the Great Man Theory is that, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership (Cherry, 2019). The Transactional Leadership Theory (TLT) and Visionary Leadership Theory (VLT) are derivatives of different leadership theories, such as SLT and UET (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Bryman, 1992; Finkelstein et al., 2009). Since being intertwined with each other, vital to this research was a review of the relevant theories.

The theoretical foundation correlated SLT with the UET. Good leadership equals good performance for the company, and bad has the opposite effect on the company (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018). An understanding of SLT as many parts of it exist, and the UET was a small part (Hambrick, 2007). Quong and Walker (2010) asked, “What is strategic leadership, and what do strategic leaders do?” (p. 22). This researcher wanted answers to those questions and more.

Quong and Walker (2010) continued, “When leaders engaged in the management process of analyzing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating, they were basically considered to be strategic” (p. 22). Quong and Walker (2010) established seven principles relating to the SLT, with planning being a significant factor. According to Thompson (2019), only some leadership theories will be suitable for some organizations and can help skills development and make better leaders.

Additional strategic leadership research could be helpful for organizations, including the church. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) and Grandy (2013) indicated a need to understand strategic leadership. In addition, individuals in some geographical areas may need to understand strategic leadership more. Therefore, because of the gap, it was necessary to investigate if strategic leadership patterns existed in churches that could be a source for small and large churches. Conceivably, other researchers and pastors in other parts of Virginia (VA) or the United States (U.S.) could find this study helpful.

This researcher was concerned with the pastors' responsibility for the church, their characteristics (i.e., humility), and what they do (i.e., to spread the gospel). It was also important to know how they do it (i.e., grow the membership) and how they affect church outcomes (i.e., develop God's Kingdom). This researcher's study narrowed the literature gap and explored processes to help pastors and ministry leaders with church growth and individuals' church attendance. The summation of pastors' perceptions regarding SLT should be valuable.

### **Sociological Context**

Bretherton and Dunbar (2020) provided information on reasons for church declining or stagnating church growth. They offered two main reasons: the church growth movement—based within the denominations for their needs and the Social Science approach—focused on

academics (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). A thought-provoking factor was that the qualities of the leaders might be an issue, and the author provided a reason why a church may not be growing (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). Bretherton & Dunbar (2020) wrote, “Single-leader congregations are limited to around 150 members” (p. 63). Pali (2019) provided information that “development is linked to mission and used to enable humanity to live life in fullness and confront social injustices” (p. 202). Thus, provided are many reasons to explore pastors’ perceptions of the SLT.

This study addressed the gap in the literature regarding strategic leadership for a better understanding of it as it relates to the church. This researcher reviewed strategic leadership literature to uncover advantages for pastors and ministry leaders. This study could be instrumental for churches that focused on training and developing ministry leaders, especially pastors, who saw a need for improvement. With this researcher providing a comprehensive forum of strategic leadership from the perspectives of pastors and ministry leaders, there was a discovery that can add strategic leadership development to church activities, with the possibility to improve individuals’ attendance at church services and improve its communities.

### **Historical Context**

Can leadership strategies for for-profit organizations also benefit nonprofits such as churches (Grandy, 2013)? The for-profit leadership development strategies are relevant to aspects of church activities, addressed later during the findings of this study. According to Krispin (2020), “Despite the importance of Christian leadership development, programs and plans for developing leaders sometimes seem unclear, unfocused, or random” (p. 19). This research would help identify good techniques, standard procedures, or methods to accomplish strategic leadership goals that may benefit pastors. Krispin (2020) added, “Efforts to develop Christian leaders would benefit from a more clearly articulated, comprehensive, research-

grounded theory underlying the practice of Christian leadership development” (p. 19). When development programs are determined to be suitable for the church, it is wise to know how they benefit the church, and this research should help with that understanding.

Essential was the development and reason to conduct this research study, assessing the strategic leadership perceptions of 19 individuals. As a result, participants could discuss processes regarding strategic leadership to enable the church to succeed. For example, according to Pali (2019), “there is a shift in the definition of development from the main focus on economic growth, infrastructure, and material gain, to human development and life transformation” (p. 202). Likewise, according to Martin (2020), “an organization’s senior leaders give their positions at the apex of power within the organization, shape its vision, strategies, organizational design, and culture (p. 1191). Regarding organizations’ importance, all the issue discussed regarding strategic leadership relates to churches and is also a reason for conducting this study.

### **The Researcher’s Relationship to the Problem**

This researcher, for many years, attended a fast-growing church. This researcher’s hometown church is not fast-growing. A decline in church attendance exists due to people moving away from the town or not seeing a need to attend. Many churches in the small town appear to be in a slow decline in members and a decrease in individuals attending church services. One of this researcher’s objectives was that this research would benefit the small hometown church and other similar small-town churches in other areas. The main goal was to benefit pastors at churches needing and wanting help, no matter the location, and possibly allow them to thrive in ways never thought possible. Hence, research to benefit churches, whether they are small or large.



### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Creswell (2014), “A problem might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study” (p. 50). In providing the background to the problem, this researcher summarized research on strategic leadership related to churches and explained the gap in the literature and the reasons for it. For example, information indicated that some churches in VA face a decline in church attendance and membership and that there are church closures. Felicetti (2021) indicated:

Just before the pandemic began, a study published by Faith Communities Today, a multifaith research organization, found a 7 percent median decline in religious attendance across the country. Although membership in our church rose until 2020, attendance had declined since 2014. (p. 1)

Church closures or declining attendance may not result from pastoral leadership deficiencies, and a strategic leadership review would not make much of a difference. However, there are instances when an in-depth understanding of strategic leadership may help church growth or attendance at church services (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020; Fletcher, 2009). This researcher conducted the study for those reasons.

According to Badshah (2012), “Across the world, many organizations spend a good amount of their revenue on leadership development” (p. 58). Companies want the best leaders and best practices and achieve the best goals (Badshah, 2012). In addition, Badshah (2012) ascertained, “Yet the advice given to managers about leadership and leader development is often overly complex and sometimes contradictory” (p. 58).

Banzato and Sierra (2016) suggested that churches are in just as much of a need for strategic leadership development programs, if not more, than other corporations, for-profit or not. Therefore, research needs exist regarding top managers in organizations (Banzato & Sierra,

2016). The information may help the pastors with activities to counteract membership decline or increase church attendance as they align themselves as the top managers (Banzato & Sierra, 2016), leading houses of worship.

A positive benefit the church has that other organizations may not be privy to is that church members are usually eager to help and volunteer when asked to do so (Fashant & Evan, 2020). When pastors keep the members informed of situations, they are usually willing to help solve problems (Fashant & Evan, 2020). According to Fashant and Evan (2020), members may understand what they can do or what is required when the pastor has a good leadership plan. When problems do occur, perhaps, that is when strategic leadership may benefit the church (Fashant & Evan, 2020), and pastors should be able to rely on members for help and support.

For church leadership, essential are pastors and ministry leaders. Due to the importance of leadership in VA churches, this study discovered what pastors or ministry leaders do to increase church attendance and membership growth. There is reason to believe problems exist in churches, similar to problems in a for-profit organization (Grandy, 2013), and pastors should want to correct the problems.

According to Schoeman (2020), “Congregations are communities where believers in the triune God meet and celebrate their relationship and serve the Lord” (p. 321). Additionally, Schoeman (2020) indicated a purpose and a mission for the church and that the meaning of the church must be understood. Research literature regarding strategic leadership indicated that strategic leadership should be fundamental for the church (Grandy, 2013; Jentile, 2021; Jenssen, 2019; Krispin, 2020).

Current literature falls short due to limitations regarding the churches (Grandy, 2013). This researcher explored the strategies of pastors and ministry leaders responsible for and

accountable to the church. This information could help other pastors or ministry leaders implement strategies to improve some church problems—as strategic leadership should align with the church to offer best practices.

This researcher addressed what constitutes leadership or strategic leadership and what perceived strategic activities might benefit a church. The activities of the pastors indicated they lead strategically with missions and purposes for the church. A review and analysis of data answered this researcher's five central questions and referenced viable avenues to improve church membership and attendance at services to help grow God's Kingdom.

This qualitative case study explored pastors' necessary strategic leadership activities to help the church with individual attendance at services. Helping with attendance at church services may improve membership growth and vice versa. Since Grandy (2013) denoted a gap in the literature regarding strategic leadership and the church, this researcher conducted a research study, closed the gap, and provided value to pastors, ministry leaders, and others. Is strategic leadership a way to increase church attendance and membership growth?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership at 11 churches in VA. For this research, strategic leadership involved the "capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515), and the Strategic leadership Theory (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) guided this study. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at services to grow God's Kingdom.

### **Research Questions**

The following five research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What are pastors,' associate pastors,' co-pastors,' or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services?

**RQ2.** What are the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning?

**RQ3.** Based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders, what commonalities exist for strategic leadership practices employed among the 11 different churches?

**RQ4.** What concerns do pastors and ministry leaders have about strategic leadership, a leading factor in for-profit organizations' success?

**RQ5.** What are the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services?

RQ1 was a focal point of the study to understand the standard practices of the participants. RQ2 helped to establish many questions for the interviewees. For RQ3, it was essential to understand commonalities among different pastors and ministry leaders at different churches, as that information should benefit other churches. Also, RQ4 provided strategic leadership information as valuable for the church. Additionally, RQ5 data provided comprehensive research regarding church membership growth and service attendance.

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

The assumptions and delimitations helped frame this research study. Provided are the assumptions and the delimitations (i.e., boundaries) that followed the assumptions.

#### **Research Assumptions**

The ten research assumptions listed below guided this study.

1. A decline in church membership and attendance at services
2. Pastors need for increased church membership and attendance at services

3. VA pastors plans for membership growth or want them
4. VA pastors plans to increase church attendance or want help
5. A demonstrated literature need for strategic leadership in churches
6. The pastors of large churches willingness to help others by sharing their knowledge
7. Research to benefit churches in rural areas
8. Pastors with the hearts to grow the church but may lack strategic leadership
9. Pastors responsibilities to include the church's mission, vision, and success
10. Church membership decline—hurting church and the community in which it resides

### **Delimitations of the Research Design**

The five delimitations listed below helped define the criteria in this researcher's study.

1. Delimited to churches in existence for at least 15 years
2. Further delimited to church membership between 500 and 3000
3. Delimited to churches in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties
4. Further delimited to pastors with a church tenure of 10 years or more
5. Delimited to Baptist-affiliated or Non-denominational affiliated Christian churches

### **Definition of Terms**

Defined below are terms pertinent to this study, with some supported by the literature.

1. *Associate Pastor*: One who ministers God's Word and holds the title of associate pastor
2. *Assistant Pastor*: One who ministers God's Word and holds the title of assistant pastor
3. *Church Attendance Decline*: A reduced number of Sunday service attendees
4. *Church Attendance Increase*: An increased number of Sunday service attendees
5. *Church Membership Growth*: An increased number of church members

6. *Church Membership Decline*: A reduced number of members on the church's roster
7. *Co-Pastor*: A preacher designated as co-pastor
8. *Community Leadership*: A practice of enhancing the conditions of individuals by serving the community and family structure and providing refuge for those in need
9. *Discipleship*: Spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and helping others to become like Him (*Holy Bible, New King James Version*, 1982; John 13:35)
10. *Executive Minister*: One who ministers God's Word, assists the pastor with church-obligated tasks and holds the title of executive minister
11. *Evangelism*: The process of going out into the world to share the Christian gospel so that others are spiritually saved (Matthew 28:19-20)
12. *Humility*: A dispositional quality of a person – whether the leader or an employee – that reflects a self-view that something greater than the self exists (Ou et al., 2014)
13. *Lead Pastor*: A preacher ministers God's Word in a church, is responsible for church leadership, and holds the title of lead pastor
14. *Leadership*: Showing others the way (Northouse, 2004; 2016)
15. *Ministry Leader*: An individual leading a church department (e.g., Women's Ministry Chair, Minister of Education, Minister of Music, Deacon Chair, or other chairs)
16. *Nonprofit Organization*: A corporation with a 501(c)(3) exemption, such as a church
17. *Pastor*: A preacher ministers God's Word in a church, is responsible for church leadership, and holds the title of pastor
18. *Senior Pastor*: A preacher ministers God's Word in a church, is responsible for church leadership, and holds the title of senior pastor
19. *Standard leadership practices*: Pastors implemented plans as reasons for membership growth and members' increase at church services
20. *Strategic leadership*: Involves "the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515)
21. *Upper Echelon Theory (UET)*: Leadership based on top management (Hambrick & Mason, 1984)

### Significance of the Study

The significance of the study has theological, theoretical, and conceptual implications. The detailed strategic leadership information from participants at successful churches may make a difference for churches facing declining membership or attendance at church services. SLT, the theory guiding this study, should be expanded for the benefit of the church (Grandy, 2013). Consequently, this study expanded the literature regarding SLT and the church, highlighting others' research (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Drovdaahl & Jones, 2020; Elkington et al., 2015; Felicetti, 2021; Grandy, 2013; Ogochi, 2018). Additionally, this study may provide pastors with information to help grow their church membership by knowing what has occurred in other research (Ayers, 2006; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020; Carter & Greer, 2013; Grandy, 2013), and at other churches. Pastors are leaders commissioned by God to help grow His Kingdom (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Matthew 28: 19-20). Therefore, understanding how to lead strategically is vital for church existence (Ogochi, 2018).

According to Grandy (2013), a gap in the literature existed. This researcher investigated what pastors or ministry leaders think regarding missions, visions, and strategies for the church and the processes they use to bring the church's mission and vision into reality. This study could help pastors with the knowledge needed to implement new church processes. According to Ogochi (2018), "Through a proper church strategic leadership, there is a high likelihood of coming up with the church organizational design that will give a road map to the success of the church's strategies" (p. 34). With the current amount of information available, there is still a gap in the literature regarding strategic leadership and the church. Understanding the pastors' or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership may lead to new ways of increasing church membership and improving declining church service attendance for some churches.

Whether confirming current or adding new data, additional research helped expand the leadership field while possibly benefitting pastors. This study may benefit pastors who may not have known before this conducted study that there may be different avenues they could take to help with goals and objectives. In addition, other pastors may use this conglomerate of data from successful pastors and researchers to build a thriving church.

### **Summary of the Design**

Based on Grandy's (2013) indication, this researcher provided an understanding of the strategic leadership practices of pastors and ministry leaders to benefit the church. Ogochi (2018) wrote that "for any church to thrive like any other organization out there, there is a need for its leadership to consider strategy, structure, and systems as very vital components of the church design" (p. 35). Additionally, preserving the sacred nature differentiates the church from other organizations (Ogochi, 2018). Thus, the imperative was SLT with implications for the church.

This researcher used a qualitative, multiple-case interview-based research design to discern pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership. Comparative literature guided the study relative to strategic leadership studies for nonprofit organizations, specifically churches (Grandy, 2013). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "If a concept or phenomenon needs to be explored and understood because little research has been done on it or because it involves an unstudied sample, then it merits a qualitative approach" (p. 19). Therefore, appropriate was a qualitative study to understand the pastors' strategic leadership perceptions of church procedures. In addition, the case study design method made data collection possible to answer this study's five central research questions.

Badshah (2012) implied that using only surveys has been a problem in understanding leadership. Also, Badshah (2012) warranted that "Despite numerous theories and volumes of



research, little cumulative knowledge has been gained. Much of the research has not been helpful precisely because it has neglected the observation of real events and focused instead on questionnaire response” (p. 49). This researcher expanded research regarding strategic leadership for the church by conducting interviews for data collection. After interviewing 19 pastors and ministry leaders in their natural environment instead of using a survey format, the data analysis provided an understanding of pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership.

This multiple-case study explored pastors' and ministry leaders' strategic leadership thoughts or processes that benefitted their church, and that may help other pastors. During the interviews, data indicated the church's processes and pastors' and ministry leaders' thoughts about strategic leadership that pertained to membership growth (i.e., numerically and spiritually), church service attendance, and leadership activities.

This researcher verbally obtained specific demographics needed to establish participants' qualifications but did not analyze the demographics. This researcher collected the pastors' agreement to participate before conducting the face-to-face interviews. The interviews were to determine how pastors perceive the strategic leadership process as a benefit for the church by answering 23 questions designed to solicit data that, when analyzed, could help others increase church attendance at services or increase membership growth. The aggregate data provided answers to this study's five RQs. Thus, this researcher analyzed data collected during the interviews of pastors and ministry leaders for each of the 11 churches to detect the same or similar logic regarding strategic leadership for the church as a benefit, as indicated by others (Grandy, 2013; Ogochi, 2018; Phipps & Burbach, 2010).

This study helped alleviate gaps in understanding strategic leadership and its effectiveness for churches with correctly and consistently analyzed data. According to Creswell

and Creswell (2020), it is not unusual for a researcher to be the primary instrument in qualitative research. Thus, this researcher was the primary instrument for data collection. The sample consisted of pastors and ministry leaders of 11 churches in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties that meet the set criteria, which this researcher purposively selected. This researcher limited the maximum number of participants at each location to four. However, due to circumstances relating to Covid, and other issues, this researcher interviewed mainly two participants per location. Therefore, four participants at each location in the best interest of all involved did not materialize. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that timing for research is crucial, and this researcher allocated it appropriately, even though site numbers remained.

As a qualitative study, keeping the interview process manageable was important. For example, if one of the 11 churches did not agree or complete the initial consent for any reason, this researcher asked another church to participate. Likewise, this researcher asked the secondary churches to participate when a church did not include at least three participants. Two pastors were experts in the study. After the data was collected, it was analyzed using QSR NVivo. QSR NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software package. It is “more than just a tool for organizing and managing data. NVivo12 offers an intuitive qualitative data analysis experience that helps you uncover deeper insights” (QSR International). This researcher used the software package to access themes throughout the data, including commonalities among the different churches, that provided information for the five central RQs.

Chapter One provided the background to the problem and showed the logic for the study. The four perspectives also helped to understand SLT and why to apply it to the church. Detailed was the study’s importance, and all information led to the research’s vitality. Chapter Two overviews the study’s frameworks, providing the backdrop to justify conducting the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two creates the foundation of this study by providing the theological and theoretical frameworks. The Theological Framework section provides the biblical and theological perspective that undergirds the strategic leadership literature. The Theoretical Framework section provides leadership theories and strategies literature. Both frameworks are relevant for building a rationale for this study and a foundation for understanding the perceptions of strategic leadership as it relates to the church. Finally, the Related Literature section offers comprehensively syntheses highly described literature.

Chapter Two begins with an overview of the SLT literature, which provides the Theological Framework for the Study—the theological foundation for the biblical basis of this study. Next, this researcher offers the context for this study by exploring literature relevant to the problem. Finally, the literature review demonstrates the importance of the problem studied and identifies a gap in the literature.

There was a need to research strategic leadership, emphasizing pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of it as it relates to the church. Therefore, for this study, a literature review was imperative to understand more about strategic leadership related to the church. This researcher focused on strategic leadership to understand its connection to the church based on other relevant literature (Deborah, 2018; Drov Dahl & Jones, 2020; Grandy, 2013). This literature review provides readers with an overview of relevant studies related to strategic leadership, leadership, church membership growth, and attendance at services and creates the foundation for this researcher's study (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Bonardi et al., 2018; Davis-Olds, 2017; Fashant & Evan, 2020; Grandy, 2013; Janssen, 2019; Ogochi, 2018). In addition, the literature review

provides definitions and other pertinent information, such as relevant theories (Bass, 1990; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Finkelstein et al., 2009; Hambrick, 2007; Thompson, 2019). This qualitative multiple-case study was to explore pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at services to grow God's Kingdom.

The research involving strategic leadership and the church has evolved, but not as much as researchers would like (Grandy, 2013). This researcher explored pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership in 11 Richmond, VA, and surrounding county churches. A theological framework is essential to this study. This researcher penned aspects of the Bible regarding good leaders and their behaviors.

### **Theological Framework for the Study**

Strategic leadership research begins as an avenue for pastors and others to prefill obligations, including increasing church attendance and membership growth (Atkinson & Rose, 2020; Ayers, 2006; Baumgartner, 2018; Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). Many authors in this study addressed some form of strategic leadership, development, and planning related to organizations, including the church (Boal & Hoorijberg, 2000; Grandy, 2013; Krispin, 2020; Ogochi, 2018; Pali, 2019; Zigan et al., 2019). However, instrumental authors addressed strategic leadership's benefit and importance for the church (Golensky & Hager, 2020; Grandy, 2013; Jenssen, 2019; Phipps & Burbach, 2010; Ogochi, 2018). In addition, Davis-Olds (2017) indicated that it is essential to understand leadership in terms of what the Bible says about leading and, more specifically, leadership in the church based on biblical constraints. Therefore, leadership for the church should be about theology (Ayers, 2006).

This researcher addresses Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Servant Leader (Greenleaf, 1977; Lanik, 2006). To imitate Jesus Christ, pastors should strive to lead by serving the congregation (Greenleaf, 1977; Greenleaf, 1991). This researcher assumes that due to Christ and the great biblical leaders, it becomes imperative to empower the church with God's best—pastors, ministry leaders, and others who help to lead it. Pastors and ministry leaders are a select few empowered by God to lead the church. Due to the assumptions, this researcher conducted this study regarding pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership for the benefit of pastors, ministry leaders, and others.

When God empowers pastors, churches should be successful. However, success can have diverse meanings for different individuals. Ayers (2006) ascertained:

It becomes evident that philosophy seeks to move the matter of understanding ourselves and the world around us from ontology (something exists) to methodology (What happened to help us understand what exists? (i.e., the science of praxis), to teleology (What is the purpose of such existence?). Theology and leadership intersect with these questions. (p. 15)

Furthermore, Laniak (2006) provided in-depth knowledge of leaders and how they should act. Leaders such as pastors and ministry leaders should understand their requirements. Cincala (2016) ascertained, “God created humans in His image, and it would be very difficult to argue that He would not want Christian leaders to function in His image” (p. 11). Therefore, good Christian leadership is essential, and the way pastors and ministry leaders act is equally important, that is, to act with awareness of the image of God (Cincala, 2016; Threlfall, 2019).

Some individuals may not understand that strategic leadership is needed to meet the demands of the church (Cincala, 2016). However, understanding that being created in God's image is fundamental for everyone (Threlfall, 2019) and how strategic leadership can be advantageous (Muthuku, 2020; Patterson, 2018). In addition, Davis and Davis (2004) identified

factors associated with strategic leadership. The two factors are that “strategic leaders have the organizational ability to be strategically orientated, and they display a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present” (Davis & Davis, 2004, p. 30).

Leadership is essential for any organization. Its importance for the church should be no exception. However, for the church and other Christian organizations, leadership should begin with God as the Head (Thiessen et al., 2018). This literature review provided biblical leadership information to help understand the importance of this study. There is no theology without God, for He is the essence of the word and the meaning it provides (Ayers, 2006). Therefore, God will be the center of this theological literature review.

An excellent starting point is with Grandy (2013), as the information provided sets this study’s trajectory in motion. Grandy (2013) wrote:

The research objectives guiding this research include: to explore the possibilities and applicability of strategic leadership to nonprofits generally and, more specifically, churches and to provide an illustrative case study of the possibilities afforded through strategic leadership in the church setting. (p. 617)

Whenever the church is involved, a look into what is biblically sound is needed. As such, according to Grandy (2013), “similar to other nonprofits, values and mission are central to leadership in churches” (p. 619). Likewise, Northouse (2016) wrote that leadership is a process where one person influences others for a sought after-purpose.

Ayers (2006) discussed how indicated theologians’ leadership perspectives historically, philosophically, and scientifically. Nevertheless, the author asked, “Is there a need for a theology of leadership?” (Ayers, 2006, p. 7). Ayers (2006) indicated, “First, it is argued that theology possesses an ontological, methodological, and teleological structure. Stated theology seeks to explain who God is, what He [sic] has done, and what His [sic] purposes are for humankind” (p.

16). Ayers (2006) advocated, “applying Philippians 2:5-11 to modern leadership is not in conflict with the original intent of the text or other biblical teaching. Moreover, it is consistent with many other texts pertaining to leadership” (p. 20). A review of leadership theology is about what the Bible indicates according to principles set by God (Ayers, 2006).

When it comes to biblical leadership, it is also essential to understand what God says about the nature of humans (Ayers, 2006; Breedlove, 2016; Cincala, 2016; Lawson, 2009). Pastors and ministry leaders are humans, so it is essential to understand leaders’ character and how they can lead. For example, they can lead ethically or unethically (Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). Additionally, leaders can have humility or not have it (Breedlove, 2016). Breedlove (2016) indicated that humility in leaders is of utmost importance.

Nielsen and Marrone (2018) proposed that humility is needed when discussing strategic leadership in or outside the church. “Understanding humility is important for organizational scholars because it underlies the choice and capacity to approach one's work (and life) from a larger, interdependent perspective that is productive, rational, and sustainable” (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018, p. 805). Breedlove (2016) ascertained that Paul (i.e., in the Bible) sought humility in leaders. According to Breedlove (2016), 1 Timothy 3:1-7 is knowledge regarding a leader’s humility, and the scripture summarizes biblical qualifications for leaders. The Bible reads in 1 Timothy 3:1: This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982).

The Bible continues in verses 2 through 6 with who the bishop (i.e., overseer) must be and things to not do. Lastly, 1 Timothy 3:7 reads: Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Breedlove (2016) wrote, “In other words, Paul appeared to be more concerned with leaders being humble

than he was with how long they had been in the faith. To Paul, humility was a key character attribute for a leader to have” (p. 36). In today’s society, humility is still important for understanding individuals’ actions (Breedlove, 2016).

Humility is vital for “Christian leadership theorists and practitioners to continue their efforts to influence secular theories of leadership and the subsequent applications toward a Christian outlook” (Breedlove, 2016, p. 36). In addition, Breedlove (2016) wrote that Acts 22:1-3 indicates how God’s will is grounded in the New Testament scriptures as conceived by the Apostle Paul. Many writers of the Old and New Testaments can attest to the Will of God. Furthermore, the Bible indicates in 1 Kings 3:1-15 that King Solomon acted in humility by asking for wisdom. Lastly, Breedlove (2016) revealed, “Jesus taught His disciples that it was a worldly practice to lord authority over followers. Rather, biblical leaders should put the welfare of followers above their own (Matt. 20:25-28); this is clearly an act of self-sacrificing humility” (p. 41). Understanding that pastors must be humble is vital because they represent God in everything they do and because humility benefits everyone (Ou et al., 2014).

This researcher examined the literature regarding Nehemiah. Patton (2017) asked, “What made Nehemiah an effective leader?” (p. 8). Nehemiah is considered a strategic leader to help lead followers using multiple leadership strategies (Patton, 2017). Likewise, pastors may lead today using helpful leadership strategies based on research (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Covrig, 2010; Davis-Olds, 2017; Grandy, 2013; Patton, 2017). Patton (2017) indicated, “The book of Nehemiah provides an early case study in strategic management. Nehemiah armed with an eclectic array of leadership strategies, ranging from prayer to perseverance” (p. 8). Today’s pastors should employ good leadership strategies (Ayers, 2006; Covrig, 2010). As pastors, they should possibly lead according to good biblical leaders (Patton, 2017).



Patton (2017) surmised that “the people needed to hear Nehemiah’s vision, for there is truth in the words of Proverbs 29:18, ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’” (p. 10). Anyone trying to do a task that requires careful consideration should have a vision and then make a plan (Patton, 2017). Nehemiah prayed first, as indicated in the Bible (*Holy Bible: New King Version*, 1982, Nehemiah, 1:5-12). According to Patton (2017), “Then, he developed a plan to station guards at the points of highest risk, dividing the workforce into guards and construction workers” (p. 12). Nehemiah had a vision and devised a plan to make that vision a reality (Patton, 2017). Nehemiah did not give up (Neh., 4:6); neither should pastors when there is opposition. Nehemiah has many commendable qualities, as he was a servant of God (Neh., 1:6).

Nehemiah is only one admirable leader. Filled in the Bible are other great leaders (i.e., Gideon, Abraham, David, Ezekiel, and Peter). Laniak (2006) provided insight into leadership while giving an account of Ezekiel. The leaders of the churches must have the vision to keep the churches moving in the right direction (Laniak, 2006). Laniak (2006) wrote, “Ezekiel’s most theologically developed leadership exposé is his *māšāl* on sheep and shepherds in chapter 34. In this extended metaphor, we find a summary of the themes and perspectives that dominate the prophetic understanding of leadership” (p. 151).

According to Laniak (2006), numerous examples of good leadership strategies exist. One such leadership strategy is to understand that leaders are shepherds, and the people are sheep. Shepherds are to care for the sheep in the best manner possible (Laniak, 2006). Jentile (2021) specified, “the term pastor is originally a Latin word that translates to shepherd in English” and “to determine if one can identify the biblical characteristics of a congregational leader” (p.1613). Therefore, both Laniak (2006) and Jentile (2021) attest to leaders as shepherd.

This literature review continues with the well-known biblical leader—Paul. He instrumentally mentored others to become leaders, which led to their conversion (Patton, 2017). Without Paul’s excellent leadership, leaders would probably not have been as successful without his guiding principles (Patton, 2016; Laniak, 2006). Clark (2008) noted, “Towards the end of the twentieth century, the designation ‘leadership’ became increasingly widespread in many churches as a collective term to describe the combined team of local office-bearers, including the pastors, ministers, elders, deacons, and leaders of other ministries” (p. 362). They were a team with different ways of getting things done (Clark, 2008).

The leadership of many (e.g., Paul, John, Timothy, and others) was necessary as the church grew and reflected on what was needed to advance God’s Kingdom. The leadership principles used then are still prevalent to those individual leaders in the pulpit and ministry positions today (Ayers, 2006; Clark, 2008). For example, Ayers (2006) writes, “The science of theology must therefore include something more than a mere knowledge of facts. It must embrace an exhibition of the internal relation of those facts, one to another, and each to all” (p. 4). After reviewing leadership theology, the focus of the literature review continues with strategic leadership—the focus of this study—with the question, “What is strategic leadership?”

Elkington et al. (2015) indicated that ministry leadership could be problematic for individuals seeking to serve the church. While relating to the development of programs, the authors addressed an age-old question—whether leaders are born or made that can affect leadership within the local church and what can empower them if they are not born (Elkington et al., 2015). The authors also addressed what takes place in church and focused on ministry leadership preparation with a model which indicated how leaders accomplished things

(Elkington et al., 2015). Elkington et al. (2015) suggested that according to leaders' uniqueness, leadership enables functions to achieve God's mission for the church.

Elkington et al. (2015) indicated that a new leadership paradigm must emerge. Some leadership concepts for the church are the same as other non-church organizations and can be problematic (Elkington et al., 2015). Consequently, the church benefits from leaders who know what to do and can do it. For example, Strategic leadership is when the leader plans to improve things (Elkington et al., 2015). According to Elkington et al. (2015), a preacher could improve the length of the worship service. In addition, they could improve what happens with new individuals when they come to the service for the first time and ensure new attendees do not leave the church without knowing about it. This researcher addressed pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership to share the data with others who may find it helpful.

An essential goal of the pastor is to move a church in a desirable direction (Thiessen et al., 2018). According to Thiessen et al. (2018), understanding the membership growth or individuals' increased service attendance is one way to know how a church is progressing. Therefore, pastors' strategic leadership plans should incorporate biblical guidance. Those willing to lead as Jesus can do His command to reach all corners of the earth to spread the Gospel (*Holy Bible: New King James Version, 1982, Matthew 7:21-25*).

Researchers should reference strategic leadership for for-profit organizations and the church as leadership impact organizations in many ways (Grandy, 2013). Also, it may make a difference between success and failure (Banzato & Sierra, 2016). For example, Banzato and Sierra (2016) asked, "Why do organizations do what they do or play the way they play? To answer this simple question, we need a deep understanding of the people at the top of the structure – their experiences, skills, other human characteristics" (p. 120).

This literature review continued with an attempt to answer the question, “What is strategic leadership?” Many authors (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Ireland & Hitt, 1999; Samimi et al., 2019) have attempted to clarify the concept of strategic leadership. Samimi et al. (2019) indicated, “Although we have learned much from this vast and expanding field of research, a surprising lack of consensus remains on the concept of Strategic Leadership, as is evident from the wide variety of definitions and conceptualizations” (p. 1). This surprising lack of consensus for strategic leadership and the church may be one reason it has not expanded to the church (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). It is essential to understand that the role of strategic leaders is multifaceted and complex and can show up in many ways (Samimi et al., 2019). The question remains, *What is strategic leadership?*

According to Boal and Hooijberg (2001), “strategic leadership involves the ‘capacity to learn,’ the ‘capacity to change,’ and ‘managerial wisdom’” (p. 515). Boal and Hooijberg (2001) are instrumental in laying a foundation for the study with a theory definition. Strategic leadership for the church incorporates Boal and Hooijberg’s (2001) definitions and others (Ireland & Hitt (1999). Ireland and Hitt’s (1999) definition indicated, “Strategic leadership is a person's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future for the organization” (p. 43). Ireland and Hitt’s (1999) literature did not address the church. A need exists to expand SLT to the church (Grandy, 2013).

Hartwig and Bird (2015) specified that thriving churches need to be led by leaders willing to take charge to get things done. Pastors lead churches in different ways. In some ways, the church thrives tremendously; in others, it does not (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Hartwig and Bird (2015) wrote, “While you will not find the exact term leadership team in your Bible, you will find myriad examples of leadership teams” (p. 45). Hartwig and Bird (2015) described how a

church might be led individually or as a group. The descriptive terms include:

“Organic/informal, Fluid, Inner circle, Family-based, Better-halved, Pastor’s staff, Senior pastor-executive pastor partnership, Ceremonial, Cheerleading only, Advisory only, First responders, Fire department, Leader’s support group, thriving leadership team. Together the team truly leads the church” (Hartwig & Bird, 2015, pp. 29-31). A description of an inner circle meant that the pastor had a few individuals who helped lead the church (Hartwig & Bird, 2015).

Hartwig and Bird (2015) suggested that a successful leadership team helps to lead the church, make plans and carry out the church’s vision. “Functioning as leaders in a collaborative manner is certainly part of God's design for local church leadership” (Hartwig & Bird, 2015, p. 52). According to Hartwig and Bird (2015), the most productive way was to have a team of individuals going in the same direction. Essentially, the pastor sets the direction with a gospel-centered and mission-driven model (Hartwig & Bird, 2015).

Strategic Christian leadership is essential, and provided is a review. Many authors related information on some aspects of strategic leadership, and this researcher penned certain ones (i.e., Malphurs & Mancini, 2003; Ruffner & Huizing, 2017; Muthuku, 2020) for a better understanding. Malphurs and Mancini (2003) provided the blueprint for developing leadership at every church level. According to Malphurs and Mancini (2003), “Christian leaders are servants with the credibility and capabilities to influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction” (p. 10).

According to Ayers (2006), leaders in the church must understand who they are and what they need to do. Likewise, Bolman and Deal (1995) indicate that leaders must understand why God has put them over the people they are to lead. Additionally, Bonardi et al. (2018) leaders find the best ways to lead, and one way is to lead strategically. Most pastors’ plans are strategic,

even though they may not assign the term *strategic* to describe them (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001).

To further elaborate on leadership in the church, addressed are biblical principles.

Ruffner and Huizing (2017) asked what Christian leadership looks like and that pastors should have an excellent way of leading the individuals who follow them. According to Ruffner and Huizing (2017), “all truth originates with God, and to the extent that leadership principles reflect God's inherent qualities, those same principles can be considered helpful to Christian or secular leaders” (p. 38). Everyone in leadership should understand the makings of good leadership (Patton, 2017). Equally, most pastors must fall into the category of good leaders (Patton, 2017).

A good leader should lead as Nehemiah did instead of leading like others in the Bible who did not know what they should do for God (Patton, 2017). Many kings and some sons of Holy Priests did not lead according to God and would be considered more secular leaders instead of Christian ones (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, 2 Chronicles 33:2; 2 Kings 21:13). Whereby Nehemiah had a plan even before starting to accomplish his goal (Muthuku, 2020). According to Muthuku (2020), “Nehemiah engaged various leadership strategies which included prayer, providing vision and foresight, adaptability, perseverance and leveraging on power and influence” (p. 67). Nehemiah would be considered a *strategic leader* in his day and now (Nehemiah, 2:1-18). Nehemiah’s plan achieved the mission (Neh., 2:1-18).

Cincala (2017) wrote, “that in 1 John 1:2-3, John attempted to describe the essence of a Christian worldview” (p. 9). First John 1:2-3 reads:

The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, 1 John 1:2-3)

Cincala (2017) provided the legacy of God's leadership by attesting to what God has done for

humankind from the beginning of creation. In the literature, being a team, enjoying each other, and working together is essential (Cincala, 2017). Cincala (2017) indicated:

John describes God giving us life so that we have a good time with each other, perhaps even having a ‘party time’ of sorts with God the Father and Son, as they seem to be having a good time fellowshiping together. (p. 9)

Pastors are to know the church’s needs to have good times as far as the church is concerned and fellowship with God and Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2-3).

John shares the foundational necessities of being like God. Cincala (2017) describes God’s operating system as a way for others to lead. Cincala (2017) ascertained, “The emphasis here is on operating under God’s value system” (p. 10). God’s value system is the one that provides everything a good leader would need (Cincala, 2017). In addition, Cincala (2017) wrote:

When dealing with leadership, we talk about having a mission statement, often not realizing where this concept came from—Mission (*missio equal [sic] sent*) derived from the very nature of God. One of the core values of His leadership was *to send*. (p. 12)

When leaders in the church develop a deep understanding of what God and others want from them, they become wise leaders (Cincala, 2017). Nevertheless, how can one lead without a plan?

Patterson (2018) specified that Jesus commands that "Christian leaders start by loving one another and embrace new disciples as followers to whom they extend the blessing of love" (p. 82). Leadership should be a relational process, according to John 15:12-15 (Patterson, 2018).

John 15:12-15 reads:

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982)

The Bible indicates that Jesus led as a servant; and transformed His followers.

According to Patterson (2018), Jesus served the twelve men called His disciples. We know it to be accurate as indicated (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Matthew 10:1). How were they served? Jesus met the disciples' developmental needs—spiritual, social, ecclesiastical, and personal (Patterson, 2018). Pastors should try doing the same thing for all individuals subject to their authority, the leadership staff, and the congregates (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). The pastors may not be able to meet every need, but spiritually they should try to be.

When examining the literature about how Jesus led, He did so strategically (Laniak, 2006). The strategic nature of Jesus is a way of today's strategic leadership for the church (Breedlove, 2016; Cincala, 2016). Again, the question of "What is Christian Leadership?" is asked and explained by some authors and researchers. Malphurs and Mancini (2003) and Tutar et al. (2011) provided information suggesting what leadership is and when it is considered strategic. Additionally, the knowledge of another author (Krispin, 2020) may help understand the theology of strategic leadership. Krispin (2020) wrote, "It can be argued that Christian formation is a prerequisite for Christian leader development. For without the beginning of life in Christ and a desire to follow his leadership in life, there is no *Christian* in Christian leader development" (p. 28). Leaders in the church have a keen understanding of leadership for God's people to lead strategically and, more significantly, to lead according to Jesus (Cincala, 2016).

This section sought to explore the theological qualifications of leadership in Christian leadership. For pastors' decisions to be biblically based, they should weigh them against what God says to do or not do. In understanding Christian leadership, one would need to understand who the strategic leaders in the Bible are. Ruffner and Huizing (2017) wrote, "In the midst of Peter's passionate epistolary message addressing various ecclesial concerns, he established a



quintessential model for defining Christian leadership” (p. 38). Ruffner and Huizing (2017) indicated that Christian leadership is of God. Therefore, one would remember that anything that deals with Christ would, in essence, be Christian, and anything relating to God is theological (Ayers, 2006; Breedlove, 2016). Understanding God shaped the model addressed as a model for defining Christian leadership. Also, Ruffner & Huizing (2017), God shaped Peter’s approach to leadership when he united interpretive and theological frameworks together, as referenced in 1 Peter 5, which he wrote revealed a Trinitarian presupposition.

Strategic Christian leadership must begin with God, and only through His grace will the church function as it should (Ayers, 2006). This concept should not be new to pastors or others in the church. This researcher understands, from the introductory text, that leaders in the church would understand the philosophy that theology must begin with God (Ayers, 2006; Laniak, 2006). Only when leaders understand that will they do everything they can to lead as they should (Laniak, 2006; Bennis, 2009). Today’s leaders should lead as Nehemiah did many years ago (Patton, 2017).

Bass (1985) mentioned leaders such as Jesus Christ, Moses, and Martin Luther. Youssef (1986) also references Jesus as the Ultimate Leader. Good Christian leadership must be essential for church leadership, including growing the church in an ideal manner (Greenleaf, 1997). In addition, Greenleaf (1977) advocated that a great leader is seen as a servant first. Additionally, Drov Dahl and Jones (2020) understood the nature of a kingdom leader. Drov Dahl and Jones (2020) detailed aspects of a leader and indicated who they are and what they believe. Leaders are to understand the love of Jesus and provide that love to others (Drov Dahl & Jones, 2020). According to Drov Dahl and Jones (2020), “Kingdom leaders are followers of Christ whom He appoints with authority, equips, and sends to influence people to pursue the Father’s will and

who demonstrate the active indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministry” (p. 579).

Pastors are kingdom leaders. As kingdom leaders, as they follow Christ, the individuals who attend the church should also follow Christ, especially when given the reasons to (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020). In addition, Drovdahl and Jones (2020) wrote:

Kingdom leaders are foremost followers of Christ who are compelled by conscience to radical obedience to his Lordship and convinced beyond all doubt that Jesus is God Incarnate, Lord of lords, God’s Messiah, and the embodiment of the promise. As followers of King Jesus, leaders engage in reciprocating agape as initiated by the Benevolent Master. Because kingdom leaders are heart-connected to Jesus, they make an abiding commitment to a lifestyle of serving the King by lovingly serving others. (p. 579)

There is no doubt that Christian leadership entails being a lover of Jesus Christ (Drovdahl & Jones (2020). In being a lover of Jesus, one has the heart to love others. Pastors are to have abundant love for the people they serve (Drovdahl & Jones, 2020). Therefore, while taking a closer look at strategic leadership, it was necessary to remember the biblical side of leadership.

According to Thompson (2015), “If competent Christian leaders constantly seek to put Christ’s mission ahead of their own glory and to put the good of the group before their own desires, then their followers will be more likely to accept their influence” (p. 56). Thompson (2015) indicated it is a good idea to understand Jesus’ Model of Leadership and provided the historical and literary context to do just that, using text from the Book of Mark. Thompson (2015) wrote, “Jesus taught that instead of seeking power and status, His disciples—if they seek greatness at all—should strive to serve others” (p. 60). Therefore, it would be in the best interest of pastors to want to lead, as Jesus indicated. Thompson (2015) added, “Servant leaders who choose sacrifice over selfish ambition are not rare, but they are rarely heralded” (p. 61).

Jesus wanted His disciples to learn everything and tried to teach them what they needed

to do (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Matthew 10:5-42). However, Jesus knew His time on earth was limited; His mission included teaching the disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, developing a *need approach* to Christian leadership would be advantageous (Baumgartner, 2018).

Baumgartner (2018) indicated that the Christian leadership approach highlighted how Jesus developed the twelve disciples.

Baumgartner (2018) suggested, “Jesus developed leaders (apostles, or disciples) in a way that they would be able to lead his work after his departure. By looking at how he was training the disciples, we gain important insights” (p. 20). By examining the leadership approach, leaders are more inclined to become Jesus-led leaders and have a passion for leading (Baumgartner, 2018). How Jesus trained the disciples (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Matthew 24:5-51, 28:16-20; John 13:34-35, Luke 9:23-24) is how the pastors may want to be, dedicated to the calling. Baumgartner (2018) indicated, “First, he led by his own example, and so we are back at values. What is important about God?” (p. 20).

The human head of the church (i.e., the pastor) must understand that sometimes it is essential to ask for help because everyone may need help at some point (Fashant & Evan, 2020). If the church is not thriving, others may make a difference or at least try to (Marrs, 2017). Marrs (2017) suggested that leading is about valuing what is necessary to do for the Kingdom of God. Pastors know better than anyone the necessity of God’s Kingdom (Marrs, 2017). According to Marrs (2017), organizations which include churches are different. Thus, Marrs (2017) wrote that leadership could differ depending on who implements it or the type of organization.

Additionally, Marrs (2017) indicated, “When we view Jesus as the leader, we must always remind ourselves of the socio-historical backdrop of His [sic] sayings and actions” (p. 2). Marrs (2017) used Mark 10; Luke 10, and John 10 (i.e., in the Bible) to allocate a vision of leadership. Marrs (2017) referred to Luke 10 as he expanded the notion of contemporary leadership burdened with a problem and to be careful not to miss great opportunities to transform situations or make a difference. The church should be a transformational organization but requires good leadership (Marrs, 2017).

When it comes to leading strategically, as Jesus did, John 10 presents the most familiar image of Him as a leader—Jesus as a Shepherd. Thomas (2018) provided literature to understand how to lead strategically and Christianly, as Jesus did. Thomas (2018) wrote, “The indispensable mark of Christian leadership is the combined effort of action and agenda purposing to influence others intentionally. This is the model that Jesus initiated in Mark 3:13-19” (p. 108). Pastors and ministry leaders should understand how they should lead. Jesus leads strategically, and they should do the same, whether they call it strategic or not (Thomas, 2018).

Having researched Christian strategic leadership or rather strategic leadership theology, this researcher presents a church theology. Theology of the church provides a way to add additional reasoning, as indicated that theology begins with God (Ayers, 2006). According to Ayers (2006), appointed church leaders must know that the leadership is to understand church theology. Leaders in the church should advocate for a substantial value and belief system while emphasizing a strong sense of purpose to make moral and righteous decisions (Lawson, 2009). These ethical decisions make the church what God has inclined it to be (Lawson, 2009).

Treated as a member of the Body of Christ is what the people of God should be (Ayers, 2006; Schoeman, 2020). According to Schoeman (2020), believers are the Body of Christ.

Consequently, it is up to the believers to let others, not believers, know the value of having or getting salvation (Schoeman, 2020). The Body of Christ grows when the church does its job and pastors lead as they should (Ayers, 2006; Schoeman, 2020). Therefore, it is vital that everyone, including the congregation, understand the church's vision and mission. According to Schoeman (2020), "Congregations are communities where believers in the triune God meet and celebrate their relationship to serve their Lord" (p. 321). For that reason, it is fundamental for everyone to understand the church's mission.

Congregational life gives meaning to having purpose and direction, which is the mission (Schoeman, 2020). The church should know its focus by understanding what God has called the people to do and, more importantly, what He has called the pastors or ministry leaders to do (Schoeman, 2020). According to the Bible, one leads when called, and when God calls them, He equips them (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Hebrews 13:20-21; 2 Corinthians 9:8). Therefore, the pastor must look to God for directions for themselves and the church. As indicated in the Bible, "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it" (Habakkuk 2:2). Additionally, Bass and Avolio (1995) indicated that leaders are to motivate and inspire individuals around them; therefore, pastors must have a plan for the future and a formulated vision for God's people. According to Bass and Avolio (1995), leaders stimulate followers to be innovative and creative. Innovation and creativity may help move a church forward by increasing membership and increasing individuals' attendance at services, problems churches in VA have and should want to change.

The theological framework was essential to complete each section of this literature review. Much research was available on leadership, and researchers are beginning to incorporate strategic leadership more as it applies to the church (Grandy, 2013). Nehemiah accomplished his

goal strategically (Patton, 2017). According to Muthuku (2020), “That strategy is very much applicable in today’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century organizations, be they religious or secular” (p. 71). The information was imperative for the church and its surrounding communities.

Meagher (2019) assessed the effects of religious and moral beliefs on satisfaction with one’s faith community. Pastors should want to know how well they are fair within their community and the church (Fashant & Evan, 2020). Other authors provided insight into what pastors believed constituted a flourishing congregation (Hartwig, 2015). Others believe that if a pastor perceives that the congregation is okay when it is not, it causes a problem for everyone (Fashant & Evan, 2020). Therefore, a flourishing congregation can mean many things. Concurring, Thiessen et al. (2018) ascertained, “Social scientists are encouraged to pay great attention to how leaders themselves perceive and define a flourishing congregation, including the narratives and boundaries that contribute to leader constructions of reality” (p. 13).

Only God can let pastors know when a change is necessitated (Thompson, 2015). Nevertheless, pastors who understand their mission and make sound decisions can see where the church stands (Thiessen et al., 2018). Whether a church is thriving or not, pastors must have eyes and hearts for the compass of the church (Thiessen et al., 2018). Thompson (2015) indicated, “Paul reminds us that only God can give the increase—our role is to be faithful servants (1 Cor. 3:1-9)” (p. 64). Therefore, it must be God’s will, whether it pertains to church growth or attendance. Thompson (2015) provides information regarding what leaders should do. Thompson (2015) wrote:

However, I believe that if ministry leaders everywhere put God's mission and the needs of their ministry ahead of their own desires for achievement and control, not only will we see increased effectiveness among God’s kingdom here on earth, but we will experience much more peace as we grow in both service and leadership. (p. 64)

Additionally, Elkington et al. (2015) wrote that “Mentors need to be selected because they view leadership as missional and effective leadership as an ‘enabling function,’ rather than a successful CEO” (p. 3).

The Apostle Paul’s biblical model showed excellent leadership (Elkington et al., (2015). The literature revealed an understanding of the biblical ideology in the *Old and New Testaments*, demonstrated in the church. It was before and still is wise to understand what happens when enabling function within the organism known as the church occurs (Janssen, 2019). Leaders should understand the importance of having a mission and purpose for the church and a way to get it thriving and keep it that way (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). The church is too important for leaders not to have a good plan for it to thrive (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). It was essential to share what literature helped with the focus of this study, as many authors were instrumental in providing information that strategic leadership for the church was as important as it is for other organizations (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013; Atkinson & Rose, 2020). Another element of strategic leadership is its planning which continues with the concepts of strategic leadership and the church (Thiessen et al., 2018).

Regarding strategic leadership planning, Nehemiah planned to accomplish his goal (Patton, 2017). Leaders derive plans when they have visions (Thomas, 2018). With strategic leadership planning, leaders have visions that will come to pass and know how to achieve successful missions (Thomas, 2018). No one would need to look any further than Joshua, who instilled in the people to follow God’s commands (*New King James Bible*, 1798/1982, Joshua 1:1-16). Additionally, the Bible indicates Paul wanted the people to understand the right way of doing things in the church (Holy Bible: New King James Version, 1982, 1 Corthinians 4:17-20). Many authors indicated a need for good leadership (Thomas, 2018; Thompson, 2015).

Paul indicated in Colossians 1:24, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982). In the New Testament, Paul demonstrated how he planned to accomplish what he believed Jesus wanted him to do (Acts 17:1-14). Paul strategically led because he made plans to do so (Romans 15:7-13). This researcher needed a good sense of the pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions to understand what is at stake with the church. It is not only about having bodies at church services but rather about saving souls. Whether it is a church or another organization, both require good planning and strategic leadership (Bonardi et al., 2018).

This literature review thus far provided some necessary information to understand the theological framework for the study and included a look at the theology of leadership for the church. The literature showed that the church requires a strategic plan similar to other organizations (Cincala, 2016; Patton, 2017). Furthermore, it indicated an understanding of some leaders in the Bible and how they led (e.g., Paul, Nehemiah, and others). The literature addressed having a plan, working it, and accomplishing the missions and goals of what God commands (Patton, 2017). The leaders of pastors or ministry leaders should have plans and strategies with a vision for the church now and for the future (Hartwig, 2015). With procedures in place, pastors can lead the church strategically if it is to flourish (Hartwig, 2015).

The next section of this Literature Review examines the relevant theory behind leadership and strategic leadership. Many authors (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013; Ayers, 2006) indicated leadership's or strategic leadership's importance. Both leadership theories and the SLT played a big part in explaining how understanding the views can contribute to understanding what the leaders (i.e., pastors and ministry leaders) need to do in today's church.



### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

The Theoretical Framework for the Study section covers leadership, strategic leadership, and other theories applicable to the research, including a historical aspect. The theological framework for this study indicated the importance of theology when assessing strategic leadership and the church. However, the theoretical framework perspectives are crucial when evaluating strategic leadership and the church. This section provides the theoretical framework for the study and connects the literature to the church. The Theoretical Framework for the Study section begins with a reason to investigate strategic leadership in the church. Understanding strategic leadership provided a foundation for this researcher's work, addressing the pastors' or ministry leaders' perceptions of it and how pastors applied strategic leadership for church membership growth and increased individuals' attendance at church services.

Grandy (2013) ascertained, "There is limited research to date that examines the applicability of leadership theories that have been traditionally applied to for-profit and public sector organizations to nonprofits" (p. 616). Therefore, a review of that literature in more detail—and providing some additional theoretical research literature was warranted. In addition, addressed is the importance of strategic leadership capabilities (Ireland & Hitt, 1999).

According to Badshah (2012), "leadership is one of the most complex and multifaceted phenomena to which organizational and psychological research has been applied" (p. 49). In addition, Badshah (2012) indicated, "Over the last 50 years, leadership has been examined in terms of enduring traits, sets of behaviors or styles, situational properties, and presumed cognitive processes" (p. 49). Conversely, this researcher examined strategic leadership in churches in VA by studying some of them. This researcher provided literature for readers to understand the philosophy of strategic leadership related to the church.

This researcher addressed the early leadership theories with brief information about the relevant connection with the SLT. This study's theoretical framework includes a Leadership Theories Overview sub-section, which summarizes leadership theories: Great Man, Transactional, Transformational and Charisma, Servant Leadership, and Strategic Leadership. Pastors may have duties similar to other leaders referred to as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Finkelstein et al., 2009) or Upper Echelon (UE) (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) of other organizations. However, most church members may not think of pastors in that way, as CEOs or UEs. As the CEO or UE of the church, this researcher assumes that the pastor should lead individuals in ways that compel them to come to church and, if not a member, conceivably become one. Additionally, they should have a strategic plan to grow the church membership (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). According to Hartwig and Bird (2015), pastors are the leaders, and with God's help, they are to ensure the church survives. Finally, pastors should lead in ways that bring physical, mental, and spiritual strength to individuals through an understanding of Christ Jesus (Hartwig & Bird, 2015).

Bennis (2009) wrote, "Only when we are fully deployed are we capable of that triumphant expression. Full deployment, engagement, hone and sharpen all of one's gifts, and ensure that one will be an original, not a copy" (p. 41). According to Bennis (2009), pastors should be prepared, for God has called them to take charge and be leaders. Leaders are to "hone and sharpen their gifts" (Bennis, 2009, p. 41) to do what God has called them to do.

There is a need for an extension of the field of strategic leadership related to nonprofit organizations (Grandy, 2013; Phipps & Burbach, 2010). Phipps and Burbach (2010) specified, "The field of strategic leadership, or the study of how top-level leaders influence organizational performance, has not yet been widely extended to the nonprofit sector" (p. 137). However, the

authors contended that “there is reason to believe that strategic leaders contribute to nonprofit organizational performance in ways consistent with strategic leadership theory” (Phipps & Burbach, 2010, p. 148). Also, Phipps (2012) extended spirituality and leadership in research concerning strategic leadership. As membership declines, leadership becomes more crucial with pastors as good leaders (Bretherton & Dundar, 2020; Davis-Olds, 2017; Thiessen et al., 2018).

Phipps and Burbach (2010) indicated that the UET focuses on top-level executives whose goal is to impact performance based on their lead. Also, Carter and Greer (2013) ascertained that “Knowledge of strategic leadership is essential as the role has become more critical and the demands have increased in complexity” (p. 375). The complexity would also include what churches face during hard times, similar to other organizations (Grandy, 2013). Additionally, Hunite's (2018) study sought to “examine the effect of strategic leadership on competitive advantage through strategic planning and strategic thinking” (p. 323). Conversely, Bonardi et al. (2018) indicated that a critical weakness exists in strategic leadership due to a lack of integration between micro-and macro-perspective leadership and a lack of dialogue among scholars in different fields.

Finkelstein et al. (2009) ascertained wanting to understand strategic leadership and the focus on executives responsible for the company. Kalshovan (2018) advocated, “Leadership studies is a field plagued by worries about definitional variety” (p. 2). Thus, the definition of strategic leadership also needed to be revised (Kalshovan, 2018). According to Ayers (2006), “The varied definitions, the past and present research, and all the analysis done throughout the years provide evidence that method and methodology (i.e., what leaders do) has taken center stage in the research” (p. 14).

This study of strategic leadership was broader than just the theological perspective. According to Jaleha and Machuki (2018), “the study and scope of strategic leadership focus on a small group of executives referred to as the chief executive officers (CEO), top management teams (TMT), and the board of directors who have the overall responsibilities of an organization” (p. 127).

This researcher used similar parts of Jaleha and Machuki’s (2018) definition of strategic leadership and Phipps and Burbach’s (2010). Jaleha and Machuki’s (2018) indicated that strategic leadership theory and research cited in Singh et al. (2016) are to understand how much influence top executives have over performance. Similarly, Phipps and Burbach (2010) suggested that “the field of strategic leadership focuses on the way top level (i.e., executive) have an impact on organizational performance through their leadership” (p. 137). It became apparent that SLT has similarities to others' research, including what and how strategic leadership has evolved; perhaps that was the reason for its complexity (Carter & Greer, 2013). In a review of strategic leadership and other leadership theories, Bennis (2009) wrote that leaders are “innovators, they focus on people, and inspire trust; they have a long-range perspective, and they do the right thing” (p. 42). Pastors are individuals who should fit that category.

Phipps (2012) indicated, “The work extends the consideration of spirituality and leadership to the field of strategic leadership” (p. 178). Additionally, Tutar et al. (2011) addressed different leadership issues that helped researchers to understand strategic leadership. The authors were concerned with ethical and strategic leadership. They stated, “The basic objective of the strategic leadership is to continue its existence in the long term in compliance with basic objectives of the business” (Tutar et al., 2011, p. 1381). Also, Phipps and Burbach (2010) indicated that “The field of strategic leadership focuses on the way top-level leaders (i.e.,

executives) have an impact on organizational performance through their leadership” (p. 137).

Therefore, this researcher reviewed many leadership theories to understand strategic leadership. A few of the theories are Upper Echelon (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), Top Management Team (Finkelstein & et al., 2009; Hambrick & Mason, 1984), and Transformational (Bass, 1985), Charisma and Servant Leadership (Farling & et al., 1999; Greenleaf, 1977), Transactional (Bass, 1985), and Visionary (Bashah, 2012; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Some of which were spinoffs of theories, including the SLT. Since strategic leadership and pastors’ and others’ perceptions of it were the focus of this study, it was essential to discuss some theories that associate well with researched SLT. Therefore, provided is limited information on the theories, including Transactional, Transformational, Charisma, and the Great Man Theory.

The earliest leadership theory was the Great Man Theory—GMT (Cherry, 2019). The theory focuses on the traits of the individual. According to Thompson (2019), “The Great Man theory considers character traits exclusively and does not consider the behavior of the individual” (p. 1). The literature regarding GMT is that individuals were born great leaders (Thompson, 2019). Stogdill (1948) proved traits that could predict effective leadership. Other theorists went from traits to personality, among other characteristics, and provided additional leadership theories (Kirkpatrick & Lock, 1991; Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). Over the years, many different theories developed, such as Transactional Theory (Blake & Mouton, 1985).

With many theories came many definitions of leadership. Blake and Mouton (1985) defined *leadership* as “processes of leadership are involved in achieving results with and through others” (p. 198). The definition was in line with what this researcher sought to understand. Within the church, leadership must achieve results (i.e., growing God’s kingdom) with and through others (i.e., ministry leaders and church members) who are engaged in the process

(Fashant & Evan, 2020). Saeed et al. (2014) wrote that “Transactional leaders identify and clarify subordinates’ job tasks and communicate to them how successful execution of tasks leads to the receipt of desirable rewards” (p. 218). A reward that most would work harder to achieve and one that some never achieved, at least not without others’ help (Blake & Mouton, 1985).

Transactional equals transact, meaning doing something requires two things (Blake & Mouton, 1985). The transactions are the reason for Transactional Leadership Theory. As Blake and Mouton (1985) indicated, there must be individuals and a goal to accomplish. As crucial as transactional leadership was, developed were others: Transformational Leadership and Charisma theories.

Many other leadership theories came to the forefront, including Transformational, Transactional, and Charismatic (i.e., often believed to be only related to the church). Accordingly, it indicated that these (Charisma) leaders have a gift from God (Weber, 1947). Even though Charismatic leadership was originally not brought about with the church’s intention, it became synonymous with the church (Davis & Davis, 2007). However, Stewart (2006), according to Burns (1978), indicated leaders to be transactional or transformational, and Bass’ (1978) literature showed otherwise; that a person as a good leader could have qualities of both transactional and transformative (Davis & Davis, 2007).

Saeed et al. (2014) ascertained that transformational equals change (i.e., to make a difference by making a change, in other words, to transform). Saeed et al. (2014) wrote, “Transformational leaders, rather than focusing solely on current needs of their employees or themselves, focus on future needs” (p. 218). Consequently, there was a need for a transforming effect. A transforming effect occurs when leading as God demands (Saeed et al., 2014). That

effect can fundamentally affect how one leads—a servant leader (Farling et al., 1999). Therefore, the Servant Leadership Theory is vital to this researcher’s study.

Transformational Leadership Theory and others such as Charisma are mainstream theories. They are synonymous with the church due to the transformational properties of transforming members and others who attained it (Farling et al., 1999). In addition to Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theories came Greenleaf’s (1977) Servant Leadership Theory. Servant leadership is synonymous with the leadership of Jesus Christ. According to Farling et al. (1999), serving was not only about getting results, but the behavior in which one used to receive them was more important. Farling et al. (1999) also addressed servant leadership, with the leader focused on the followers. Jesus Christ focused on His followers, for He served the people (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Mark 10:42; Matthew 20:25-28). Serving others is why Servant Leadership Theory has become synonymous with the leadership of Jesus Christ (Badshah, 2012; Drov Dahl & Jones, 2020).

According to Yukl (1989), many authors have initially added or subtracted from what they thought was how to be lead. Yukl (1989) wrote that the controversy over the appropriate leadership definition continued. For this literature review, leadership, in some form, existed when individuals came together to accomplish something (Yukl, 1989). According to Yukl (1989), the definition included a leader and followers. How one leads can be many ways, but a meaningful way is to lead strategically, and to do that, one must understand what strategic leading entails (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). According to Bonardi et al. (2018), it was crucial “that scholars bridge the micro-macro divide regarding theories of strategic leadership and bring together theories that have merged independently” (p. v). After researching the early stages of leadership, the focus was on understanding the SLT.

The SLT is the theory guiding this researcher's study. Hambrick and Mason (1984) began to understand leadership, and based on their findings, they came up with the theory referred to as the UET. Later, Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) expanded the UET to become the SLT. Accordingly, UET dealt primarily with top managers' decision-making (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Whereas Finkelstein and Hambrick's (1996) focus on SLT examined the top managers' psychological makeup and the influence on information processing and strategic decision-making.

Finkelstein et al. (2009) "use the term strategic leadership because it connotes management of an overall enterprise, not just a small unit; it also implies substantive decision-making responsibilities, beyond the interpersonal and relational aspects usually associated with leadership" (p. 4). Finkelstein et al. (2009) suggested that strategic actions occurred due to inertia and careful decision-making. The decision-making factors are precisely what this researcher was interested in bringing to the forefront as perceptions of prosperous church leaders. The decision-making aspect of strategic leadership was one practicable reason to bring and relate the theory to the church.

In addition, Ayers (2006), Ireland and Hitt (1999), and Quong and Walker (2010) indicated that there are principles, roles, and many perspectives of strategic leadership. Quong and Walker (2010) ascertained that "Leadership should also be strategic, where strategic means positioning the organization to its best advantage in order to maximize goal attainment" (p. 22). Quong and Walker continued that SLT's premise was that "it is about deliberate and sustained practice" (p. 22). Ideally, a strategic leader focuses continuously on what is needed and establishes thought patterns to accomplish any task (Quong & Walker, 2010). The task included how leaders lead an organization to be successful (Quong & Walker, 2010), or in the case of a



church that grew tremendously.

A good starting point for SLT is to provide the definition used in this research. Quong and Walker (2010) wrote, “Strategic leadership used to be defined as determining where an organization was heading and how to get there” (p. 22). Also, Quong and Walker (2010) indicated that “when leaders engaged in the management processes of analyzing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating, they were basically considered to be strategic” (p. 22). Even though Quong and Walker’s information was essential, more appropriately based for this research was Boal and Hooijberg’s (2001) definition of strategic leadership. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) ascertained that “the essence of strategic leadership involves the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom” (p. 515). Other authors (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Bass, 2008; Northouse, 2016; & Yukl, 2013) were instrumental in addressing many facets of strategic leadership. Taken into account were other strategic leadership research (Blake & Mouton, 1985; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Stogdill, 1948; Vera et al., 2022).

Based on the traits of individuals was the theoretical work of Stogdill (1948). Among other works was Blake and Mouton (1985), which is based more on behavior than an individual’s traits. Many leadership theories have, through the years, focused on the individual leaders to focus on the followers (Farling et al., 1999; Greenleaf, 1977). Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) SLT addressed the leader’s strategic decision-making. Hence, leaders were to provide for the organization’s mission, vision, and direction (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Also, Finkelstein et al. (2009) wrote, “And, like many of our colleagues, we believe that performance is determined in great part by the strategic choices and other major organizational decisions made with the firm” (p. 4). That firm could include the church.

Hambrick and Mason (1984) provided information regarding the UET. The focus was that the leaders at the top were responsible for all the organizations' decisions (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The upper echelons were at the top of the organizations that provided the essence of finance, management, and marketing (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). However, strategic leadership concerns what happens inside and outside the organization (Davis-Olds, 2017; Deborah, 2018). Therefore, when wisdom came into play, one led strategically (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001).

Many other theories existed, but this researcher based this study on what has become known as the *SLT*. The authors' most prevalent works in discussing SLT were Boal and Hooijberg (2001), Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), and Ireland and Hitt (1999). In addition, Vera and Crossan (2004) provided enormous work regarding SLT. According to them, leadership is related to all leaders in the organization, but as stated by others, strategic leadership applies only to the top (Vera & Crossan, 2004). To be a strategic leader, one would strategize, be proactive and collaborative, looks to the future, and go from doing things right to doing the right thing (Harung et al., 1996). Also considered a visionary was a strategic leader (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). The *capacity to change* and *managerial wisdom* are attributes of being considered a visionary (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001).

According to Finkelstein et al. (2009), SLT is approaching its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Strategic leaders cannot be all things to all people and must know how to adjust their leadership based on the needs and the people they lead (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Individuals look to leaders to understand the directions by making the right decisions at the right time (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Hearing from God is crucial as the pastor and the strategic leader (*Holy Bible: New King James*

*Version*, 1982, Psalm 37:23). God's wisdom must lead the church pastors with a mission and purpose (Philippians 4:19).

Vera et al. (2022) stated, "Recent developments in the fields of strategic management and economics offer unique opportunities to broaden the frontiers of our knowledge about strategic leadership" (p. 4). However, Boal and Hooijberg (2001) indicated:

In the past decade interesting new leadership research has been published that, while relevant for the strategic leadership literature, has received relatively little attention in that area. We believe these emerging theories hold great promise in furthering our understanding of what we have argued are the three cornerstones of strategic leadership: the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom. (p. 529)

The fact that strategic leadership has not, even today, had much progress (Vera et al., 2022) is one reason this researcher reviewed SLT and gathered as much information as possible about the church from the experts. The pastors (i.e., the experts) know about leading a church better than anyone.

Carter and Greer (2013) indicated, "A great deal of scholarship over the past 30 years has been devoted to the analysis and comparison of different leadership styles" (p. 375). One important reason that this researcher addressed leadership and, more importantly, strategic leadership was that "as the roles of strategic leaders expand, we need to understand how these leaders have the greatest positive impact on our organizations while meeting societal expectations" (Carter & Greer, 2013, p. 375). Another important reason to investigate strategic leadership was that this researcher believed understanding its benefits to the church might enhance its membership and individuals' attendance at church services. This understanding is from the work of others (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013).

Conversely, and more importantly, when deemed beneficial to the church, strategic leadership provides the leaders (i.e., pastor and ministry leaders) another avenue to transform and

grow God's people. This researcher's desire to conduct this study was due to the lack of data regarding strategic leadership and the church (Grandy, 2013). The church is similar to other organizations that prepare strategically. "Strategic leaders force themselves to look beyond the present and into an uncertain future" (Quong & Walker, 2010, p. 23). Assumed is that pastors or ministry leaders should do the same. Additionally, Strategic leaders strive to make a difference, and they make it (Quong & Walker, 2010).

Dimitrios et al. (2013) ascertained that "leadership of a company may be the only management concept that receives more attention than a company's strategy lately. However, there is little unanimity on what strategic leadership is and how it should best be encountered" (p. 276). For strategic leadership, as far as what it is, there is a need for researchers to begin to agree on what constitutes strategic leadership (Thompson, 2019). Other researchers may then join in and find the need to help add to the literature regarding strategic leadership, as was the case for this researcher. However, contention exists that strategic leadership could benefit the church as it does other organizations (Grandy, 2013). Consequently, it became imperative to research strategic leadership and the church for any benefits for the church.

Reviewed as much information regarding strategic leadership, now considered an avenue needed for many organizations, which included the church. Phipps and Burbach (2010) indicated a need and potential benefit for the nonprofit organization regarding strategic leadership based on other authors' (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001) information. Phipps and Burbach (2010) were instrumental in addressing the many application of strategic leadership for nonprofit organizations. The literature pertained to nonprofit organizations and churches in ways that this researcher felt the literature benefitted the church as a nonprofit organization.

Thompson (2019) states that "leadership theories can help you develop the skills and

understanding to make you a better leader. However, it could require some flexibility and trial and error to figure out the best approach for your business” (p. 7). For example, the church is a business run by a leader but headed by God to transform members to be like Christ and increase membership and attendance at church services (Thomas, 2018). So, perhaps by trial and error, pastors or ministry leaders may determine what works best for the church.

Phipps (2012) asserted, “The particular style of leadership adopted and practiced by a strategic leader will moderate the extent to which an individual’s spiritual belief influences strategic decision-making” (p. 184). Concerning pastors should lead in a manner that shows they are individuals after God’s heart (Laniak, 2006; Thomas, 2018). Regarding SLT, much information was needed and has emerged in recent years. Nevertheless, nowhere is enough (Grandy, 2013). Boal and Hooijberg (2001) were instrumental in helping to bring strategic leadership to the forefront. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) wrote, “Researchers can gain a better understanding of the processes that lead to effective strategic leadership if they focus on the essence of strategic leadership and incorporate the new and emerging theories of leadership” (p. 15). They proposed that *absorptive capacity*, *capacity to change*, and *managerial wisdom* denote strategic leadership (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Boal and Hooijberg (2001) suggested that their definition of strategic leadership was the essence of the SLT. Therefore, included was the definition throughout this researcher’s dissertation.

In this theoretical framework for the study, this researcher revealed that the organization’s (i.e., the church’s) mission revealed by Jesus is to grow God’s kingdom (Davis-Olds, 2017). Also, in the sections was information regarding strategic leadership that pastors or ministry leaders should find beneficial. For example, one way for pastors to increase membership and service attendance is to lead strategically (DeSagun, 2015). Finding out the way

pastors and ministry leaders think was essential to this study. Even though provided information regarding the leadership theory, it still boils down to the pastors' perceptions of it (Deborah, 2018; Drov Dahl & Jones, 2020; Iszatt-White, 2010).

The theoretical literature review provided a history of strategic leadership. Jesus as the ultimate leader, involved His followers (i.e., disciples) in His plan so they could continue to accomplish the objectives (Greenleaf, 1977; Greenleaf, 1991). In this study, this researcher revealed that pastors and ministry leaders need to understand the church's vision, prepare for its mission, and achieve its goals. The perceptions of the pastors and ministry leaders regarding strategic leadership for the church were significant. This researcher provided relatable information regarding strategic leadership.

### **Related Literature**

The Related Literature section includes literature relevant to organizations' research problems, especially churches, such as growth and development (Kohl, 1984; Wilson, 2017). The Related Literature section continued to convey the problem and indicated a gap in the research. The literature gave readers a critical overview of the various strategic leadership concepts related to the church, pastors, members, and subsequent information associated with this researcher's goal and study. The organization of the related literature included information relative to church leadership, church growth, and church attendance and offered a comprehensive synthesis of the literature. The literature related to topics and sub-topics relevant to the research study: Church development (i.e., vision, mission, leadership shift), kingdom development (i.e., God's plan—pastor's plan), and addressed strategic planning and development. The section ends with brief details of the information that framed and guided this research.

Bolman and Deal (1995) pointed out that “the heart of leadership begins with the heart of leaders” (p. 15). Therefore, it becomes paramount to mention development theories. In one study, Sparkman (2017) provided the reader with an analogy of leadership and its importance to church leaders. Sparkman (2017) wrote, “Leadership development through experiences is thought to be one of the most effective approaches in the development of leaders” (p. 54). Pastors often learn to lead by experience (Bolman & Deal, 1995). Pastors should practice excellency in their roles, which is not different from others who are great in their field (Carter & Greer, 2013).

Most pastors in small churches cannot attend elaborate developmental seminars after becoming a leader for different reasons, such as financial or time restraints (Sparkman, 2017). Understanding that they can develop themselves is crucial (Crossan & Nanjad, 2008). Sparkman (2017) states that the journey to the top can be difficult. Sparkman (2017) shared, “Finally, a primary responsibility of those who hold this position (i.e., a top leader) is to provide visionary and inspirational leadership” (p. 57). Regarding church leadership, the pastor is at the top as the human leader and finds the necessary means to lead the church to provide growth and spirituality for God’s people (Davis-Olds, 2017). A primary responsibility of pastors is to provide visionary and inspirational leadership (DeVries, 2016). Pastors are heavily relied upon and should not take their position nonchalantly (Douglas, 2014; Deborah, 2018). Church leadership development is essential, as are leaders having the heart to lead God’s people.

The church leader is essential, and humility plays a part in everyone’s life, including pastors (Breedlove, 2016; Krispin, 2020). The theological literature section established that humility was a good leadership trait. According to Nielson and Marrone (2018), “the great majority of studies to date have examined the outcomes of humility” (p. 813). The bottom line

from the authors' point of view was that "the cumulative body of work provides support that humility is positive and productive in a variety of diverse social settings, including organizations and work teams" (p. 818). Therefore, pastors and ministry leaders should be humble as well as others. According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), leaders should be trustworthy and know what to do. As leaders, pastors should develop and grow the church to please God (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Titus 1:6-9; Acts 15:1-41).

Growth is essential for many organizations, and the church is no different. Church growth was not a new phenomenon but appeared to be a new problem for churches that have suffered a membership decline (Felicetti, 2021). Davis-Olds (2017) gave a vivid account of how a church grew and developed despite the downward spiral of some churches. The lead pastor and others implemented plans that eventually led to a thriving church in church development and growth (Davis-Olds, 2017). Davis-Olds (2017) wrote that "this article presents a case study of one church that has overcome the deep-seated resistance to change found in most congregations" (p. 26). Davis-Olds (2017) wrote the story hoping it would benefit congregations in other places and situations. Situations can hinder the church from developing or thriving in ways individuals would not expect (Felicetti, 2021; Kohl, 1984; Mills, 2017).

Davis-Olds (2017) told of the different programs' implementations using seeds. According to Davis-Olds (2017), "the first seed that would become *The Growing Church* was planted as a strategic response to a growing dissatisfaction among the congregants, and the second a theological shift" (p. 30). The author (Davis-Olds, 2017) carried the reader through each stage of the church development process. For example, Davis-Olds (2017) indicated that "The next significant seed was related to the practice of worship" (p. 31). Next, the church grew



because it implemented a plan that created a harvest (Davis-Olds, 2017). Then, there was a vision for the church's future and a mission to get it done (Davis-Olds (2017).

Davis-Olds (2017) indicated that the plan worked after implementing a program with detailed instructions on what would work best for the church. The goal was to improve the church's membership, which was what happened (Davis-Olds, 2017). In addition, a leadership shift meant implementing changes that would be the best for the leaders, the congregants, and the community (Davis-Olds, 2017).

Many churches may find that they, too, need a leadership shift to grow and prosper. It does not mean a change in leaders (Thiessen & et al., 2018). According to McFayden (2009), "Many congregations want growth without change. Such growth is not likely, however. Where there is growth, there is typically change" (p. 5). Some members must thoroughly understand what must occur in the church, or they may become members who are no longer interested in what is happening to the church (Mills, 2017; Wilson, 2017). Some members may leave the church, causing a decline (Kohl, 1984). Nevertheless, with the right strategic plans, the pastor may ward off falling prey to a declining church (Davis-Olds, 2017; DeVries, 2016; Felicetti, 2021; Kohl, 1984; Mills, 2017; Thiessen et al., 2018)).

Additionally, McFayden (2009) indicated, "becoming more responsive to others' emotional processes is an important function of leadership" (p. 42). The pastors should have a vision that leads to strategic planning (McFayden, 2009). McFayden (2009) wrote, "If the vision might involve a significant degree of change, listen carefully to the congregational traditions of the past" (p. 74). Nevertheless, do not let the traditions be a deterrent or hinder the progress of the church membership (Wilson, 2017). The vision for the church must be one that the people can understand (Davis-Olds, 2017). Assessing many issues may be needed when the church is

not advancing (Felicetti, 2021; Golensky & Hager, 2020)).

According to Baumgartner (2018), some pastors came out of seminary unprepared for what was ahead. Baumgartner (2018) wrote, “The world has changed dramatically and has left the church unprepared. One of the purposes of leadership development today is actually to increase the capacity of the leader to bring change” (p. 17). Therefore, *a leadership shift* may be needed (Davis-Olds, 2017). This leadership change may mean the difference between a church growing or not or the members attending services (DeVries, 2016). Those in leadership must try new things (Felicetti, 2021). They must also revamp things that are not working (Felicetti, 2021).

Baumgartner (2018) revealed that leaders must improve their knowledge and skills and plan church development. According to Baumgartner (2018), “the whole idea of leadership development is based on the assumption that leadership is not only a gift but is also something that can be developed” (p. 22). Furthermore, Baumgartner (2018) alluded that leaders must be ready for what may come. Baumgartner (2018) stated, “When a person is a leader, they cannot escape the conflict. But they can learn how to deal with conflict in more productive ways” (p. 22). Pastors, too, must deal with conflicts and be ready to solve them.

Jaleha and Machuki (2018) ascertained that due to the complex environment of the 21st century, effective strategic leadership is indispensable for the success of an organization. Therefore, exploring strategic leadership concerning the church was necessary since it also contends with complex environments. According to Jaleha and Machuki (2018), “Most of the conceptual and empirical studies have shown that strategic leadership actions significantly influence performance” (p. 124).

Metaphorically speaking, God’s Kingdom is the Body of Christ, and the body needs to grow until it matures in numbers and statutes (Samra, 2008). This maturity is how Paul expected

the church to benefit from spiritual maturity (Samra, 2008). Samra (2008) wrote, “Believers are members of the body of Christ and the people of God, drawing their identity from Christ and God. They are also members of the body of Christ and are united in community with other believers” (p. 134). Therefore, this researcher’s study focused on the importance of numerical growth. Numerical and spiritual maturing should both be a focus for pastors and leaders (Davis-Olds, 2017).

Laniak (2006) indicated, “While many metaphors are much more modest in their aims, they all have the capacity to communicate in ways that are unique to figurative language” (p. 39). Pastors must be careful not only to use words but to paint a coherent picture (DeVries, 2016). According to Laniak (2006), “Metaphors are irreducible moments of multi-modal communication” (p. 39). Many metaphors are used in the Bible to explain many things (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, John 10:11; 10:14; 15:1-17). Understanding what a pastor perceives as their goal should be essential when growing the church (DeVries, 2016). Even others, especially ministry leaders, need to understand the importance of having a plan and what the goals are for the church (Cnaan & Scott, 2020; DeVries, 2016).

Cnaan and Scott (2020) stated that “religious congregations are community hubs of welfare and health services. They are known mostly for their spiritual and faith-based activities as leaders, and the clergy does not work alone. Members that work alongside clergy are essential for the congregation’s functioning” (p. 382). Therefore, it was essential to understand other perceptions about church growth and church attendance. This researcher did not limit this research to only the pastors but included ministry leaders as appropriate.

DeVries (2016) suggested, “Since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, church growth in its various forms has always been a central focus of Christian mission” (p. 1). DeVries

(2016) provided good information about the Body of Christ. DeVries (2016) wrote, “Since the Holy Spirit works through believers to build up the body of Christ, advocates of biblical church growth should seek to employ his means to motivate spiritual giftedness in the church” (p. 1). Pastors should want God to lead the church and increase new bodies (DeVries, 2016). With church growth, what should come are the individuals called to help do what they are to do, which is to help grow God’s kingdom (DeVries, 2016). Needed are new individuals’ attendance at services for membership growth; with them, growth would occur as new members join the church (Janssen, 2019).

McFayden (2009) specified that individuals (i.e., pastors or ministry leaders) might understand that there is a problem until the problem is vast. As McFayden (2009) wrote, congregations can feel lost when change occurs. Many changes have occurred throughout recent years in the churches, with pastors and ministry leaders somewhat unaware (Cnaan, 2021). Such changes include a lesser attendance of church services, and pastors and ministry leaders should be aware of any drastic (Cnann, 2021; McFayden, 2009).

Jaleha and Machuki (2018) provided additional information addressing strategic leadership regarding factors that may be detrimental to the leader. One such factor was the environment (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018). According to Jaleha and Machuki (2018), “The nature of the turbulent environment forces strategic leadership to articulate a clear vision of the future by implementing organizational change” (p. 129). Pastors have many things to contend with, but they must understand and take precautions for what occurs inside and outside the church (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018). Good leaders should know the climate of the church and its surroundings, which can consist of many things taking place in the church environment (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018).

Wilson (2017) used the Book of Acts to indicate church development and growth. Wilson (2017) wrote that “while the book of Acts is frequently appropriated as a model for church growth with the Christian community, the theme of church growth with the narrative of Acts has seldom been analyzed in a sustained way” (p. 317). One way of developing the church was to do as Jesus did, which Paul writes in Acts (Wilson, 2017). Noted was that what was an excellent way to grow the church in the past can still benefit today’s pastors. Wilson (2017) took the readers through the scriptures outlining how the Body of Christ grew. “While Acts most often depicts the growth of the church in general terms, at a few points in the narrative, specific numerical references occur with regard to the increasing size of the church” (Wilson, 2017, p. 324). Wilson (2017) ascertained:

Suppose we are to draw any lessons from individual passages in Acts regarding the ways in which we might plan for and pursue church growth today. In that case, we must do so with an awareness of how the individual passages fit into the broader narrative they are a part of. (p. 332)

The critique of Acts and its benefits for church leaders can be advantageous if individuals are willing to do the work as Paul did in the Bible, as the work may not be easy, but needed (Ayers, 2006; Wilson, 2017).

According to Krispin (2020), “church leaders are interested in growing in their own leadership abilities as well as the leadership abilities of other current and emerging leaders, enabling them to continue to guide the church into the future” (p. 18). The writer addressed good information regarding Christian development throughout the article (Krispin, 2020). Krispin (2020) wrote, “thus, the development of a Christian leader is not merely the acquisition of skills or competencies. It is built on a foundation of discipleship which continues to be nurtured throughout life.” (p. 26). Also, Krispin (2020) indicated, “the most common outcome category

of Christian leader development suggested by the Christian literature is in the area of personal faith formation and character development” (p. 27). Pastors should understand that it is not about what one knows but what one does (Krispen, 2020).

What should be the primary focus of pastors? How can they focus on the most important right thing when so many things need accomplishing? First, they should have a strategic plan (Saeed et al., 2014). Saeed et al. (2014) indicated that any leadership plan must incorporate how to handle conflict. Conflict can occur in the church, and as the good things of an organization benefit the church, negative ones do the opposite (Saeed et al., 2014). Oliver et al. (2017) surmised, “The Christian religion was also responsible for division, death, destruction, and war. Focusing on the positive change, nearly 500 years after the reformation, it seems Christianity has lost its renewing and transformative powers” (p. 1). Pastors and ministry leaders should help ensure those renewing and transformative powers are not lost (Oliver et al., 2017).

Church development is essential and is one reason for research to assess strategic leadership that could enable the churches to be as successful as other for-profit organizations and be a pillar for the community (Pali, 2019). Pali (2019) said that “there is a shift in the definition of development from the main focus on economic growth, infrastructure, and material gain, to human development and life transformation” (p. 202). Therefore, the church should have leaders who understand how vital the mission and vision are and will devise a plan for them (Pali, 2019).

Davies and Davies (2004) ascertained that nine factors are associated with strategic leadership, including organizational activity and individual abilities. According to Davis and Davies (2004), “strategic leaders have the organizational ability to: be strategically oriented; translate strategy into action; align people and organizations; determine effective strategic intervention points; and develop strategic competencies” (p. 30). In addition, strategic leaders

should implement a plan and take the necessary steps to work the plan strategically (Davis & Davis, 2004). For this reason, as a reminder, strategic leadership is the *capacity to absorb, learn, and have wisdom* (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515). In addition, Davies and Davies (2004) indicated, “Strategic leaders display a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present, absorptive capacity, adaptive capacity, and have wisdom” (p. 30). Other authors (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001) indicated that these capacities are essential for strategic leadership.

Also, pastors should consider these factors when devising a plan to properly lead the church (Davis & Davis, 2004; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Ogochi (2018) ascertained that “Through a proper church strategic leadership, there is a high likelihood of coming up with the church organizational design that will give a road map to the success of the church's strategic” (p. 31). A road map for success for the church to use outlines processes (Ogochi, 2018).

Strategic leadership development includes developing relationships (Threlfall, 2019). The church relationship may mean the difference between pastors who succeed and those who do not. (Threlfall, 2019). Without a relationship, it would be hard for a pastor to accomplish church goals or develop the church (Threlfall, 2019). Godly relationships are mandatory, not only with other individuals but with God (Threlfall, 2019). A Godly relationship is required with God and others (Threlfall, 2019). According to Threlfall (2019):

If the fact that God created humanity in his image has any ontological significance, it means (at least) that the question of what humans are cannot be rightly answered apart from their relationship with God. Indeed, the terms used in Gen 1:26-27 suggest that human nature is relational. (p. 543)

Pastors must have a relational nature to have followers (i.e., members) (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Hebrews 2:10-12). Furthermore, they need relationships with everyone (Threlfall, 2019). “The doctrine of the *imago Dei*, then, informs our understanding of a basic

feature of human nature: we are relational” (Threlfall, 2019, p. 546). Therefore, individuals should be aware of the needed relational aspect of ministry (Threlfall, 2019).

Serrano (2018) indicated that “Christian leadership involves merging the fundamentals of organizational behavioral theory with the truths of the scriptures. This merging allows Christian leaders to maximize the decision-making process that positively impacts their organization while bringing glory to God” (p. 10). Leaders have gone astray when leadership in and out of the church is not about bringing glory to God (Serrano, 2018). However, Lemke (2017) indicated:

Christ pointed others to the Father, as a leader, modeled compassionate pursuit of His mission, and capitalized upon the learning potential with His [sic] disciples. It was through these disciples that he extended his Kingdom ministry to all nations. (p. 272)

Leaders must serve in a way that shows the love of God (Breedlove, 2016; Lemke, 2017). Leaders must understand what is at stake when one of God’s children hurts when not leading in a Christ-like manner (Lemke, 2017). Some scriptures which indicate how leaders should lead (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Mark 9:35; Philippians 2:7; Matthew 19:16-22, and Romans 12:16) indicated how leaders should lead. Even though the scriptures relate only to a servant leader, all Christian leaders must follow the scriptures (Lemke, 2017). Lemke (2017) asked, “How can leaders be justified in their actions?” They are to lead, guide, and care for their followers (Lemke, 2017).

Conversely, according to Mills (2017), a discussion of strategic planning is relevant when discussing leadership or strategic leadership for the church. Mills (2017) indicated how people must want to attend church and elaborated on how membership grew. Mills (2017) wrote that church membership increased by 9%, from 235 to 255, while service attendance grew almost 30%, from 120 to 155. The growth only occurred with adequate strategic planning (Mills, 2017).



Mills (2017) indicated that “all our strategies, plans, and surveys can help focus our attention on the goal, but it is God who changes the hearts and characters of our congregants” (p. 73).

Mills (2017) discussed the devised plan the church put into action. Focusing on God is paramount; without it, strategic planning will be in vain (Mills, 2017). Additionally, Mills (2017) stated that pastors should strategically plan and ask God for help. Small changes often bring a larger harvest (Mills, 2017). Church development was most important when ascertaining church growth and member attendance at church services (Atkinson & Rose, 2020). Atkinson and Rose (2020) wrote that church development was an essential avenue for the church. According to Atkinson and Rose (2020), churches may become stagnant without development. A view of for-profit organizations is vital as some things that work for them may benefit non-profit organizations, such as the church (Atkinson & Rose, 2020). Development may be necessary for other organizations and just as crucial for the church (Atkinson & Rose, 2020). Needed is research for these reasons.

According to Hartwig and Bird (2015), the church grows through strategic means, and significant to its survival is leadership. A church cannot survive without implementing plans to accommodate members' needs (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Also, Hartwig and Bird (2015) asked, how can the church adequately thrive if the leaders are unwilling to implement strategies or change them as the needs predicted? Also, leadership can negatively affect church growth (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). That non-growth can, in turn, indicate that the church may end up with low attendance at church services (Hartwig & Bird, 2015; Kohl, 1984).

Church leadership, growth, and attendance can go hand and hand with an inverse or direct relationship (Kohl, 1984). Strategic planning and church development complement each other, as pastors or ministry leaders should not have one without the other (Kohl, 1984). This

portion of the literature review provided readers with an understanding of strategic leadership literature.

According to Iszatt-White (2010), “the grounding of leadership theories in the practical doing of day-to-day leadership work is vital, though often neglected, aspect of leadership research” (p. 409). In understanding the facets of leadership, it is essential to know that the pastors put plans in place, but the purpose must always exist (Schoeman, 2020). No matter how great the plan is, the purpose of administrating it must always be at the front of the pastoral leader’s mind (Schoeman, 2020). Furthermore, Iszatt-White (2010) wrote that there is a constant need to change a strategic plan for successful implementation and refine the strategy due to external contingencies.

Moreover, for strategic leadership in small churches, DeSagun (2014) advised through research exploring “biblical values from the Christian sacred text of 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 and 11-12 to examine how they can contribute towards an understanding and development of a strategic small church leadership” (p. 10). DeSagun (2014) indicated that the early churches were small and that those small churches, mostly in homes, sustained themselves. According to DeSagun (2014), “the New Testament texts set a precedent for guidelines and praxis for small church ministry” (p. 13). If the small church grew during the New Testament period, could it grow in today's environment? Likewise, DeSagun (2014) indicated, “the need for the development of a small strategic church leadership is evident, essential and success of the future Christian church” (p. 1).

Strategic leadership for the church may come with challenges, but when the church has put forth an effort to honor God’s people by providing a place of transformation, the results are worth the work (Woodbridge & Joynt, 2019). Woodbridge and Joynt (2019) wrote:

Since its inception, the Christian church has been involved in social transformation, especially when it has sided with the poor and the oppressed. Despite losing its focus from time to time, throughout church history, it has mostly managed to adhere to its missional responsibility. Given the increasing poverty, violence, and injustices in today's world, more than ever, the Christian church is called up to engage in and continue with its task of being an agent of social transformation. (p. 1)

Schoeman (2020) indicated that “congregations need to re-imagine their calling in their movement from isolation to involvement” (p. 322). Needed is a purpose for all involved (i.e., pastors, ministry leaders, and individuals) who attend the church to be involved (Schoeman, 2020). Schoeman (2020) advocated that “the theoretical understanding lies in a movement in congregational life from isolation towards involvement” (p. 322).

Additionally, Schoeman (2020) asked, “What is the empirical or contextual position in which congregations find themselves? Would it be possible to imagine a movement for congregations towards the future?” (p. 322). Subsequently, Elkington et al. (2015) indicated a need for a new paradigm for local church leadership in the 21st century. The authors concluded that “the leadership of the local church supports the ministry of the local church by serving to strengthen and support the health of each believer who comprises part of the complex adaptive system that forms that particular local church” (Elkington et al., 2015, p. 7).

### **Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature**

The literature overview showed a need for a study regarding the church related to strategic leadership (Grandy, 2013). With both leadership and strategic leadership, historical information and authors’ pertinent research to understand strategic leadership in the church dictated that more studies would help expand the leadership study base. A review of the authors’ precedent research regarding strategic leadership to understand how it may benefit the church guided this researcher’s study (Atkinson & Rose, 2020; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Davies &

Davies, 2004; Grandy, 2013; Lemke, 2017; Serrano, 2018; Threlfall, 2019). All literature was vital and provided evidence that a gap existed and that there was a need for further research (Grandy, 2013).

Strategic leadership may benefit for-profit organizations, and authors are beginning to address strategic leadership as viable for the church (Grandy, 2013). This researcher continued the process by researching the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders' strategic decisions regarding the church with an emphasis on membership growth and attendance at services. Since the literature indicated a need to apply SLT to the church, the appropriately conducted study may benefit churches and close the literature gap. A need existed for a paradigm shift to include the church as a benefactor of selected knowledge about the SLT (Grandy, 2013).

Additionally, a membership or service attendance decline can affect many other situations (Felicetti, 2021). The world is changing, and with changes, perhaps there is a need for some churches to change how they conduct business (Gilley et al., 2009). Once considered to benefit only for-profit organizations, strategic leadership may now catalyze the church (Grandy, 2013). Atkinson and Rose (2020) provided eight suggestions for research that focused on context because what has traditionally worked for churches may not be as effective. Pastoral leaders' missions make previous information necessary for a research study (Grandy, 2013).

This researcher focused on the pastors and ministry leaders, what and how they thought, and what they felt was essential for the church. A gap in the leadership field was a reason to conduct the study. Elkington et al. (2015) pointed out that proposed interventions could improve the functionality and effectiveness of the church. Elkington et al. (2015) and others (Dimitrios et al., 2013; Grandy, 2013) indicated that additional research was needed and suggested strategic leadership research as beneficial for the church. Other authors (Atkinson & Rose, 2020; Grandy,

2013) consistently alluded to the problem of a gap in the literature.

The literature review provided insight into understanding the gap in the research (Grandy, 2013). The research was limited when assessing strategic leadership and the church. Also, no research was available for Richmond, VA, surrounding counties' churches, and the SLT. This researcher believed the study would benefit VA churches and others in other regions. This researcher wanted to narrow the gap that the authors indicated existed.

This researcher's goal was for the pastors participating in the study to benefit others who may have difficulties thriving without the knowledge. The literature review provided tremendous information on strategic leadership and how it benefits the church. For example, Deborah (2018) wrote:

Through proper church strategic leadership, there is a high likelihood of coming up with the church organizational design that will give a road map to the success of the church's strategies. Therefore, organizational design is a guided and formal process of assimilating information, people, and technology to the form of the organization as closely as possible to the core purpose the organization is seeking to attain. (p. 34)

The church's strategy should have the best process due to the people's importance. Therefore, many authors (Ayers, 2006; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Elkington et al., 2015; Grandy, 2013) suggested further research regarding the SLT and the church.

The current research did not address the same question or the perceptions of pastors or ministry leaders, as was the goal of this researcher. Also, Atkinson and Rose (2020) addressed small groups within the church. Atkinson and Rose (2020) wrote, "The practitioner is faced with how to meet the specific needs of the local church as it relates to pursuing the unique vision God has given his or her church in an ever-changing world" (p. 556). Whatever the pastors find themselves in, they must learn to change with the circumstances (Kohl, 1984; Mills, 2017; Thiessen & et al., 2018). This researcher's study may bring changes for churches and a rationale.

Atkinson and Rose (2020) suggest “think strategically” (p.556). The authors indicated that strategic leadership might help the church “operate healthily” (Atkinson & Rose, 2020, p. 556). This researcher’s study increased readers’ awareness of SLT and the church, benefitted those responsible for growth in God’s Kingdom, and narrowed the SLT gap for churches. The literature reviewed by this researcher connoted that strategic leadership is viable for churches.

### **Profile of the Current Study**

This researcher addressed the philosophy of strategic leadership relating to church leadership and found it as necessary for the church as it is for other organizations (Grandy, 2013). The philosophy of each church was different, and church leadership was different for each church, with some similarities. Those similarities were apparent during the analysis, based on the prominent themes. Displayed were the themes across many church topics, including strategic leadership. Presented was church leadership development information regarding different leadership theories, from the beginning to more philosophical ones.

Information about churches facing declining membership, attendance, or even closures is alarming (Elkington, 2013). In 2013, Elkington asked, “What is happening in North American church life to give birth to the alarming loss of three pastors from the vocational ministry every single day” (p. 7). The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the perceptions of strategic leadership of pastors and ministry leaders at 11 churches in VA, with membership of 500 to 3000. Therefore, needed were the 11 churches conducive to obtaining the participants’ information to ascertain if trends existed in pastors’ perceptions of SLT.

This researcher investigated pastors’ and ministry leaders’ perceptions since the SLT guided this researcher’s study involved “the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom” (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515). According to DeSagun (2014), “Small

church leaders function in a context that is unique and distinctively different from larger churches” (p. 17). Conducting interviews was a way to accumulate data and determine what works for pastors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance to help grow God’s Kingdom. These avenues includes learning, changing and using wisdom (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001).

This researcher’s study was accomplished with a case study design and interview implementation and with the researcher as the primary instrument. This researcher obtained data and answered the five central research questions. In addition, there were five delimitations of the research (e.g., a church existence of fifteen years). Also, this researcher obtained participants from the purposively selected churches in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties based on set criteria. Additionally, there was a connection between the church and the SLT while researching pastors’ and ministry leaders’ perceptions of strategic leadership.

Smaller churches may have different circumstances than larger ones (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). Bretherton and Dunbar (2020) state that “congregations of larger size confront a significant dilemma. One of the advantages of a larger congregation is the increased financial income and societal impact that a larger body of people can accomplish” (p. 72). Therefore, pastors should prepare for enhanced growth, especially if there is a sudden increase in bodies before money (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). This researcher believed most pastors would welcome increased membership and attendance. Since essential finance for the church to thrive, the finances should increase with the additional members (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020).

This researcher used a questionnaire to collect data during the interview to achieve the objectives. A modified pilot studies addressed the validity of the interview questionnaire

documented at two other churches with the set criteria for the study. Also, this researcher obtained signed participants' consent forms before the interviews. Additionally, the qualitative case study allowed this researcher to dive deep into a problem and obtain data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2020).

This qualitative research method with a multiple-case study design began after IRB approval. This researcher purposively selected 11 churches, interviewed 19 participants, asked 23 questions, collected the data after signed consent forms. This researcher conducted the designed IQs that answered the five central RQs. The literature review established a need for additional research. Pastors and ministry leaders vital to the church and communities must have the opportunity to be the best based on the “capacity to absorb, the capacity to learn, and the capacity for managerial wisdom” (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515). Other individuals will help when a church is headed in the right direction and led by God (Fashant & Evan, 2020).

Ideally, this researcher understood the need for additional research to benefit other small churches. While this study advanced the literature, needed may be further refinements for interviewing pastors and selections of ministry leaders. Nevertheless, this researcher's study was a great start; others may see value in extending the literature by replicating it.

Next is Chapter Three—Research Methodology. Chapter Three includes a research design synopsis, data collection methods, and instruments. In addition to the data collection process and complete study details, it consists of the study's significance.



### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study aimed to explore pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at services to grow God's Kingdom. This chapter provides the qualitative research method and design used for the study, beginning with the research design synopsis. Next, this researcher provided the details of the settings and participants, along with the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and the data collection methods. In addition, indicated are the instruments section and the Data Analysis section. The chapter ends with a summary.

#### **Research Design Synopsis**

This qualitative explorational study obtained data utilizing a multiple-case design. Qualitative studies help to understand individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This section covers the details of the research processes and procedures. In addition to the method, indicated is the reasoning for the study. Provided are a recap of the study's problem, purpose statement, and research questions. The research design and methodology followed the research questions.

#### **The Problem**

Information about churches facing declining membership, attendance, or even church closures is alarming (Elkington, 2013; Felicetti, 2021). There may be many causes for declines, such as the church losing its pastor, the economy, or even a pandemic. Some reasons may be due to the pastors' leadership, and other reasons may have nothing to do with the pastors' way of leading, and a leading strategy would not make a difference. However, in some cases, strategic leadership may include processes to increase membership or attendance at church services (Ogochi, 2018). Grandy (2013) implied a need to apply strategic leadership to the church.

Badshah (2012) indicated that many organizations spend a good portion of money on leadership development. Similar to other for-profit organizations, pastors should invest in themselves. Most small organizations need more funds for expensive programs (Badshah, 2012). Church members may be eager to help, but strategic planning must be in place (Fashant & Evan, 2020). When pastors keep the church members aware of certain situations, the members may be willing to assist the pastor with a solution (Fashant & Evan, 2020). Awareness of other strategic leadership practices could be beneficial for the church. This researcher conducted this study to benefit the church with problems of membership or church attendance declines.

Additional studies were needed to explore strategic leadership related to the church (Grandy, 2013). Also, strategic leadership information that works and appeals to leaders may help a stagnant church (Felicette, 2021). Studies suggest that churches are in just as much of a need for strategic leadership development programs, if not more, than some other types of corporations (Badshah, 2012; Felicette, 2021). Research on top managers is necessary (Banzato & Sierra, 2016).

The participants in this study provided valuable information that may assist other pastors in surviving and prospering by understanding processes that may counteract membership and church attendance declines. Pastors and ministry leaders are vital to church growth and attendance (Davis-Olds, 2017; DeVries, 2016). A decline in church membership and attendance exists among smaller and even some larger churches making conducting this research essential (David-Olds, 2017). According to Schoeman (2020), believers need the church to meet others and serve God, making the church's mission critical. Therefore, the church mission is essential, as also how pastors achieve it (Breedlove, 2016; Cincala, 2016).

While researching strategic leadership, it became evident that there is a need for the churches, and gaps existed in the literature (Grandy, 2013). Pastors shared processes and information about how to accomplish church goals and ways to develop the church to continue God's commandment to grow His kingdom. This research may benefit pastors facing a decline in membership or those wishing to increase church attendance.

Limited literature regarding strategic leadership and the church exist (Grandy, 2013), and current research regarding leadership still falls short (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Bonardi et al., 2018; Davis-Olds, 2017; Drov Dahl & Jones, 2020). This researcher explored pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of accountability to the church. As a result, pastors may implement plans to improve church outcomes by aligning leadership strategies (Drov Dahl & Jones, 2020). The focus of this study explored strategic leadership activities based on the pastors' information that may help solve problems they face with individuals' attendance at services and, in doing so, aid in church membership growth. However, the literature was limited to date for churches (Grandy, 2013). Thus this researcher's goal was to conduct the study and close a gap in the literature.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership at 11 churches located in VA. For this research, strategic leadership involved the "capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515), and the Strategic Leadership Theory (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) guided this study. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at church services to grow God's Kingdom.

## Research Questions

The following five research questions guided this study by breaking down the distinct researchable aspects to explore the problem and purpose of this qualitative research:

**RQ1.** What are pastors,' associate pastors,' co-pastors,' or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services?

**RQ2.** What are the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning?

**RQ3.** Based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders, what commonalities exist for strategic leadership practices employed among the 11 different churches?

**RQ4.** What concerns do pastors and ministry leaders have about strategic leadership, a leading factor in for-profit organizations' success?

**RQ5.** What are the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services?

## Research Design and Methodology

This researcher's research methodology and design were qualitative with a multiple-case study design. The research methodology and the design chosen accomplished the goal of providing a way to answer the central research questions and were the best fit for this study. This section details the proposed study type (i.e., qualitative) and the design (i.e., case study). The rationale for the design is also provided, including its relevance and reasons for its use.

This researcher began with what *qualitative research methodology* and *case study design* are, along with definitions, history, and general use of the research design. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), "Research methodology can be classified under three broad generic categories: quantitative, qualitative, or multiple methods (also called mixed methods)" (p. 141). Qualitative researchers are interested in investigating how people understand and experience their world and collect data from participants in their environment (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated, “This up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research” (p. 181). The up-close information gathering process was one reason for this researcher’s use of a qualitative method, as it allowed the up-close interaction this researcher wanted. Research is about knowing the issue, problem, or concern that requires addressing (Balnaaves & Caputi, 2001). It is also about knowing how to appropriately research a problem (Balnaaves & Caputi, 2001).

Balnaaves and Caputi (2001) wrote, “Knowing what to research, knowing the purpose of the research, is key to the first steps in a research design” (p. 20). Researchers should be mindful that research is about obtaining data accurately and successfully (Balnaaves & Caputi, 2001). Vogt (2011) indicated, “All independent researchers are faced with three questions: What areas will I investigate; how will I go about doing the investigations; and what tools/skills will I need to carry them out?” (p. 25). The answers to the questions determine the research method to employ (Vogt, 2011).

According to Anderson (2010), researchers can only answer some question types by conducting qualitative research. Therefore, knowing which questions are answerable with qualitative research is crucial (Anderson, 2010). Likewise, the type of information this researcher needed based on the questions answered was a second reason to conduct a qualitative study with a multiple-case study design. That is, wanting to obtain perceived information of pastors related to strategic leadership. Therefore, a qualitative multiple-case study with an interview implementation process worked well for this strategic leadership and church study.

Patton (2002) indicated, “Qualitative methods facilitate the study of leadership in-depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of

analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (p. 14). Moreover, a qualitative case study helped obtain information this researcher may have missed with other methods or designs (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The upfront and in-person relationship can be a significant factor and a plus for qualitative researchers (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

Roberts and Hyatt (2019) specified, “In contrast to quantitative [sic], qualitative research recounts the lived experience of a smaller sample in an effort to provide rich descriptive detail” (p. 144). The characteristics of the qualitative method made it an excellent choice for this researcher. After choosing a research methodology, needed was the appropriate design that helped with the answered study’s questions. Qualitative researchers can choose designs such as narrative, ethnography, and grounded theory (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Furthermore, included are phenomenology and case study designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated, “These approaches have emerged in the field of qualitative research since it has matured in the social sciences since the early 1990s” (pp. 182-183). The rich descriptive details regarding qualitative research were a plus for this researcher and helped to make the data collection successful (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) revealed, “In these approaches, researchers study individuals (narrative, phenomenology); explore processes, activities, and events (case study, grounded theory); or learn about broad culture-sharing behavior of individuals or groups (ethnography)” (p. 183). The logic of the designs provided in qualitative research provided a third reason for this researcher’s qualitative method. According to Taylor et al. (2015), “the phrase qualitative methodology refers in a [sic] sense to research that produces descriptive data—people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (p. 18). Consequently, the qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this researcher’s study due to having an

interview process. Hennink et al. (2016) ascertained, “In broad terms, qualitative research is an approach that allows you to examine people’s experiences in detail by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, observation, content analysis, and [sic] visual methods” (p. 10).

This researcher’s method design helped explore perceptions because of its methods of obtaining detailed information. Also, Hennink et al. (2016) indicated, “Perhaps one of the most distinctive features of qualitative research is that the approach allows you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants and understand the meanings and interpretations that it gives to behavior” (p. 10). Qualitative research helps to understand the why and what (Hennink et al., 2016). Hennink et al. (2016) wrote, “Therefore, qualitative research is most suitable for addressing ‘why’ questions to explain and understand issues or ‘how’ questions that describe processes or behavior” (p. 10). In qualitative research, it is not uncommon to ask *what* or *how* questions to understand behaviors (Hennink et al., 2016). Qualitative research with a case study design worked well for this study because it allowed ways to obtain the thoughts or perceptions of individuals that related to strategic leadership.

This researcher believed much was at stake to conduct a successful research study and wanted the topic understood thoroughly (Robers & Hyatt, 2019). According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), “Rather than numbers, the data are mainly words and can also be audible or visual objects that describe people’s knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feelings as well as detailed descriptions of people’s actions, behaviors, activities, and interpersonal interactions” (p. 143). The design helped with obtaining the information needed for this study. In addition, the method was perfect for focusing on organizational processes (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

McAuley et al. (2007) defined *organizations* as “collectivities of people whose activities are consciously designed, coordinated and directed by their members to pursue explicit purposes and attain particular common objectives or goals” (pp. 12-13). Pastors with missions and purposes also have objectives and goals. Another rationale for the design was that the data collection process provided a way to understand the church as a business organization (Grandy, 2013). This researcher considered the limited research regarding strategic leadership and the church (Grandy, 2013).

As indicated, the pastors’ perceptions of the strategic leadership to achieve its objectives and goals provided information that may benefit other churches that need and want help. A qualitative case study allows researchers to dive deep into a problem to obtain the required data and is only one of the designs of the qualitative method (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Researchers describe the situations but do not make predictions, and predictions are unnecessary with the questions that govern the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Case studies can be explanatory or exploratory (Anderson, 2010; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, this researcher used the case study to explore pastors’ perceptions of strategic leadership and explored the thoughts that indicated why people do what they do.

According to McGregor (2018), a research design is a larger concept than a method. After researchers have their research questions, they need strategies to collect and analyze the data (McGregor, 2018). This researcher used a qualitative research methodology with a multiple-case study design, and the design was appropriate because different meanings can be associated with the questions (Cassell & Symon, 2004). This researcher was to understand the participants.

Systematic and ethical processes and trustworthy findings make for an excellent qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the potential case study allowed for



upfront interaction with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The case study design was ideal for this researcher to discover and understand how one thinks by enabling them to share thoughts. Also, the case study was ideal for this researcher because of its investigative nature of individuals (i.e., pastors). Compiling perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders' provided imperative information for this researcher's analysis.

Qualitative designs are needed to discover reasons for observed patterns, mainly invisible or surprising (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A suitable method provides in-depth questioning to obtain detailed answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case studies are usually not generalizable but can offer transferable insights beneficial to others in a general field of study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The case study is a complex qualitative research design, but it provided immense information for obtaining data to complete the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), case studies are a suitable method to understand one person, situation, or group of people in depth. The case study design allowed this researcher to study pastors in their environments during interviews. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) indicated that case studies offer valuable perspectives because they relate to the phenomena making it possible to understand data themes. The information allowed the participants to reconsider their goals and objectives and how they conducted business that may help others needing or wanting help. Additionally, Leedy and Ormrod (2018) wrote, "Sometimes researchers focus on a single case perhaps because its unique or exceptional qualities can promote understanding or inform practice for similar situations" (p. 231). Therefore, a single case may be suitable for some researchers. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) indicated:

At other times researchers study two or more cases—often cases that are either similar or different in certain key ways—to make comparisons, build theory, or propose generalizations, such an approach is called a multiple or collective case study. (p. 231)

This researcher explored strategic leadership and pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of it.

This researcher's study was an exploratory multiple-case study. Hence, several definitions and kinds of case studies exist (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). Each has advantages, as the multiple case study could be more time-consuming but provide more detailed information than other types, such as grounded theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). In addition, it may offer more of a theme across the cases for the study during analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). Also, the multiple-case study aided this researcher obtain the necessary information to complete this study, which allowed in-depth and detailed information about pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership. Multiple case studies can consist of research at numerous locations, numerous organizations, or one location with multiple cases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). This multiple-case study consisted interviewing participants at 11 churches. However, this researcher added other churches to interview the number of participants needed.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), an essential characteristic of the case study is the "researcher as a key instrument" (p. 181). This researcher was the primary instrument. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, "Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants (p.181). The subjective is focused on grasping the *why* and *how* of behavior in situations (e.g., cultural, societal, or individual) and is not biased (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). McGregor (2018) wrote, "The problem is the deeper, more complex reason why the researcher is conducting the study (e.g., to explore, describe, explain, or find meaning)" (p. 209).

The study's success was that the design and method accomplished what this researcher needed: to explore and obtain the data necessary to complete the study. As this researcher explored the pastors' perceptions, a focus was on how the data could benefit churches.

Therefore, the first goal for completing the study was to determine how the data could help other pastors. Another goal was to obtain as much knowledge as possible in front of experts in the field (i.e., the pastors and ministry leaders).

Leedy and Armond (2018) indicated that “a case study may be especially suitable for learning more about a little-known or poorly understood situation” (p. 231). The pastors’ perceptions of strategic leadership for the church have limited knowledge which is why this researcher conducted the study (Grandy, 2013). This researcher’s problem statements and research questions aligned well with the research design and methodology. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) wrote, “For anything you do in a qualitative study, you must have a definite rationale and a distinct purpose, and you must keep your overall goal—to answer your research question—clearly in sight at all times” (p. 236). Based on aspects of a qualitative multiple-case design, this researcher would “understand a very small number—in great depth; focus on one case or a few cases within its/their natural setting(s)” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 236). This researcher believed in-depth case studies would benefit churches with declining membership growth or individuals’ attendance at church services.

### **Setting**

This section describes the setting for this study. According to the internet, many churches located in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties met the criteria for this researcher's study. The geographic location was the State of Virginia. The organizations chosen were 11 churches in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties. According to statistics (Association of Religion Data Archives—ARDA, 2022), there appeared to be many churches within a 500-3000 membership range. This researcher understood that the churches were probably doing things correctly and wanted to determine what constituted their success.

Pastors, defined in other places of this dissertation, usually are the head leaders of the church, with God as Head of it, and, therefore, fall under what others deem a *strategic leader* (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). Websites for churches in VA with a membership of at least 500 showed that the church had a lead pastor, associates, and ministry leaders. In addition, some also had co-pastors, assistant pastors, and executive ministers. This researcher's interest was to find out the progression of the church based on the strategies implemented.

This researcher understood that getting the perceptions of others were necessary. Although the pastors' perceptions are of utmost importance, other minister leaders' perceptions were also relevant for this study. This researcher found that the ministry leaders' perceptions were very similar to the pastors' regarding strategic leadership, regardless of the titles. However, some participants' differences existed on certain items asked regarding church growth. Thus, some pastors, concerning church growth, indicated that no matter what they did, if God did not provide the increase, it would not happen.

The churches consisted of Baptist or Christian Non-denominational affiliates but were mainly of Baptist Affiliated. This researcher defined an affiliated Baptist church as a church without outsiders making decisions. No one other than the pastor and selected congregants have the authority to direct the church (i.e., except God has complete authority). This researcher defined a Non-denominational church as a Christian church without connection with any denominational affiliation (e.g., Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, or Methodist). All churches used in the study met the same criteria. However, this researcher did not limit the church affiliation to only Baptist and decided to include Christian Non-denominational to obtain different insights regarding growing the church membership and getting the members to attend church services.

All churches existed for at least 15 years, with a minimum of 500 members, before COVID-19. This researcher chose churches based mainly on size, with a membership of between 500 to 3000. Also, this researcher decided that a 3000 membership maximum was the more remarkable size church (i.e., unless the pastor was an expert advisor). To find out how pastors grew the church to the minimum size, which could benefit other churches needing and wanting to grow. Thus, noteworthy was the church's minimum size.

Even though this researcher was familiar with Baptist and Christian Non-denominational churches in VA, that familiarity was non-existent for some churches and limited for others participating in the study. Therefore, there were no common issues, and any bias was minimal. Also, to not be too intimidating to smaller churches that review the study for guidance. This researcher did not want the size of a megachurch to be a determinant for the smaller ones. Instead, this researcher hoped to have a mixture of small church sizes (e.g., 500 - 999) and larger (e.g., 1000 – 3000) memberships. Also, this researcher chose the church settings for the study due to the adequate size and the criteria for the pastors and participants. The pastors of the size church indicated would probably have more of a strategic plan in place to maintain the church and continue to grow it. Pastors are the functional head of the church and, essentially, the de facto CEO of the church. The organizational structure of a church may differ denominationally.

Due to confidentiality being critical to trustworthy data collection and ethical use, this section utilized codings (see Appendix H) for both individuals and churches. This researcher used a code for each church, associating it with the letters A, B, and C through K. Assigned codes were randomly for each church to protect its identity. For example, this researcher coded one church as A. The 11 churches have an alphabet assigned for the church's name and a number for the participant so as not to identify any particular church or participant. Setting or contextual

information refers to the circumstance in which the participants minister or engage in social contact (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The church environment was similar to most churches which can house 500 – 999 or 1000-3000 members.

This researcher found no church to note due to the environment. The records noted if there was a reason to believe the environment for the research was a significant factor since information can be different for people and their behavior based on the influence of the environment (setting) where they serve (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher understood that human behavior, attitudes, and beliefs are a function of the interaction between the individual and their environment and paid close attention to noticing if anything out of the ordinary existed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher found it did not be the case.

This researcher chose the settings by researching the local library and the internet. The library had information about church institutions, but this researcher found the internet a better resource for developing a mailing list. Once this researcher had a separate church list and a church interest, it was easy to get some information regarding the pastors and other ministry leaders readily available from their website. Also, a plan was to review the internet for pastors, associates, assistants, co-pastors, and ministry leaders' information readily available on the churches' websites to help with time constraints. For example, based on the pastors' recommendations, once they agreed to participate, it was easier to see the staff that may participate once they agreed.

The setting for conducting research was at each independent church. Even when a church had more than one campus, this researcher conducted research at only one location. On one occasion, the interview occurred at a local library instead of the church due to the church closure at that time.

Confidentiality, privacy, and ethical use of the data were critical to trustworthy data collection and ethical use of the data. This researcher used tables to show church information similar to those in Table 1 and Table 2. All churches appear as coded for both the church and the participants. Therefore, the relevant information to the study provided in the tables included the participants' titles, church code, church affiliation, and the county or city' church location. Additionally, the tables indicate how data collected adheres to confidentiality for each church in Tables 1 and 2, using church and participant codes (i.e., Church A, Participant 1, 2, or 3).

**Table 1**

*Sample Church and Participant Expectation—Church A-D*

Church	Title	VA County	Church Affiliation
Church A	Pastor Minister Leader 1 Minister Leader 2	Richmond	Baptist
Church B	Pastor Minister Leader 1 Minister Leader 2	Chesterfield	Baptist
Church C	Pastor Minister Leader 1 Minister Leader 2	Richmond	Church of God in Christ
Church D	Pastor Minister Leader 1 Minister Leader 2 Minister Leader 3	Henrico	Full Gospel

*Note.* The participants were pastors or ministers who were leaders.

**Table 2**

*Sample Number of Participants Interviewed—Church A-D*

Number of Interviews	Number of Participants Interviewed				
	4	3	2	1	Church
		X		X	A
			X		B
				X	C
					D

*Note.* The table provides the sample data of the participants interviews at each church.

Included in the analysis were the participating churches in the study. The study noted the number of churches contacted before obtaining seven and an additional five to participate, with two expert advisors. The panel data are outlined in the study and with the same confidentiality.

### **Participants**

Drawn from the population were the 11 churches that accepted the request to participate, and the participants were from those churches. The study employed purposively sampling that recruited participants and used it as an avenue that appropriately selected individuals (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual materials) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 185). As a result, the participants provided the necessary information to make the study successful, which led to increased knowledge of church leadership.

Pastors led the 11 churches, mostly with at least two leaders to interview. In addition, some participants were the Executive Minister or Minister of Education. The research population consisted of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, or other ministry leaders in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties based on the church history (i.e., time in existence) and pastoral information (i.e., time at the location). The sample size was 11 churches (including the expert advisors), and the number of participants per location was one to three. These numbers were relevant to what expert authors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) reference as reliable case numbers for a qualitative study.



The purposive sample provided 19 participants for the study. Due to different circumstances, the three to four participants at each location did not occur, mainly due to Covid-19, where offices needed to be completely operational. Due to personal preference, conveniently based sampling procedures utilized churches located in VA. The sampling method was not based on convenience alone and is only a minor reason since technology makes having participants easily assessable in any geographical location. However, each church had been in existence for at least 15 years. In addition, the pastors had at least a ten-year tenure.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2018), “most sampling in qualitative studies is purposive sampling—that is, it entails choosing those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation” (p. 242). Participants selected had the willingness to help other pastors with their mission and purpose and indicated what worked best in continuing to grow God’s Kingdom. This researcher interviewed pastors, associate pastors, and ministry leaders at a selected church based on purposive sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher chose churches based on the indicated criteria and obtained the data.

Chapter One has the complete list of definitions. Below are the participants’ definitions.

1. *Associate Pastor*: One who ministers God’s Word and holds the title of associate pastor
2. *Assistant Pastor*: One who ministers God’s Word and holds the title of assistant pastor
3. *Co-Pastor*: A preacher designated as co-pastor
4. *Lead Pastor*: A preacher ministers God’s Word in the church, is responsible for church leadership, and has the title of lead pastor
5. *Ministry Leader*: An individual with a role in the church as a chairperson (i.e., Women Ministry Chair, Minister of Education, Minister of Music, Deacon Chair, or others)

6. *Pastor*: A preacher ministers God's Word in the church, is responsible for church leadership, and has the title of pastor
7. *Senior Pastor*: A preacher ministers God's Word in the church, is responsible for church leadership, and has the title of senior pastor.
8. *Strategic Leader*: An individual leading in a way that involves the capacity to *learn, change*, and has managerial *wisdom* (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001)

The participants were limited to the pastor, senior pastor, lead pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor, co-pastor, and ministry leaders affiliated with churches in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties. This researcher required the participants to meet the criterion for the pastor and others and the criterion for the church. This researcher's goal was to have a combination of one pastor, co-pastor (i.e., if a co-pastor existed), assistant/associate pastor, or a ministry leader for three to four participants. This researcher's goal was to keep the associate or assistant pastors and ministry leaders' titles the same for each participating church as possible.

The first stage in identifying the participants, since this researcher's interest was with current pastors, co-pastors, associates, assistants, and ministry leaders, was to ask questions. Next, the sampling procedure identified the churches with the demographics needed for this researcher's study. This researcher's goal was to have approximately 28 participants since this study was a multiple-case one, with three to four participants from each church.

The rationales for selecting the VA churches were: Churches in VA were of particular personal interest to this researcher; other qualitative case studies have utilized churches in VA (Smith, 2020), and essential to this researcher was getting to know pastors and others in other counties close to this researcher's proximity. Another reason to use churches in VA is that it comprises many churches that meet the membership requirements. This researcher conducted the study to attain the information that others in the area may find helpful for the church and other locations outside Richmond, VA., and surrounding counties. Therefore, the settings chosen for

this study were because they were throughout Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties. The counties had the type of churches this researcher could choose from, and accessibility was more accessible because this researcher resides in VA.

This researcher did not use the names of pastors, ministry leaders, or churches in this study. Also, this researcher coded each participant's name to ensure trustworthy and ethical research in the study. The inclusion criteria determined that the cases were worth studying based on the church size and other factors. This researcher obtained sufficient knowledge to benefit other churches and their communities. The location was not limited to any area except churches within Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties. Solicitation continued if the church met the criteria until seven churches agreed to participate. Due to unforeseen circumstances, this researcher asked four other churches to participate. This researcher is confident of sufficient selected participants by adding the four other churches; all churches met the criterion.

Some churches in this researcher's study had more than one location, but this researcher interviewed participants at only one site. All churches had a main building where pastors conducted worship services. This researcher did not obtain the private information of the pastors or ministry leaders. This researcher may use information regarding the history of a particular church based on the answers to the interview questions, but not enough to deter confidentiality.

A pastor nor a church had any adverse information discovered before or while conducting this study. Therefore, no church with a negative report (i.e., adverse information reported) joined this researcher's study. This researcher reviewed all data during the research process and analyzed all data gathered during the data collection process.

This researcher found some participants' demographics interesting, even though demographics were not analyzed. One interesting demographic aspect was that only one was

female out of the original listing of 100 churches from the Google search engine. In addition, there was only one minister with the title Executive Minister, who was female. Also, this researcher was only able to ascertain the educational level of some of the participants. Thus, the numbers listed are not a concrete picture. The members' sample information provided for Church A and subsequent churches is shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

*Interviewee Demographics—Church A-K*

Interview Type	Gender (#)	Education Level (D, M)
Senior Pastor	Male (1)	D
Pastor	Male (9) Female (1)	D (1)
Co-Pastor	- -	- -
Assistant Pastor	Male (1)	M
Associate Pastor	Male (3)	M (3)
Executive Minister	Female (1)	D
Minister of Education	Female (2)	M (2)
Minister of Music	Male (1)	M

*Note.* Education Level: Doctorate (D), Masters (M). The above information was not obtained from participants nor analyzed but taken from a website or title.

Established were criterion questions prior to scheduling the appointment for the interviews. This researcher identified most pastors' or church information before sending the invitation to the participant, based on the criteria for selecting the church or pastor. Even during the sampling procedure, this researcher established confidentiality when the church agreed to participate in this study. Therefore, only this researcher has the information that connects any participants with any church or knowledge about the church.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is significant in all aspects of research. More importantly, this researcher was the instrument of choice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since being an instrument of choice, this researcher provided any bias upfront. This researcher brought one bias or assumption to the study that did not influence the view of the data or its analysis. This researcher recognized that individual pastors have different ways of leading and could not make biased assumptions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “experiences may cause researchers to lean toward certain themes, actively look for evidence to support their positions, and create favorable or unfavorable conclusions about the sites or participants” (p. 184). Accordingly, this researcher considered that past experiences could shape the interpretations of the data. Therefore, this researcher separated what could be considered the researcher’s bias from the pastors’ perceptions by utilizing software analysis.

The interpretations of the data of a qualitative study are of utmost importance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher must always conduct the research with integrity and good ethics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Keeping integrity and ethics at the forefront, this researcher ended with a replicable study that may provide meaning to others. Creswell and Creswell (2018) ascertained, “Another aspect of reflecting on the role of the researcher is to be aware of connections between the researcher and the participants or the research sites that may unduly influence the researcher’s interpretations” (p. 184). It was important to note up front any information that could be an issue. To alleviate such issues, this researcher had never met or heard of most of the participants interviewed. This researcher did not utilize the church currently a member of to alleviate any potential bias which may have presented itself in the study had this researcher included the church.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “In addition, gaining entry to a research site and the ethical issues that might arise are also elements of the researcher’s role” (p. 183). For this study, the pastors decided to have the church participate. This researcher was fortunate to gain access to the 11 churches to conduct 19 interviews. Gaining access to the church was not an issue, except in cases where the church had not fully reopened due to Covid 19. The pastor also decided who else would be a likely candidate to interview and gave the okay if they were willing to participate.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to all ethical considerations without exception. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2018), “Most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues” (p. 111). The National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects guidelines (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) set participants’ guidelines. This researcher’s study has no unethical issues associated with it and assured that no unethical issues occurred due to following all guidelines (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). In addition, this researcher followed the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (LU IRB) guidelines (Liberty University, 2022, IRB Section, p. 25) to alleviate any possibility of unethical issues.

Obtaining approval from the LU IRB (2022) was the first step before conducting research. After approval from the LU IRB, this researcher collected data. The LU IRB (2022) guidelines included obtaining permission to conduct the study and receiving the approval letter (see Appendix A). After receiving approval to conduct the study, this researcher verbally

assessed the population of interest to meet the study's criteria. To conduct the study, this researcher used recruitment letters (see Appendix B) and other recruitment materials, such as follow-up letters (see Appendix C). Once verbally determined that the church met the criteria, this researcher needed permission for each person to participate. All materials used were LU IRB submitted and approved with minimal approval changes.

The minimal changes included having one Consent Form (see Appendix D & E) for all participants, no matter the type of participant, and not using a demographic survey deemed unnecessary for this researcher's study (LU IRB, 2022). As the LU IRB representative suggested, having too many consent forms and survey forms that were not needed would be too time-consuming and confusing when conducting such a massive research study with different types of participants. Therefore, one minimal change included having one consent form for all participants.

This researcher obtained signed Consent Forms (see Appendices D & E). Other information and approved LU IRB (2022) documents included the interview questionnaire (see Appendix F). All documents were created and approved by the LU IRB, with the approved research submitted with minimal approval changes. Provided are all instruments as indicated, recruitment letters (see Appendices B & C), consent forms ( see Appendices D & E), and the interview questionnaire (see Appendix F). In addition, a thank you letter (see Appendix G) was approved and sent to each participant, thanking them for participating in this research.

Paramount to a qualitative study are strategies to ensure replication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). In addition, researchers must ensure they provide ethical considerations (Creswell & Creswell, 2016; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). A way to ensure ethical considerations was to understand what was involved in conducting an ethical study

(Creswell & Creswell, 2016). This researcher obtained The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) certification to conduct human subjects research and was fully aware of the processes outlined in the Belmont Report (1978) as indicated to conduct all research with “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice” (National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. In addition, the LU IRB (2022) process indicated that there should always be minimal risk to participants, whether physical or psychological (see Appendices D & E). Roberts and Hyatt (2019) wrote, “The respect for persons includes voluntary consent to participate, informed content, privacy and confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from participating without penalty” (p. 146). As a result, this researcher began and maintained an ethical study.

According to Robert and Hyatt (2019), beneficence refers to “Risks justified by potential benefits, study design minimizes risks, and conflicts managed to reduce bias (p. 146). Ethical principles for research with human subjects include justice (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Roberts and Hyatt (2019) indicated that according to the ethical guidelines, “the study does not exploit vulnerable persons, exclude people who may benefit from participation, and participation is borne equally by society” (p. 146). Understanding the concepts led to an ethically conducted study. Additionally, this researcher knew that required was a statement regarding the confidentiality and non-identification of participants (see Appendices D & E). The participants understood the study fully and that it was always voluntary (see Appendices D and E).

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), “In addition to respect for participants, respect should be shown for the research site(s), including gaining permission to collect data at the site, if appropriate” (p. 147). As indicated, an element of the researcher’s role was gaining entry to a site and avoiding ethical issues (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This researcher paid close attention to



possible occurrences that could cause unethical problems and adhered, as the LU IRB Representative suggested, according to the LU IRB Guidelines (LU, 2022, IRB Section, p. 25). The expert panel pastors and the modified pilot study, as the LU IRB representative suggested, benefitted this researcher. The detailed procedure provided the necessary validity for the study by having the interview questionnaire reviewed prior to its use for all research participants. According to panel advice, no modifications were made to the interview questions, as they appeared appropriate for such a research study and should answer the research questions.

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

This section briefly describes the information this researcher needed to answer the study's research questions. It indicated the problem investigated and how this researcher gathered the necessary information to address the problem. In addition, this section included any information about the data collection methods, instruments used to collect data, and the procedures and approvals followed in data collection, including the LU IRB (2022) approval processes. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study through sampling and recruitment, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews" (p. 185). The boundaries were set and approved by the LU IRB.

This researcher identified the types of sites and individuals needed to answer the study's questions. Other vital details are how the participants were informed about the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and as outlined in LU IRB Guidelines (LU, 2022, p. 25). The procedures included the steps to conduct the study and the information regarding eliciting participants, gathering and recording the data, and analyzing the strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following section details the data-collection methods this researcher used and includes the

safeguarding measures of the data. It provided the instruments' protocols and information for the modified pilot study, interviewing process, interview questionnaire, and, most importantly, the case study. In addition, this researcher provided information regarding document analysis.

### **Collection Methods**

This researcher detailed the collection methods used in this study. Essential to the qualitative inquiry is the collection method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher used interviews to collect the data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Leedy and Ormrod (2018), collections may include focus groups and observation. This researcher's data collection method only included an interviewing process. This researcher verbally reviewed the criteria information from each participant during the solicitation process using the recruited materials (see Appendices B & C). The materials were designed and used according to the LU IRB (2022) recommendations. The Interview Questionnaire was the only document approved for the interview questions (IQs).

This researcher purchased a digital voice recorder to audio record the interviews. In addition to purchasing the digital voice recorder, this researcher purchased granite letter paper with matching granite envelopes and stamps. After compiling a mailing list of approximately 100 churches, this researcher narrowed the list to 40 churches and sent the recruitment letter (see Appendix B) informing pastors of the study and requesting participation. Approximately one week later, this researcher made follow-up phone calls using the IRB-approved follow-up recruitment document for calls, United States Postal Service (USPS) mail, or emails (see Appendix C). In addition, made were telephone follow-up calls to the churches. After following up with the churches by phone, this researcher scheduled appointments, and the participants signed informed consent (see Appendices D & E) before the interviews.

The Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix F) began the collection process. This researcher used the same introduction technique for each participant and conducted the interviews similarly for each case. Additionally, this researcher collected in-depth information and hand-wrote all answers on the interview questionnaire sheet. Also, this researcher typed each interview verbatim as an aggregate document (see Appendix H) without identifying the church or participants, with both coded. Finally, this researcher prepared the aggregate data using software to code and analyze it.

### **Instruments and Protocols**

This researcher collected the data as questions presented to the participants during an interview, which lasted less than one hour. This researcher developed the IQs to answer the overall study's central questions. They also provided the information to address the primary purpose of the study. The answers to the IQs addressed and provided the answers to the five central questions indicated in the study. Asking the IQs provided the information to address the study's primary purpose. This researcher explored pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership in the churches located in VA. Also, this researcher resides in VA and is interested in helping churches in the state. Conducting research provided information for the churches participating in the study and, more importantly, to benefit other churches in VA thriving to grow numerically and spiritually.

This researcher developed and provided a validation method for the questions. The process to validate the questions consisted of an expert panel and a modified limited pilot study, as no viable questionnaire list existed. This researcher used an expert panel of two pastors and conducted a modified pilot study (IRB Approved) to ascertain if the interview questions provided the necessary data to answer the study's central questions and overall purpose.

### ***Pilot Study***

According to Leedy and Ormond (2020), a pilot study is a “brief exploratory investigation to determine the feasibility and validity of procedures, measurement instruments, or methods of analysis that might be useful in a subsequent, more in-depth research study” (p. 417). A pilot study and expert panel helped with the study’s validity. Cone and Foster (1993) indicated that “pilot work is important because what you plan to do may look good on paper but not work very well when you try it out with real subjects” (p. 201). Additionally, the modified pilot study helped ensure the participants understood what would happen and helped with unforeseen issues before conducting the fundamental research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Some researchers may think a pilot study is time-consuming (Cone & Foster, 1993). However, Cone and Foster (1993) indicate it is better to find out upfront that the questions do not provide the data necessary to answer the study’s questions instead of finding out after conducting the complete study. Finding out too late that the data is insufficient wastes the researcher’s or others’ time (Cone & Foster, 1993).

Before addressing the interview process or other processes, ensuring the IQs were valid and understandable to the participants was essential. This researcher developed the interview questionnaire (see Appendix F) to answer this research study’s central questions with the purpose of the study and obtained information to address them. Conducted as a modified pilot study (IRB Approved) for the study’s research questions validation. The appropriate questions approved by the IRB appeared relevant. This researcher conducted a modified pilot study—initial pilot study steps without conducting the complete study’s analysis.

The modified pilot study was with two pastors interviewed before conducting the interviews with the remaining participants. A modified pilot study's importance benefitted this

purpose wholly regarding the interview process. This researcher conducted the additional cases only after validating the initial interview questions. The total number of churches for the study was 11, including two additional for the pilot study and nine more for the multiple-case study. The additional cases ensured that this researcher had enough interviewees to make the study reliable. Once this researcher determined that access to as many participants at each church were not feasible, the next step was to solicit additional churches. The other churches were ideal as they provided this researcher with more direct information from additional pastors.

This researcher was the primary instrument used to conduct the research. This researcher wrote answers to each interview questionnaire for each participant (see Appendix H) and audio-recorded the interview information. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), if electronics are used, such as audio or video, the researcher should still take notes due to the possibility of equipment failure. In addition, this researcher conducted the interviews at the participant's site.

### ***Interviews***

Three primary sources of data collection exist, but the interview was this researcher's primary source. This study was a qualitative methodology with a multiple-case study design, and the interviewing process was this researcher's primary way of collecting data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions of the participants" (p. 251). Interviews require a list of questions with a rationale for each (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher generated the IQs (see Appendix F) from and grounded in the literature on the SLT and the church topics. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate, "In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, telephone interviewing or engages in focus group interviews" (p. 187). This researcher considered electronic interviews, but

interviews at the participants' site were ideally better (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote, “The interview protocol should be about two pages in length” (p. 190). The total number of questions should be between 10 and 25 questions depending on the question type (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher had 23 IQs (see Appendix F). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), less than 25 questions will help simplify and brief the interview process. The expert panel provided information that the number of questions was adequate and significant, and the modified pilot study helped this researcher refine and finalize the process. In addition, this researcher was familiar with the questions for consistency during each process.

There are several critical interviewing components: (1) basic information about the interview, (2) an introduction, (3) the interview content questions with probes, and (4) closing instructions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To prepare, this researcher ensured that the interview process was conducive to answering the research questions. This researcher designed the IQs to correlate to a specific research question and answer each of the study’s five central RQs. After carefully developing the questions, this researcher needed to prepare. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), one should prepare for the interview process.

This researcher generated the IQs to mirror the literature on the research topic. The questions related concisely to pastors’ and others’ perceptions of strategic leadership. To collect the correct data through the interview process, the expert panel and modified pilot study helped ensure that this researcher’s questions were adequate. For this researcher’s study, the interview process was most applicable. This researcher found the interview techniques essential, allowing for new insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, this researcher realized how hard it was to not comment on the pastors’ or others’ answers but realized the importance of not doing so. In

addition, this researcher was the only interviewer and interviewed one participant at a time.

This researcher scheduled interviews at other churches, conducting two most days. Also, when this researcher scheduled and conducted interviews, they were usually two interviews per day at two different churches. After interviewing the pastor, he or she would recommend who else would be a good candidate to interview and that they would let the person to know that this researcher would call them. However, this process did not work for all churches, and there were reasons only one participation occurred at some churches.

### *Surveys/Questionnaires*

This researcher screened each participant verbally (see Appendices B & C) before the face-to-face interview. According to the LU IRB (2022), surveys would be an excellent choice for obtaining demographic information if analyzed because information not to be analyzed is unethical to collect. Therefore, verbal screening was a better choice (see Appendices B & C). Additionally, this researcher accessed some information from the church's website before mailing the letters. Also, this researcher received other information while scheduling the interview or discussing the study. This researcher assessed titles efficiently for some participants from the church's website and obtained the educational level from it as well.

A uniform survey provides researchers with demographical data needed for analytical purposes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this researcher, utilizing surveys was different. Surveys are usually only the primary way to obtain information for a qualitative study if they utilize open-ended questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher's interview questionnaire consisted of primarily open-ended questions, with a few having multiple-choice options and a choice allowing further explanation. Therefore, this researcher did not need to

utilize a demographic survey but recruitment documents, consent forms, and the interview questionnaire (see Appendices B, C, D, E, & F) to obtain the necessary data for this study.

The expert panel and a modified pilot study did not require analysis. However, they ensured that pastors would understand the questions and that there should be no problems with the participants answering them. The Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix F) was the only document used to obtain data for analytical purposes. In addition to this method of gathering data, this researcher employed a more formal design of getting information, referred to as a case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Case Study***

Grandy (2013) “employed a case study methodology and drew primarily upon qualitative data collected from interviews and observation” (p. 616). The researcher provided in-depth information regarding a qualitative case study of a church (Grandy, 2013). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Case studies are a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 247). In addition, the case study can focus on individuals, events, and the data collection can consist of interviews, documents, reports, or observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). This researcher’s decision to use a case study to review the SLT related to today’s pastors’ and leaders’ perceptions provided flexibility. The multiple-case study was a way to acquire perceptions of pastors and leaders and better understand how they implement plans to get and keep the church moving in the right direction.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Roberts and Hyatt (2019) provided much insight to ascertain the best collection methods for any researcher. Creswell & Creswell (2018) indicated that crucial aspects of qualitative research consist of the methods and the questions the research



answers. After deciding that qualitative research would work best for this study, this researcher determined that the appropriate amount of data would be sufficient with a case study or case studies design and conducted the multiple-case study, as initially approved.

A case study design allowed this researcher to answer the leadership research questions. Yukl (2013) indicated, “One of the more useful ways to classify leadership theory and research is according to the type of variable that is emphasized; characteristics of leaders” (p. 10). Although others (Kouzes & Posner, 1985; 2017) understand successful organizations in leadership-making decisions, this researcher believed a study regarding pastors’ perceptions of *strategic leadership* and the *church* was vital to the leadership field. Grandy’s (2013) research indicated that churches are run similarly to for-profit organizations. McAuley et al. (2007) defined *organizations* as “collectivities of people whose activities are consciously designed, coordinated and directed by their members to pursue explicit purposes and attain particular common objectives or goals” (pp. 12-13). However, available was little information that connected the church and strategic leadership. This researcher affected a well-needed connection between strategic leadership and the church with this multiple-case study. Additionally, this researcher made connections by interviewing individuals who adequately responded to questions.

This researcher conducted this study to make a difference in others’ lives; a third reason to conduct the study. Consequently, this researcher focused on individuals’ similarities based on answers to needed questions. Pastors with a mission and purpose should also have objectives and goals. The rationale for the case study design was that it would help obtain the data. This researcher conducted the study as planned and, with sufficient data, can present the findings. In addition, the findings may benefit many (i.e., pastors, ministry leaders, and researchers).

Other authors (Jackson, 2020; Smith, 2020) found the multiple-case study design valuable. They utilized a qualitative multiple-case study to ascertain perceptions. Smith (2020) “conducted interviews in a semi-structured manner” (p. 83). At the same time, Jackson (2020) utilized a qualitative multi-case study to present rich data. Both dissertations provided aspects of a multi-case study beneficial to this researcher, whether the design or the data collection.

This researcher conducted this study to acquire a deep understanding of the participants’ strategies, plans, and actions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), an excellent qualitative study produces trustworthy findings if systematically and ethically conducted. A case study allows upfront interaction between the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study information helped this researcher to understand how individuals think by enabling them to communicate those thoughts not shared during other types of research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that qualitative designs uncover reasons for observed patterns, mainly invisible or surprising.

The best method for a study should provide in-depth questioning, which allows for detailed answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Hyatt & Roberts, 2019). The findings from the case studies answered this researcher’s central research questions and were ideal for this study. It was a reliable study design used to conduct the research beneficially, and it did that exceedingly.

### ***Document Analysis***

One participant provided a document. Some documents can help with historical information about the individual (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). It is, however, essential to know that document analysis examines and thematically analyzes the content of documents, interview transcripts, and publications (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). A criterion for selecting the documents may be what it provides; historical data or an understanding of recorded work, or its relevance to

the organization that provides it (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). The results can be trusted only when the findings make sense based on the data presented (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). This researcher did not use any unsolicited documents.

## **Procedures**

This researcher provided all the steps necessary to collect the research data in this section. The procedures included securing the LU IRB approval to elicit participants and to gather and record the data (LU IRB, 2022, p. 25). According to Creswell and Creswell (2019) and Leedy and Ormrod (2018), researchers must detail all steps. Therefore, this researcher provided all the mandatory steps. In addition, the recruitment of participants was a significant factor in this research. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), all steps are vital for most qualitative research, no matter how minuscule, primarily when not conducted in a study with probability sampling but purposive selection. This researcher's participants were purposively selected for this study as non-probability sampling worked well for the cases.

### ***Eliciting participants***

This researcher obtained a list of churches in Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties by a Google search and retrieved approximately 100 churches. The elicitation process began with an invitational letter (see Appendix B) this researcher sent by the USPS asking pastors on the list who fit the criteria to participate. Next, this researcher searched for the churches' websites according to zip codes in the different counties. When reviewed, a list with the name of the church, pastor name, title (if other than pastor), physical address, phone number, and church email (e.g., information found on church websites) narrowed the list to 40 churches. Finally, with a good list, this researcher prepared the invitation recruitment letter (see Appendix B) on Fine Granite Ivory paper and envelopes to send 40 pastors detailed information about the study.

This researcher sent letters to the pastor's name and church appearing on the website to request participation. Also, this researcher created an alphabetical Excel spreadsheet for easy reference and follow-up. Four pastors responded to the mailing, one with regrets of being unable to participate due to a personal issue, and the other three agreed and scheduled the interviews.

After waiting one week, this researcher contacted other pastors by phone or email (see Appendix C) to acquire participation in the study. The calls continued, verbally accessing eligibility until seven churches agreed to participate. After conducting some interviews, it became apparent that more churches needed to participate in reaching the number of participants this researcher needed for the study. This researcher made more calls and sent more emails, which afforded more interviews. The process continued as needed.

### ***Gathering and Recording Data Steps***

The process of solicitation, gathering, and recording the data included the following steps:

1. Initial contact letters (see Appendix B) sent to pastors
2. Calls made or emails sent to pastors according to the approved recruitment follow-up (see Appendix C) process
3. Obtained prior participants' approval using the Consent form (see Appendix D & E)
4. Conducted individual audio-recorded face-to-face meetings that followed interview protocols (see Appendix F)
5. Thank-you letters (see Appendix G) to all interviewees
6. Typed hand-written interviewee answers into an aggregate document of the 11 churches and confirmed it to the audio-recording of the participants (see Appendix H)
7. Information analyzed and interpreted (i.e., using QSR NVivo12 Software)
8. Wrote the compilation protocol and measures, demographic and sample data, data analysis, findings, and an evaluation of the research design (see Chapter Four)
9. Provided research conclusions, implications, applications, limitations, and further

research; multiple recommendations and directions for future research (see Chapter Five)

10. Updated the Abstract, Chapters One, Two, and Three; and added Chapters Four and Five according to the gathered data
11. An electronic copy of the final study to pastors and ministry leaders after publication (see Appendix G)

Data gathering began after IRB approval (see Appendix A), obtained the verbal demographic information and the interviews (see Appendix B & C). In addition, this researcher provided Consent Forms (see Appendix D & E) to participants regarding confidentiality at all times and used coded data for any identifiable information for non-identifiable purposes (i.e., church names, participant names). Also, this researcher followed the interview protocol and guaranteed privacy and confidentiality because only this researcher would have the information identifying any participant in the study's data (LU IRB, 2022).

This researcher locked the data, which will remain locked for five years (LU IRB, 2022). In the case of computer information, the data was password protected. Furthermore, this researcher followed IRB guidelines for informed consent (LU IRB, 2022). The participants were allowed to agree not to participate, or if they started and decided to stop, they would not be obligated to continue (LU IRB, 2022). In addition, this researcher provided each participant with a copy of the Consent Form (see Appendix D or E) per IRB guidelines (2022) before conducting the interviews. The consent forms provided all the required information. The participants had to agree with everything on the consent form before participating in the study and the interview.

According to LU IRB (2022) guidelines, this researcher provided all information upfront without any hidden agendas. Furthermore, this researcher made no changes after the LU IRB approval without additional approval. The interview protocol included several vital components

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), needed and established in advance are: “basic information about the interview, an introduction, the interview content questions with probes, and closing instructions” (p. 190). Essentially, this researcher was to understand all guidelines when dealing with human participants. In addition, this researcher understood the importance of adhering to the LU IRB rules for this study.

The pastor selected the additional participant (s) within the church (i.e., anyone on the leadership team, other pastors (e.g., associate, assistant, executive), or any ministry leader to participate. This researcher obtained information from the pastor’s selection of the other participants as a side note. It was up to the pastors to choose the additional participants after the first interview. This researcher needed the approval to interview other participants, and those participants chose whether to participate. This researcher scheduled the additional interviews for another day or week. Also, this researcher wanted three to four participants from each church, but that became impossible for most churches. Therefore, this researcher added four churches. Finally, this researcher scheduled one participant per location per day because of waiting to get the names of the next participants from the pastor after the interview.

### ***Securing the IRB Approval***

According to the LU IRB guidelines, research for a study can only begin after approval (LU IRB Guidelines, 2022). This researcher filed an application with the LU IRB that indicated procedures and information about participants. The LU IRB reviewed and approved this researcher’s application with additional information submitted and changes made. Before beginning any research to collect data or contact participants, researchers must apply for and receive LU IRB approval (LU IRB Guidelines, 2022). Likewise, Leedy and Ormrod (2018) wrote:

They include the following: Identification of the researcher; sponsoring institution; the purpose of the study; benefits for participating; and level and type of participant involvement; notation of risks to the participants; guarantee of confidentiality to the participant; assurance that the participant can withdraw at any time; and provision of names of the person to contact if questions arise. (p. 111)

This researcher followed the LU IRB protocols without exceptions. Some documents were similar and removed from the original application. Once the LU IRB approved all documents, this researcher received an approval letter (see Appendix A). This researcher also received a congratulations email from the Dissertation Chair indicating field research could begin.

The *Christian Leadership Doctoral Programs: Program Handbook* (2022) detailed the required information for approval before field research could begin. According to the LU IRB (2022) guidelines, this researcher submitted: basic protocol information, materials, and consideration; purpose; included or excluded participants; the recruitment process; the research procedure; the data analysis and methods; informed content; privacy and confidentiality; risks and benefits. This researcher followed the LU IRB guidelines before starting the qualitative study, during the collection process, the evaluation of findings and data analysis, and during all study protocols (LU IRB Guidelines, 2022). The protocols included what would happen to the data after it was collected and its use, safeguarding, and password-protecting data. This researcher safeguarded and locked hand-written data in a desk of a private home office. According to the LU IRB guidelines (2022) and the *LU Handbook*, this researcher will save the data for at least five years.

### **Data Analysis**

In this section, this researcher described the collected data organization and analysis. For qualitative research, a researcher must have a defined plan for data analysis before data collection takes place, which allows for an understanding of the data (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). Since the received data consisted of words, it required content analysis. This analysis began with codes for the participants in the study, along with the church codes. Next, this researcher analyzed the collected data from the interviews. Finally, a researcher must transcribe the data into protocols and transcripts coded to protect the confidentiality and to provide meaning to the collected data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). This researcher analyzed the data using analytical methods.

### **Analysis Methods**

This researcher provided the data analysis procedures and the rationale for the analysis. Researchers look for common patterns across the collected data in the analyzing process, which can change over time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The method of data analysis began with plans to manage the large volume of data meaningfully (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the data analysis stages included: transcribing and organizing data, developing and applying codes, identifying themes, patterns, and relationships, validating the data, and summarizing. In addition, Creswell and Creswell's (2018) stages used and aligned, allowing others to replicate the study using the steps outlined. This researcher followed Creswell and Creswell's (2018) six steps.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that “coding categories are expected, surprising and unusual, or conceptual interest. Expecting—the ones readers would expect based on common sense; Surprising—would not expect until conducting the study; and Unusual—not expecting but of conceptual interest” (p. 195). With the QRS NVivo12 data analyzing software or manually analyzed data, tables and figures helped display data so readers could understand it better (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, researchers contribute to the field's knowledge base with proper analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, researchers must be careful with the



analytical methods for themselves and others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) provided the necessary procedures, and this researcher used them for the data.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) included the “*simultaneous* procedures— steps done collectively: *Winnowing the data* —using data that is beneficial and disregarding non-beneficial, allowed for a sum of the data in themes: and *using qualitative computer software*” (p. 192). The steps embedded in the process benefitted this researcher. Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) provided additional information for software data analysis, such as “MAXqda, Atlas. ti, Provalis, and QDA Miner, Dedoose and QSR NVivo” (p. 193). This researcher used QSR NVivo12 since the analysis software was beneficial to establish themes. Due to this researcher’s familiarity with the software (i.e., QSR NVivo12), used was the appropriate software to analyze the data.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) five steps to the data analysis process are: “organize and prepare the data for analysis, which include transcribing interviews; read or look at all data; start coding all of the data; generate a description and themes, and represent the description and themes” (pp. 194-195). This researcher coded the data and used tables or figures to organize and present the final results. Also, this researcher analyzed the data for each church individually and then collectively to understand commonalities. However, before that information, the key for this researcher was to analyze the data, indicate the themes that emerged throughout the process, and present the findings and results later in the following chapters. Due to the nature of qualitative methods research, the imperative was the study’s trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is necessary for any research and is the standard for judging good and bad research and convincing readers of the study’s accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Other

authors' information set the criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of this researcher's study. Needed are set standards that all researchers abide by in qualitative research, and trustworthiness is one such standard (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). Additionally, Leedy and Ormrod's (2018) information provided some guidelines as indicated:

Qualitative researchers do not [sic] necessarily measure things—at least not in the numerical sense of the word—but they need to ensure that their research is trustworthy, that data are collected ethically and accurately, and that findings are credible, plausible, and well-substantiated. (p. 239)

This researcher reviewed trustworthiness and demonstrated that this study revered credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

This researcher implemented strategies to ensure that four criteria were in place. First, when conducting a qualitative study, the standard for the study is its trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that qualitative research is “a rich, thick description to convey the findings” (p. 200). The description does not use numbers but words that help to give trustworthiness to a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Nonetheless, when researchers are human instruments, bias in the collected data could emerge, and researchers must watch for it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the human instrument, this researcher remained cognizant of the problem bias may cause. Consequently, indicated were any known biases upfront so that others understood them and the reasons for particular information.

### ***Credibility***

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Researchers need to convey the steps they will take in their studies to check for the accuracy and credibility of their findings” (p. 199). Credibility is accurate information-producing findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, researchers must provide the criteria for others to recognize that the study is credible (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018). Leedy and Ormrod (2018) wrote that researchers must understand that without credibility in a study, it may not be deemed plausible or believable from participants' perspectives or whether others can apply it to other settings.

This researcher assured *credibility* by documenting everything appropriately, as previously indicated in the data collection section. Findings must accurately describe reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, researchers enhance credibility by engaging an expert panel or conducting a pilot study to review and comment on the interview questions before conducting the study (Cone & Foster, 1993; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This researcher followed the best steps for the research collection and, as a researcher, accomplished both with the use of experts in the field and a modified pilot study.

This researcher utilized expert panel pastors and performed a modified pilot study to help credibility because of its relevancy and importance (Cone & Foster, 1993). The modified pilot study added credibility to the study, as indicated by the LU IRB. A pilot study reveals issues before conducting the entire study (Cone & Foster, 1993). Once a researcher completes a study, available should be the details for anyone wishing to replicate the study. Other researchers are only interested in replicating studies that they feel are credible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Roberts & Hyatts, 2019). Also, researchers want their work to meet all professional standards, including its credibility. Therefore, taking those necessitous steps was vital for this researcher.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability refers to the detail of the research context, processes, and procedures (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Leedy and Ormrod (2018) indicated, "Many qualitative researchers prefer to speak of dependability—a term that accounts for the ever-changing contexts within which qualitative research studies take place—and urge one another to provide in-depth

descriptions of data-collection methods” (p. 239). This researcher remained conscious of the importance of correct documented details of the study. Other researchers may want to review and replicate the study with other participants and in other areas. As Roberts and Hyatt (2019) ascertained, “Dependability demonstrates support for the conclusions” (p. 149).

Additionally, Roberts and Hyatt (2019) denoted, “It’s the dependability factor that helps the reader trust your data analysis” (p. 154). This researcher knew that a second data reviewer was advantageous for credibility and dependability. However, this researcher did not utilize a second reviewer. Instead, a clearly and concisely outlined study indicates how to conduct it, how others may replicate it, and support its conclusions (Robert & Hyatt, 2019). This researcher was committed to an unambiguously and concisely outlined study that specified how to conduct and how others may replicate it. Also, one must provide data support for the study’s conclusions. Thus, this researcher based the conclusions precisely on the data.

### ***Confirmability***

Leedy and Ormond (2020) advocated having an alternative to rectify problems when biases exist due to the researcher as the human aspect of the instrument and wrote:

Accordingly, rather than strive for complete objectivity in data collection (which is probably an impossible goal), qualitative researchers adhere to the standard of confirmability; that is, they make a concerted effort to base their conclusions on their actual data as much as possible. (p. 240)

Since the researcher is an instrument in qualitative research, they can discern patterns and dynamics that other methods may not (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Confirmability refers to the findings of the study reflecting the information received from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The human aspect of the instrument is less of a concern than some may think. The benefits should outweigh any negativity that can arise (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According

to Creswell and Creswell (2018), being aboveboard about all study details helped with confirmability.

There are other factors, such as being human, to consider (Leedy & Ormond, 2020). Leedy and Ormond (2020) ascertained, “the potential downside of this instrument—the human mind—its preconceived theories and expectations can bias it [sic], and such biases can adversely affect the quality of the data obtained” (p. 239). Therefore, this researcher noted any biases upfront before conducting the study. Also, according to Leedy and Ormond (2020), adhere to confirmability by being true to the actual data as humanly as possible. Consequently, this researcher’s qualitative study conformed to confirmability.

This researcher ensured that others could trace the processes and procedures used to collect the data. Indicating every step of the process from beginning to end helped so as not to avoid taking sides or only discussing portions of relevant information or significant data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The steps also included avoiding disclosing only positive results and respecting participants' privacy (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This researcher provided all the necessary information to provide confirmability. This researcher preserved all the information that made this study confirmable.

This researcher provided as much information as possible, but due to the substantial amount of data obtained, it was only possible to include some of it in the findings. However, this researcher provided all data (see Appendix H). In addition, this researcher will protect all data for five years. Anyone desiring additional information may consult with this researcher.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is the possibility that results found in one context apply to other contexts (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Transferability became important since generalizability is impossible in

qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This researcher's study may apply in other contexts, settings, or situations by conducting the indicated steps using the process in other areas, including states or other non-profit organizations. For example, this researcher conducted this study to help pastors in other churches and could also be helpful in other counties or states. Others may use this research in different situations to help others. This researcher outlined the study correctly and thoroughly with all steps, making replication of this study possible.

### **Chapter Summary**

For each church, the pastor is for ten or more years, with the church in existence for at least 15 years. This researcher conducted a study to obtain viable information regarding strategic leadership and the church. Many churches in VA have existed for years, some even as many as 200 years, in the U.S. The pastors' and ministry leaders' answers provide insight into the mission and vision of the church as a viable reason for the church's continued growth and increase of individuals at church services. However, Covid 19, a virus that crippled the U. S. in 2019, caused many organizations, including churches, to close their doors, which was a significant issue for them. According to the pastors, technology helped the churches' survival tremendously.

This researcher reviewed 100 websites of churches in VA and sent invitation letters approved by the LU IRB (2022) (see Appendix B) to 40 churches. With only a few responses, this researcher called twenty churches as a follow-up according to the approved IRB script (see Appendix C). This follow-up allowed this researcher to discuss the study further by reviewing the information in the letter. After establishing the criterion, this researcher scheduled interviews with pastors. Before any interviews, each signed a Consent Form (see Appendices D & E) by each participant. This researcher scheduled the additional interviews for that church site for

another day or week. Unfortunately, Covid-19 still hindered the number of participants able to be interviewed at some churches. Nevertheless, this researcher was able to schedule and conduct enough interviews to conduct a successful study.

Chapter Three provided the research methodology. Based on this study's literature and the data needed, the qualitative method accomplished this researcher's goal. This researcher provided the design synopsis, setting, participants, the role of the researcher, data collection methods and instruments, and the data analysis. This chapter addressed the qualitative multiple-case study design in detail and included the research design synthesis with the problem, purpose statement, research questions, and research design and methodology summary. Also, this researcher provided all guidelines used to conduct the study. The design process consisted of interviews to obtain the necessary data. It stipulated the process, which included initial steps to select participants and the settings for the study.

The problem section provided the problem statement and reiterated the purpose statement and the research questions. In addition, this researcher provided information about the study's necessity, direction, structure, and how the five central RQs subdivided the problem. The design's significance was as crucial as the information on conducting it.

Chapter Three also outlined the chosen participants, purposively sampling, and addressed the participant's recruitment process. The chapter comprised knowledge of the setting and type of participants. The settings comprised 11 church facilities, and the participants comprised 19 pastors, assistant pastors, and ministry leaders. Ministry leaders include participants such as the Minister of Education and Executive Minister. This researcher addressed all participant-type definitions and provided definitions. This researcher has embraced the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and IRB guidelines in this study.

In addition, this chapter included the data collection methods and instruments and the data analysis. It indicated what tools and how the interviews, expert panel, and modified pilot worked. The Data Analysis section included the analysis methods, including the study's trustworthiness. It utilized literature to provide a comprehensive synthesis of highly related information profiling the chapter with reasons to conduct the study. Chapter Four will detail the analysis of the findings.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership at 11 churches in VA. For this research, strategic leadership involved the "capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515), and the Strategic leadership Theory (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) guided this study. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at services to grow God's Kingdom. Chapter Four indicates what this researcher discovered and analyzes the findings after beginning with the above restatement of the study's purpose, followed by the research questions.

This chapter analyzes the findings of the five central RQs and contains the analytic process. The findings include themes as established through the analysis process. This chapter's organization is according to the five RQs. This researcher used a thematic analysis approach to focus on the content of the data, which involved coding and organizing the data to identify the key themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research questions are restated for easy reference and illustrated according to the findings and themes. The researcher presented the data according to RQs 1-5 and the main themes throughout the data analysis with tables and figures. The contents and organization of this chapter include the purpose of the study, the research questions, the compilation protocol, measures to include the interviews, and the demographic and sample data. The data analysis and findings for each RQ highlight the themes with examples. Provided are the RQs analyzed based on the IQs analysis. The chapter ends with the evaluation of the research designs.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What are pastors,' associate pastors,' co-pastors,' or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services?

**RQ2.** What are the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning?

**RQ3.** Based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders, what commonalities exist for strategic leadership practices employed among the 11 different churches?

**RQ4.** What concerns do pastors and ministry leaders have about strategic leadership, a leading factor in for-profit organizations' success?

**RQ5.** What are the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services?

RQ1, used to understand the participants' perceptions of strategic leadership, was a focal point of this study. RQ2, another focus was to find out the standard practices of the participants. Additionally, it was important to know what commonalities existed between the pastors or ministry leaders at the different churches (RQ3). RQ4 provided thoughts regarding strategic leadership as valuable for the church. Lastly, RQ5 provided the data for comprehensive research regarding church membership growth and members' attendance at services. The RQs defined the problems, and the data provided answers. As a result, all the data indicated supports the RQs, organized according to the RQs and by the themes. This researcher indicated the best examples of the raw data to confirm a point made during the analysis.

Grandy (2013) indicated that strategic leadership should extend to the church. Therefore, this researcher aimed to explore the individuals who are most likely to provide answers to questions that may benefit others needing help with increasing church service attendance or membership. This researcher addressed the questions using a multi-case design by interviewing each participant and then analyzing the responses to reveal any themes established during the

data analysis adequately. This researcher sought to understand the importance of strategic leadership from the perspectives of pastors and ministry leaders based on the five central RQs.

### **Compilation Protocol and Measures**

This Compilation Protocol and Measures section describes the protocol and measures used to manage and analyze the data obtained for this qualitative multi-case research study. This researcher interviewed the participants to assess the perceptions of strategic leadership related to the church for analysis. Also, this researcher used software (i.e., QSR Nvivo12) to analyze the data. Presented was the thematic analysis according to the RQs.

#### **Protocol**

This researcher collected data from participants during an interview process and compiled a 30-page aggregate document. Also, once this researcher generated the document, the coding process included assigning codes for analysis. Word data (i.e., word responses) coded for theme manipulation and analyzed using QSR Nvivo12 software (QSR International, 2022). Based on the process for analyzing data, pastors' and ministry leaders' responses generated themes indicated throughout this chapter. The primary purpose of the interviews was to procure the data to understand pastors' method of strategic leadership as an avenue to achieve church growth or increased attendance at church services. This researcher used tables and figures to help explain the data and findings.

#### ***The Interview Process***

The interviews were scheduled and conducted from purposive selected sampling. After collecting the data from the pastors and ministry leaders, this researcher transcribed the individual interviews. Also, this researcher typed the data from the written interview questionnaire sheets and compared it with the audio-recorded data transcribing it into a Word

document (see Appendix H) to be analyzed. Next, this researcher coded the churches and participants according to the rules for confidentiality and assigned an alphabet for each (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, the churches received codes such as Church A and Church B and continued until this researcher coded all churches and the participants interviewed received 1, 2, or 3 codes. The codes were CA P1 and CA P2, continuing until each church and each participant had codes (see Appendix H). For example, a church coded as CA for Church A and the participants as P1, P2, which meant participant one and participant two. This researcher developed and used a code sheet during the thematic analysis process.

During the interview process, this researcher asked each participant 23 questions. The analyzed data revealed the themes from the participants' answers obtained during the interview process. With the answers to the participants' questions, this researcher analyzed the data using the QSR NVivo12 software, which generated the themes, provided the importance of the data, and gave meaning to it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, 2020). All collected data, after coding, provided the themes.

### **Qualitative Measures**

With qualitative data, correct coding is vital, as that will be the extent to which themes are assessed and recorded (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the qualitative findings must undergo a process to keep the study valid. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2018), regarding analyzing qualitative data, researchers must focus on gaining a holistic understanding when utilizing a case study approach because of the type of data received. Both reliability and validity are important in qualitative methods for others to replicate the study, and the data measures the researcher's intent (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, 2020). In addition, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validity is different for qualitative research. The researcher checks

for the accuracy of the findings. Due to the nature of this researcher's qualitative data, utilized is the thematic approach collected and coded, and organized to identify key themes.

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

The data collection involved a one-hour interview with the pastors from each church included in the population and one or two additional participants, such as ministry leaders. The online Google search engine located Baptist churches in counties in VA (i.e., Richmond City and the counties of Chesterfield, Henrico, Powhatan, Amelia, and Colonial Heights), producing a list with 100 churches, later narrowed to 40 churches that met the criteria. Of the 40, four pastors responded after receiving the invitational letter by U. S. Postal Service mail, and three indicated participating. This researcher made additional calls one week later, and four more pastors agreed to participate. The solicitation process continued until there were 11 churches with 19 participants purposively selected.

The purposively selected participants were part of a Baptist or Non-denominational Christian church in Richmond, VA, or surrounding counties. The Richmond, VA, and surrounding counties participants provided the necessary members for participation. Indicated in Table 4 below is the pastors' and ministry leaders' information. According to Creswell and Creswell, purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants or sites to help answer research questions.

Derived was the data from the face-to-face audio-recorded interviews (see Appendix H). This researcher compiled and analyzed the answers to the questions, analyzed separately first and then together regardless of the title. Each coding was done randomly without a set guideline to provide complete confidentiality. The materials from each church were put in a separate folder, turned over, and given a code blindly. This researcher then established a code key. Table 4

shows the demographic information for each participant and church. Also, the information includes the participants' titles, church locations, and affiliations. The participants were all pastors and ministers and mainly consisted of Baptist affiliations in Chesterfield County.

**Table 4**

*Final Type Church and Participant—Church A-K*

Church - Participant Title – Code – Location - Affiliation				
Church	Title	Participant	County in VA	Church Affiliation
Church A	Senior Pastor	P1	Richmond	Baptist
	Executive Minister	P2		
Church B	Pastor	P1	Henrico	Baptist
	Minister of Christian Education	P2		
Church C	Assistant Pastor	P1	Chesterfield	Full Gospel
	Executive Director of Operations	P2		
Church D	Pastor	P1	Chesterfield	Non-denominational
	Associate Pastor	P2		
	Associate Pastor	P2		
Church E	Pastor	P1	Chesterfield	Baptist
Church F	Pastor	P1	Powhatan	Baptist
Church G	Pastor	P1	Richmond	Baptist
	Youth Pastor	P2		
	Minister of Music	P3		
Church H	Pastor	P1	Richmond	COGIC
Church I	Pastor	P1	Chesterfield	Baptist
Church J	Pastor	P1	Chesterfield	Baptist
	Assistant Minister	P2		
Church K	Pastor	P1	Chesterfield	Baptist

*Note.* Final participants and titles.

Table 5 below shows the number of interviewees at each participating site. Again, the church breakdown shows only two churches as having three interviewees and others with only one each. Therefore, a need existed to add additional churches.

**Table 5***Final Number of Participants Interviewed—Church A-K*

Interviews at Churches A-K												
Interviews	4											
	3				x			x				
	2	x	x	x						x		
	1					x	x		x	x	x	
	Church	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K

*Note.* The data for the final number of churches and interviews.

Table 6 breakdowns interviewees by gender and education. Of the 19 participants, three were female ministers and one female pastor. Additionally, out of the 19 participants, at least six had doctorate degrees. However, there could have been more doctoral degrees, as some levels were unknown. This researcher did not present statistical analysis for the data; although used in qualitative data, it was not necessary for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

**Table 6***Interviewee Demographics—Church A-K*

Interviewee Type	Gender Numbers	Education
Interview Type	Gender (#)	Education
Senior Pastor	Male (1)	D
Pastor	Male (9) Female (1)	D (4) M (4)
Co-Pastor	--	--
Assistant Pastor	Male (1)	M
Associate Pastor	Male (3)	M
Executive Minister	Female (1)	D
Minister of Education	Female (1)	M
Minister of Music	Male (1)	U
Minister	Female (1)	U

*Note.* The Education Level—Doctorate (D), Masters (M), Unknown (U).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Data Analysis begins with analyzing the collected data from transcribed interviews into protocols and transcripts coded to protect the confidentiality and provide meaning to the collected data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). Researchers look for common patterns across collected data in the analyzing process, with a plan to manage the large volume of data meaningfully (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), procedures used and aligned allow others to replicate the study using the outline easily. This researcher transcribed, organized, developed, and applied codes, identified themes, patterns, or relevant relationships, and validated and summarized the data.

Each participant completed an interview that lasted approximately 60 minutes (see interview process). The themes generated by QRS NVivo12 data analyzing software provided much insight for this researcher. In addition, the tables and figures used to display findings provided a better way to understand them. This researcher used Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five steps to the data analysis process to "organize and prepare the data for analysis, which include transcribing interviews; read or look at all data; start coding all of the data; generate a description and themes, and number five is representing the description and themes" (pp. 194-195). This researcher coded the data and used tables and figures to organize and present the findings. The data indicated the themes that emerged throughout the process.

This researcher conducted the interviews using a 23-question Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix F) constructed for this study. This researcher assigned each pastor or ministry leader a code based on the current title. Also, this researcher used the IQs for qualitative data only and coded it. In addition, this researcher coded the data to determine viable avenues for church growth or increase church service attendance. According to Creswell and Creswell



(2018), coding organizes the data into usable units and can be considered expected, surprising or unusual, or conceptual interest.

This researcher organized the RQs and related themes and discussed them in the Discussion of the findings. This researcher discussed the findings and organized them by each RQ. The procedure for reporting this researcher's findings follows the procedures for Data Analysis described in Chapter Three. In addition, this researcher supported the findings by paraphrasing and quotes to support the analysis for each RQ.

### **Research Question One**

RQ1 asks: What are pastors', associate pastors', co-pastors', or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services? RQ1 included the question for strategic leadership extended to the church (Grandy, 2013). This researcher wanted to know how relevant strategic leadership may be for the church since limited research exists. This researcher assessed the RQ1 in each interview with pastors and ministry leaders of each church based on IQs 1-9. The IQs were explicitly structured to answer particular research questions. For example, the first IQ asks: What is the #1 goal for the church (not including converting individuals to Christians)?

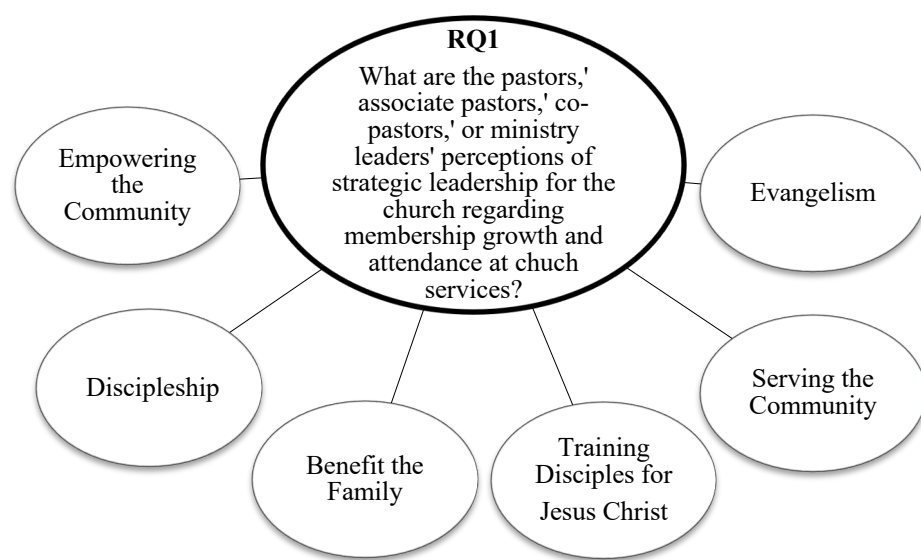
According to Grandy (2013), leadership theory is as important for the church as it is for other organizations. This researcher sought information to understand if this study would support the researcher's claim (Grandy, 2013) regarding strategic leadership for pastors and ministry leaders. In addition, information regarding strategic leadership thoughts according to Boal and Hooijberg (2001). This researcher designed the 23 IQs specifically to answer the five central RQs. IQs 1-9 one addressed and answered RQ1. Answering RQ1, the data analysis provided information indicating that *discipleship* is important to all participants.

The participants gave various answers for the questions, but the majority of themes generated indicated that, according to the data analysis, the most prevalent themes included a focus on doing mission work and offering Jesus Christ as a means to operate under the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. In addition, IQ2 asks: What is the #2 goal for the church (not including converting individuals to Christians)? Many participants answered RQ1 and 2 together—the theme based on the coded data generated as *community leadership*.

IQ3 asks: What do you think a flourishing congregation is? The answers included a focus on the needs of the community or being mission-driven. One participant stated, “A flourishing congregation is one that is not isolated. It is outgoing mission-driven.” Another participant stated, “I think a flourishing congregation is rooted in love for God and one another. To [sic] have a sense of being used by God for a purpose greater than oneself. Also, I may add being used by God to be a blessing to others.” Figure 1 provides the initial RQ1 themes generated.

**Figure 1**

*Research Question One Themes (IQs 1-3)*

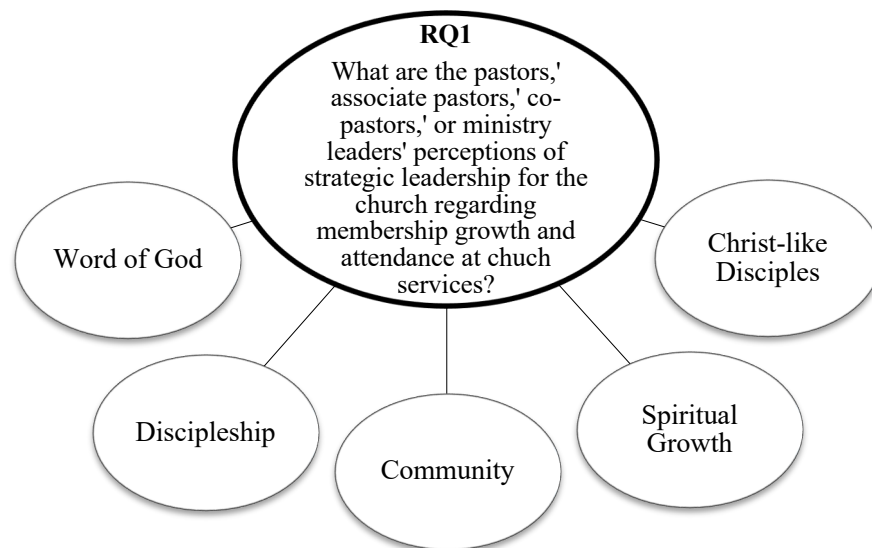


*Note.* Figure 1: Themes generated through the data analysis regarding RQ1 and IQs 1-3 answers.

The themes for RQ1 continue with IQ4 multi-choice question: What do you consider the central focus of the Christian mission? Most of the answers were about spiritual growth, discipleship, or evangelism. For example, the data revealed a theme of *making disciples* when coded. In addition, IQ5 asks: What is the vision for the church? For IQ5, a theme of community leadership was a significant component of the data, along with discipleship and evangelism.

Likewise, IQ6 asks: What is the mission of the church? For IQ6, an example of one answer was “making sure that God’s Word is heard.” The answers fluctuated between both offering Jesus Christ and evangelizing for Jesus Christ. For IQ6 answers also included *evangelism*, *discipleship*, and *ministry to win souls*. Previously, Figure 1 provided an easy snapshot of some of the answers that the QSR NVivo12 software established as themes discussed in further detail.

The IQs 1-9 primarily addressed the study’s RQ1. IQ7 asks: What is your primary strategic focus for the church (or ministry) aside from salvation for everyone? IQ7, depicted in Figure 2, is answered explicitly. The themes were prevalent throughout the data for IQs 1-9 for answering the RQ1. For example, to answer RQ1, the church’s goal is to make disciples, offer Jesus Christ, evangelize, and care for the community. Therefore, IQs 4-9 when analyzed provided the themes for RQ1. Provided are all the participants’ answers (see Appendix H) that allowed the breakdown for the answers to each RQ.

**Figure 2***Research Question One (IQs 4-9) Themes*

*Note.* Figure 2: Themes generated through an analysis regarding RQ1 data based on the answers to IQs 4-9 answers.

NVivo12 coding and analysis continued to reveal the themes generated in the following sections.

### **Research Question Two**

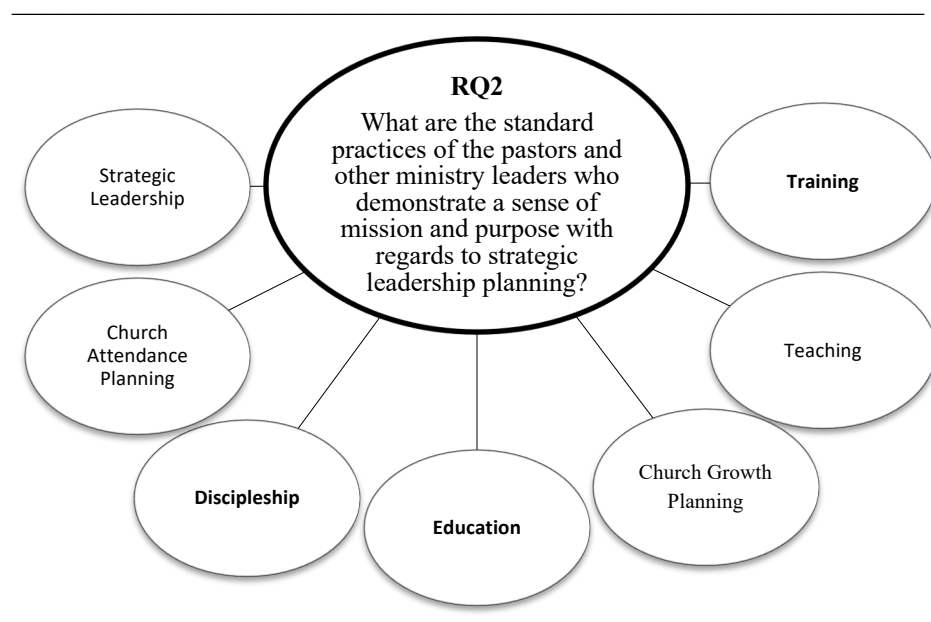
RQ2 asks: What are the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning? RQ2 seeks an understanding of the participants' standard practices concerning the SLT (Grandy, 2013). The IQs helped with finding the answers to the question. IQs 7-14 addressed and answered RQ2. IQ7 asks: What is your primary strategic focus for the church (or ministry) aside from salvation for everyone? The answers included many, but the prevailing themes were church growth, caring for God's people, and community leadership. For example, one participant stated, "I would say church growth. It can accomplish so much."

IQ9 asks: What plans have you developed for the church (or ministry) aside from salvation for everyone? Answers included expanding the facility, adding another campus, and focusing on education. Education was a theme generated based on the responses of the pastors and ministry leaders. In addition, responses also included community leadership and caring for God's people.

RQ2 was to determine if practices at one church were similar or the same as another. This researcher developed RQ2 to determine what the practices are. Depicted are the most prevalent themes generated from the data collected and analyzed. The themes most prevalent for RQ2 were that of training, discipleship, and education, which surfaced during the analysis. Many questions, absolutely help with answering RQ2. There were instances in which the IQs overlapped, and during the analysis, the process provided answers to more than one RQ. However, to answer the RQs were the overall themes that surfaced from the IQs. Outlined in Figure 3 are responses.

**Figure 3**

*Church Plan Developed*



*Note.* Figure 3: Most prevalent themes for RQ2.

According to Grandy (2013), it is important to understand the functionality of the church. In understanding that, one would understand how data revealed in IQs 7-14 would generate themes such as discipleship, training, teaching, and planning. Again, themes generated throughout the data, precisely aligned with RQ2.

### **Research Question Three**

RQ3 asks: Based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders, what commonalities exist for strategic leadership practices employed among the 11 different churches? RQ3 was to see all participants as a total by looking at the commonalities among the pastors who participated in the study. It was essential to know the pastors' views. Therefore, combined were IQs 10-14 to answer this central question. Strategic leadership, education, and leadership development are the most significant response themes. Some examples of the answers are: "I think it really, I believe the church begin an initial role of the ministry of discipleship church. Saw the need to grow leaders and develop discipleship training. New leadership and third leadership role." In addition, one participant stated, "All training for everyone was revisited regardless of the position. Doorkeepers were trained on the importance of making a good impression." Also, the church [sic] "added some training classes for everyone wanting to be in a leadership position."

IQ10 asks: Do you have a strategic road map for success as a pastor or ministry leader? What are three things that the road map includes? The IQs that helped answer RQ3 based on data analysis included, for example, succession planning, education, and training. See Figure 3 above for a snapshot of the answers that helped to answer RQ3. Also, IQ11 was similar to IQ10, which asks: What was the first strategic process implemented or changed when you became a pastor,

co-pastor, associate pastor, or ministry leader to enhance church growth? An example of an answer based on the IQ10 included:

So, we had to develop an evangelism plan. And we had to because the church is so old, we had to develop a youth and adult plan. We had to rethink. We had to reinvent the worship service to be attractive to new people.

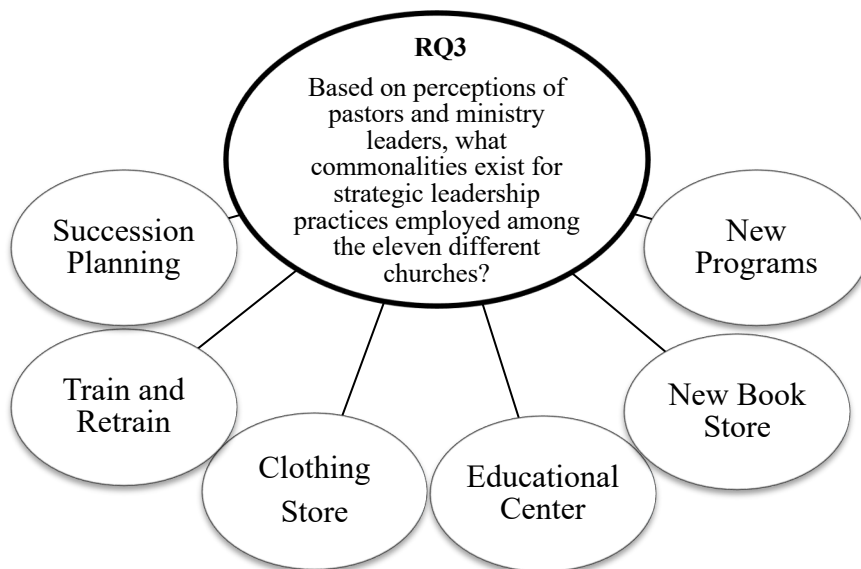
Also mentioned was, “I think changing the flow of the service also helps with church attendance.”

The answers related to the same issues faced by the churches and what the pastors did to rectify the problems. Overwhelmingly, the answers were *strategic leadership*, *church growth*, and *education*. Therefore, the prevailing themes generated, once again, included strategic leadership, education, and leadership development. In addition, IQs 10-13 all centered around strategic leadership for the church. Therefore, having those questions answered with in-depth information from the pastors; it was not surprising that the analysis revealed strategic leadership practices as an avenue for the church, whether increasing church attendance or alleviating church membership decline. Both have been a concern for some pastors, especially during Covid-19. For that reason, the pastors put in place new strategic plans.

IQ12 asks: What was the first strategic process implemented or changed when you became a pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or ministry leader to enhance church attendance? In addition, IQ13 solicited: What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on membership growth? Also, IQ14 is similar to IQ13, except that it addresses attendance at church services. It asks: What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on attendance at church? Some themes generated during the analysis of IQs 12-14 included the road maps for success, and, in essence, answers provided the appropriate themes for answering RQ3. See Figure 4 for the themes generated through the analysis of IQs 10-14.

**Figure 4**

*Strategic Road Map for Pastors and Ministry Leaders*



*Note.* Figure 4: Commonalities of strategic leadership practices for RQ3.

All three questions had properties designed to understand strategic leadership practices.

#### **Research Question Four**

RQ4 asks: What concerns do pastors and other church leaders have about strategic leadership, a leading factor in for-profit organizations' success? Both IQ15 and IQ16 had similar themes that surfaced during the analysis process. Based on Grandy's (2013) literature, this researcher found it noteworthy to research strategic leadership for the church. Getting the information from different sources and analytically revealing the data themes was thought-provoking. According to Creswell & Creswell (2020), the incredible thing about qualitative research is that there will always be something worth considering. According to the data and this research, the church has similar concerns as other for-profit organizations—ensuring the people they serve to get what they need (Grandy, 2013). For instance, just like consumers go to other



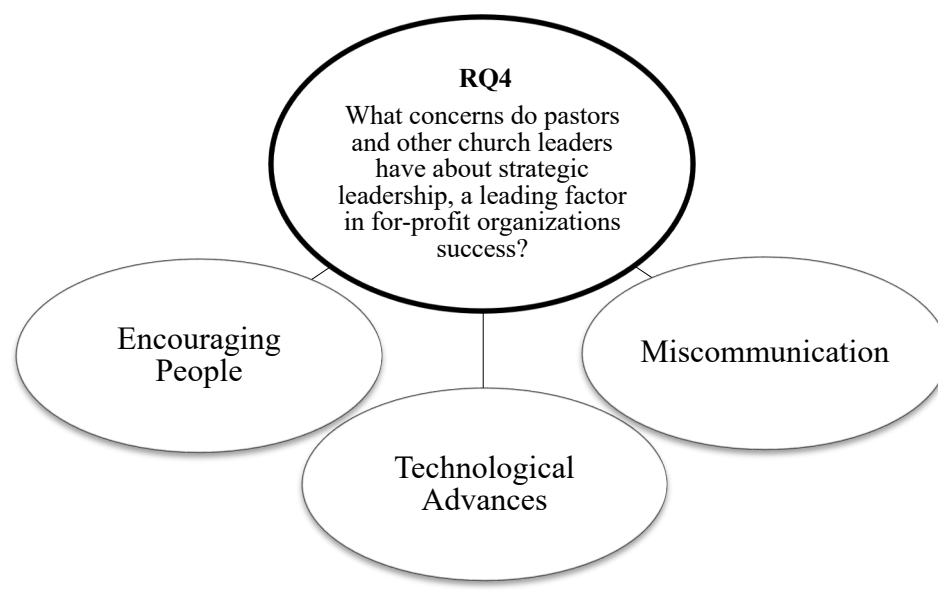
places to shop, members leave the church to go elsewhere in search of something different.

Therefore, the pastors indicated that knowing why *members leave* a church was as important as knowing why they stay, as the church is necessary.

Answers were similar throughout the data. IQ15 addressed the issue of what a pastor would do differently than when first becoming the pastor of the church. IQ15 asks: If this was a new church (less than a year in existence), what would you do differently than what you did when you became the pastor or ministry leader to increase membership? IQ 16 asks: What do you think is the #1 reason why churches grow? The answers included themes such as technological advances, encouraging people, and knowing when there is a problem with miscommunications. The most prominent reason members left the church was a miscommunication or the lack of communication. Figure 5 lists the prevalent concerns, addressing RQ4.

**Figure 5**

*Strategic Leadership Planning / Strategic Leadership Concerns*



*Note.* Figure 5: Concerns for the church and other organizations.

### **Research Question Five**

RQ5 asks: What are the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services?

IQ17 asks: What would you say is/was the #1 reason the church grew in the last five years?

Moreover, IQ18 is a follow-up question: What do you think is the #1 reason why members leave the church? These questions help with answering RQ5. Some of the answers to both questions were: "Growth has been due to this relocation (new campus) and due to an established clergy."

Overall, the answer mostly given was that the church grew due to *word of mouth*.

IQ19 asks: Based on strategic leadership involving the "capacity to absorb, learn, and have managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515), what strategies do you implement to ensure the church does not stagnate (i.e., not growing or fewer individuals coming to the church)? Answers to IQ19 included "a yearly visioning process and program improvements."

IQ20 asks: What new church strategies have you implemented in the last five years? Answers included programs such as "breakfast with the pastor" and, in some instances, "breakfast on boat rides." IQ 21 solicited: How would you advise a pastor wishing to stop church membership decline that would help the church? One prevailing theme was to use technology to help with church growth.

IQ22 asks: What theological motivation (i.e., praying to God, prayer meetings, worship conferences, or other) resulted in the continued growth of your church? Not surprisingly, almost every answer to IQ22 was to *pray*. Therefore, praying was dominant among the 11 churches.

Finally, IQ23 asks: Is there anything else you would like to share that would benefit a church struggling with membership growth or having a decrease of individuals at church services? For

IQ23, there were many different answers, but a theme, even though it may be considered small, was *asking for help* early when needed.

A follow-up question asks: Do you have any questions for the researcher? IQ23 replaced the missing IQ8? The majority of answers for IQ23 were “no.” However, others wanted to thank this researcher for conducting the study. All questions helped this researcher to see, after coding the data and analyzing it, that there were many prevailing themes. The data allowed answers to the five central questions, with all combined and analyzed data discussed further in Chapter Five. More importantly, this data should help other pastors with such problems. Table 7 provides some of the participants’ answers about particular themes that surfaced (see Appendix H for all responses). In addition, Table 7 provided raw data findings based on the IQs and analyzed data indicated as final themes. Table 7 provides the outlay of the themes based on data for IQ1 through IQ9. Based on the data analysis, the most prevalent themes were *Discipleship*, *Evangelism*, and *Community Leadership*.

**Table 7**

*Data Analysis and Findings for RQs 1-5 Interviewees’ Responses*

Themes	Reason for Theme	Participant /Responses
Discipleship	Strategic Leadership Growth – RQ1	CA P1 “I would say our #1 goal is to offer Jesus.” CB P1 “I would say the number one goal for the church is to offer Jesus Christ as a means of encouragement and productive spiritual life.” CC P2 “For the church, consider individual, we train disciples to evangelize the world.”
Evangelism	Strategic Leadership Planning – RQ2	CA P1 “Well, church growth encompasses discipleship and evangelism and spreading the Good News and values. So, church growth is not just numerical.” CG P1 “To evangelize and spread the Word of God.” CC P1 “The mission is training disciples to evangelize the world.”

		CD P1 “The mission is to go out and evangelize the world.
		CB P2 “Being [REDACTED], my primary responsibility is to bring holistic educational ministry to the entire church.”
Community Development	Strategic Leadership Practices - RQ3 Strategic Leadership Concerns – RQ4 Strategic Leadership Activities – RQ5	CK P1 “Way, I think – Baseball Diamond. First base, belonging (help them). Second base, begin to help the group spiritually – teaching/minor. The third base is doing the ministry. Fourth base, home plate – sending them out, Missionary.” CB P2 “Yes, women in transition. Another thing is the domestic violence ministry. CA P2 “Saw the need to grow leaders and develop discipleship training. CC P1 “ I think the mission programs. And another thing is strong families. No marriage to suffer.” CD P1 “The first would have been to change the flow of service. CJ P1 “Added some training classes for everyone wanting to be in a leadership position.

*Note.* Table 7: Randomly selected interviewees’ answers (see Appendix H—Interviewees Answers).

According to all the interviewees, discipleship, evangelism, and community development were the most important themes for the answers. In return, it generated an answer to RQ1. See Appendix H for the complete list of questions and answers to the data coded for themes development and confidentiality.

This study could be instrumental in advancing the strategic leadership field concerning the church. Many themes surfaced, with some more meaningful and prevalent than others. The ones that surfaced during the more profound analysis, which came about during the data analysis, were: Discipleship, Evangelism, Church Growth, Training, and Education. In addition, based on the analysis, the pastors’ data provided information that other pastors may find viable to help

with a membership decline or a need to increase individuals' attendance at church services. See Table 8 below for a display of the results.

**Table 8**

*Total Picture: Pastors with Mission and Purpose – Top 10 Themes for Advice*

Pastors with Mission and Purpose Advice to New Pastors and Ministry Leaders		
Advice # 1	Teaching	Leadership Training / Teaching the members
Advice # 2	Education	Education Center / Bible Institute
Advice # 3	Strategic Change	New Programs / Change in worship
Advice # 4	Leadership Development	Yearly Training / Discipleship Training
Advice # 5	Community Involvement	Serving the community / Community Outreach
Advice # 6	Discipleship	Making Disciples / Great Commission Plan
Advice # 7	Missionary	Developing Outreach
Advice # 8	Church Growth	Domestic Mission Growth / Home Outreach
Advice # 9	Building Enhancement	Additional Church Facility / Locations Additional Worship Centers
Advice # 10	Leadership Programs	Community Leadership Programs Community Programs

*Note.* Table 8: Themes directly related to growth and attendance at churches.

According to Elkington (2013), pastors are leaving the church. Some authors believe strategic leadership may make a difference (Grandy, 2013; Jaleha & Machuki, 2018; Janssen, 2019). Information should be readily available to help with situations many pastors face. This summary of advice to new pastors or ministry leaders may help, in ways, to have a thriving church (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). In addition, this researcher believes that if the information helps only one pastor, that one pastor is worth helping. Therefore, this researcher provided a literature review regarding strategic leadership and the church (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Davis-Olds, 2017; Deborah, 2018; DeSagun, 2015; DeVries, 2016; Dimitrios et al., 2013; Grandy, 2013).

This researcher discussed Trustworthiness as the study demonstrated credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Also, this researcher assured credibility by documenting everything appropriately so that the findings accurately described reality. Dependability details the research context, processes, and procedures (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Leedy and Ormrod (2018) indicate “dependability—a term that accounts for the ever-changing contexts within which qualitative research studies take place—and urge one to provide in-depth descriptions of data-collection methods” (p. 239). As Roberts and Hyatt (2019) ascertained, “Dependability demonstrates support for the conclusions” (p. 149). This researcher provided the necessary data-collection methods outlined step by step, detailed data findings, and analysis.

For this research, confirmability refers to the findings of the study reflecting the information received from the interviewees and providing all details of the study that help with it. This researcher coded the data to maintain confidentiality but provided the data so that others may review the information obtained and how the themes prevailed. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2018), transferability is the possibility that results found in one context apply to other contexts by conducting the indicated steps.

This researcher would like to see this study conducted in other parts of VA; others may do so in other areas. With the totality of the triangulated data, the themes outlined individually became five prevalent themes. Some questions crossed over into others, and themes overlapped. Pastors’ and ministry leaders’ responses, in some cases, during analysis referenced a different theme for the same data. After careful analysis, the themes became apparent, as in Table 9.

**Table 9***The Themes of the Research Study*

Number of Themes	Strategic Leadership Practices	Major Themes
Theme I	Discipleship - Mission building	Discipleship
Theme II	Growing individuals for discipleship	Evangelism
Theme III	Education - Learning is essential	Education
Theme IV	Training is essential for everyone	Training
Theme V	Caring for all and the community	Community Leadership

*Note.* Table 9: The *Five Prevalent Themes* for this study.

***Theme I—Discipleship***

While conducting the interviews, transcribing, and coding the participants, themes were apparent during the analysis of the assessed data using the software. The first theme that surfaced throughout the research was being true to God’s mission for the church. In the data collection, there was a significant response from the participants regarding mission and *discipleship*, whether they were the pastor or the ministry leaders. Most participants attest to the church’s mission as discipleship being important to the church, whether it is developing or implementing strategic leadership programs to do so. The most relevant theme throughout the data analysis was mission building alongside discipleship. According to Boal and Hooijberg (2001), the capacity to change, learn, or have managerial wisdom are attributes of strategic leadership. Pastors indicated a need to change a process if not working and have the wisdom to know if it was not. As CA, P1 indicated, “a need to adhere to the Great Commission to make disciples in all nations” (see Appendix H for full disclosure).

***Theme II—Evangelism***

The second theme that emerged during the analysis of pastors and ministry leaders’ data was growing individuals for all discipleship over the nations, but also a significant component to

*evangelize*. Also, education was a constant indication regarding the commitment to grow individuals spiritually and not necessarily for church membership or attendance. A solid commitment emerged to the people of the communities, with a need to make individuals whole and grow them spiritually. The pastors and leaders indicated that education is crucial to equipping individuals to disciple others and especially to evangelize.

### ***Theme III—Education***

A third theme was the importance of *education*. The third theme in the data analysis referenced education many times throughout the process, and during the analysis, the software generated education as a major theme. In the interview data, several participants indicated how important education was to the church's success, whether for leaders or strategic leadership. As a result, CB, P2 developed a complete education curriculum to benefit the church and stated "a need to enhance spiritual and academic for the members and families attending the church."

### ***Theme IV—Training***

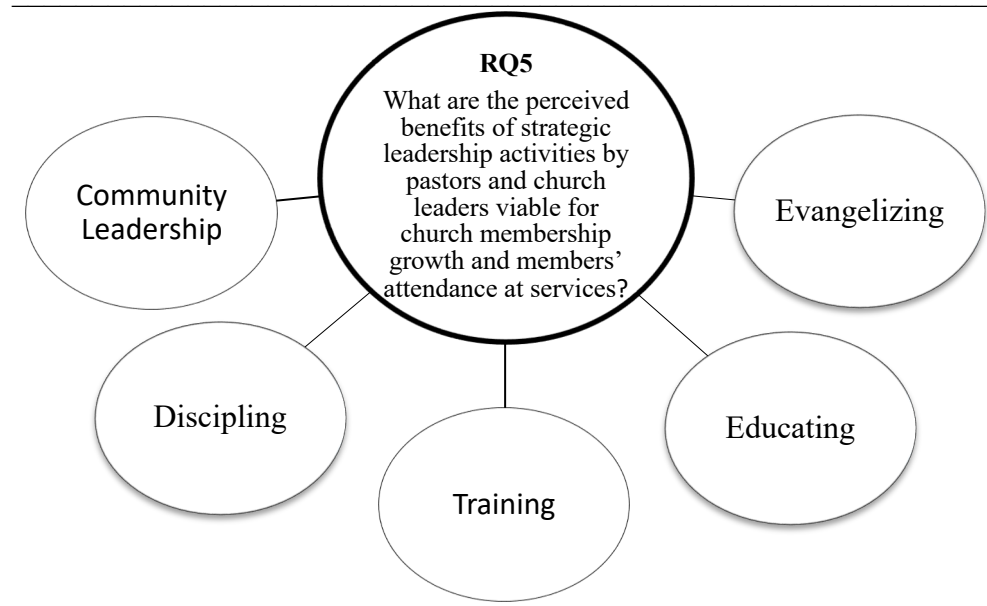
A fourth theme was *training*. During the data analysis process, training surfaced. It is not usual that such a theme would occur among pastors and other ministry leaders because, as Ayers (2006) in *Toward A Theology of Leadership* discussed, the importance of humility. Ayers (2006) stated that humility is an attribute everyone needs to thrive on having. As Davis-Olds (2017) indicated, strategic leadership has many angles. The author indicated, "The first seed that would become *The Growing Church* was planted as a strategic response to a growing dissatisfaction among congregants (Davis-Olds, 2017, p. 30). Therefore, it was unsurprising that the data followed a similar pattern indicating training as essential. Having humility allows individuals to admit when they need additional training and, as Boal and Hooijberg (2001) state, the *capacity to learn*.



### ***Theme V—Community Leadership***

When interviewing pastors or ministry leaders, this researcher knew that if salvation could be an answer, it probably would have been the answer to many questions. However, many of the questions were to provide an answer other than salvation. For example, IQs 1, 2, and 7 specifically ask: What is the #1 goal for the church (not including converting individuals to Christians?); What is the #2 goal for the church (not including converting individuals to Christians?); and IQ7: What is your primary strategic focus for the church (or ministry) aside from salvation for everyone? Although indicated, *aside from salvation*, it still came up as an answer first. For example, one pastor stated, “Without salvation as a reason, nothing else really matters.” In addition, in some parts of the questioning, all participants referenced growing individuals, providing, educating, caring for them, or wanting or giving to the local communities and others. Therefore, *community leadership* was prevalent.

The pastors and ministry leaders were willing to share road maps for success. Also, the individuals’ strategic knowledge was invaluable, and pastors may use it to stop church membership decline or increase church service attendance. This researcher coded and analyzed the data with QSR NVivo12 software so that the vital information or themes extracted and meaningful descriptions from the interviewees surfaced as important. It was necessary to see the themes emerge and that the interview questions did what this researcher needed them to: get the perceptions of the pastors and ministry leaders. Likewise obtaining the data for RQ5 was not different and once analyzed provided the themes for it. Figure 6 below provides the answers to RQ5 based on the themes generated.

**Figure 6***Strategic Leadership Perceptions / Strategic Leadership Processes*

*Note.* Figure 6: Strategic Leadership Activities.

In summary, one could readily attest that the individuals shared many common goals, which became apparent as themes emerged. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), coding is segmenting the text and highlighting data themes. Another important aspect of the study was the participants themselves. All interviewees were very comfortable with the audio recording and showed patience during times when it took this researcher longer to write down everything said as they verbally answered the questions. At the beginning of each interview, this researcher explained that the interview would be recorded, in addition to writing, in case of equipment failure, which did not occur during any recording. The participant's body language indicated they felt comfortable with the interviewing technique and was glad to take part and help in any way they could. During all the interviews, the participants were eager to discuss the church, its programs, the leadership they bring to the church, and the importance of caring.

This researcher presented the data analysis collected through an interviewing process consisting of the 11 churches with 19 participants. The participants were audio-recording during a one-hour or less interview at their place of worship, except for one interview at a local library. The participants in the study provided the necessary information during interviews that lasted from as little as 35 minutes to almost one hour, allowing this researcher to get a broad understanding of the strategic concepts the pastors and other ministry leaders were so engaged in sharing. After conducting the interviews, this researcher organized the data and analyzed it, resulting in five major themes discussed in detail for the benefit of others.

In this chapter, this researcher gathered information to understand pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership and presented the findings. More importantly, once analyzed, the study's data detailed the crucial aspects of pastors' and ministry leaders' leadership. For the benefit of others, they were willing to share knowledge regarding church strategies, mission and vision goals, strategic focus for the church, and the plans they developed. This researcher's goal was to narrow a gap identified (Grandy, 2013) and relate strategic leadership processes (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). These authors and others indicated that strategic leadership should be researched further and applied to the church (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). The common themes were acknowledged throughout the data analysis and will help with additional research.

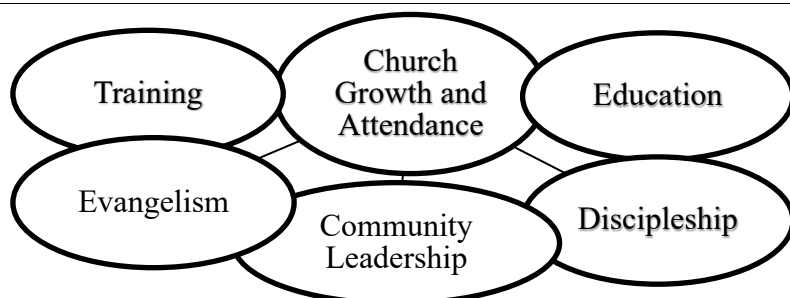
### **Evaluation of the Research Design**

The qualitative multiple-case research design was an excellent choice for this researcher based on the data collected. With the design, this researcher sought objective information regarding this qualitative multiple-case study to explore pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership at 11 churches in VA. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions

of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at services to grow God's Kingdom. In evaluating the research design, this researcher returns to what the expert authors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019) wrote about the qualitative methodology and the case-study design. Roberts and Hyatt (2019) indicated that qualitative researchers are interested in investigating how people understand and experience their world and collect data from a participant in their environment. Therefore, this researcher wanted to conduct the interviews at the participants' sites. Likewise, the interview process was a great way to obtain information for each case/church investigated.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) advocated that "This up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research" (p. 181). The qualitative methodology allowed this researcher to tailor a design to meet this interview participants goal of extracting information from pastors and ministry leaders. Consequently, the qualitative method and case study design using interviewing techniques helped accomplish the goal this researcher planned to accomplish.

As Patton (2002) suggested, "In contrast to quantitative [sic], qualitative research recounts the lived experience of a smaller sample in an effort to provide rich descriptive details" (p. 144). The qualitative methodology with the multiple-case design provided the rich descriptive details this researcher could get while conducting face-to-face audio-recorded interviews, as illustrated in Figures 1 through 7. Figure 7 below indicates that words can provide rich descriptive details when obtaining data and can be understood analytically as easily as a drawing. Prayer, worship, Bible study, and fellowship came through as individual processing. However, the analysis did not reference them individually but collectively as *Discipling*, *Evangelizing*, *Training*, *Educating*, and *Community Leadership* as ways for church growth and attendance.

**Figure 7***Rich Descriptive Details*

*Note.* Figure 7: Qualitative research adds meanings to words.

This qualitative multiple-case design was appropriate for this type of study because the information needed to be informative and trustworthy and could be helpful information.

According to Hennink et al. (2016) who wrote, “Therefore, qualitative research is most suitable for addressing ‘why’ questions to explain and understand issues or ‘how’ questions that describe processes of behavior” (p. 10). In addition, *what* and *how* questions are asked in qualitative research to understand behaviors (Hennick et al., 2016). Thus, qualitative research with a case study design was ideal for this researcher’s study because it helped answer the RQs.

The study’s design made it easier to address the issue in question and to design the study in an easy way to administer, having scheduled the appointments. The hardest part of the study was getting the appointments to do it, as everyone’s schedule was busy. However, this researcher was able to conduct 19 interviews in a relatively short time. As indicated, this researcher may get the opportunity to conduct research similar to this qualitative multiple-case study in other areas later. The multiple-case study with the audio-recorded interview worked out well. It was good to have the recorder as some of the pastors and ministry leaders had lots of information to provide.

However, a few weaknesses existed that this researcher needed addressing. There were limits on the sizes of the churches utilized in this study and to conduct a study without limitations on the size of the church would be beneficial. This researcher now believes that the church size should not have made a difference in inclusion in the study and any size should be allowed to participate. Another limit was the time a pastor had been the church pastor. This researcher believes some pastors are new to a church but have been pastors for many years, and the church is growing in membership and attendance. Therefore, including less tenured pastors in the study could have been advantageous. The two study changes may be helpful for replication.

Chapter Five are the research conclusions, implications, and applications, based on the data analysis that answered the five central RQs. This researcher provides the conclusion for each research question and the study's limitations and indicates further research. The chapter ends with a summary.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview**

Chapter Five provides an overview of this study. It recaps the research purpose, five research questions, and a summary of the findings. This researcher highlights the research conclusions of the findings and provides implications and applications of the interpretation of the study. Also, this researcher outlines the study's theoretical and empirical implications. In addition, this researcher asserts the findings, expands strategic leadership and contributes to the leadership field while providing the discussion according to the RQs. Chapter Five concludes with research limitations, further research, and a study summary.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership at 11 churches in VA. For this research, strategic leadership involved the "capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515), and the Strategic leadership Theory (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) guided this study. The focus was on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at services to grow God's Kingdom.

### **Research Questions**

The following five research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What are pastors,' associate pastors,' co-pastors,' or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services?

**RQ2.** What are the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning?

**RQ3.** Based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders, what commonalities exist for strategic leadership practices employed among the 11 different churches?

**RQ4.** What concerns do pastors and ministry leaders have about strategic leadership, a leading factor in for-profit organizations' success?

**RQ5.** What are the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services?

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

This Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications section summarizes the study findings by briefly answering each research question from its data and results. This researcher aims to discuss the study findings with the empirical and theoretical literature. Also, this researcher explored, in this study, SLT in terms of its benefits for the church based on an indication that strategic leadership and church research could benefit from such a study (Grandy, 2013).

This researcher explored the participants' perceptions as they related information to SLT (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). This section provides the research questions regarding strategic leadership and the church used to interview the pastors and ministry leaders. Also, this chapter provides the conclusions of the analysis of the data. In addition, the 19 participants at 11 churches provided candid information on what has worked for each of the churches and what has not during the one-hour interview and this information may benefit many.

According to Phipps and Burbach (2010), strategic leadership provides a research opportunity to investigate whether the church operates similarly to other organizations in terms of its strategic processes and as a non-profit sector. Furthermore, other researchers (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020; Davis-Olds, 2017; Deborah, 2018; Janssen, 2019) shared information to indicate that strategic leadership could be viable for the church as it is for other organizations based on



the information shared by the participants. In addition, this researcher provides implications for pastors and ministry leaders.

This study contributes to the field of leadership research through an analogic of data and provides helpful themes generated during that analysis. Based on the study results, this researcher concluded that several themes emerged during the analysis process, including:

1. Pastors' goal is to offer Jesus Christ to all nations—Discipleship.
2. Pastors' goal is to reach the unchurched better and save them—Evangelism.
3. Pastors' goal is to accommodate the people in the community—Community Leadership.
4. Ministry leaders follow pastors when they follow God and implement plans and processes (e.g., training for leaders and members) to help the church succeed—Training.
5. Revise processes and educate members and others as a major factor—Education.

Based on the above themes generated for the overall study, this researcher presented each conclusion according to the RQs. This researcher linked the literature (Grandy, 2013) in that the church and strategic leadership needed reviewing.

During the interview process, the participants in the study provided strategic practices utilized in VA churches. Also, the participants provided valuable insights into focusing on pastors' purpose and perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to help improve church membership and attendance at services to help grow God's Kingdom. The five central research questions guided the construct of the study's relevant interview questions. Due to the relevance of the questions, the data analysis provided the answers one considers admirable when researching pastors with a mission and purpose to help improve churches that may need the help that this research may provide.

The results of the study provided much-needed information and narrowed the gap in the literature regarding pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership in a way that may benefit other churches with a decline in membership or church services. Therefore, to answer the research questions, it appeared that pastors and others' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at services were similar among all 11 churches. According to Grandy (2013), there was a need to research strategic leadership related to the church.

### **Research Conclusion One**

This researcher solicited the perceptions of the pastors, associate pastors, co-pastors, or ministry leaders with interview questions that provided information regarding strategic leadership related to the church's membership growth and individuals attending church services. RQ1 asks: What are pastors,' associate pastors,' co-pastors,' or ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership growth and attendance at church services? The participants' responses to IQs 1-9 led to the answers for RQ1.

An analysis of the data indicated that pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding membership and growth are similar to organizations in that they want the church to be the best that it can be. They also want to have the right things in place to meet the obligations of the people coming through the door, whether they are members or not. The pastors discussed the importance of the church, which also related to information that other researchers have considered (Davis-Olds, 2017; DeVries, 2016; Gilley et al., 2009; Hunite, 2018). Based on the data collected, pastors and others genuinely want to provide individuals with what they need, whether training or education.

The pastors and others indicated a deep desire to care for individuals' souls, their physical needs, and the community. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) indicated that strategic leadership involves "the capacity to learn, change, and have managerial wisdom" (p. 515). According to the analysis results, pastors should be able *to learn, change, and have managerial wisdom* similar to what others in other organizations use to run the business. For example, many pastors indicated the importance of accommodating facilities and providing strategic leadership programs for leaders.

In addition, the pastors and ministry leaders implemented programs to revisit the strategic leadership processes every year. The data obtained indicated that churches may face issues similar to what other for-profit organizations face. This research could help pastors facing issues in membership growth and attendance at church services by providing an understanding of what other pastors achieved with an understanding of strategic leadership strategies for the church. Grandy (2013) indicated that strategic leadership is a viable option for non-profit organizations, such as the church. Therefore, when it came to the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning, they also took the organization as a business thoughtfully. They implemented processes and made plans to accommodate the members (new worship services), the leaders (training programs) and the community (helping families), when provided the conclusion for RQ1.

## **Research Conclusion Two**

According to the data collected, pastors and ministry leaders with mission and purpose have many standard practices that benefit the church in many ways. They included revisiting existing programs for refresher courses or changed processes. With RQ2, reviewing the standard

practices of the 19 participants began with an understanding of the standard practices of each of the churches. RQ2 asks: What are the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose concerning strategic leadership planning? The question came to this researcher's mind after reading enormous literature on strategic leadership for organizations. Grandy (2013) states that limited literature on strategic leadership and the church existed.

In this study, standard practices of pastors or ministry leaders included adding additional programs for youths and adults alike and opening another facility in a different area that constituted additional growth for the church and more attendance at the church. The pastors responded to the questions differently, but the answers came down to the same or similar standard practices used to benefit the church. According to Badshah (2012), how a church operates is important, just like any other business. Understanding the standard practices of thriving churches may benefit churches facing dilemmas such as declining membership or individuals' attendance at church services. Today's pastors may be more inclined to change their practices if there are indications that specific standards benefit a church more than others. Likewise, the ministry staff will be happy to know that the pastor is willing to make changes that can benefit the congregates at the church.

All the pastors and ministry leaders had a keen sense of leadership planning and the need for constant change to stay ahead of any issues. For example, many pastors understood that addressing how they worshipped should be done at least once a year, if not sooner. In addition, they needed to put strategic plans in place to accommodate a different church makeup, including changing the time of a worship service or when conducted. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), many factors can affect how one answers a question based on prior experience. However,

it was apparent that many pastors' standards are similar as the analyzed data displayed a theme the same throughout the data for the standards.

As indicated in Chapter Four, the themes that surfaced during the analysis were evangelism, discipleship, Christian education, and attending to the community's needs (IQs 10-16). Addressed were the similarities among the pastors for RQ2 conclusion. The data analyzed determined the most prevalent themes: Discipleship and offering Jesus Christ were at the top—a standard practice that all the pastors and ministry leaders shared. Some pastors had changed processes or changed strategic plans to benefit the church.

### **Research Conclusion Three**

The pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership were common to all 11 churches. Therefore, with RQ3 combined, were the complete IQs to answer the RQ3: Based on the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders, what commonalities exist for strategic leadership practices employed among the 11 different churches? Again, all the pastors gave almost the same answers to some questions. For example, in Churches A-K, the pastors referenced the importance of caring for the community. The same response confirmed that pastors play a large part in many people's lives and should have strategic plans to accommodate those needs (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). The analyzed data attested to the need for good leadership practices.

Likewise, according to Felicetti (2021), churches need help to survive as they struggle with planning and processes. Such is the case for other organizations (Janssen, 2019). In addition, with similar answers to the questions during the interview, with a total of the answers during the analysis, it was easy to see the theme of the data generated across all the pastors' replies. In Table 8, there was an indication that the data generated three particular themes.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a researcher looks for expected and unexpected coding. In the case of this data for RQ3, it was easy to understand that the pastors all had similar thoughts. There were many parallels for the participants, and the thematic analysis revealed five prominent themes:

1. Community Development
2. Discipleship
3. Evangelism
4. Training
5. Education

With this question (i.e., RQ3), it showed the commonalities that existed and it became apparent during the data analysis indicating the employed strategic leadership practices across the spectrum of different pastors and other ministry leaders. Even when other factors are different (i.e., location of the church, the makeup of the church), overall, commonalities exist among the 11 different churches. Therefore, the commonality between Research Conclusion One, regarding membership growth and attendance at church services, and Research Conclusion Two, with Research Conclusion Three, indicated that commonalities existed across the 11 churches. The 11 churches located in different counties had similar strategic leadership practices. Pastors and ministry leaders provided similar answers, whether it was to do the church's mission through discipleship, community development, evangelizing, training, or educating, they had provided similar answers.

#### **Research Conclusion Four**

RQ4 asks: What concerns do pastors and other church leaders have about strategic leadership, a leading factor in for-profit organizations' success? Pastors' concerns are similar, as

church attendance and membership declined (Fashant & Evan, 2020). What strategies are in place factor in how the church handles itself in times of uncertainty. Quong and Walker's (2010) indicated seven principles of strategic leadership. The principles are: "Strategic leaders are futures oriented; evidence-based and research lead; get things done, open new horizons; fit to lead; make good partners; and do the right thing" (pp. 23-31). The pastors and ministry leaders can use the same principles that help the for-profit sector to benefit the non-profit one, of which the church is one.

Samimi et al. (2019) also added to the strategic leadership literature that needed a framework for future research. However, analyzing all the answers to IQs 2, 3, and 7, much information discerned what could happen if a pastor is unaware of the church's environment. Pastors agree that the church is no longer (not that it should have ever been) run as a business. This study found that pastors need to strategically understand the need to have processes in place when the church should grow and prosper. For Research Conclusion Four, the pastors based their answers on the goings of the church. However, with the literature review (Davis-Olds, 2017; Dimitrios et al., 2013; Fletcher, 2009; Golensky & Hager, 2020), churches are more similar to other for-profit organizations today than ever.

According to Felicetti (2021) and Hartwig and Bird (2015), it was detailed that churches can have an issue similar to other organizations. Pastors and others can think about strategic leadership that benefits other organizations. That is, they need to have plans and processes in place just like others outside the church if the church is to survive (Felicetti, 2021; Hartwig & Bird, 2015).

RQ4 was one of the hardest to pinpoint the best IQs, but overall it highlighted some concerns to investigate. They were: Pastors must overcome specific aspects of leadership to

overcome problems. They must have processes to alleviate concerns and plans put in place.

According to Sashkin and Sashkin (2003), leadership in any capacity matters. Therefore, when Boal and Hoorijberg (2001) describe strategic leadership as the “capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom” (p. 515), that applies to the church as well. Finally, plans must be in place to handle the problems associated with any business.

The data suggested that pastors horn into the processes for the church and change or revisit them to ensure they are ready when unforeseen occurrences happen. For example, one pastor indicated the church was strong because the church already had a successor if something happened to the senior pastor. Therefore, the concerns indicated were similar to concerns of other types of business—such as programs to help with leadership (Badshah, 2012; Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020; Grandy, 2013). All questions eventually return to understanding “what perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders are viable for church membership growth and members’ attendance at services,” which leads to the RQ5.

### **Research Conclusion Five**

Table 8 lists 10 items as advice to new pastors or even ones that could use the advice, even if they are not new. They included: Teaching (leadership training, teaching the members), education (education center and Bible institute), strategic change (new programs or change in worship), and leadership development (yearly training/discipleship training). In addition, there were community involvement (serving the community/community outreach), discipleship (making disciples / Great commission plan, and missionary (developing outreach). The last three included church growth (domestic mission growth /home outreach), building enhancement (additional church facility/locations and additional worship centers), and lastly, leadership programs (community leadership programs/community programs).



Table 8 outlines the study's relevant factors to help pastors with declining membership or individuals' attendance at church services. The answers include advice given to a new pastor and answered the question by comparing the answers provided and the themes generated during the analysis. For example, RQ5 asks: What are the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services? The answers included: (1) Being prepared; (2) Understanding when a change is needed; (3) Changing the status quo when things are needed, for example, utilizing technological advances; (4) Adjusting programs; and (5) Revisiting leaders' training regularly.

The participants indicated that they perceived the benefits of strategic leadership activities as viable for church membership growth and members' service attendance. As Felicetti (2021) indicated, church decline can be an issue for some churches as a whole and independently as a church with the membership growth and members' attendance at services problems. This section answered RQ5 again because this researcher ascertained as literature indicated that if pastors had the correct answers from the beginning, they might make better decisions when problems occur. If they are not a new pastor, the answers to that questions could still benefit them, no matter how long they have been responsible for leading God's people. The data analysis returned these answers as significant themes for the study.

This study corroborated with previous research that strategic leadership can benefit the church (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). In addition, this study extends previous research because this researcher received information from the experts, who are the pastors and leaders, to understand better church practices that work. This study shed new light on the SLT by obtaining data that, combined, the entire study highlighted that strategic leadership is as practical for the church as it is for any other organization (Grandy, 2013). The thematic findings present

referenced practices for the church that could benefit old or new problems with a decline in membership or attendance at church services.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders regarding strategic leadership in the church. The answers to 23 questions by 19 participants provided valuable information. Four themes emerged: Evangelism, soul-winning, educational aspects, and a theme that shone across all data and provided additional knowledge of the SLT to benefit the church. Willing were the pastors to help individuals in the community. Much of the research was about the literature that provided the background about being a servant leader (Ayers, 2006; Cincala, 2016; Farling et al., 1999; Greenleaf, 1991; Howell, 2003; Marrs, 2017).

The data had numerous indications where themes repeatedly surfaced—for example, discipleship, evangelism, and community involvement. In addition, a theme surfaced that interviewees were a proponent of education. However, most importantly, it was good to see a significant theme referencing Jesus Christ, evangelism, and the need to be a servant leader, helping the community. Therefore, the perceived benefits of strategic leadership activities by pastors and church leaders viable for church membership growth and members' attendance at services would be to monitor policies and programs and implement the new process as needed, to improve the organizational effectiveness (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Davis-Olds, 2017; Deborah, 2018).

### **Theoretical Implications of the Study**

The theoretical implications aligned the study with SLT (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996), based on Boal and Hooijberg's (2001) strategic leadership definition of "the capacity to change, the capacity to learn, and managerial wisdom" (p. 515). Pastors or ministry leaders looking for new ways to advance God's Kingdom may find that understanding the theory and empirical data

used throughout this study may be the information needed to change course or add to what they are currently doing in the church. There are ways to do something better if what is currently in place is not working (Felicetti, 2021). In other words, others can always gain knowledge from others (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). This study was one way of cumulating much theoretical literature from others.

The theoretical significance of this study was that using information that already exists regarding strategic leadership could make a difference in the lives of many, not just the church's pastors. The study was conducted with the SLT (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) as the theory guiding the study. The theoretical aspects of the leadership theory provided a need to conduct this study regarding the gap in research (Grandy, 2013). Many participants' perceptions provide concrete evidence that the study should be duplicated as close as possible but in a different context, such as other local churches. Therefore, SLT was the integral theory for the study.

The local pastors answered the interview questions with much enthusiasm. Some even indicated that they may not have thought about leadership recently but have processes monitored often and change when needed. Therefore, this researcher could reasonably conclude that strategic leadership based on the SLT (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) benefits the church. The interviews were like a refresher to leverage where they are currently (according to one minister). This researcher was pleased with the study, and pastors and ministry leaders willingness to share the knowledge that may benefit them by looking closer at their current processes and possibly benefit others needing assistance.

The implications are for the pastors' policies or practices based on strategic leadership provided much insight that could help others. This researcher used the findings from this study to discuss implications helpful to pastors and may help pastors who are currently having problems

with membership decline or a decline of individuals at church services. The findings of this study suggest several things pastors may consider. They include training, education, community, evangelism, and discipleship, among other things, such as training and leadership staffing that may assist pastors in many ways. Based on SLT (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996) with current knowledge, pastors and ministry leaders could use the theory's information (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013; Phipps & Burbach, 2010) to enhance the church. Understanding the problems other pastors may have faced and what plans they implemented or changed were monumental to understanding the thoughts of prominent pastors that have worked out issues relating to strategically leading a church.

### **Empirical Implications of the Study**

The study's implications for the pastors and ministry leadership provided the intentional design for the study and the importance of the effectiveness and success of all the interviewees who participated. After concluding the study, it was good for this researcher to understand that it could make a difference in the lives of many; pastors, ministry leaders, and other individuals associated with the church. This researcher may be able to apply this type of research to other organizations, which should be great for another context. It should work to take the study to other churches in other locations as well. The empirical significance of this study was to fill a gap in the current research on strategic leadership and its possible effects on pastors and ministry leaders in the church.

This study was one way of cumulating a vast amount of practical information based on theory and empirical data (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Farling et al., 1999; Fletcher, 2009; Grandy, 2013). The empirical significance of this study was to expand the strategic leadership research for pastors facing a decline in membership and a decline in individuals attending the church (not

related to Covid 19). This study addressed how this research and additional research can explore the problems pastors face and the knowledge received from other pastors to make a difference in the lives of many. One IQ asks, in some cases: What advice would be given? Grandy's (2013) study began to help to understand pastors' and ministry leaders' concerns and to assist them with needs relating to church growth and individuals' attendance at church services.

The empirical data of this study is what other authors have indicated (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Grandy, 2013). Strategic leadership can benefit the non-profit sector (Grandy, 2013). The answers provided throughout the study should be viable for others. The analyzing data were efficient and, in totality, could be implemented by some pastors immediately. This researcher believed the information received would help pastors or ministry leaders struggling with fulfilling their purpose: to grow God's Kingdom in ways to honor Him. Sometimes that plan may need a little changing.

This researcher believes this study was a plus for leadership studies based on Grandy (2013) and Boal and Hooijberg (2001) for all pastors and ministry leaders. In addition, Golensky & Hager's (2020) and Janssen's (2019) studies provided ways for this researcher to compare to this study. They, too, wanted to indicate how strategic leadership could apply to the development of the local church and strategic leadership and management in non-profit organizations. This research should benefit some smaller churches as it would allow them to discuss things not considered. The IQs sparked the interest of many pastors and ministry leaders.

### **Practical Implications of the Study**

This researcher conducted this research to benefit churches located throughout counties in VA. Since the researcher's literature (Grandy, 2013) did not address the VA population, other populations may warrant further research and answers to the IQs may differ. However, it would

make sense for any pastors or ministry leaders to use the data obtained and analyzed, which could benefit them in many ways. For example, effective leadership is based on many factors regarding growing the church or getting individuals into it. The participants asserted that *word of mouth* was a major factor. According to Malphurs & Mancini (2003) and Meagher (2019), the church must develop leaders at every level. Additionally, pastors must know what is expected of them (Meagher, 2019). Pastors and ministry leaders thanked this researcher for conducting the study.

The data obtained, and the analysis provided could lead to the betterment for anyone reading this study. Everyone could gain many aspects of the literature in this study that would be beneficial. That includes the participants of the study and those who read it. The implications are for pastors' policies or practices. This researcher used the findings from this study to discuss implications helpful to pastors as the findings may help pastors who are currently having problems with membership decline or individuals decline at church services. The revealed themes would benefit many organizations, including the church.

The findings of this study suggest several things pastors may consider. They include increased training, educational programs, community outreach, evangelism, and discipleship. Training members and leadership training may assist pastors in many ways and need annual reviews. Understanding the problems other pastors may have faced and what plans they implemented or changed was monumental. Understanding the thoughts of pastors that have worked out issues relating to strategically leading a church was vital.

In this study, the following emerged, indicating that pastors should know what may help them. One of the things revealed was how vital a succession plan is to the success of the church. As one of the strategic leadership questions, it indicated that someone would be there if the

current pastor were not. The answer was to have someone ready before that individual is needed. Only a few pastors mentioned that succession plan during the interview as it was not a direct question asked of them. However, that information surfaced during the questions. Authors reported that strategic leadership planning is needed before a problem occurs (Galley et al., 2009; Jalcha & Machuki, 2018; Janssen, 2019).

The findings in this study provided practices that pastors could utilize to help with a decline in membership. They included, first of all, knowing why members left the church. IQ18, created for that purpose, asks: What do you think is the #1 reason why members leave the church? In addition, after knowing and understanding that information, it was paramount that practices be in place, not to help those who left, but to help those that remained. One answer to that question was, “The church is aware of who will be pastor once I am no longer here, and they are very pleased with that person.” This question aligned with the IQ: What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on membership growth?

Moreover, a similar question asks: What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on attendance at church services? Some answers included “the stability of the leader” and “the church being a comprehensive or intergenerational ministry.” These practicalities may make a difference in churches with declining membership or attendance at church services. Conversely, the practical implications for pastors and ministry leaders is to understand that there is available strategic leadership help.

### **Research Limitations**

This section outlines the apparent research limitations of the study. Most studies have some limitations in the research. Accordingly, control can be some limitations, but others can not (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, research on pastors’ and ministry leaders’

perceptions of strategic leadership has mainly focused on a general understanding of this concept; however, no research focused exclusively on the church and strategic leadership (Grandy, 2013). In this research study, there was an IQ unintentionally left out. This researcher rectified the situation, as the last IQ asks: Do you have any questions for this researcher? It replaced the missing one to have 23 questions, as the research document indicated. Therefore, it was not an issue.

This researcher could have conducted the study with the population purposively selected from only one area, such as Chesterfield County. However, a benefit of having all participants from churches in one county could provide for the selection of participants being the location at a church that would be more similar to churches in that area as opposed to ones located in other counties. Hence, the geographical location may warrant different answers from the participants to the IQs. Another area for improvement is conducting a qualitative study instead of a mixed method. The mixed method provides an avenue to get more data and analyze it statistically to determine whether a relationship exists indirectly or directly based on certain factors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher would, however, replicate the same study with perhaps more churches and review the data again.

A potential weakness of the study not controlled was that some pastors only recommended one other interviewee. This researcher was grateful for the opportunity to conduct research in a church meeting with the pastors for the first time and that they were admirable to give their time and ask others to do the same. However, this researcher did not make it necessary for any pastors to allow more interviews, especially when it became apparent that some offices opened only due to conducting the interviews. Therefore, once this situation occurred more than once, this researcher requested participation at other churches. This researcher might have



enhanced the study if all participants were pastors or ministers of churches. Collecting qualitative data allowed this researcher to reach a smaller sample size. However, this researcher did not attempt to cross all barriers concerning understanding the expectations of smaller churches.

A limitation may have consisted of the sample. It may have worked better to have more participants at the same sites. Grandy (2013) utilized many participants from the same site. The settings were similar, except for the one interview conducted at a library. This researcher is unsure whether the answers would differ had the interview occurred at the church. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate that the surroundings may be a factor based on the location.

This researcher believes Covid 19 changed how pastors and ministry leaders conducted business. That is, some churches had not fully opened their churches for services other than on Sunday, and this was a limitation whereby others at a site may not have been available. Due to this awareness, a reason for getting only two to three participants per church, and in some cases only one (i.e., only the pastor), was not something this researcher could control if all interviews conducted were face-to-face. A limitation of the multiple-case study included the ability to find an additional number of participants in the same church.

The only issue with the interviews was that the timing for in-person may not have been the better type of meeting. This researcher believes some pastors and ministry leaders may have come into the office only to conduct this meeting. However, of course, this researcher was so very grateful for their time.

Although the present study represented an important extension of SLT and church research, it had limitations. The delimitations to the study may have been lower for each criterion, such as the number of members belonging to a church. However, no maximum number of members should have been a criterion. Other than the number of participants at one location

being an issue, the study's design was a plus as it allowed this researcher to meet face-to-face with individuals never seen in person and to have the opportunity to interview them.

This researcher as the primary instrument may have changed the reliability of the study due to the questions being generated especially for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018; Cone & Foster, 1993). As a result, the research questions may need examining. Also, although biases were listed upfront, unknown biases may have been an issue if this researcher did not perceive them as biases. Finally, even though different ethnic groups participated in the study, and for the most part, answers to the questions were similar, suggesting that narrowing the group to one ethnicity may or may not have made a difference. However, this researcher tried to keep the interview process the same for all participants, using the instrument developed for the study. Therefore, the threats to validity may have been an issue only to the extent that the interviewing questions were newly developed.

Another limitation may have been the software used for the analysis. Although the analysis got completed, it took many days to get the information coded correctly to produce an analysis that made sense. Other software may have been a better fit, but it eventually worked because this researcher was familiar with it. The problem with the software was that it took a few days longer to complete the analysis than planned. Therefore, conduct other studies to enhance the population selected. In addition, the number of letters to the pastors may have been insufficient for the study. Lastly, conducting the study may require more time. These factors and others may benefit other researchers replicating this study.

### **Further Research**

This study contributes to the literature regarding strategic leadership and the church, as indicated as needed (Grandy, 2013). This researcher supposes conducting additional research.

Although this researcher conducted this study well, it scarcely achieves what one could find if one digs deeper into pastors' perceptions of strategic leadership and the church. Needed is future research, considering the study findings, limitations, delimitations, multiple recommendations, and directions. Grandy (2013) states that SLT needs to extend to the church. This section will include what topics and populations should be studied and why. This further research section will also include the additional type of designs that should be employed.

Due to the study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, this researcher recommends that future research include churches; where established is the number of participants upfront, so the number of participants will be the same at all churches. Two per church interviewees would make the numbers consistent across the board. However, that would also mean increasing the number of churches. With the increase of participants at one church, the titles used by each church may be the same. Also, no questions solicited individuals' titles or information regarding their responsibilities at the church. Analyzing that type of information may provide more profound knowledge.

This researcher suggests a different study in which the number of churches is increased (e.g., 20) and recruited are two participants from each church. In the case of this researcher's study, this study was conducted based on the number of interviews as successful. Researchers should consider conducting the same study with different participants to replicate the study. An improvement of the study could be by conducting research as a longitudinal study. Having a small church implement the strategies mentioned in this study may be helpful. Then, after some time, collect additional data to compare before and after data.

Different demographics may produce different outcomes. For this study, only one female pastor participated. While searching the churches with Google's online search engine, only one

church with a female pastor surfaced. Perhaps a study with more females may generate different responses. Also, the ethnicities of the pastors were different but somewhat more African American. However, for this study, the ethnicity of the pastors or ministry leaders did not appear to make a difference in the answers. A researcher may be interested in conducting a study with all participants of the same ethnicities to see if there is a difference. For this researcher, it appears, based on the data analysis, to not make a difference.

This present study had a qualitative approach to understanding SLT and the church. Instead of conducting another qualitative study, researchers could conduct a mixed method study to see if a correlation exists between before and after implementing some leadership strategies obtained from participants. Additional studies are needed to learn more about strategic leadership and its effects on the church (Grandy, 2013). Therefore, further research is needed to help with the study's reliability, improve the response rate of more than one participant at a location, and provide others with the importance of strategic leadership and pastors' and ministry leaders' perceptions of it. In addition, the participants were from different backgrounds and ethnicities, and perhaps other variables to research could be added to see if findings are different when more churches are a part of the population. Also, researchers should conduct more research to understand the strategic leadership of pastors further and applied to other situations.

Therefore, researchers should conduct other studies to enhance the population selected. Also, increase the number of letters sent to 100 to produce more of a selection for participation. Lastly, allowing an extended period for the research may be beneficial. These factors and others may benefit other researchers replicating this study. Even though some information listed as a limit could be a reason for further research.

## Chapter Summary

This qualitative multiple-case study provided information concerning the perceptions of pastors and others of strategic leadership related to the church. The study included 19 participants who answered 23 IQs about their processes and experiences and provided information readily that could help other pastors. Five themes emerged throughout the data, listed and given an explanation for each. In addition, there were implications for policies and procedures, limitations, implications, and applications.

This researcher included the Interviewees Answers document (see Appendix H) to share the information. Anyone reading this dissertation could comprehend how engaged all the pastors and the ministry leaders were. Also, for replication purposes, compare the document to the contents of the participants' answers given. This researcher found the study beneficial regarding strategic leadership (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001) and agreed that it should extend to the church (Grandy, 2013).

One comment this researcher believes is worth sharing about the pastors and ministry leaders is that they were all willing to help other pastors—and support this researcher in conducting the study. What this researcher remembers wholeheartedly are the pastors who did not hold back on sharing their information even though this study may not benefit them directly but others. They still shared everything they could.

This qualitative multiple-case study explored the perceptions of pastors and ministry leaders regarding strategic leadership related to the church. This researcher explored the perceptions by interviewing 19 participants and asking 23 open-ended questions at 11 churches. The pastors and other ministry leaders shared their knowledge openly and without hesitation.

During data analysis, noted were the following themes: discipleship, evangelism, education, training, and community involvement.

The research centered around the five central research questions designed to answer the issue of strategic leadership being a viable avenue to help pastors with problems they may face within the church. The problems included a decline in membership or individuals attending church services, and the IQs centered around getting that detailed information. There were indications that the research had a significant factor in that the pastors participating in the study believed the study would benefit other pastors that require help with the two common problem areas, a decline in membership and individuals attending the church services. This researcher designed the research questions to address both and noted other concerns many pastors may face.

In addition, it became evident during a review of research that additional research was needed and that a gap in the literature existed (Grandy, 2013). Therefore, it was essential to close the gap and, more importantly, provide an avenue for other pastors seeking or needing help. Since the research questions answered the study's central questions relative to what was needed, other researchers should use the same questions in future research. The tables and figures throughout this document helped provide an understanding of the many avenues taken to get factual data, when analyzed, supply each reader with additional knowledge not generated in other articles.

What do the pastors' perceptions of the church's status indicate? Are leaders willing to put forth the effort to grow the church? Do they even think the church membership has declined? What is essential to pastors or ministry leaders? These questions and others were worth investigating. Therefore, essential were the perceptions of the pastors and ministry leaders. Pastors should keep strategic planning in mind as they conduct their daily activities, as it should

benefit the pastor, church members, and future members. Therefore, through this study, this researcher expanded SLT and the church research. Moreover, this researcher hopes that other researchers will share further to increase the literature regarding SLT and the church.

This researcher's final thoughts are that due to this study, many pastors are interested in the findings so that they may revisit their leadership objectives. Also, this researcher would love to conduct the study in a different locale (i.e., a small rural town). Lastly, this researcher agrees that good strategic leadership is a process, with leadership theories and understanding it is vital *for the success of churches* (Northouse, 2015, 2016; Grandy, 2013; Ogochi, 2018).

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - IRB Approval Letter

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 12, 2022

Nancy Smith

Gary Bredfeldt

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-96 PASTORS WITH MISSION AND PURPOSE PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHURCH--A MULTI-CASE STUDY

Dear Nancy Smith, Gary Bredfeldt,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B - Recruitment Letter

Name  
Address  
Address

Hello Pastor:

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand pastors', co-pastors', associate pastors', and ministry leaders' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church regarding church membership growth and attendance at church services and the standard practices of the pastors and other ministry leaders who demonstrate a sense of mission and purpose with regard to strategic leadership planning. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and either a pastor, who has been in that role at his current church for at least 10 years, co-pastor, assistant pastor, or ministry leader of a church that has existed for at least 15 years, is of a Baptist or Christian Non-denominational affiliation, and has between 500 and 1500 members. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. It should take approximately one hour, at a time convenient for you, to complete the interview. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED]

A consent document will be emailed to you. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and email it to me prior to attending the interview.

Sincerely,

Nancy B. Smith  
Doctoral Student at Liberty University

[REDACTED]

### Appendix C - Recruitment Follow-up

Date

Name

Church

Address:

Address

Dear Pastor:

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. Last week you were invited to participate in a research study. This follow-up is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is November 10, 2022.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. It should take approximately one hour to complete the interview. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED]

A consent document will be emailed to you. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and email it to me prior to attending the interview.

Sincerely,

Nancy B. Smith

Doctoral Student at Liberty University

## **Appendix D - Consent Form (Docx)**

**Title of the Project:** Pastors with Mission and Purpose Perceptions of Strategic Leadership for the Church—A Multi-Case Study

**Principal Investigator:** Nancy B. Smith, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and either a pastor, who has been in that role at his current church for at least 10 years, a co-pastor, an assistant pastor, or a ministry leader of a Baptist or Christian Non-denominational church that has existed for at least 15 years with membership between 500 and 1500. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### **What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to explore perceptions of strategic leadership at seven churches in Richmond, Virginia, and the surrounding counties (i.e., Chesterfield, Henrico, Colonial Heights, and Amelia). The focus is on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at church services to grow God's Kingdom.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:  
Participate in an audio-recorded interview, at a convenient time for you, which will last approximately one hour.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, benefits to society may include helping other churches with membership decline or attendance decrease at church services and may help benefit a community where the church is located.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. 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 kept confidential through the use of codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Physical data will be stored in a locked desk drawer and shredded three years after the study's completion.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

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.

### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Nancy Smith. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED]

### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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

### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team 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 audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

## **Appendix E - Stamped Consent Form (pdf)**

**Title of the Project:** Pastors with Mission and Purpose Perceptions of Strategic Leadership for the Church—A Multi-Case Study

**Principal Investigator:** Nancy B. Smith, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and either a pastor, who has been in that role at his current church for at least 10 years, a co-pastor, an assistant pastor, or a ministry leader of a Baptist or Christian Non-denominational church that has existed for at least 15 years with membership between 500 and 1500. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### **What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to explore perceptions of strategic leadership at seven churches in Richmond, Virginia, and the surrounding counties (i.e., Chesterfield, Henrico, Colonial Heights, and Amelia). The focus is on pastors with mission and purpose perceptions of strategic leadership as a viable avenue to improve church membership and attendance at church services to grow God's Kingdom.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:  
Participate in an audio-recorded interview, at a convenient time for you, which will last approximately one hour.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, benefits to society may include helping other churches with membership decline or attendance decrease at church services and may help benefit a community where the church is located.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. 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 kept confidential through the use of codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Physical data will be stored in a locked desk drawer and shredded three years after the study's completion.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

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.

### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Nancy Smith. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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

### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team 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 audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

Liberty University  
IRB-FY22-23-96  
Approved on 9-12-2022

## Appendix F - Interview Questions

# Interview Questions

### PASTORS WITH MISSION AND PURPOSE PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHURCH—A MULTI-CASE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to explore pastors' and others' perceptions of strategic leadership for the church as a viable avenue to grow the church membership and increase attendance at church services. Each participant will be asked 23 questions needed to complete the study in the order written. Each question helps answer the study's central research questions and should take no longer than a minute or two to complete each one.

The entire interview process should take approximately an hour.

1. What is the #1 goal for the church (not including converting individuals to Christians)?

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2. What is the #2 goal for the church (not including converting individuals to Christians)?

---

3. What do you think a flourishing congregation is?

---

4. What do you consider the central focus of the Christian Mission?

1. Church growth \_\_\_\_\_
2. Church attendance \_\_\_\_\_
3. Church activities \_\_\_\_\_
4. Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

---

5. What is the vision for the church?

---

6. What is the mission of the church?

---

7. What is your primary strategic focus for the church (or ministry) aside from salvation for everyone? Choose one:

1. Church growth \_\_\_\_\_

2. Church service attendance \_\_\_\_\_

3. Other, please indicate \_\_\_\_\_

---

9. What plans did or have you developed for the church (or ministry)? Please indicate the top three.

---

---

---

10. Do you have a strategic road map for success as a pastor or ministry leader? What are three things that the road map includes?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

11. What was the first strategic process implemented or changed when you became the pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or ministry leader to enhance church growth?

---

---

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12. What was the first strategic process implemented or changed when you became the pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or ministry leader to enhance church attendance?

---

---

---

13. What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on membership growth?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

14. What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on attendance at church services?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

15. If this was a new church (less than a year in existence), what would you do differently than what you did when you became the pastor or ministry leader to increase membership?

---



---



---

16. What do you think is the #1 reason why churches grow?

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---



---

17. What would you say is/was the #1 reason the church grew in the last five years (Not including 2020 to 2022 due to COVID 19 if a decrease occurred)? Choose one of the following:

1) Outreach Marketing \_\_\_\_ (e.g., door to door canvassing, mailers sent)

2) Word of Mouth \_\_\_\_ (e.g., seminars by pastor or others, inviting neighbors or friends)

3) Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Explain)

18. What do you think is the #1 reason why members leave the church?

---



---



---

19. Based on strategic leadership involving the 'capacity to absorb, learn, and have managerial wisdom,' what strategies do you implement to ensure the church does not stagnate (i.e., not growing or fewer individuals coming to the church)?

---

---

---

20. What new church strategies, if any, have you implemented in the last five years?

---

---

---

21. How would you advise a pastor, wishing to stop church membership decline, that would help the church?

---

---

---

22. What theological motivation (i.e., praying to God, prayer meetings, worship conferences, or other) resulted in the continued growth of your church?

---

---

---

23. The last question: Is there anything else you would like to share that would benefit a church struggling with membership growth or having a decrease of individuals at church services?

---

---

---

Do you have any questions for this researcher? Thank you for completing the interview process.

Nancy B. Smith, a doctoral candidate in the Christian Leadership Program, John W. Rawlings School at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Please contact Nancy Smith at [REDACTED] for more information.**



### **Appendix G - Recruitment Thank You Letter**

Date

Name

Church

Address:

Address

Dear Pastor:

Thank you for participating in the research study entitled, “PASTORS WITH MISSION AND PURPOSE PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHURCH—A MULTI-CASE STUDY.” Your participation was essential to the study’s success. This letter reminds you that once the study is complete, I will be happy to send you a copy of the findings.

Thank you for your kindness and help. If you have further questions, contact me at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

May God continue to shine upon you.

Cordially,

Nancy B. Smith

Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University

## Appendix H – Interviewees’ Answers

### Interview Questions Answers

#### Pastors with Mission and Purpose Perceptions of Strategic Leadership for the Church—A Multi-Case Study

---

#### **Q1. What is the #1 goal for the C (not including converting individuals to Christians)?**

---

CA P1

I would say our number one goal is to offer Jesus Christ. So, we operate under the Great Commission and that is the Bible mission. But we have expanded to enhance the life conditions of individual in our area.

---

CA P2

To be a great church. To grow in worship. To reach for Christ excellency in ministry, and to work as a team in spirit.

---

CB P1

The #1 goal for the church is to offer Jesus Christ. This would be as a means of encouragement and production of winning spiritual lives.

---

CB P2

God is to develop disciples for Christ. Good for preaching and the number one goal is to serve the community through outreach and evangelism.

---

CC P1

The number one goal – Work side great fine gifts and develop those gifts. The church is Mission Driven. God did not look at the individuals. God gives everyone a gift. We are to pull out that gift and learn how to use it, pulling out the gifts of other really enhance lives.

---

CC P2

For the church, consider individuals, train disciples to evangelize the world. We want to build conversion, not looking to train the members for the calling. We are a holistic church building the person’s mind body and spirit. Doing missionary work.

---

CD P1

To aid God ‘s people and to serve the community.

---

CD P2

To Be a beacon of light for the community.

---

CD P3

To serve the community and lead people.

---

CE P1

The number one goal for the church is helping people utilize their gifts—bringing family and the world into the life of Jesus Christ.

---

CF P1

---

I believe the number one goal for the church is service –The Cross is composed of vertical relationship to people. Conversion how they see the community into kingdom, the after, salvation. But have to get them in here and go out to get them.

---

CG P1

The goal for the church is to enrich the lives of its members and to help others as needed.

---

CG P2

For the church one would agree that the first goal after salvation would be to meet the needs of the members spiritually, physically, and mentally.

---

CG P3

The number one goal is to be the light that is needed throughout the world.

---

CH P1

The number one goal for the church is to not to reach people making community-spiritual emotional and community – Individual person and family. To meet the person goals- come together to be mediator- problem thing is family.

---

CI P1

I don't think to exclude that making disciple out all nations without that you just a club.

---

CJ P1

For the number one goal for the church is to experience eternal hope in Jesus.

---

CJ P2

Based on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission abiding by them to do everything within the church.

---

CK P1

After 36 years I was to teach the church how to pray. In turn to determine prayer-breathing into the Body, its style, church collaboration mission, long-pace Bring -People do not populate go it understand to hear God. Everything comes out.

---

**Q2. What is the # 2 goal for the C) not including converting individuals to Christians?)**

---

CA P1

To enhance the family structure, and to provide opportunity for the family to bond with the church and each other. Biblical principle is to come together to worship the Lord.

---

CA P2

Taken one form above. Express in common goal is our work to strategic develop leadership. Intergenerational and mission available.

---

C B P1

Meeting the physical and material needs –Do through food pantry. Church meeting—children – tutoring. Thanksgiving dinners—housing development. Try to be active in the community.

---

CB P2

Develop disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.

---

CC P1

---

All we do center around bringing God glory. Everything in excellent. Understand doing the best with what you have. Started with 282 people. Moved increased 1500. Push to do things in excellent. Fixed the bathroom. Things like that, creation canvas beside you. Take care of everyone and everything. We all have responsibilities including to return phone calls. Things speak to people.

CC P2

The place beyond individual, to be a place of encouragement for the community. Place of safety development and partnering, live to comm, eave for a helping hand to community.

CD P1

To provide a place or provide a place of refuge.

CD P2

To help a community to strive.

CD P3

To serve the needed of the community.

CE P1

To add people in economic development among other things. Do what the people need.

CF P1

Being consistent, Integrating and companion, to never meet strangers or make a determination between us and them. We are all God's people. Respect each other.

CG P1

The number two goal for the church is to help the community by providing whatever the church may be able to help with.

CG P2

Number two goal would have to be to have a secure for member to come to.

CG P3

I would have to say, to be watchman for everyone that comes into the church doors and beyond.

CH P1

Answered in QI.

CI P1

Well, if you look at the call of God, to create being redeemed because redeeming the world is recognizing it mention and work not about people. But all about a people. had to achieve engagement and when world is a better place. If this closed not meaningful at all but could not exist.

CJ P1

The number two goal is for the church to not worry about the same things and concentrate on what God's plan for humanity is.

CJ P2

To not only benefit a member to benefit the entire family.

---

CK P1

After prayer—join Him—I will see disciples—consumer conversation – not leading God’s church—them there. Others duplicate that—Disciples. Simple disciples Teach to win—prayer read God’s Word—Wake fill with the spirit.

---

**Q3. What do you think a flourishing congregation is?**

CA P1

A flourishing congregation is one that is not isolated – it is outgoing, mission driven.

CA P2

I think a flourishing congregation is one that is able to minister to the entire church member. Intergenerational and mission available.

CB P1

A congregation that is rooted in love for God and one another. Sense of being used by God for a purpose greater than oneself and a blessing to others.

CB P2

One that is growing – one that is meeting the needs of the community and the church. You see the fruit. Seed-plant. Seed began to grow and flourish. Thriving.

CC P1

People who know who they are in according to Christ—walking in in their God given talent—flouring—train you –challenge—teach people. Where we came from God—change your perspective. Servant – plug in—Power of connection. How to receive power surge. Pastor receive the power. Pastor—to the congregation.

CC P2

A flourishing congregation is one that is empower individual and family and exercise job education.

CD P1

In my opinion, it is one where the needed can be clothed, fed, and recharged

CD P2

A flourishing congregation is one that feeds God’s people spiritually.

CD P3

A flourishing congregation is one that can provide for not the needs of the church but the need of the community.

CE P1

A flourishing congregation is one that growing (not just numerically) – not based on cars, how they grow spiritual—Book of Acts—church grew and broke bread together –flourishing and prospering breaking break together or fellowshiping.

CF P1

A congregation that first now guidance –experiencing special evaluation and emancipation—not held hostage by their history. A place of general –trees fall—snow comes—community.

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CG P1

A flourishing congregation is one where the needs of the people are met – physically and spiritually.

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CG P2

Well, what I would say a flourishing congregation is one where the people get what they come to receive whether a spiritual blessing or a physical one.

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CG P3

One where the needs of the members and others are met with prayer, worship and activities for the families.

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CH P1

A flourishing congregation is when you have the needs are being met. Not pressured to attending or coming. Come back with services and membership.

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CI P1

A flourishing congregation is recognizing it mention and work to engagement and when the world is a better. If it close—not meaningful at all could not exist.

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CJ P1

A flourishing congregation is one that meet the needs of flawed individuals.

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CJ P2

A flourishing congregation is one that hears the Word of God and lives their lives according to it.

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CK P1

A flourishing congregation is a prays consistently. God is telling them what to do.

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#### **Q4. What do you consider the central focus of the Christian Mission?**

**1. Church growth; 2. Church attendance; 3. Church activities; 4. Other (explain)?**

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CA P1

Well church growth encompasses (Spreading the good news.) Accomplishing discipleship and evangelistic. Growth

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CA P2

Church growth but would be other because spiritual growth and development which is different from growth.

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CB P1

4. Other—Spiritual growth –Growing in relationship with Jesus Christ. People growing in spiritual maturity.

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CB P2

4. Other. Based on the Commission – Kingdom Building.

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CC P1

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4. Other. Training disciples and what talked about earlier--mining the gifts in people. Church is going to grow. Talent flourishing. Train you—Challenge—Teach people. We all came from God—Changes your perspective.

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CC P2

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4. Other. Because it should be the development of the people to recognize individual to the father. Church.

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CD P1

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Making disciples.

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CD P2

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There is only one focus and that is developing people to be good people.

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CD P3

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4. Other disciples.

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CE P1

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4 Other –Reason could be different. Discipleship—way I would look at it. Both speaking church as Christ meaning changes—Discipleship.

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CF P1

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Four. Other. Church witness – Moving back once—collectively –Church outreach—Grow for Church on road—each Church is different – preach that good opportunity is available.

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CG P1

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Four. Other. To spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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CG P2

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I would have to pick number four—other. To evangelize and spread the Word of God.

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CG P3

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The central focus would be to make disciples out of everyone until Jesus' Return.

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CH P1

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Four. Other. Is to encourage them and to find out about Christ. See Christ—what Christ after death. Christ and their mission. All about them.

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CI P1

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Four. Other. Mobilizing servants

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CJ P1

---

Four. Other. To go out and spread the gospel to all corners of the world.

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CJ P2

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To be witness and train others to do so as well.

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CK P1

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Four. Other. Central focus—continue in Christian. See God at work—not number of people not and a lot –not indicated a church praying and mission with God. Not condemnation –that is key – mission with God. God leave.

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**Q5. What is the vision for the church?**

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## CA P1

The vision for the church is to be a socially consciousness church, committed to helping and empowering the African American Community.

## CA P2

The vision for the [REDACTED] is to minister to family to ensure the continued growth of the church which is currently 200 years old.

## CB P1

Our vision based on Luke 4:18-19. Blessing to our community to provide encouragement and a sense of hope and giving people a sense of purpose.

## CB P2

Vision for intentional about meeting the needs of the people with the Love of Jesus Christ. Intentional treat the needs of the broken people.

## CC P1

Mind—train love and fed my sheep—meet the needs of the people. Eighty-seven acres- 3 houses. Treasure within houses. People to transition—abusive situation—Manage finances for one year. Land, have a farm. Take to the food bank. Last year over 40,000 of food given away.

## CC P2

Vision-statement is vision/mission-Training disciples to evangelize the world.

## CD P1

The vision is to see that God is honored and people are saved.

## CD P2

Having the church to meet the needs of God's people.

## CD P3

To see the church prosper according to Matt 5:14-16.

## CE P1

Look Matthew – Great Commission-vision to attend to that looking being transformative – Community better. To be more like Christ – to model Christ.

## CF P1

Minister to whole –well holistic ministry—be compassion way people to vision –worship people that somebody –no distinction—no empty bowl—winning station.

## CG P1

Seeing the workers as one that teaches God's Word, help the sick, fed the hungry and so mission work.

## CG P2

Making sure the God's Word is heard everywhere.

## CG P3

The vision of the church is to be the one that people want to come to hear the gospel.

## CH P1



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Basically, to let the people know the purpose of Christ. He wants them saved. They are his children and encourage them love. Get them to change their lives

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CI P1

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Our vision is articulate – Call to make Christ-like disciples –called to make Christlike who impact family. Co-mission to make Christ-like-in the nation.

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CJ P1

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That all will come to know God's character and seek Him

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CJ P2

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A church that is will to help its community in as many ways possible.

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CK P1

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Vision—Said Great Commandment – All the commission Ex: Vision love and love people reach the work to meditate with

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#### **Q6. What is mission of the C?**

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CA P1

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The mission of the church is to provide and see that others are fulfilled based on the Great Commission.

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CA P2

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Our mission is to provide ministry that seek to win souls and transform lives.

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CB P1

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Mission of the church – Just to be a church that teaches the lifestyle or Model of Jesus Christ here on earth.

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CB P2

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Mission –How you see people with the Love of Jesus Christ. Heal. Whole-Growing.

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CC P1

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Training disciples to evangelize the world.

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CC P2

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Training disciples to evangelize the world.

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CD P1

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The mission is to go out into all the world and preach the Word of God

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CD P2

---

The mission is to go out and evangelize the world

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CD P3

---

To see the C, prosper and to set the goal to accomplish the mission and vision to take the church in the direction that God intended.

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CE P1

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Commission to win souls to Christ. Foundation—Mission in place 2000 years ago— miss the promise of C but to congregate and grow, to do the mission.

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CF P1

First and foremost, be yourself and timing and practice is important. The mission –a city that sits on a hill. Transportation for transfer. While the Lord leads you, be a member of the Body of Christ. Given to each the Word of God.

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CG P1

The mission of the church is to make disciples of all

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CG P2

Make disciples the helps everyone

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CG P3

The mission to take the Gospel to each corner making disciples.

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CH P1

The mission is to encourage them to know who Christ is and church is for the. May refer or another organization or a like a little inspiration.

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CI P1

Mission, go into all the world and make disciples in all the world, and in the nation (scripture) any better. Intentional prayer, doing prayer movement, spirit of fruit, knowing gifts, connecting people with God. Reach people for Christ. Connect, grow, and serve.

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CJ P1

The mission of the church is to set in place the things needed to take the people of the church directions-To have the goal to evangelize all of this world.

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CJ P2

Training disciples for here and everywhere.

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CK P1

Not activities—corporate body---prayer to be a mission with god. Disciples around the world—include God—God leads us around the world.

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**Q7. What is your primary strategic focus for the church (or ministry) aside from salvation for everyone? 1. Church growth; 2. Church service attendance; 3. Other, please indicate \_\_\_\_\_**

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CA P1

Church growth

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CA P2

Church growth – accomplish so much.

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CB P1

Church service attendance. By that having people involved for spirit gifts and talents.

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CB P2

Loving, serving, meeting the needs. Not just numbers – not what we are. If your C was not in the Community – various – outreach –Go back to that of service to the community. Service as

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Holistic Ministry – Christian Education. Everything is a teachable moment. To identify by Greater VA area.

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CC P1

---

Church service attendance, church in His house; Other 3. Servicing never focus on church growth, never our focus.

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CC P2

---

Other. Would equipping the people to be productive in community and in their family.

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CD P1

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Other. For everyone to use their God given gifts.

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CD P2

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Other. Serving God's people.

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CD P3

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Other. To be a healer for the nation.

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CE P1

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Other. Spiritual growth.

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CF P1

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Three, Other. Ensure spiritual relationship to hear the Lord's voice. Visual primary, find your voice, existing voice.

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CG P1

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Other. The primary strategic focus is to take care of God's people.

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CG P2

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Other. Because a focus is to provide the necessary means to all to get what they need including educational needs if necessary.

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CG P3

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Other. Being a leader that people can come in a church that tries to provide as many needs as possible, physical, mental, and definitely spiritual.

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CH P1

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Three, other. Strategic in winning and spending valuable time, fun time. Pick up to do change, their need, trust, and friendship. Go from being miserable, working with child to build their self-esteem.

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CI P1

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Three. Other. Used to mobilize 2% of country into the mission. 23,000 people came to know Christ, to be like Christ, Bring to gather to scatter, to do the commission that Christ has called to do. Intentional prayer, going prayer movement, Spiritual and fruit, knowing gifts connecting people with God's, 1) Reach people for Christ, Connect, Grow, and serve  
To connect to growing and serving, defining our reach, probable to the 3 things God given focus

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CJ P1

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Three. Other. For all to understand the infallible Word of God to help people to nourish them and to show love.

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CJ P2

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One. Church growth but that growth is to include spiritually.

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CK P1

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Not ready – serving God everyday – Don't feel like it. You can have passion. Passionately loving good love people and strategic answer passion to know God

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Q8. Missing from the interview questions

**Q9. What plans did or have you developed for the church (or ministry)? Please indicate the top three.**

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CA P1

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- (1) We operate in two location. Opened and operate two location – [REDACTED] and this campus, [REDACTED]
  - (2) Established a Multi-purpose building; education is on focus, and to
  - (3) Add to the sanctuary. We have 23 acres at this location
- 

CA P2

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- (1) Purposefully growth and develop ministry
  - (2) Development of leaders
  - (3) Minister to young and young adults
- 

CB P1

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1. A focus on children (Children ministry)
  2. Growing the ministry of the men
  3. Growing the facility
- 

CB P2

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1. Holistic educational ministry
  2. Looking to see how to bring meaning—Annual activities
  3. How to approach – Align with the vision of the pastor.
- 

CC P1

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1. Mission—training for mission
  2. Educational programs – Called the Transformation institute—Training how to apply the anointing—Discover gifts and calling. How to be a man of God.
  3. Flowing in the apostolic
- All I knew as a calling—Didn't know what it was—Came to me. I can get use to this—Primary—what is gift—answer the calling. 1. New member 14 join, had dinner. Part of my calling is to train ministers.
- 

CC P2

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1. Workforce-stability
  2. Operational procedure
-

3. Member care program
CD P1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trying to establish larger mission opportunities</li> <li>2. Establish an educational wing to benefits participants and the members.</li> <li>3. Establish additional worship services</li> </ol>
CD P2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach</li> <li>2. Men, women, and children ministries</li> <li>3. Being a teaching church</li> </ol>
CD P3
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Started a place for the youths in the church to have activities.</li> <li>2. To have the family meet for activities at the church</li> <li>3. Have more education.</li> </ol>
CE P1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Long-term goal basically physical-long-term – fine with meeting what to vision</li> <li>2. Maximize using probably while better serving the community</li> <li>3. Vision beyond the pastor – seven years ago. Incorporate the ministry –Other computer services—other training –cloth closet. Trying to establish other means to enhance long-term financial –Believe in tithe and offering. Other activity to long term development.</li> <li>4. Develop more interactive teaching –Wed hour in the word reaching unchurched people –deep and wide— Bible with own hybrid, online after Covid. Dealing with social media to social ministry, reviewable teaching, know there. How to keep ministry relevant.</li> </ol>
CF P1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community market (men get produce partnership)</li> <li>2. Partnership -Share</li> <li>3. Strong men ministry that uses social resend –restaging until finishing –Call Caption other. Call other brothers-Concrete: Civil engagement—Voice in the Wilderness—Social justice and the treatment—Social justice a form of ministry. To the Kingdom building.</li> </ol>
CG P1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Added a new updated part of a sanctuary.</li> <li>2. Added a new evening room designed for kids needing additional help with school.</li> <li>3. Added an additional prayer time per week</li> </ol>
CG P2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Put together a standard program that could benefits the parents of young kids.</li> <li>2. Additional older kids’ programs to help parents</li> <li>3. Part of the leadership teams that help to review each program to inquire whether changes may be needed.</li> </ol>

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CG P3

A lot of new changes were taken place when I came on board, so I did not implement any new ones but was available to help with the newly added ones.

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## CH P1

1. Plan is to win souls to Christ – through Mission.
2. Mission – through activities—Serving community through teaching
3. Exercise—also setup to computer center—learn to use the computer—computer and learning—helping with school and GED. Group of young people with their gifts [REDACTED] records-practice—wrote songs. Learning how to save money. Meet needs and not waste money.

Once trained in the classes provide through the [REDACTED], helped the young people to find jobs—major contractor, electronic, stone brick mason, modeling. People came from everywhere. Also, including barbering and orator speaking, and choreographer and modeling. All in order and a way the church helped.

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## CI P1

Our biggest focus is to leverage for education, arts and crafts, wells of evangelism, meeting people to connect and serve. To connect to growing and serving, defining our reach, probable the third thing, God given division.

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## CJ P1

1. Added a kitchen to be able to feed the hungry
  2. Added a closet for people needing clothes
  3. Added an additional service (worship)
- 

## CJ P2

1. Now have two locations because of the new sanctuary – But only one will remain open and hopefully used for improving the community.
- 

## CK P1

Try to start Millennium – Come to altar – Let go to some houses. I have deacons, and leaders—small groups –feeling things they are going through. Teaching to pray. Open on mission with God –Accept what God brings: X-cons – pregnant mothers. Not so sharp – Grief support Youth Director to challenge them. Not popular –as they see God—become more and more exciting. Discipleship, is a broad term. Team how to think about and bring people. Very good job—come later. Belong here. Teach to do discipleship group. Wednesday night – Starting life group. The way I think—Baseball Diamond. 1<sup>st</sup> base – Belonging (Help them) 2<sup>nd</sup> base – Begin to help group spiritually –teach/mentor. 3<sup>rd</sup> base – Doing the ministry. 4<sup>th</sup> base – Home plate – sending them out. Missionary out of the church– Keep in head – church start at 2<sup>nd</sup> base. I just don't feel like I belong. [REDACTED] but knock our people from wanting to come. Pitcher – worship, [REDACTED] and going Center -- Worship – obeying. God and worship – Him for who He is. Revival – go with disciples listening to go. Read sense of revival; meeting on revival.

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Holy Spirit brings revival. End Goal—Beginning, end goal; road and the path. Keep in mind, along the way go a little success.

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**Q10. Do you have a strategic road map for success as a P1 or P2? What are three things that the road map includes?**

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CA P1

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1. Educational Center
  2. So for me, Ministry to the whole person
  3. Special attention given to Black people and that what lead me into public life; to minister to the older person—senior person (General aspect of the ministry)
- 

CA P2

---

1. Dated – Spiritual develop without a strong spiritual development for everything fails
  2. Succession planning and development of leaders
  3. To relieve by those leaving to serve – delegate.
- 

CB P1

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1. Prayer
  2. Learning how to let things go, and
  3. Giving yourself permission to grow.
- 

CB P2

---

Yes—Women in Transition. Attention – Domestic Violence – launch domestic Ministry – set a passion. Develop Bible Institute – allow not only members but to learn the Word of God. Way of learning, in collaboration with church: Grace Ministry – Growing, Restoring, Accepting, Caring and Equipping women for life (Partnership with [REDACTED] jail – 12-week prayer, personal-interpersonal –First Graduation—Sept 7, 2022. Number one: Outside of the Christian calendar – Pick up a new ministry –Support the mission. Visual. When Covid – Quickly look at being a blessing to children, parents, those in the community.

1. Visual learning center, tutoring (one on One). Mental Health – student buddy check. Youth adult to mentor the youth – Support Growth.
  2. Found in the community – Parents don't know how to advocate, helped to advocate resources for the parents.
- 

CC P1

---

First—be faithful. Connection – Connected to the [REDACTED] Use him to profess 2004 1997-2000 by 2001 if you me –purchase land 62 building. 2012 –Youth Facility 23 Million financed. Hit but continue to grow 3-4 times-snatch out of death—From God house to my house. Oversee construction in building facility campaign to get out of debt. And get out of debt too. Seen more, after more. Keeps getting better, hope-not tap into the more—Mission Growing: Missionary-Building-Chef.

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CC P2

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That I do not have a written strategically lead to achieve growth for the ministry and C unapologetically point back to the Father—Whatever ever program absolutely where the C should be as the head. Flowing back to that to prefill the Great Commandment with the church.

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CD P1

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1. To have more members involved in church activities
  2. Develop more plans for the young adults in the church
  3. Establish more than one worship service
- 

CD P2

---

1. Have more educational classes
  2. Provide activities in the church and outside the church
  3. Be a beacon of hope for all in the community
- 

CD P3

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1. More education for the church
  2. More delegation among the leaders
  3. Establishing more leaders
- 

CE P1

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1. Long-term
  2. Consistently relevancy
  3. Goal the overreach tenure—must be bigger that require faith
- 

CF P1

---

1. Serve as a moderator [REDACTED] – Make a priority as Christian Education – Mentors-human wisdom.
  2. To understand the Lord—Ancestry legacy and leadership
  3. Create platforms for young adults –Save space. Seen as a resource, mutual urgent process. More in Ministry, as well as constituents.
- 

CG P1

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1. Add more ministers to the leadership staff
  2. Develop more programs for the youth
  3. Develop more programs for senior adults as well as for the families
- 

CG P2

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1. Help with the new programs along with others
  2. Make sure the adults are aware of all programs by putting together a handbook so everything would be in one place.
  3. Updating the bookstore
- 

CG P3

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1. Helping with the new bookstore
  2. Being more available to the members and to the pastor
  3. Being an assistant to the families that require additional attention
- 

CH P1

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- 
1. Be available
  2. Dependable
  3. Also, consistent

Always try to make sure I am friendly. Free to share. Confidential information is private.

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CI P1

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1. Strategic objective of what we called to become.
  2. Strengthening for success.
  3. Mobilize for success, financial budget for God. Flows out of the strategic objective that we have.
- 

CJ P1

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1. Spiritual development
  2. Minister to the individuals physically, for healing, and mentally
  3. Educate God's people
- 

CJ P2

---

1. To be a teaching church
  2. To be an education for many through leadership
  3. Classes for others—To engage the whole community and non-Ced to get involved.
- 

CK P1

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1. Prayer – Can't read a map without prayer—family praying.
  2. Lead people to pray in small groups. Dealing with loving God and loving people. Find that are we loving God with all our heart. Am I loving people? Heartbeat, God heartbeat. Ministry – Believing –A believer with other people—Everything else makes sense.
  3. Out in front. Vision to cast out there. Church key to the roadmap is prayer.
- 

**Q11. What was the first strategic process implemented or changed when you became the pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or ministry leader to enhance church growth?**

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C AP1

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Hasn't already been the pastor. The church is 200 years old and has had only five Black pastors. So, when I came here the first thing was to trained and retrain leadership. New direction for the ministry.

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CA P2

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Begin an initial role of ministry of discipleship church, saw the need to grow leaders. Having discipleship training. Third leadership role.

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CB P1

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Order of worship

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CB P2

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Director of Education--Christmas Calendar Focus. Switched to what are the needs of the congregation. Spiritual and academic to enhance the bigger need. Intentional about the community. Summer enrichment program, Fall-put out spiritual and academic -Dinner. Home –

---

before School- Parents were coming to Bible study. Didn't go into to grow the church. Growth, go out to evangelize.

CC P1

Mission Programs: Send missionary all over the world. Snapshot—people get saved. Mine the gift. Have classes. Discover gift. Put on the mission field. Everything is covered. Task to do it. Tithe and offering, do for God. Honor in giving, so much that God had done, in structural done. God to him 10% of what comes in to put in another account—Mission account. Fast forward Mission Field. Mission Field 1998, Mission Trip, Teenage Cosa. Interesting—acting and drama.

CC P2

First, done would have been creating a model that mold. We utilize domestic mission-growth of church plus, explain meeting needs in the community, growing in church impact generally will increase. Food bank, garden, home outreach, expand the foodbank of the Christian mantel. Meeting needs in the community growing in church impact.

CD P1

Changed the flow of the service

CD P2

The church service to include *come* as you are.

CD P3

Retraining leaders and other workers—as the P1 is unable to do it all.

CE P1

Evaluate ministry in place to determine if all needed – New ones were added. Why were the benefits the people we have now?

CF P1

First believe. Reinforcing kingship and legacy, but dismantling the mist. Promote healing. Work to do responsible tool. “Reminding Dr. King. I cannot be, you can. [REDACTED] You are because I am, I am because you are.”

CG P1

All training for everyone was revisited regardless of the position

Doorkeepers were trained on the important of making a good impression

CG P2

Helped with training-- was a big initiative for everyone which—long run be a plus for members and visitors –to grow the church.

CG P3

I think being available, in a way for people already members and seeing to their needs

CH P1

One was to keep the minds of communication, husband had transitioned. A time for healing, time to share. Be Alone. Believe in visions having those learning-yearning.

CI P1

---

I would say the biggest, when from a point teacher, from pastor to develop, appoint to improve and release teaching team, health, added health and breath. The person has a team.

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CJ P1

---

Added some training classes for everyone wanting to be in a leadership position.

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P2

---

Training based updated training manuals

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CK P1

---

Became a co-pastor. A good planter. Taking where it is and more forward. Not a lot of pride—checking at the door. Together the copastor retired. Called to lunch. Talked about both preach and teach. Choose to check pride at door. Both pastors careful to build up the other one, careful-not to make a lot of big decisions. Asking them to change. First change how we pray – having a strategy for very good teachers. God’s Love--Teaching time to time. The “cross” is loving people. Ministry of people, Disciples plus. Remember to keep it simple, not make it complex.

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**Q12. What was the first strategic process implemented or changed when you became the Pastor, Co-Pastor, Associate Pastor, or Pastor to enhance church attendance?**

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CA P1

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So, we had to develop an evangelism plan and we had to because the church is so old. We had to develop a youth and young adults’ plan. We had to rethink, everything. We had to invent the worship service again to be attractive to new people.

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CA P2

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The vision to first was two-fold. First, move from a one service to two services -along with that, number two expand the facility ministry to the county to expand with two locations to three services providing a menu of opportunities

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CB P1

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Changing the order of worship. Trying to make the flow of worship more inviting.

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CB P2

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First to say, develop program for children, the parents will come. Summer enrichment program. Enrichment Program, engaged and focus.

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CC P1

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Go for Growth. Christ will grow, must need connection. To see God, do the little things. Time to call. Never invite. Set a standard.

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CC P2

---

Spreading the gospel – Expand the facility Members improving physical church. Opportunity to come together. Women, men, youth. Fellowship. Group meeting, enhancing and improve attendance. Life socially are affected. Change to holistic offering. Economic physical health.

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CD P1

---

Changing the flow of the service also helped with church attendance.

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CD P2

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The times of the worship services.

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Minister Leader

---

Retraining leaders also worked for the enhancement of church attendance.

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CE P1

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Personal as possible—greet people. First second Sunday Two-Sunday rule –Call from the P1 – will be called. Don't like to assume—Two Sunday rule. People do it.

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C F P1

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Personal transparency –More appropriate. Normally behind the scenes, not on Sunday, Monday – [REDACTED] “Beat the wolves Monday through Saturday.”

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CG P1

---

Wanting people to come to the church is a number one goal of the church for how they can learn—if they don't come.

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CG P2

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I would say the same things that applied to growth, apply to church attendance.

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CG P3

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Implemented visitors documents that were more inviting, I think.

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CH P1

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First thing-Working with the [REDACTED] ministry. As gave out the food ministry. Only on doing radio broadcast. It was not all about me but about that food ministry.

---

CI P1

---

Launch an online campus in 2015. Covid 19 was nothing for us. Had been online for year. Opened the doorway to people engagement. Eventually try out one of the seats. Larger and smarter at the same time. Group your groups along without be, only be soul showing or a show but not as to grow.

---

CJ P1

---

Based on Genesis 12:23, to make the church a great church by changing the evangelic outlook.

---

P2

---

The training manual incorporated not only benefitted C growth but also included church attendance and growth.

---

CK P1

---

Prayer – how to get more people to come. Ask what's God doing –He will bring – activities— give up belief system—second for church growth

---

**Q13. What are two strategic reasons you believe the C has prospered based on membership growth? 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_**

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CA P1

---

The C Continued stability of the leader for 49 years. Church originally had five white pastors: and The future of the church is secure with son which will take over when I step down, which is a stable situation which is a stable situation. We have been a comprehensive ministry.

---

## CA P2

Our willingness to sit and embrace the time in which we live – envision change. Our willingness to love and embrace all. Minister to the doctor, homeless. Willing to have a welcoming space—a very welcoming church.

## CB P1

The kindness of member. The preaching and singing

## CB P2

1. Because commitment and dedication come from teaching – Held accountable to God.
2. Teaching ministry – dedication and committed—Spirit of Excellent

## CC P1

Growing in spiritual. Growing in number

## CC P2

We again—try to lead individuals to Christ—Try to share with the purpose as a plan for other, becomes empowered the growth of church become multiply effect on each one. Strategic thing after conversion build you.

## CD P1

The same applied to the membership—Changing the flow of the service.

## CD P2

1. Additionally, teaching the Word classes
2. The Bible has been more of an inspirational for people to come and join the church.

## CD P3

1. More energetic worship services
2. More people bringing family to church probably due to the deaths of Covid.

## CE P1

1. More resources, gifts and talent utilize, serve.
2. Stewardship

## CF P1

1. Carry out any vision with the remembrance of who you are
2. Come Revelations. Forgotten your first love. Corporate moment for giving birth—New birth and possibility.

## CG P1

1. Strategically looking at tall avenue of the church from the pastor on down.
2. Establishing criterion—to put in place new ways of enhancing the service with more spiritual worship

## CG P2

1. Everyone working to make this the best church.
2. Changes to the church services

## CG P3

- 
1. Updated services with a new worship team
  2. I think the choir is awesome--and then the preaching is great
- 

CH P1

---

1. Bible teaching –some young think the church is a hard thing to do—Need to be here when they come for help
  2. Help them when they come for help
- 

CI P1

---

Many hands make life work, the more people pushing the plow. Will grow in size, capable in a broader way.

---

CJ P1

---

1. Having not one but three great leaders to minister God's Word.
  2. Member's legacy to keep the church for more years to come.
- 

CJ P2

---

1. Changes to the program services
  2. Changes to the structure of the times and added additional for people unable to attend traditional services
- 

CK P1

---

1. Doing it God's way –They love god and love each other. Membership growth – Effective Word of Mouth bring them with you – accept and belong. Work in different ways – Bible Study

Say, these people asked for prayer-coming on their own – It makes sense since church is seen as a community spot—things open to the community.

2. How you pray for each other –Word of mouth –the other step out in faith
- 

**Q14. What are two strategic reasons you believe the church has prospered based on attendance at church services? 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_**

---

CA P1

---

1. Been a comprehensive ministry
  2. People of that content- not just spiritual
- 

CA P2

---

1. Strengthening of services
  2. Creation of distinct services that provide options to our worshippers
- 

CB P1

---

1. Having ministry and a place for the children
  2. Trying to be an intergenerational church
- 

CB P2

---

1. Core value- Radical hospitality
  2. Passionate worship – Intentional faith – Look at information given out.
- 

CC P1

---

- 
1. Came from a place of excellent –Reflect in the earth. First impressions for people. Taking care of God’s home. Bathroom-excellent.
  2. Changed the development of the church. Lift and spend. Building renovated. Go through the building—Open the spirit up.
- 

CC P2

---

1. We again—try to lead individuals to Christ—Try to share with the purpose as a plan for other. Becomes empowered the growth of church become multiply effect on each one.
  2. Strategic thing after conversion build you.
- 

CD P1

---

1. Actually, shorten the time of the service
  2. Moved a come as you are on Sunday since the church opened back up
- 

CD P2

---

1. The same thing as above for the people coming to the church services
  2. Changed the flow of the worship service
- 

CD P3

---

1. Set church guidelines
  2. More people coming to church dressed casually
- 

CE P1

---

1. Fellowship of sharing
  2. Encourage words in songs
- 

CF P1

---

1. I think when attendance grows that it is being known and witnessed by others
  2. To cross the threshold –Responsible to be a place they fine.
- 

CG P1

---

1. Make everyone aware of the Biblical aspect of the church
  2. Bulletins that are now printed in addition to the online focus of the church magazine
- 

CG P2

---

1. It takes more to keep a church running better—than before—things have changes and we realize changes had to occur
  2. Realizing changes were needed
- 

CG P3

---

1. Leading with fire
  2. Keeping people once to come and once they join.
- 

CH P1

---

1. Breakfast at the church – different programs.
  2. Family related problems missed with food. They want food and the XXXXXXXXXX play.
- 

CI P1

---

1. Want to definitely have a hunger and need for life commentary. Don’t think the church is inspirational when gathering no presence.
-

- 
2. When someone is engaging, participating, connecting value in benefit for gathering in room is a mission moment.
- 

CJ P1

---

1. The ministry is one that benefits all no matter whether young or old, and new ministries created.
  2. Add more services before Covid.
- 

CJ P2

---

1. More people attending always allow for increase in revenues. Which in turn allows for enriched services at the church.
  2. New youth center is a part of the church.
- 

CK P1

---

1. Spending time in prayer and obey – Example – Bought property – Praying about the situation – it worked out wonderfully.
  2. Always praying
- 

**Q15. If this was a new church (less than a year in existence), what would you do differently than what you did when you became the pastor or ministry leader to increase membership?**

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CA P1

---

I would utilize all the technological advances that were not available when we started out.

---

CA P2

---

Building relationships – Spend that first year preaching and teaching – three secure areas.

---

CB P1

---

I probably would try to get the membership to do more things out of the box. Same method about Jesus Christ but open to using new ways to convey the message.

---

CB P2

---

Nothing different – Passion to know what I grew up – New member – teaching ministry. Teach. Study at his feet. Learn that from him. Christian Counselor. The relationship is more important than the problem. Feed them, provide school supplies, give generous.

---

CC P1

---

Nothing would be done differently. Learn from mistakes and grow from it. May not know what to do but not to do. Faked out of school, part of the growing process to go through stuff. ■ four years played ball. Different picture. Grasp the concept.

---

CC P2

---

Nothing differently.

---

CD P1

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Start to use more technology sooner. I believe the church is somewhat behind when it comes to technology especially zoom, Youtube, and others.

---

CD P2

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I would do more delegating and bring more people on staff sooner.

---

CD P3

---

Start to use more technology—Ask for help from others—seek out a good mentor.

---

CE P1

---

Add an early contemporary service, come on Sat or weekend , very traditional. Another time of week, two instead of one. Align ministry, full effect.

---

CF P1

---

I would create worship shops – so abuse transportation slave trade – Resources to correlate met on every level –Have that be relative. Soul tremble base on trauma—Based on trauma paranoid—base place on needs. Address mental help. Luke: come to the church and go see whoever to get right.

---

CG P1

---

I would have added an additional area used exclusively for educational training—for the pastors, for the ministry staff, for others. Wanting a leadership position.

---

CG P2

---

Be more creative and not afraid to go outside the box.

---

CG P3

---

As the new kid on the block, step out into my real calling earlier.

---

CH P1

---

I would probably say I wasn't using my phone to text message—Using other people to help. Delegate to include more people. Need help.

---

CI P1

---

Brand new, reminder to build around the commission. When you are going through life. Go. When we live out mission rightfully because of many empty and balance throughout the earth.

---

CJ P1

---

Would begin to use technology a lot sooner than then when it became almost mandatory due to the savvy people.

---

CJ P2

---

I wish we had relocated the C to this location sooner.

---

CK P1

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Start small group sooner. Everything is timing –establish faith quicker. Reach further in faith. Encourage the people, preach bolder. God will it His way.

---

#### **Q16. What do you think is the #1 reason why Churches grow?**

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CA P1

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Hard to just give one reason. to answer or give one reason. The dynamic leadership is probably is key, as much as we say it is not personality.

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CA P2

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I believe to provide ministry that connects to the soul.

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CB P1
I think offering people a sense of encouragement and belonging.
CB P2
Love and meeting the need. Agape Love – Godly Love. New emergent leader
CC P1
Level of Word that is spoken. First mission to teach the Word that people get elementary—receive it and receive victory.
CC P2
I think number one reason that the church now is growing, people are hungry and eager to find hope. Whether something is an offering, an inner search base on what is happening in the world—evil place—it's not good. Desperation driven people to the church.
CD P1
They grew because of good Bible study and good worship services
CD P2
People like what the P1 is saying.
CD P3
The people.
CE P1
Execution of the Word – Word is relevant—Good preaching
CF P1
Sincerity. On the environment, feel embraced, appreciated. Square watermelon. Wonderfully made—a square watermelon, unique to be you.
CG P1
Some grow mainly due to the teaching – Ministering of the pastors
CG P2
A good worship environment is always--good
CG P3
Many things help—good preaching the most.
CH P1
I think it is even though lost because of family- encouragement- Word of mouth.
CI P1
It is true grow, when churches happen through the Spiritual, through prayer at every line. Planter and water. Healthy church grows when watered, it grows.
CJ P1
A church that can maintain itself under any circumstances people wish to be a part of it.
CJ P2
They grow because people want them to grow and they don't mind helping the church to grow with their time and with their finances.

---

CK P1

No question – when they have a prayer ministry that is viable – Jesus will draw them. Reach people and see the things to do or not do. Church growth – Put that slice of church growth to the total picture. Church growth movement, may continue but may not work. Less growth: 1. Lack of faith and 2. Lack of prayer, Co-mission with God.

---

**Q17. What would you say is/was the #1 reason the C grew in the last five years (Not including 2020 to 2022 due to COVID 19 if a decrease occurred)? Choose one of the following: 1) Outreach Marketing \_\_\_\_ (e.g., door to door canvassing, mailers sent) 2) Word of Mouth \_\_\_\_ (e.g., seminars by P1 or others, inviting neighbors or friends) 3) Other: \_\_\_\_ (Explain)**

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CA P1

For us it is Other. Growth has been due to this relocation--established clergy. Growth has been due to this location. Establishing this location.

---

CA P2

Three. Other. Having a strategic plan of succession – key to the growth.

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CB P1

Two. Word of Mouth

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CB P2

Two. Word of Mouth – People to join

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CC P1

Two. Word of Mouth

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CC P2

Two. Word of Mouth

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CD P1

Two. Word of Mouth

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CD P2

Two. Word of Mouth

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CD P3

Two. Word of Mouth

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CE P1

Two. Word of Mouth

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CF P1

Three. Other. Church intergenerational platform. Walk down that path, that where that I am. Is [REDACTED] Watermelon square.

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CG P1

Two. Word of Mouth

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CG P2

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Two. Word of Mouth

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CG P3

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Two. Word of Mouth

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CH P1

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Two. Word of Mouth

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CI P1

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Two. Word of Mouth (Best Way)

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CJ P1

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Two. Word of Mouth

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CJ P2

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Two. Word of Mouth

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CK P1

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Two. Word of Mouth – reaching out in the community with hot topics; abortion. Research and bring neighbors. Back in ministry – essential of God doing this His way – His people.

---

**Q18. What do you think is the #1 reason why members leave the Church?** \_\_\_\_\_

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CA P1

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Members leave the church for so many reasons. Members leave # 1 for personal situation (job, relocation). Disagreement with Dissatisfaction, faith reasons, church directions.

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CA P2

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Don't know, lack of understanding of what it really takes to entice people. Selfless dare all churches have challenges. Often want to leave that lessen the process to get to leadership. Have structure in place- misunderstanding of the church operation, the necessary of having a church operation.

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CB P1

---

For lack of communication.

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CB P2

---

They die. When they come, they don't leave. Move out to another state.

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CC P1

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The number one is get offended somehow, church birth, offended or left. Never to leave but be sent. Not called to pastor, birthing out of hurt and receive or what man of God. Have to stay in, not emotions—sprint—miss interrupt. Listen to the people. Called not an expert in the church.

---

CC P2

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Is offended.

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CD P1

---

They get upset.

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CD P2

---

Due to miscommunication.

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CD P3

Some people just move around for no apparent reason.

---

CE P1

Say that members leave the church, no longer getting anything out of the service. Corporate - exit. Is it something (relocation, person kids grown, then an empty nester. Longer couples activity, small group. No longer getting the benefits of the ministry.

---

CF P1

Feeling rejected and modified—two are mistreated.

---

CG P1

They are not happy.

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CG P2

They are someone left out due to their own fault

---

CG P3

Not letting anyone know what is going on with them. Mad with the world.

---

CH P1

I think the number one reason members leave the church is because someone hurt their feelings. Perceptions of what was said. Persuaded to leave and go with other—Listen to others.

---

CI P1

This is by and low, the #1 reason why members leave the church is they believed that the church is all about them. The constance mentally, if leave this one, just left so and so.

---

CJ P1

They are like animals lost in the wilderness. They are looking for things they may never find.

---

CJ P2

Most times it is because some believe they have been wronged by the pastor or someone in leadership.

---

CK P1

Having a power play with another person in the church. Pride—Don't agree with direction of the church.

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**Q19. Based on strategic leadership involving the 'capacity to absorb, learn, and have managerial wisdom,' what strategies do you implement to ensure the church does not stagnate (i.e., not growing or fewer individuals coming to the church)?** \_\_\_\_\_

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CA P1

We have a yearly visioning process, and a yearly training process. Every year, call it Joshua Honor people where people come through to get an understanding the Word.

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CA P2

I think # 1 Having your own personal relationship with God. Dailey meditation to constantly create an appetite of a long last learning. In hour study, reading books; webinar courses. A strong prayer life to seek the leadership and guidance of the Lord.

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CB P1

Part of our focus on intergeneration –Make sure that we have ministries of services that reach different categories.

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## CB P2

Be creative, like with the virtual, just doing something new. Be in the know of what is going on to meet the need. Very flexible in the ministry. Developing of intergenerational members—bingo—eat—intentional about meeting the needs of bingo.

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## CC P1

Programs to help people development. Empowerment ministries. Reputation. How to interview. Basic things. Teach how to live. Help people. Didn't come. Figure out money.

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## CC P2

I think that what we have found is being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit—What's happening now. Open to address hard issue of life—open to speak researched have conversation back to the Biblical answers to today's questions.

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## CD P1

Always looking at ways to do things better but always keeping God's plan for the C in mind.

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## CD P2

Every year look at what is working and continue those and changed anything not working.

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## CD P3

Keep the Bible study lessons current—Offer dynamic worship services.

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## CE P1

Trending of others. Delegate to others responsibility and resources; not try to do it all myself.

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## CF P1

I think to have an intercession between community and district, commit to work instead of being isolated and have a few to attend.

---

## CG P1

Always being made aware of new technology and using it during services – all services

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## CG P2

Having a current Word.

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## CG P3

Wanting more for everyone, seeing people happy, and free.

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## CH P1

I am opened to suggestions and the individuals that are here included in working/serving in the church. Things are for children-parents with the church.

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## CI P1

Number one, make sure I am growing. If I am not growing, they are not growing, the church will not grow. Raise led on churches. Stay small design to take small build and a few people and never allowed to grow.

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CJ P1

Keep up the times now. Things are changing and the church must also change—keeping God always in the mist of what is taking place.

CJ P2

Improve programs. Keep the church in the know. Add additional staff as needed.

CK P1

Don't like change – Teach them to pray. Prayer is such an emphasis. But must have prayer, spill over into everything. If changed, make it difficult. Go back to prayer.

---

**Q20. What new church strategies, if any, have you implemented in the last five years?**

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CA P1

So, Co-visual intervention - Redefine the capacity of what the church does. Now all over country to have a virtual presence.

CA P2

I don't have new strategies – Enhance the ones we have in place—strong strategic leader – Joshua Army train individuals to prepare for leadership opportunity and us use that when ready to appoint new leaders or current leaders. Everyone goes through Joshua Army. Program is made up of class study and application. Ministry application process to begin help to understand leadership is a call—lead like Jesus- look at various leadership models to prepare them. Develop and operate as a team. Teach [REDACTED] the purpose driven life – ST1 – Using that model. Everything we do in ministry develop through a purposeful lens. End results saving tools used. If your souls can't explain how to enhance the 1. Disciples 2. Evangelism 3. Worship 4. Fellowship 5. Ministry must apply to the ministry: Core Value –Engraved.

CB P1

Something called *Breakfast with the Pastor*. Gave children breakfast. Increase in younger children. Greeting and getting to know them.

CB P2

Developing of intergenerational members. Bingo, eat, intentional about meeting the members each year. Bingo is important for that.

CC P1

Programs—know how to get it out.

CC P2

Technology, open to tech streaming- even ministry bishop the growth of the people—streaming to use help push members. Fearing of cell plan. Try to utilize social media—the word—or Tik Tok from family or good conversation electronic embrace that to build the kingdom.

CD P1

No new strategies except for adding new technology

CD P2

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None, except now due to Covid, modified the Bible study.

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CD P2

---

None, except new technology.

---

CE P1

---

None

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CF P1

---

Again, cousin to complacency. Created a climate to not be anything but who you are.

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CG P1

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Updated all the digital equipment – installed new cameras throughout the church.

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CG P2

---

No new strategies- just help with pastors' implemented changes.

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CG P3

---

Updated the church program description which were outdated.

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CH P1

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Not that many new, it was period of healing, sickness and taking a break. Take care of the family. Doing for the home is important too.

1. Breakfast and Boat ride
2. Post to Post Fairy
3. Ports picnic at park

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CI P1

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How do we become commission? If you are not reworking the leader's strategies everything I build in 2022 sink. In the new world post Covid decided landscape approach 2023 2024 with a new mindset. Must hang it up. Looking at everything strategic. Someone just doesn't wake – Connect with people to become a part of Body of Christ – to have people come through our doors. Monday through Friday, engagement for evangelism and have to fish in the world, Walk in the doors are close. Every person invitation for experience.

---

CJ P1

---

Only added new technology

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CJ P2

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Updated the look inside the building and outside.

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CK P1

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Life groups. Prayer meetings. Prayer emphasis is in every meeting, life group, or any group.

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**Q21. How would you advise a P1, wishing to stop C membership decline, that would help the C?** \_\_\_\_\_

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CA P1

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How would I advise? I would advise that they seek counsel of a successful pastor or a seasoned pastor in their community.

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CA P2

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First advise of the importance of relationship, building with the people in leadership circle and encouraged to be present--no matter how well we preach. Important is that we care—we must be present. To develop the leadership gift within, nourish the gifts, testing for people in the right place, whether paid or not. Do it for the glory of God—where your passion is. Help us, help leaders.

---

CB P1

---

I would advise him or her to find their passion, challenge and to see how that passion can be challenge that in a way that can aid the growth of the church.

---

CB P2

---

It's okay if you don't know something. I would advise to be lovable, approachable, and available. Genesis—God wants relationship. Not too quick to get angry – He or she cares. Look for people that are very creative. Need to get wisdom.

---

CC P1

---

Teach people the Truth—not tradition. Stand for the truth, don't compromise. Into the Word of God. Follow in God, feed my sheep.

---

CC P2

---

I would encourage him to pray fully consider what is being provided at the church—contradictory to God led living. People won't come to a church if it is declining, is not meeting needs. Tunnel vision looking at what you are preaching—people in leading community restoring not a healing place—draws people to be healed.

---

CD P1

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Know the problem, know the why. Understand the reason.

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CD P2

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Find out why, ask members why. They usually know if they are willing to say.

---

CD P2

---

Understand what is going on in each area of the church, from leaders to the children.

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CE P1

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Hybrid church, now doing the streaming. Bible on zoom. Conference on hand, streaming live—staying connected. Putting newsletter online. Virtual people, keep community live on next year.

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CF P1

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To realize that he is a service of God first, the under shepherd of the church to always be seen in sackcloth and ashes—not a king. Attend Bible study, Stand in front, stand from behind. Leading from behind. Lead from behind. You don't look for them. Know to follow them anyway, lopsided relationship.

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CG P1

---

Do a mailer to the congregation for feedback requiring different aspects of the church from preaching, to the choir singing.

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CG P2

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Discussion with the other leaders of the church may help.

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CG P3

Ask or call the members.

---

CH P1

I would first find out the reason that they have heard—mothers, saints, friends—know what the problem is. Learning God personally. Find out from the people. Train, read, find out why.

---

CI P1

Stop focusing on the problem and start vocalizing on mission. Plan before climbing.

Attendance and giving are trialing indicated, not connecting. Watch training indicates first time guest. Ways of invitation. Focus on the mission indicated.

Shopping for Christian commodities. American Christianity bundled a lot into the gosbel. Make it all about me. No longer abouts God's calling; but about my preference. Consumer rather than a mission.

---

CJ P1

Can always rely on each other. Therefore, all pastors should have a go-to, probably outside the church.

---

CJ P2

I would advise a pastor to make sure to have someone in which they can be very confidential with and can help them.

---

CK P1

Spent a lot of time on knees with the Lord if declining. Start with you. Back in sink—go ministry pulling people to pray.

---

**Q22. What theological motivation (i.e., praying to God, prayer meetings, worship conferences, or other) resulted in the continued growth of your C? \_\_\_\_\_**

---

CA P1

So, our worship services, prior to the pandemic, we were doing three worships a Sunday — Organizational thematic thrust more men and family of the church. More men and family of the church with emphasis to the men of the church and women of the church.

---

CA P2

Prayer. Teach that to congregation. Address the prayer needs of the people. Worship, saturation in prayer.

---

CB P1

I am going to say prayer and conferences.

---

CB P2

Intercessory prayer ministry, learn from Covid. Intercessory went from 5 people to 45 people. Increased!

---

CC P1

Camp Meeting, one of three major meeting. Practices, strategies, and to function in the supernatural. Meeting next week, Camp meeting—Prosperity revival. Set under the apostolic.

---

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You have no coverage, no direction, opportunity to get offended.

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CC P2

---

Following the voice of God!

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CD P1

---

Praying

---

CD P2

---

A big *Praying to God*.

---

CD P3

---

Praying to God *mercifully*.

---

CE P1

---

Strong on prayer. Praying and fasting. Praying already undergird everything, power that manifest.

---

CF P1

---

Syndicate name, know their self. Community of self. Community with daily devotion. Prayer line, no one person standing by themselves. Help with internal involuntary, not to carry by themselves in a secular sense.

---

CG P1

---

It would be *prayer*.

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CG P2

---

Definitely more praying.

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CG P3

---

Praying and praying.

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CH P1

---

Prayer. We need to pray. Leaders need to pray. Teach and lead God's people. Need guidance from God. Praying with the members. Fasting with the members and reading the Bible.

---

CI P1

---

Praying.

---

CJ P1

---

Prayer.

---

CJ P2

---

Praying always helps and makes a difference.

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CK P1

---

Praying to God, Prayer Meeting. True Worship. Obey God—Doing it for Him. Prayer. Praying. Disciple some key people and see what God does from there. Keep focus on God, loving people. Prayerfully that you are pulling forward. Both ways God use to teach—Missionary. Tell me how. Amen—if you are on your knees and Will to God. Yielding to God, prayer, Heart of God.

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**Q23. The last question: Is there anything else you would like to share that would benefit a C struggling with membership growth or having a decrease of individuals at C services?**

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CA P1

I think that a C has to be True to its mission and not to contemporary trends. And I would advise the C to take advantage of visual technology. It is the way of the future.

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CA P2

Prayer and faithful to the assignment. When it becomes difficult, I believe often it is as God is developing us as leaders. Learn and listen, whispering to pause and hear Him. Learning and hearing God is much more important the suffocation of our praying.

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CB P1

Having and maintain a spirit of encouragement, being faithful to the call, and trusting God for the rest. And also, not comparing yourself to other churches, that can weigh you down. Learn from other church but don't compare—can be detrimental.

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CB P2

Go back to being dedicated and committed. Look to Jesus. Look for the number, focus on which is, not on what's not.

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CC P1

I would say, have to make sure you have the right cover; uncompromising and faithful to what God has given. Get out of the tradition. Learn there is more.

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CC P2

Really encourage. God back and seek God in prayer. If not go to find a place of result, if declining. Large membership is not quality. Quality not quantity with peace. Don't be afraid to ask why. Examine time of service 1) population changed. Differences. Some different X-term factors. Seek God and be open.

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CD P1

Look to see what others are doing that works.

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CD P2

Find out why? Only when you understand why you will be able to fix the situation.

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CD P3

Look for ways to make a difference in the community. If not involved become more involved.

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CE P1

I would suggest having someone to come in to evaluate the ministry. Evaluate the service program, time, singing, and preaching. All the analysis is, living in the house. Not a big deal, we want stuff fixed—no longer even functional. Have an outside person to come in.

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CF P1

If the church would incorporate the practice, have an overcomers night—people to testify what they had gone through. The whole meniscal common practice back to the workmanship; who so ever will go. Give people time to tell their story.

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CG P1

Every child will have problems, every now and then, and the best thing that can happen is to fix the problem before it gets out of control.

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CG P2

Get plenty of rest and tackle each problem head on.

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CG P3

Ask others in the church for help.

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CH P1

I would encourage and share to get security and supports groups with other pastors. Support programs -Financial support and other programs. Some pastors don't address the problem. Advise the pastors that things do happen. Get the support, some don't know how to reach out. Call and communicate, not gossiping but prayer and fasting. Another program—Group of pastors' seminars. Network what we are doing together. Go to churches to take choir and help the pastor. Do what you can do for the ministry. Everyone will not support everything. Communication through pastors and people.

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CI P1

Leaders don't focus on the lost, but on the mission. Win people, you grow. Not coming to you, go to where they are. That is why focus on education. Do not require a statement of faith to attend. Take care of their commodities for the purpose of taking. Recreations, rubbing shoulders with people. Building a relationship.

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CJ P1

Do not conform to every new fad that comes to your way—Stick to the bases, for they always work better than most.

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CJ P2

The C members and friends must pray for the church, the pastor, and each other at all times. Must always have a prayer time schedule. Without it the church will probably not last.

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CK P1

In a decline try identifying current reality. Healthy things grow, evaluate your systems; staff systems, body of Christ system, staffing or organize your ministry. Respiratory make the threats to become healthy—Healthy things grow. Focus on church health, not church growth and things will grow.

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**Replace question #8: Do you have any questions for this researcher?**

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CA P1

No, I do not.

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CA P2

Thank you –To really be able to horn in leadership to ministry. Often, I think we don't have enough reflective moments. Our leadership reflective moments. Reflect on strategy. God has honored the strategy and want to thank you!

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CB P1

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No, I do not.

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P2

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Comment: We are one body with many members—Find out the spiritual gifts.

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CC P1

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No

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CC P2

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No

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CD P1

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No questions

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CD P2

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No other questions.

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CD P3

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Not at this time.

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CE P1

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None

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CF P1

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No. The time spent was essential—Carry out the benefit from the work. The crossing the journey, *Be a reference!*

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CG P1

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No question but thank you for including me as pastor and this church in your study. I look forward to your findings.

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CG P2

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None at the moment.

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CG P3

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No questions

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CH P1

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No extra questions.

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CI P1

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What do you hope to accomplish?

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CJ P1

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No.

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CJ P2

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None at this time.

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CK P1

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No additional questions, thank you.

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*Note.* Church (C); Church code (A-K) ; Participant (P); 1, 2, or 3 (First, second, or third interviewee).

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Nancy B. Smith, a doctoral candidate in the Christian Leadership Program, John W. Rawlings School at Liberty University, is conducting this study.