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**Being Present without Being Present: An Internet-Based Approach to Providing Pastoral
Counseling to an Always Online Generation**

by

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CHAPTER 1: MINISTRY PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION OF MICRO-PROJECTS

Introduction

Creating a pastoral counseling program for any church is a positive endeavor that can help the people of the church, the life of the church, the growth and maturity of the church, and is in keeping with Christ's command to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17, English Standard Version). Shepherding the flock can become difficult when the flock changes, the landscape changes, and the tools change. This is the case with The Risen Refuge Church, which changed as it grew from a ministry into a church – a church that doesn't have time for traditional pastoral ministry.

Ministry Context

The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church is a new church that was established in January 2022. This process has taken a journey of about eight years, which officially began as The Risen Refuge Ministry in 2014.¹ It was then that the teenage children at the Eastern Christian Church in Jersey City, NJ, asked their pastor if they could use the sanctuary on Sundays for their own worship service under the name "Risen Refuge". This was a group of second-generation Egyptian-Americans who wanted to come together for a worship meeting in their language. It was approved, and The Risen Refuge Ministry of the Arabic-speaking Eastern Christian Church began.

Along with a few key adults from the Eastern Christian Church who acted as guides, mentors, and teachers, they organized, invited guest speakers, assembled their own worship team, and hired a pastor under the supervision of the senior pastor of the Eastern Christian Church. They created outreach ministries and put together their own events and annual

¹ Mina Gabriel, interview by author, July 1, 2020.

conventions under the guidance and assistance from the mother church. As time passed, they felt the need to be more and more autonomous until a pastor was appointed in 2019 who worked closely with the senior pastor and members of the Eastern Christian Church while also developing the vision and mission for The Risen Refuge Ministry. With the blessing of the mother church, The Risen Refuge Church was established January 30, 2022, and they started the process in earnest of being the church God had called them to be.

Ministry Problem

There are parts of what a church does that The Risen Refuge Church had been doing since it began, but there are areas they had to learn about and step into. A couple of years before they became a church, they had their own board of administration, their own finances, fully compensated their own pastor, full control of their own worship service, ran a couple of outreach ministries, held Bible studies and small group meetings, and even paid tithes to the mother church. What they hadn't developed, over the years, was a pastoral counseling program.

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. This group had been through pastors who didn't connect at all with the congregation, to pastors who were loved by half and ran off the other half, to pastors who were loved by almost all, but who didn't have time for providing more than a Sunday sermon. The only pastor they had that they could go to with their problems, whether mundane or spiritual, was the pastor for the Eastern Christian Church, whom they loved, but also felt didn't fully understand them.

The regularly attending members and parishioners of The Risen Refuge Church are almost entirely from the Millennial Generation and Generation-Z, and almost entirely of second-generation Egyptian-Americans. These two, when evaluated holistically, show a congregation

who, while still connected to their cultural roots, emulate their American peers in their daily lives. One part of being a church they don't have is a pastoral counseling program that reaches them, and is available to them in a way that fits with their schedules and regularly used forms of communication.

Explanation and Justification of Micro-Projects

Developing a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church isn't a simple one, which isn't to say that this task should be particularly simple in any context. This church is a new church; however, it is one that has been around as a ministry for eight years, and this group has been together, meeting together as friends, and in Sunday School, and other church events, since the mid-1990s. It has its own culture and group norms, developed over a few decades, so while it is a new church, it cannot be treated as a new church plant. The Risen Refuge Church is also a second-generation Egyptian-American church that still holds ties to the mother church, while trying to stand on its own. A pastoral counseling program would need to be presented as thoroughly American and appeal to the urban nature of this group, while not disregarding their ethnic heritage.

The following micro-projects were chosen to clarify the positions held by the people of this church on what kind of pastoral counseling would resonate best with them, and determine if three specific avenues for delivering pastoral counseling would be beneficial. As such, the first micro-project was an interview and analysis, and the three micro-projects that followed were blogging, podcasts, and digital posters.

Interview and Analysis Micro-Project

The Interview and Analysis Micro-Project addresses this ministry problem by providing clarification regarding the church's thoughts on the benefits that can be provided through

pastoral counseling, and the willingness of the people of the church to utilize different formats for pastoral counseling. Through this clarification, the subsequent micro-projects could be strategically chosen to research the pastoral ministry options that may have the best opportunity for positive results. A deeper understanding of the church's views on the benefits of pastoral counseling, and their feelings towards what formats they would prefer was essential in developing a plan of research into areas that took their ethnicity, enculturation, and generational positions into consideration.²

These interviews essentially functioned as both a formal interview for research purposes, and an in-person counseling that created a better understanding for both persons in the interview process. The information gained through the analysis of the interviews formed a better understanding for the researcher, and the interviewee seemed to come away with a better understanding of how they personally could benefit from pastoral counseling.³ For the researcher, this was enormously important since he is also their pastor, who cares for them and their well-being. After the conclusion of each meeting, the pastor prayed with them, and encouraged them to not hesitate to reach out when they were in need.

Blogging Micro-Project

Armed with the information from the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project, the next micro-projects were chosen based on the understanding gained therein and the data surrounding the population of The Risen Refuge Church member's enculturation, generation, and urban lifestyle. The Interview and Analysis showed while they acknowledge the benefits of pastoral

² Timothy E. Clinton and Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 502.

³ Clinton and Hawkins, 503.

counseling and would like to utilize this opportunity, they feel they don't have the time to devote to in-person meetings. Instead of researching how to encourage them to make time for in-person meetings, the Blogging Micro-Project was chosen to research how to take pastoral counseling to them wherever they may be throughout their busy days.

Blogging is a popular and growing platform for mass communication, and it is similarly popular and growing for pastoral counseling.⁴ Current data on it shows that it is continuing to grow in popularity with both the Millennials and Generation X, which are the two generational groups that make up the entirety of The Risen Refuge Church.⁵ This was also chosen as it addresses the desire for pastoral counseling, as well as the feeling of having no time for in-person meetings, since they will make time for browsing through blogs on topics they want to know more about.⁶ They regularly get their information about their concerns with a quick read before moving on to whatever they have planned next.

Podcasts Micro-Project

Similar to the Blogging Micro-Project, the Podcasts Micro-Project addresses the ministry problem by creating an avenue to deliver pastoral counseling to a church made up of two generations who are constantly online, and constantly on the move. While blogs require more attention from the user, podcasts can deliver content to people who are involved in another activity at the same time. Pastoral counseling has also seen a rise in popularity in podcasts as

⁴ Marko Dimitrievski, "Blog Statistics," True List, last modified February 25, 2023, <https://truelist.co/blog/blog-statistics/>.

⁵ Dimitrievski, "Blog Statistics."

⁶ "How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith," Barna, last modified October 15, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith/>.

they are becoming more and more simple to set up.⁷ The danger in creating a pastoral counseling podcast is setting up a podcast that is very easy to create a product that is not professional, either technically, or in content, or delivery. In this aspect, podcasts might be more difficult than blogging, but it provides another worthwhile medium for reaching the people of the church.

Just like broadcasting sermons over the radio began about 100 years ago and became very popular, when people today want to listen to their favorite pastor, hear their home church sermon, or find an answer to a pressing question from a Christian perspective, Millennials and Gen-Z often go to podcasts.⁸ Since these generations are the ones that make up the membership of The Risen Refuge Church, and they are already in the habit of using podcasts, using this medium for pastoral counseling that has great potential. However, the problem that is being researched here involves creating a pastoral counseling program, not an online sermon delivery format. The creation of the topics and the recording and delivery of the podcasts for this micro-project must be keenly focused on providing pastoral counseling that will help the people of The Risen Refuge Church. Keeping this in mind, and using the education and experience the researcher has in journalism and broadcasting, this micro-project can help provide a part of the solution to the problem being addressed here.

Digital Posters Micro-Project

Keeping with the focus of trying to find ways to reach the people of The Risen Refuge Church wherever they are throughout the week with pastoral counseling, the Posters Micro-Project showed that it can have some added value to a pastoral counseling program. Regardless

⁷ “Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024,” Statista, February 23, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1123105/statista-amo-podcast-reach-us>.

⁸ Paul Guggenheimer, “100 years ago, live radio sermons began at Pittsburgh church,” AP News, January 9, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/pittsburgh-jerry-falwell-joel-osteen-radio-07ee95e24ea41185557ca8a87d4aee9d>.

of generation, culture, status, ethnicity, and more, images have the power to communicate deep and powerful messages, increase retention, and evoke emotions.⁹ Many of the great painters did work on cathedral walls and ceiling, and countless canvases, that tell stories that stir up emotions in people today. So much so, that people, religious or not, spend their time and money to go see these works of art. Most posters are not incredible works of art, but images are powerful tools for communicating deep messages.¹⁰

For the stated problem, these posters need to be provided in such a way as to meet the people of The Risen Refuge Church wherever they are if they are to have any possible benefit as part of a pastoral counseling program. Digital posters are the answer to this dilemma. Digital posters can be published on a wide variety of social media platforms, websites, and blogs. Using digital images, that include short and meaningful text, may be able to reach these generations, and possibly have a more lasting effect than podcasts or blog posts. They are also more easily, and more apt, to be saved and shared.¹¹ This is also an area where this researcher has more than two decades of experience as a photographer, and his love for photography has led him to create Christian images for social media prior to this study.

Conclusion

Together, these four micro-projects provide clarity, purpose, and a pathway to creating a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church. The church has regularly had to

⁹ Pauline Dewan, "Words Versus Pictures: Leveraging the Research on Visual Communication," Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research, vol. 10, no. 1 (2015): 2, <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/perj/article/view/3137/3473>.

¹⁰ Inga Kiderra, "Pictures Move People More than Words," UC San Diego Today, last modified January, 29, 2018, https://today.ucsd.edu/story/pictures_move_people_more_than_words.

¹¹ Matic Broz, "Importance of Images on Social Media in 2023," Design, Photutorial, last modified April 20, 2023, <https://photutorial.com/importance-of-images-on-social-media/>.

change and adapt to best communicate the gospel in a context that will be best heard and understood by the current culture. Pastoral counseling is not immune to this need in order to continue to provide Godly counsel, even if it means changing to meet the changing culture that the pastor is operating within. These micro-projects, when seen as a whole, provide insight to providing positive pastoral counseling to The Risen Refuge Church.

CHAPTER 2: MICRO-PROJECT ONE

Introduction

The first Micro-Project this student conducted to address the ministry problem was the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project. While The Risen Refuge Church has in many ways been doing the work of a church for many years, including weekly Sunday meetings, discipleship programs, local ministries to the poor, local evangelism events, support of local and worldwide missions, and sending members on short-term mission trips, it is completely lacking an organized pastoral counseling program primarily because, in its many years as a ministry, it has not had a dedicated, qualified, full-time pastor. Pastor Raif recalled that in the 8-years since the Risen Refuge Ministry began holding Sunday meetings, it has had four pastors, with one pastor serving as little as 6-months, and a few periods of time with no pastor at all.¹² This has resulted in a new church that has many years of experience that has taught them that pastors don't stay, and when pastor's don't stay long enough to form intimate relationships, pastoral counseling isn't considered as an option in the church. The current and founding pastor of The Risen Refuge Church has served this congregation as a full-time pastor to this ministry for four years. This research hopes to determine the best way to implement a pastoral counseling program under these circumstances to this church in the best way possible in order to effect positive results for the glory of God in The Risen Refuge Church.

¹² Raif Azab, interview by author, April 21, 2022

Justification

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. In order to seek a resolution to this problem, research will be completed via four Micro-Projects. The first of these is this Interview and Analysis Micro-Project that was chosen, developed, and implemented in order to obtain qualitative data regarding the current cultural understanding of the purpose and place of pastoral counseling in this church. It was deemed necessary to complete this Micro-Project before any further research primarily because this congregation is a second-generation ethnic church that is made up of members who are between the ages of 16-34. As such, The Risen Refuge Church has a unique cultural understanding that is unlike either Arabic-speaking churches or English-speaking churches in the area.

The Interview and Analysis Micro-Project was selected in order provide qualitative information from a group of members of The Risen Refuge Church, who were chosen to represent the diversity that exists in this relatively small group. This information gathered was intended to help the researcher discover the current acculturation of this ethnic congregation.¹³ Equipped with this knowledge, further research on the development and implementation of a pastoral counseling program will be planed based on a clearer understanding of the current ethnic culture in this church.

Pastoral counseling is where lasting bonds between shepherds and their flocks are made. When the pastor takes the time to go through difficult situations with his flock, providing them with guidance, care, and comfort, that pastoral relationship is formed. When the flock

¹³ Clinton and Hawkins, 501.

experiences the loving care and the spiritual and personal dedication that the pastor has to them, individually, they put their trust in him, and will turn to him more easily in the future.

It is how the shepherd tends and cares for the flock that engender trust and form strong relationships that will help each sheep to develop and the flock to grow in strength and in numbers. The biblical mandate for pastors to care for their flocks was clearly established with Jesus' use of the metaphor of the shepherd.¹⁴ Just as is seen in the conversation of Jesus and Peter before Jesus' ascension. Jesus asked Peter the question "do you love me" three times in John 21:15-17. The same number of times that Peter had recently denied Christ. In this conversation, Jesus, using the emphatic answers Peter provides, establishes the foundation for the task Peter is given.

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'"

The instructions that Jesus gives to Peter, and to all whom Christ has given a flock to care for, is stated in three ways: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep. The threefold manner in which these questions are asked and answered, and the instruction are given,

¹⁴ Stella D. Potgieter, "Communities: Development of Church-Based Counselling Teams," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (June 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.2050>, 1.

demonstrate the clarity of this requirement and the importance of this mission. Pastoral counseling is founded on the love that pastors have for Jesus, and it is only on that foundation that any pastoral counseling program will be successful. Success here, according to Jesus, is that his sheep are fed and tended to. Jesus tells his disciples that he knows his sheep, and his sheep know his voice (John 10:14,27). This is how the relationship should be when the sheep have a good shepherd.

As shepherd, it is important that pastors know their congregation, and that their congregation know and trust their pastor. While the pastor of The Risen Refuge Church has had three years to get to know and grow this relationship with this congregation, through the information gathered in this Interview and Analysis Micro-Project a stronger understanding will be gained regarding this particular flock.

Peer Review

The Interview and Analysis Micro-Project was conducted to research the problem that The Risen Refuge Church does not have a pastoral counseling program was proposed for peer review in the planning stages of the micro-project. The problem was stated and background information was provided, which is contained in the introduction section of this paper. The problem of a lack of a pastoral counseling program in this group that has existed for more than 20 years was described as a boat that needed to be built instead of a boat that needed to be fixed. Even though this group has existed for such a long time as a ministry, it has never had a pastoral counseling program, and seemed to have little desire to seek pastoral counseling in general. It was presumed that this was due to a turning away from the parents view on pastoral counseling,

which was one of regular and often use, and it was also due to a disconnect with the pastor of the parent church.

As part of the peer review process, Elijah Pierick, a Doctor of Ministry student at Liberty University, put forth the recommendation in an online discussion on April 10, 2022, of considering the end results of a pastoral counseling program in the process of this and future research. This advice was heeded and included in the interviews in the form of questions regarding the benefits of pastoral counseling and what a pastoral counseling program should look like. Participants were asked about the results of pastoral counseling on a personal level. “What expectations do you have for future pastoral counseling?”¹⁵ They were also asked about the results of pastoral counseling for The Risen Refuge Church as a whole. “What kind of pastoral counseling program would provide the most benefit to this church as a whole and the people in it?”¹⁶

Pierick also asked some questions, in an online conversation on March 20, 2022, regarding the sufficiency of members of The Risen Refuge Church receiving pastoral counseling from someone other than the pastor of this church. Specifically asking about the members receiving pastoral counsel from a pastor from another church, from someone else in the congregation, or by going to God in prayer. Only one of these sources for counsel would be considered pastoral counsel, and that one, receiving counsel from a pastor at another church, would presumably lack the benefit of the relationship between the member and the pastor that knows the member best. The other two, while they may provide good counsel, would not be pastoral counsel as they do not come from a pastor. However, in order to ensure that as little bias

¹⁵ Stephen Woolverton, email message to interview participants, April 13, 2022.

¹⁶ Woolverton, email.

or presumptions were made in the preparation for this research, this input was also utilized, which resulted in the following interview questions. “When seeking counsel, what factors are a part of your decision to choose whether to go to a friend, a pastor, or a secular counselor?”¹⁷ “In what ways can someone who is not an ordained elder in the church provide counsel that would in your eyes fulfill the need for pastoral counseling?”¹⁸

As part of this Interview and Analysis Micro-Project, a list of 20 questions were created, which can be found in Enclosure 1, as possible questions that were all intended to gain qualitative responses in order to come to a deeper understanding of the current views on pastoral counseling from The Risen Refuge Church. The question arose concerning the method of the interviewing process. In order to ensure that all the interviews were as similar as possible, what should the interviewer do when a participant doesn’t understand the question for whatever reason? Should this question be restated verbatim, or should it be rephrased, or should key words or phrases be defined? Howard Owens, Ph.D., explained in an online communication on April 11, 2022, that in this situation the interviewer should, “rephrase the question or use another angle to get the rich response that you need to the original question.” Following this advise, the interviewer both rephrased questions and defined terms that some of the participants didn’t understand at first, which resulted in qualitative responses to the original question. In one question in particular, all of the participants required the explanation of the phrase “ordained elder” for them to understand the original question. Once that was explained to mean a pastor recognized by the church, each participant was able to provide an informed response.

¹⁷ Woolverton, email.

¹⁸ Woolverton, email.

Implementation

Synopsis of Interviews

The participants who were interviewed for this micro-project provided valuable qualitative information that created a clearer picture of the current cultural position of this second-generation Arabic-American church in regards pastoral counseling. Three of the interviews were completed in-person, Bobby, Ron, and Carrie, and two were completed via Zoom video call. All of the interviews were recorded for audio only and later transcribed.

Bobby

Bobby is a married professional with a full-time position who holds an undergraduate degree. He doesn't have any children, and is very involved with the church. Bobby answered almost all of the questions with relatively short answers in a matter of fact tone. He has a strong outgoing personality that dominates the room, but it is a jovial and compassionate presence. He has a love for the church, and a strong regard for pastors, but doesn't seem to be comfortable being completely open in his responses. There was more to his thoughts on these questions than he said.

Rachel

Rachel is an engaged to be married, professional with a full-time position, who holds an undergraduate degree and will soon be completing a master's degree. She doesn't have any children. She regularly attends the Sunday meetings, but is not active in church ministries or activities beyond Sunday attendance. Rachel was thoughtful in her responses and took the interview very seriously. She did not provide many personal details to explain her positions, or give personal anecdotes to explain her history with counseling, professional or pastoral. She was glad to be part of this research, and seemed focused on giving her own honest perspective.

Ron

Ron is a single high-school senior with a part-time job. He does not have any children and lives with his parents. Ron is an active member of the church, taking part in multiple ministries and willing to help with any church activity that he has time for. He was glad to help with this research, but it took a while for him to understand the difference between pastoral counseling and any other interaction with a pastor. While it was obvious that his enthusiasm was tied to a desire to help his pastor, his answers were honest and were beneficial to this research.

Amy

Amy is a married professional with a full-time job who holds an undergraduate degree. She does not have any children, but she has a dog that she spends a lot of time with. Amy is an active member of the church, regularly attending Sunday meetings, and involved in multiple ministries in the church. She also works for the school system helping children with disabilities. In her job she has recommended professional counseling for some of the children she works with. Amy's experience in a helping profession came through in her demeanor as she wanted to help with this research that is focused on helping the people in her church.

Carrie

Carrie is a single college student who lives with her parents, and has no children. She is very involved in the church, attending both meetings with the Eastern Christian Church and The Risen Refuge Church, and volunteering in children's ministries. She has had the most personal experience out of all the participants with professional counseling, but very limited experience with pastoral counseling. She was nervous and a little restless at the beginning of the interview, but settled in and opened up after the first few questions, becoming more excited to explain her thoughts on counseling.

Analysis of Responses

The responses from this Interview and Analysis Micro-Project shed light on how the members of The Risen Refuge Church feel about pastoral counseling, and what a pastoral counseling program could look like in this church. While some of their answers were similar, and others were very different, all of their answers helped clarify the overall mindset of the church. The prevailing view on pastoral counseling was very positive. Among all the participants there is a respect for the position of the pastor, and the belief that the pastor will provide guidance and direction that is from God.

One thing that became clear was that even though all the participants held pastoral counseling as beneficial, their parents do not all hold the same position. From one participant to the next there was no commonality in their responses regarding whether or not their view of pastoral counseling lined up with their parent's view of pastoral counseling. Bobby, who has sought pastoral counseling for premarital counseling, occupational counseling, spiritual counseling, and relationship counseling, said he doesn't believe his parents even know that pastoral counseling is an option. "I think they don't even think it exists, or that it's a thing."¹⁹ According to Rachel, her parents see pastoral counseling as "more accepted than a professional counselor."²⁰ Amy's mother doesn't hold any religious belief, but her grandmother, who is the one who took Amy to church every week, views pastoral counseling as unnecessary because, as Christians, "if you've got to speak to someone, she would say, speak to God directly."²¹ These

¹⁹ Bobby, interview by author, Jersey City, N.J., April 18, 2022.

²⁰ Rachel, interview by author, Zoom video, April 14, 2022.

²¹ Amy, interview by author, Zoom video, April 14, 2022.

differences were not expected because all of their parents are Egyptian and grew up in Egyptian Christian homes. It was presumed that all the parents, being culturally similar, would hold similar beliefs as it pertains to pastoral counseling. Rachel, Carrie, and Ron all have parents who demonstrated what was the expected response, “Obviously my parents are believers, so they suggest going to a pastor for help.”²² However, the differences between Amy’s mother and grandmother, and Bobby’s parents were confusing. After receiving these unexpected responses, the senior pastor for the Eastern Christian Church, the church of the parents in question, was sought for clarity. Pastor Azab explained there is in fact a difference in attitudes amongst Christians in Egypt. Christians from Upper Egypt, which is predominantly more rural, are not likely to seek pastoral counseling, or open up to a pastor, as they would think it improper to speak about personal or spiritual problems to a pastor. However, those who are from Lower Egypt, which includes large cities like Cairo and Alexandria, regularly go to their pastor for almost everything: medical advice, spiritual issues, occupational advice, family and marital problems, etc.

A commonality that was a surprise was that all of the participants recognized pastoral counseling as equally valuable as professional counseling, and in some cases they listed pastoral counseling as more preferable than professional counseling. This is inline with the studies that have shown that pastoral counseling can be more effective than secular counseling because it is being provided from a religious foundation that is inline with the client’s belief.²³ Amy feels that Christ-centered pastoral counseling is so important because professional counseling lacks the important component of biblically addressing issues. While she has personally made referrals for

²² Ron, interview by author, Jersey city, N.J., April 12, 2022.

²³ Clinton and Hawkins, 27.

people to receive in-home professional counseling, Amy sees their lack of a religious foundation as a limitation. “They're not consulting God before making any sound decisions, before they provide counsel to their youth or the other clients.”²⁴ Carrie, who has had positive results from professional counseling, also recognizes this limitation. According to Carrie, she sees added value in talking to a pastor that is older than her, because they have more real-world experience and a strong biblical foundation. “I feel like when I'm going through something, I forget sometimes that God is there, and he can help me in that way, because I'm too busy trying to figure it out myself.”²⁵ Rachel, Bobby and Ron see pastoral counseling as a source for spiritual direction and Godly advice for mental health issues like stress, anxiety, fear, or depression. They all have the same reason: it is important to talk to a man of God. “I think it's very good to talk to a man of God, pretty much and just talk to a pastor about it.”²⁶

In all of these questions, the focus was individual counseling, or with couples for pre-marital counseling. Until Rachel brought up group counseling. Group counseling has been shown to have beneficial results.²⁷ These beneficial results have shown to carry over or even be greater when the group counseling incorporates religion.²⁸ When asked about possible future counseling, Rachel brought up that group counseling for people who are about the same age and going through similar struggles can be very effective.²⁹ Rachel explained that she was part of an

²⁴ Amy, interview.

²⁵ Carrie, interview with author, Jersey City, N.J., April 16, 2022.

²⁶ Rachel, interview.

²⁷ Clinton and Hawkins, 253.

²⁸ Clinton and Hawkins, 27.

²⁹ Clinton and Hawkins, 255-256.

internship in an inner city high school where she witnessed the benefits of group counseling. “It was so powerful, even though the counselor himself didn't talk as much as they all talked, but they just all took from each other.”³⁰ She witnessed how they helped each other and even provided solutions for problems they were all facing. According to Rachel, if she were putting together a pastoral counseling program, regular group counseling would be a definite part of that program.³¹

Noticeably, the responses from these interviews brought out the positive attitude from all participants towards pastoral counseling, and provided some interesting ideas for resolving the problem, which will be discussed in the next section, while clarifying some of the cultural similarities and differences between this group and their parents. When it comes to pastoral counseling, they hold differing ideas on how pastoral counseling could provide help to the people in The Risen Refuge Church, but they all agree that it would be beneficial to initiate such a program.

Contributions to Problem Resolution

Most of this Interview and Analysis Micro-Project was focused on researching the current cultural views on pastoral counseling within this second-generation Egyptian-American congregation. An important part of providing effective pastoral counseling is understanding the cultural heritage that the counselor brings into the conversation, and investigating the client's cultural background in order to better understand the attitudes and behaviors of their cultural setting.³²

³⁰ Rachel, interview.

³¹ Rachel, interview.

³² Clinton and Hawkins, 17.

The premise of this research is that this holds true when starting a new pastoral counseling program in an ethnic church. According to Rachel, their Egyptian background makes their lives different from the lives of others their age in this way, “we have different struggles than maybe other people in our ages.”³³ To use an example, Amy explained how a pastoral counseling program that was culturally sensitive could be very beneficial to the youth in The Risen Refuge Church. Something as relatively normal in the lives of so many teenagers, namely dating, is drastically different for a second-generation Egyptian-American. “In the dating realm, I know Arabs have it way different. They just scare you so much. There’s no such thing as boyfriend and girlfriend. So maybe also navigating that while still being respectful to your family in your culture.”³⁴ If this seems like a small example that wouldn’t cause much harm, then it is a perfect example of how important it is to understand the culture of an ethnic church before implementing a pastoral counseling program.

High Respect for Pastors

Egyptian Christians, whether they are Coptic or Evangelical, have a high level of respect for the office of the pastor. Pastors are invited to almost all major celebrations in the lives of the people, they are seated in places of honor, they are told to eat first and are served the best of the food, and they are listened to without interruption in any public scenario. Parents and grandparents instill this on their children with stern corrections and admonishment to listen to the pastor and pay attention to the pastor. Even though The Risen Refuge Church was blessed to hold its own Sunday worship meetings with non-Egyptian pastors, they still hold to this level of respect for the pastor. To them, the pastor is a man of God, who deserves a high level of respect

³³ Rachel, interview.

³⁴ Amy, interview.

as they are devoted to God and speaking the truth of God. Carrie defined pastors as, “someone who's dedicated their life to God and makes this a part of their life, and they speak on how much of a positive impact it's had on them. That's really inspiring.”³⁵

As discussed earlier, there are regional differences in Egypt to seeking pastoral counseling, but the pastor is treated with a lot of respect. This research has shown that this attitude of respect for the pastor holds solidly among the second-generation Egyptian-Americans in The Risen Refuge Church, and it effects how they view pastoral counseling. Their faith leads them to God through prayer and the Bible even in problems that aren't directly spiritual or religious in nature. Whether it is a mental health issue, stress, depression, family problem, marital issue, all of these things and more, the people of The Risen Refuge Church go to God. According to Amy “there's 1000 reasons to seek pastoral counseling. Honestly, there's a whole never-ending list. I mean, it could be anything.”³⁶ For all of these possible problems, they seek answers through prayer and the Bible, and when they cannot find an answer they, the next logical step for them is to go to the pastor. Ron explained, “only God has all the answers, so with anything in life, I think you should go to God first, not just a regular counselor.”³⁷ Carrie agreed. “If issues arise in my life, I try my best to address them in a Christian way, but I know my knowledge on the Bible is limited, so to get someone else's advice who knows more about God than I do is helpful.”³⁸

³⁵ Carrie, interview.

³⁶ Amy, interview.

³⁷ Ron, interview.

³⁸ Carrie, interview.

This new information about how these participants choose to address problems in their lives demonstrates that the members of The Risen Refuge Church, while growing up in an American society but living in families and going to churches that are ethnically Egyptian, seek God in their every day situations as well as in their religious dilemmas. They are open to pastoral counseling, and recognize the benefits that come from seeking counsel from a pastor as a man of God who can speak to them from a scriptural point of view as a someone who has studied and committed his life to God, as well as provide an authentically human perspective from his personal experiences.

Require a Strong Personal Relationship

The respect the members of The Risen Refuge Church have for pastors is not enough in itself to influence them to seek pastoral counseling even when the problems facing them are specifically religious in nature. Pastor Azab said he has found it concerning to him that these young people do not come to him more often with issues they are facing.³⁹ This is mainly because, for the past 24 years since the Risen Refuge began meeting as an English ministry in his church, they have had English-speaking pastors for their group who are not Pastor Azab. The result is they have had less and less of a pastoral relationship with him over the years, but this relationship has not been replaced by a pastoral relationship with anyone else, as all the English-speaking pastors come and go too quickly to establish that relationship. Without the development of a pastoral relationship, the members of The Risen Refuge Church will not trust the pastor enough to seek out pastoral counseling, or have any faith that pastoral counseling will be effective.⁴⁰ Their relationship with Pastor Raif is one where they trust him to speak the truth, but

³⁹ Raif Azab, interview by author, April 21, 2022.

⁴⁰ Clinton and Hawkins, 414.

not one of trust that is founded on an intimate relationship and knowledge that would allow him to fully empathize and relate to their struggles. Likewise, they have not had that relationship built up, with a few exceptions, between the church and one of their English-speaking pastors.

Some of those exceptions were specifically between one or two persons and a previous pastor who provided pre-marital counseling as the members of the church were growing up and getting married. Amy recalls that her only recollection of pastoral counseling was when she and her husband received pre-marital counseling. However, it is revelatory that she at first didn't recognize this, or categorize it, as pastoral counseling. It was simply pre-marital counseling that happened to be provided by a pastor. Even acknowledging that, Amy explained that the pre-marital counseling they received was very beneficial. Thinking back on it, she even noted that while the conversation topics may not have been specifically spiritual - topics like finances, extended family interactions, the future, and managing holidays – they spent time discussing them, writing them, and praying over them with the pastor.⁴¹ That said, the trust that was given by Amy and her husband to the pastor was specifically tied to the topic of marriage. Even after receiving positive pre-marital counseling, Amy had no inclination to seek out pastoral counseling in the future. Based solely on this experience, she explained “I found it very helpful, but it was focused only on one point: marriage.”⁴² However, given time, and acknowledging that there are benefits specifically to pastoral counseling, Amy discovered that she might find that she could seek out pastoral counseling in the future. “It's important to at least know that there is someone that you can, at any time, reach out to.”⁴³

⁴¹ Amy, interview.

⁴² Amy, interview.

⁴³ Amy, interview.

As a whole, all of the participants pointed out that while the people in the church are in favor of seeking pastoral counseling, there are qualifications that would need to be filled in order to be comfortable with counseling from a specific pastor. These qualifications mirror the results from a study by Paivo and Pascual-Leone that was published in 2010, which resulted in a list of principals needed to develop a productive alliance.⁴⁴ The participants noted the need for compassion, nonjudgmental acceptance, assurance that they are not alone, provide information and guidance, and hope. “The reason why I'm coming to him is because I don't have the solution, so I'm hoping he does, so I'm hoping he gives me that solution, because I obviously don't know.”⁴⁵

Desire for an Established Pastoral Counseling Program

Pastoral counseling is an essential part of being a pastor. Jesus directly instructs Peter to care for his sheep (John 21:16), and throughout the new testament we find that the instructions and admonishments to take care of one another as we are all parts of the body of Christ. As such, we are to “care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:21-26). The problem addressed in this research was never whether or not pastoral counseling should be provided to The Risen Refuge Church. The problem is how to best create and implement a pastoral counseling program that will be effective in this particular ministry context. Therefore, some of the questions asked of the participants were “What kind of pastoral counseling program would provide the most benefit to this church as a whole and the people in it,” and “Why is it important for a church to have a pastoral program in place for its members”. The responses to these questions were full of hope and

⁴⁴ Clinton and Hawkins, 415.

⁴⁵ Bobby, interview.

excitement as the participants demonstrated a genuine desire to see an organized and communicated pastoral counseling program put in place for The Risen Refuge Church.

“People are lost. Especially right now trying to find where they belong.”⁴⁶

“We all fall short and we're all struggling.”⁴⁷

“I can be so angry inside, and so like upset and frustrated, but as soon as I talk to you about it, things get so much better.”⁴⁸

“I think just having that option could be a huge comfort for people who may be struggling with certain things, or may be going through something really difficult right now.”⁴⁹

This research has clearly shown that The Risen Refuge Church feels that it would benefit from a pastoral counseling program, and they would be eager to utilize this program and encourage others to do so as well. While all of the participants have received pastoral counseling, whether informal or formal, only one of them has received professional counseling, which can be drawn out to conclude that possibly only 20 percent, likely less, of the members of The Risen Refuge Church have received professional counseling.

Analysis of the Micro-Project

This Interview and Analysis Micro-Project resulted in useful qualitative information that contributed to the resolution of the stated problem. For this project, five people were interviewed from the membership of The Risen Refuge Church. These participants were chosen in order to

⁴⁶ Amy, interview.

⁴⁷ Rachel, interview.

⁴⁸ Bobby, interview.

⁴⁹ Amy, interview.

get the widest diversity from among the people in the church so that this group would have best possible representation of the whole church.⁵⁰ They were chosen based on age, sex, marital status, gender, and education level. Foreseeing possible cancellations or other problems, seven members of the church were contacted to be part of this micro-project.⁵¹ In the process of conducting this research one interview was cancelled as the only location available to that participant was a busy coffee shop, and another interview was cancelled by the participant at the last moment due to a sick child at home. Both of these were replaced by the two extra participants who were similar in the qualifications for this study.

The location for the interviews was decided carefully to create a space where all the participants would feel emotionally safe and comfortable.⁵² The location was also chosen to eliminate both visual and audio distractions, so the participants could focus on the interview questions, and the recordings would be clear for transcription.⁵³ Three of the interviews were conducted in the primary location of their pastor's office, which has no physical barriers between the interviewer and the participant to facilitate an interview that feels more like a chat.⁵⁴ Two of the interviews were conducted using a recorded Zoom video chat, and both of these participants were in their home office with no other people or distractions around them.⁵⁵ All of the

⁵⁰ Stefanie Döringer, “‘The Problem-Centered Expert Interview’. Combining Qualitative Interviewing Approaches for Investigating Implicit Expert Knowledge,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 24, no. 3 (2020): pp. 265-278, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766777>, 274

⁵¹ Döringer, 274.

⁵² Kathryn Roulston, “Considering Quality in Qualitative Interviewing,” *Qualitative Research* 10, no. 2 (2010): pp. 199-228, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356739>, 206.

⁵³ Jim Zabloski, “How to Conduct Interviews,” (March 25, 2022), 1.

⁵⁴ Zabloski, 2.

⁵⁵ Zabloski, 1.

interviews were recorded using two digital recording devices: a Sony digital audio recorder, and an iPhone as a backup. The Zoom meetings were also recorded using the Zoom recording function as an additional backup. The recordings were all transferred to cloud storage and were downloaded to personal computers for transcription.

Prior to the interviews, each participant was emailed an Interview Introduction document, which is included here as Enclosure 1. This document contained an explanation of the reason for the interviews, the purpose of the research, an American Psychological Association definition of pastoral counseling as well as a simplified definition.⁵⁶ It also contained 20 possible questions that could be used during the interview.⁵⁷ The intent of this document was to best prepare the participants for the actual interview. Four of the five participants acknowledged they had received and read over this document before the interview, and the fifth was provided a printed version to read before the interview began. A lesson learned in the process was to verbally review the purpose, key definitions, and the need for personal responses that have “I believe,” “I think,” or “In my experience,” statements. The four participants who acknowledged reading the Interview Introduction document needed to be reminded of these key items in the first few questions of the interview. Their responses were still useful where they were personal in nature and fit into the proper definition of pastoral counseling. Ron in particular was confused through the third question, so his responses to these questions were not used in the analysis phase of this micro-project. Additionally, one question asked of all participants was removed from consideration in the Analysis phase because it was discovered upon reviewing the transcripts that

⁵⁶ Woolverton, email.

⁵⁷ Woolverton, email.

the interviewer asked the question incorrectly, forgetting to include the word “not,” to three of the participants, which changed the meaning of the question.

The transcriptions of the audio files were completed by two volunteers who both have experience as professional transcriptionists.⁵⁸ Upon a recommendation from Dr. Howard Owens, the Zoom meetings were going to be set up to automatically complete the transcriptions, but it was discovered that this option is only available to business or education Zoom accounts with ten or more licenses. Thankfully, two volunteers were found who provided their transcription services, and this author checked all of the transcriptions against the recordings for accuracy.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this Interview and Analysis Micro-Project, it was presumed that there was a cultural reason that the members of The Risen Refuge Church were not seeking pastoral counseling. While there were one or two, here and there, who came to the pastor, primarily for informal pastoral counseling, there were no requests and no apparent desire for any formal pastoral counseling from this congregation. In the experience of the pastor, the older generation, in the parent church, would often go to their pastor for counseling for a variety of reasons. This was confirmed in responses like these: “Obviously my parents are believers, so they suggest going to a pastor for help”, and “Pastoral counseling is the most accepted to my parents, or you know, more accepted than a professional counselor”.⁵⁹ However, this didn’t hold true for the

⁵⁸ Ping-Chun Hsiung, “Lives & Legacies,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (2015): pp. 132-139, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800415617205>, 134.

⁵⁹ Ron, interview; Rachel, interview.

other three who noted their parents would instead read scripture, pray, seek a professional Christian counselor, or simply not seek counseling at all.⁶⁰

It turns out, their resistance to pastoral counseling was not resistance to pastoral counseling at all. Instead, in more than two decades of existing as a ministry in the parent church, they had not sought out pastoral counseling, because there was never enough time for a pastor to develop a strong, trusting relationship with the congregation.⁶¹ Bobby explained, “I never grew up with a thinking of pastoral counseling, and I guess that's partly because we never had a stable pastor.”⁶² Most of these pastors, if they had made it a priority in their ministry, could have developed a trusting relationship with this group in the time they were pastoring to this flock. Thankfully, the current pastor, who has been there for three years, has developed this kind of a relationship with the members of this group. However, after decades of learning that pastoral counseling is not something that happens in this church, a strong relationship is not enough to for this group to seek pastoral counseling without first being made aware that this option is available. “We know we have Pastor, but we don't know there's a pastoral counseling program, because we never ... I've never put the two together.”

⁶⁰ Bobby, interview; Carrie, interview; Amy, interview.

⁶¹ Clinton and Hawkins, 502.

⁶² Bobby, interview.

CHAPTER 3: MICRO-PROJECT TWO

Introduction

The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church is a new church that developed out of the Arabic-speaking Eastern Christian Church. The Risen Refuge was a ministry to and for the younger English-speaking people in the church. Instead of losing these young people who grew up in the Eastern Christian Church, they formed a separate Sunday meeting that would take place entirely in English. As a result, many of the children of the Eastern Christian Church did not go find a new church when they started college, their careers, and their families. After years of establishing and growing this ministry, to include other ministries that were created out of this ministry, The Risen Refuge Church was recognized as a fully independent and autonomous church.

Thanks to the grace of God and His wisdom given to the leadership in the Eastern Christian Church, The Risen Refuge continues to be supported prayerfully as is needed while this new church learns how to effectively manage itself. As a new church, it is developing and implementing new programs that many churches simply have had for many years. While no two churches are alike, The Risen Refuge Church has some particular nuances that make it stand out. To the best knowledge of the lead pastor for the Eastern Christian Church, Rev. Dr. Raif Azab, this is the first time an English-speaking church has grown out of an Arabic-speaking church in North America.⁶³

⁶³ Raif Azab, interview by author, April 21, 2022.

Justification

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. This blogging micro-project was implemented to research the use of blogs as part of a larger pastoral counseling program in order to positively meet the needs of this particular group. There are two strong concerns that have emerged when considering how to best develop and implement a pastoral counseling program for this new church. The membership of The Risen Refuge Church is made up of a narrow age group, and they are all children of immigrants, primarily Egyptian immigrants. The use of blogs as part of a pastoral counseling program should help address the concerns that some may have surrounding pastoral counseling that develop from these two factors.

Firstly, the members of this church are entirely made up of Christians from the Millennial Generation and Generation-Z. The oldest member of this group recently turned 32-years-old, and the youngest active members of this group are attending college in the area. The oldest people who attend this church are the pastor and his wife, and a deacon who helped form this new young church, but belongs to and also attends the Eastern Christian Church. While there are other active persons in the church who are not members, they are all younger than the oldest member. This creates an environment where an initial pastoral counseling program can be effectively targeted to focus on two specific generations.

Some of the attributes of these two generations are, they are always on the move and constantly interacting with their world through electronic devices.⁶⁴ They are also attached to

⁶⁴ Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, March 7, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

their phones and constantly connected and connecting with their world and getting information through their always-on and accessible access to the internet.⁶⁵ This provides an avenue to reach them wherever they are through their phones, tablets, or other mobile devices.⁶⁶ These generations share in the experience of growing up in a world with mobile phones and internet access.⁶⁷ For every question they face, the first source they consider to find an answer is the internet. This includes questions regarding spirituality, Scriptural understanding, coping as a Christian, and dealing with struggles of faith, trust, love, and more.⁶⁸ Using a pastoral counseling blog can place a Christian tool in same location they often turn to when they need help.

Secondly, the members of this church are almost entirely second-generation Egyptian-Americans, and those who are not have at least one parent from either Egypt or another neighboring country in that region. This puts them in a place where they see themselves, and want to be seen by others in their communities, as American, but they also feel strongly about their Egyptian cultural heritage, and enjoy being Egyptian as strongly as they want to be seen as American.⁶⁹

In general, they grew up in homes where their parents held a high regard for pastors, and would turn to them for prayers and help in times of need. However, those discussions, much like any personal pastoral counseling session, were private, and what they grew up seeing was their

⁶⁵ Dimock.

⁶⁶ Dimock.

⁶⁷ Dimock.

⁶⁸ “How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith,” Barna, last modified October 15, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith/>.

⁶⁹ Clinton and Hawkins, 502.

parents reaching out to the pastor for prayers, and nothing more. This group of young second-generation members has missed being surrounded by and immersed in the Egyptian societal culture. Instead, this has been replaced with an American culture that overwhelmingly seeks out doctors first. Using a pastoral counseling blog to reach into the lives of this group may be the opening of a door into another viable and valuable tool they can use to provide them help from a source they might not have considered initially.

Peer Review

The plan and purpose for creating a pastoral counseling blog in order to research if blogging would help solve the problem of The Risen Refuge Church's lack of a pastoral counseling program was reviewed. As a result, some valuable insights were received that were used in this blogging micro-project. In a review provided by Mason Norman, a doctoral student at Liberty University, in an online discussion forum on Sept. 14, 2022, he reinforced some of the information received through initial research on the topic of blogs, made some suggestions based on his previous research in the area of blogging, and suggested a few options for moving forward.

People who don't read blogs may not realize how popular they still are. Norman confirmed what was found during the initial research regarding the current popularity of blogs today. Blog readership has continued to increase over the years, and so have the numbers of bloggers.⁷⁰ Additionally, the topics that bloggers are writing about are as varied as there are

⁷⁰ Dimitrievski, "Blog Statistics."

interests among readers. The data shows that the majority of all blog readers fall into the Millennials group, which is more than half of the membership of The Risen Refuge Church.⁷¹

With all those blogs out there to choose from, and the number of pastoral counseling blogs specifically also rising, Norman pointed out there needs to be attention given to what makes this pastoral counseling blog stand out.⁷² Admittedly, the purpose of this pastoral counseling blog is specifically to address the problem that The Risen Refuge Church doesn't have a pastoral counseling program. For this purpose, the blog doesn't need to rise in popularity against nationally or internationally know pastoral counseling blogs. Instead, it simply needs to stand out from the crowd enough for those who are a part of or who feel connected to The Risen Refuge Church will be able to find it and utilize it for help for their particular needs. While a pulpit announcement or a reminder in weekly bulletins will help, these don't take into account the established patterns of behavior for the Millennial or Gen-Z member.⁷³

One of the considerations that was given to making this blog stand out, especially to the members of The Risen Refuge Church was the format, look, and feel of the site for this blogging micro-project. The concept was based on trying to establish a personal connection with the members through a well-known aspect of the pastor's personality. Since it is well know that the pastor served for many years in the military, and the members of the church honor and respect the pastor for this, it was decided to use that as a theme. One of the related suggestions made by Norman came from a book he had read on the subject of blogs, *Building a StoryBrand*, by Donald Miller. In Miller's book, he recommends connecting with the readers by making sure

⁷¹ Dimitrievski, "Blog Statistics."

⁷² "Top Websites Ranking for Faith and Beliefs in the World," Similarweb, last modified August 2022, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/category/community-and-society/faith-and-beliefs/>.

⁷³ Dimock.

they are the heroes of the story, and not the author of the blog.⁷⁴ This advice was incorporated into the theme of the pastoral counseling blog in a subtle but very important fashion. The danger in the original plan was the author of the blog could become the hero as military anecdotes are told to illustrate points. Taking Miller's direction, the author will be careful to ensure all such anecdotal stories point to the readers, and how the readers can learn from these illustrations to be the hero of their own story.⁷⁵

Norman helped address the getting noticed, or marketing, problem with a separate bit of advice from his research regarding blogging for pastoral counseling in his context. His blog received more traffic from people who were directed there through social media platforms they used. So much so that Norman states nearly all of his views came from social media or word of mouth. Arguably, some of the word of mouth views came from people who saw a link to a blog post on their social media. To take advantage of this recommendation, utilizing social media will be strongly considered as part of the future ongoing program, and it will be investigated as part of research through future micro-projects.

Research shows that regular posting is key in increased readership, which Norman backed up with data from his own blog.⁷⁶ The statistics from his pastoral counseling blog, www.thepastoralcounselingnetwork.com, show that views go up two or even three times when he posts on a consistent weekly basis. Norman recommends planning ahead, which was incorporated into the plan both as a part of the needs of this blogging micro-project and carried out into the continuation of this pastoral counseling blog. Specifically, the plan mirrors the

⁷⁴ Donald Miller, *Building a StoryBrand: Clarifying Your Message So Customers Will Listen* (New York, NY; HarperCollings, 2017), ix.

⁷⁵ Miller, ix.

⁷⁶ Dimitrievski, "Blog Statistics."

micro-project requirement of writing six blog posts before launching the blog website, which will be the plan moving forward. The first week the first two blogs will be posted. Also, during that week, the next six posts will be written, which will create a cycle that can withstand life events postponing new post being written on time.

Implementation

This pastoral counseling blogging micro-project used the Wordpress platform through an annually paid subscription because it is rated by Forbes Advisor as among the top three platforms for hosting blogs for 2022.⁷⁷ The paid subscription was chosen because it offers more customization opportunities, and the annual fee, which is not exorbitant, was also discounted for the first year and covered the cost of the URL registration for the first year.⁷⁸ Finally, it is also the platform that the author has experience with and is comfortable using.

The URL for this pastoral counseling blog is <https://fotc.blog/>, which stands for “Faith Of The Centurion”. This name was chosen to fit the overall theme of relating the readers to the pastor through his experience in the military. It also is the scriptural basis, which comes from Matthew 8:5-13, for the focus on faith that is a thread that goes through every post. While there are many positive Christian concepts that can be woven into any and all pastoral counseling – hope, peace, love, grace, forgiveness, etc. – faith was chosen as it is a positive encouragement for readers that is tied to the everlasting truth found in Jesus Christ.

Meeting Millennials and Gen-Z Where They Are

⁷⁷ Kathy Haan and Kelly Main, “Best Blogging Platforms of 2022,” last modified July 26, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/software/best-blogging-platforms/>.

⁷⁸ Haan and Main.

One of the two largest areas of growth in understanding that developed through the process of this blogging micro-project was the importance of meeting this relatively focused group in regards to their age range and the attributes from those generations that are identifiable in the membership of The Risen Refuge Church. Creating a pastoral counseling blog as part of a larger pastoral counseling program for this church may be the most important aspect of the pastoral counseling program for this congregation. This is almost entirely due to the tendencies of Millennials and Gen-Z generations.

The vast majority of The Risen Refuge is between 20 and 30 years old, and they evidence behaviors in line with what is seen across the board from these generations. They are constantly connected, yet they have a hard time connecting. These generations have grown up in, and been indoctrinated into the concept that to be social one must be on social media. This has created an understanding that real, deep, and important one on one conversations can happen on social media platforms, and they will often prefer to have these serious discussions using a chat function on their phones than in person.

They are all actively involved across many different social media platforms. Some of the Gen-Z group in the church think it is weird that the Millennials are tied to one or two main platforms, while they skip around from one platform to another. The Gen-Z members will be active on multiple different social media platforms at once, and are quick to leave one platform entirely and move on to the next new platform that is growing in popularity. This is likely a large part of the reason why less than 10 percent of Gen-Z are interested in blogs, while the Millennials are the largest consumers of blogs.⁷⁹ When it comes to reaching the Gen-Z with a

⁷⁹ Dimitrievski, "Blog Statistics."

pastoral counseling blog, there must be more concerted effort to make it interesting, and it is even more important to have a presence on multiple social media platforms that point to the blog.

Millennials and Gen-Z are also constantly on the move, going from one activity or event to another, filling their days and weeks with this and that. Again, thanks to their phones and constant access to the internet and social media, they are constantly connected and coordinating their movements with multiple different friend groups. The members of The Risen Refuge Church are no different in this way. As a result, they get their news, and all their information while they are on the move on their phones. Whether they are waiting for the professor to arrive, waiting for their next class, waiting on their friends to arrive, going to the next event on the train, or ride-share, they are on their phones searching, reading, and being entertained. Questions, mundane or spiritual, casual or deep, are all just a quick search away from their answers, which they can do on the go.⁸⁰ This means that it is possible to get the most impact from a pastoral counseling program by using a platform that best integrates to their lives and how they get information. If some focus is given to what social media is being used, and how the blog presents on a phone or mobile device, this could be the most impactful part of a pastoral counseling program for these generations.

Opening Pastoral Counseling Channels to 2nd Generation Egyptian-Americans

This particular group is enculturating into the broader American culture, which in this particular case is specifically the urban, big-city American culture. As a second-generation group, they have a foot in both cultures, and want to be recognized as Americans, however they still love, honor, and keep their Egyptian cultural behaviors, especially in large groups. While their parents might make the pastor a first call in times of need, both for prayer and for counsel,

⁸⁰ “How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith.”

this group is more likely not to call their pastor until last, and only for prayer. This seems to be part of the enculturation process, where they are trying to behave more along the lines of how they feel their counterparts in the American culture handle hardships, struggles, and emotional, spiritual, or psychological trauma.⁸¹

This is another way in which a pastoral counseling blog could help the members of The Risen Refuge Church in the long term. By getting pastoral counseling out to them where they are in their day to day lives, and teaching them that pastoral counseling is an avenue to discuss some of these topics they believe they simply had to deal with alone, they can come to see that pastoral counseling is an option and the help it provides. What their parents simply knew was that if they had a problem, any kind of problem, they could talk to their pastor about it. This pastoral counseling blog can teach these second generation members that they have access to pastoral counseling to help them with any kind of problem they may encounter.

Blog 1: Three Scriptural Truths how Pastoral Counseling can help

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Acts 20:28

“Pastoral Counseling just isn’t really all that important in my life.” I’ve had the opportunity to hear this, or something very close to it, from many Christian men and women over the years. Honestly, this answer comes from Christians across the socio-economic spectrum. I’ve even asked many people who did not grow up in America if pastoral counseling was important to them, and gotten mixed responses.

⁸¹ Clinton and Hawkins, 502.

It is a blessing when my flock, those that God has appointed me to serve, nurture, feed, and protect, come to me with their problems, issues, concerns, and struggles. However, with only a very few exceptions, the reason these are brought to me is so that I can pray for them. This is, after all, in part why God appointed me there, and I give thanks for every opportunity to pray for these brothers and sisters of mine. What follows is my offer to spend some time with them to talk through this issue, learn more about what is causing the issue, and provide them with some pastoral counsel. This is where my flock will politely decline, and thank me for listening to them and for my prayers.

Much like the centurion, we have faith in Christ, but do we have that level of faith? That faith that believes that if God says it is so, then it is so. If so, then we should seek the help of our pastors who are given to watch over their flock (Acts 20:28) and bear our burdens (Galatians 6:2).

When was the last time you found yourself seriously injured, or terribly sick? For some people the pandemic was like a light cold or nothing at all. For others it a horrible sickness that sent them to Hospitals and Emergency Rooms where they were fighting for their lives. When our friends or loved ones get sick or injured, or first response is to get them to a doctor or hospital. As we get older, we learn more about the signs our body is giving to us, and we can discern the difference between a small sprain or pulled muscle and a broken bone or worse. Some people like to tough things out and wait to see if their injuries or sickness will resolve itself. Most people seem to know when it is time to go see the doctor, or rush to the hospital.

When I was a young “Hooah” Infantryman, I, like all of my battle buddies, knew how to push through pain or discomfort to complete the mission. It is amazing to consider some of the things a soldier can convince themselves can wait because the mission comes first. I’m not sure

if our doctors ever got used to the Infantryman making our injuries worse by pushing on when they would have told us to stop and receive treatment. There was a sign on the gates of the base we operated out of when I was deployed to Haiti. It said, “Safety First! Mission Always!” Every single soldier I served with completely ignored the first sentence. They shouldn’t have wasted the ink on those first two words.

This is fine for the infantry soldier, and the military when on a mission. But it is not fine if you are hurting, injured, or sick. Of course you have a mission, or even multiple missions, that you are on from day to day or week to week. You have missions to accomplish at work, and at home, and at your church, and with your friends, and more. But that’s just not the same.

Like I said earlier, some of us are more stubborn than others, but when you’re sick, or injured, or hurting ... you need to get help. As a pastor, and possibly your pastor, hear me clearly on this. If you are sick, injured, or hurting – go get help from a medical professional. You are loved and dear to many who would rather you get seen by a doctor for something that turned out to be minor, than to not be seen for something that turned out to be major.

In exactly the same way, when you or anyone you love suffers spiritual, emotional, or psychological trauma, they should seek help. Our faith in Christ means we take this to the Lord in prayer, we ask the body of Christ to pray for us, and we go to those whom God has given us to care for us. This is specifically one of the reasons pastors are appointed by God. There is a terrible misrepresentation that has grown up in the culture that tells us the pastor’s job is limited to Sunday meetings.

Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” And after every time that Peter responded in the positive, Jesus instructed him, “Feed my lambs,” “Take care of my sheep,” and

“Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17) I firmly believe that Peter did not interpret the words of Christ to mean he should preach once per week at an established time and place for no more than 30 – 45 minutes. No, Peter knew that Jesus was reinstating him, and giving him the incredibly important task of shepherding Jesus’ flock.

Shepherding a flock doesn’t entail speaking to a bunch of sheep when they are gathered together in their pen, and then throwing open the gate to let the sheep wander out on their own to fend for themselves. It means getting them out of briars and bushes when they get stuck, leading them to the good pastures, running after the one who wanders away, standing guard and fighting off the wolves that come, and caring for their every need. It is a huge understatement to say this was a difficult task that Jesus laid on Peter and all the other pastors who came after in the years and decades that followed. While there is no reason to compare then to now, suffice it to say, this same task appointed by God to pastors today is still a difficult task for any pastor who rightly understands this calling.

Let’s be honest, your life is so busy that realistically you have to consider a myriad other obligations that are pressing for your attention before even making the decision to go to a medical doctor or to the hospital. How much are you going to consider asking your pastor for prayer, seeking his guidance on spiritual questions, going to him for help with emotional pain, or asking for some time to open up with real inner trauma that you don’t know how to handle? There are simply so many other obligations, so many appointments to keep, events to attend, and appearances to keep up. Besides, you don’t want to burden your pastor, and you’re sure he has enough to do without you placing more on him.

But none of that is biblical. There is nothing in Scripture that tells you not to burden your elders in the church. There is nothing that says you need to handle trauma, pain, or suffering all

on your own. There is nothing that says healing for the body is more important than healing for mind, or the heart, or the soul.

Instead ...

Scripture says that it is the elders' job to care for you.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

Scripture says when you are suffering, you are supposed to share that and get help from your brothers and sisters.

“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2)

Scripture says God's healing is for all of you: heart, mind, body, and soul.

“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.” (Psalm 94:19)

God has given you a reason to hope. That hope isn't only in the heavenly residence that awaits you in the next life. God's hope is also in the pastors who have been called to what He has given you here in this life. Have faith in the hope that God speaks through His Holy Word. When you are suffering, hurting, struggling, or tired go to God in prayer, and go to that pastor who God has instructed to care for you.

Blog 2: God's Loving Grace Shines Through His Children to His Children

The second blog post is intended to help the readers come to see how pastoral counseling can be a guide and a help to finding their way either through difficult times or in times when they are lost or confused. God gives Christians direction and guidance in more than one way, but

Christians often seek only to have their prayers, often given directly and privately to God, answered in some miraculous way. However, God often brings clarity, guidance, and direction to his people through righteous leaders, priests, prophets, judges, and even pastors. It is understandable, and encouraged, that Christians go to God in their prayers, and lift up their needs before him. It is unfortunate that more Christians don't seek pastoral counseling when facing questions and needing direction and guidance. The blessings they can have through pastoral counseling are compassion, care, loving advice, learned counsel, and prayerful considered direction, to name a few.

This blog will use an anecdotal story about a time when the pastor was an infantry soldier, and he became lost while trying to complete land navigation training in the middle of the jungles of Panama. During this time, while he was surrounded by the thick vegetation, animals, and bugs, he became terrified and petrified by his own thoughts of how he may never make it out of the jungle. This wasn't him being overly dramatic, but a real fear based on actual events of people who have been lost in those jungles and never found. Thanks to the grace of God, he was able to calm his thoughts and use the training he'd received and the compass and map he had to reorient himself and find a way back. This illustration will be used to acknowledge how readers may feel or may have felt similarly lost in their lives, and that they too have God's grace and the tool of pastoral counseling to reorient themselves so they can find God's way for them.

This blog post will use Scripture from both the Old Testament and the New Testament describing how sometimes God speaks into the Christians ears to tell them which way to go (Isaiah 30:21), while other times God uses pastors and others He has designated to speak for him and to act in such a way as to take care of Christ's flock (John 21:17). As Christians are called to

place their faith in God, they should not turn away from, but use and go to those whom God has appointed to care for them.

Blog 3: Finding the Love of God When You are Suffering, Angry, or in Pain

The third blog post turns its focus to giving advice and encouragement to those readers who are or have had to handle suffering, problems, or difficulties in their lives. Christians are not removed from the possibility of suffering, nor are they protected from the suffering that comes from living in this world. In fact, Christians are more likely to suffer because they have the added possibility of suffering for their faith in Jesus. For Christians, facing difficulties or problems might be part of God's plan for them in order to further His kingdom or bring glory to Himself. That doesn't mean that God intends for his children to lead sad, miserable lives mired down by the suffering and difficulties they face.

This blog will use the anecdotal story of when the pastor was completing his Advanced Individual Training in order to become a US Army Infantryman. As part of the culmination of that training, the recruits go through a grueling field training exercise capped off with a 12-mile road march carrying more than 50 pounds of equipment. This story will be used to illustrate how Christians can manage to keep moving forward in the face of problems or difficulties if they keep in mind that God has a purpose and a plan. It also points the readers to how they will have those around them attacking them and encouraging them to quit, but they have a more powerful and eternal family of believers who are there to lift them up and give them strength in their trials.

This post will use Scripture that demonstrates how Christians can find glory in their suffering (Romans 5:3-4), and how while they have to go through difficulties in this life, there is an eternal glory awaiting them (1 Peter 5:10). Keeping faith in the truth of God's promises can lead to strength and perseverance in the face of suffering, problems, and difficulties.

Blog 4: Why Does God Speak to Others but Not to Me?

The purpose of the fourth blog post is to address the very common problem that all Christians face: the feeling that God isn't listening to them. This problem seems to affect all Christians at some point or other, and some Christians even feel like God has never spoken to them or answered their prayers. It can be very disheartening for Christians to hear from testimonies from the pulpit, to the words of Scripture, to the stories from their friends about all the times that God has answered prayers. These can be regular reminders that those who feel they haven't heard from God don't really know if He is listening to them, or if they are doing something wrong.

For this blog post, an anecdotal story will be used relating a time when the pastor witnessed a failure in the communication process while he was deployed with his infantry unit to Haiti. While on a patrol the Lieutenant wasn't able to hear any response from his squad leaders over the radio, and was questioning his assistant as to why they weren't replying. He didn't know if they heard him, where they were, if they were doing what he asked, if his radio was working at all, or if something bad had happened. This illustration will be used to connect with the readers on how they may feel and what they may think when they don't hear from God. It also shows the readers that even when they feel like God is not speaking back to them, they are not alone, and can get help from one another.

This post will use Scripture to show how Christians can help others to understand what God is saying (Acts 8:30-31). As children of God, Christians should lean on their faith in God, and that faith should remind them that even when they feel like God is not speaking to them, it don't mean He has left them or isn't listening to them.

Blog 5: Not Another Blog About How to Have a Happier Marriage

The fifth blog post will address the relationship of Christian Marriage. This is especially pertinent to those in The Risen Refuge Church as many of them have become married within the last five years, and many will be getting engaged to be married over the next five years. Because of the narrow age range currently in The Risen Refuge Church, and looking at the number of people in the high school group that will be moving into this church, marriage is a relationship that many will have to come to understand as a Christian institution and learn how to be in that relationship in a Godly fashion.

This blog will utilize an anecdotal story from the pastor's time in the Navy. While he was serving on the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, the pastor worked with one particular sailor who loved being a sailor more than even some of the more dedicated sailors. This sailor was once questioned as to why he loved being in the Navy so much. His answer was, "I'm not in the Navy. The Navy is in me." When the secular world, especially in American culture, is categorizing marriage more and more as simple a contractual agreement, or something even less committed, the Christian can get sucked into living out their married lives in ways determined by this secular, contractual definition. It is important for all the decisions, behaviors, attitudes, and actions taken inside the marriage relationship that they all come from a foundation of a solid understanding of Christian marriage. To that end, this illustration is designed to point readers to the biblical definition so their marriages will be blessed.

The Scripture used for this blog comes from both the Old Testament texts and New Testament texts that define marriage as a man and a woman becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5). Christians are to have faith in the Godly formation of Christian marriage if they are to behave in their marriage one to another as God has intended. This affects how they

handle problems, overcome obstacles, and even celebrate blessings, and it all comes from having faith in God and trusting in His design for this important relationship.

Blog 6: What Does the Bible Say About Being Christian and Being Single?

The purpose of the sixth blog post is to address the elephant in the room that is present after speaking to Christian marriage in the previous post. This post is directed to all those who are seeing their friends get marriage and start their families, but year after year, haven't met the person they are to marry. This is a difficult stage for many to be in. They see their friends from the outside, and these days they see the smiles, hear the happy stories, and scroll through all the shiny, happy photos and videos on social media. This reinforces the idea that marriage is happiness, and a blessing, except that this happiness and blessedness is for others and not for them.

For this blog post, the anecdotal story will come from a time when the pastor was in the Navy, and a retiring Captain made disparaging remarks about the ship he was assigned to, and thereby insulted all the sailors who served aboard that ship. This Captain stated that an aircraft carrier without the airwing is worthless, which transferred that concept to all those who crewed that ship when the aircraft were gone. The idea the Captain had was that without the aircraft, this mighty vessel was weak and worthless, but the crew knew better and were happy to see him leave. This illustration shows how the crew didn't let anyone or anything else define who they were or what gave them worth. Likewise, as children of God, marriage doesn't define who Christians are, Christ does. Marriage is a blessing to be sure, but those who are not yet married should keep their faith in the one whose love they will never lose.

The Scripture use in this section recognizes that we do not know our future (1 John 3:2), but our faith needs to be in the one who has the future in his hands (Ephesians 2:19). It also

reminds Christians that they are Christians regardless of their marital status. It is normal and even good to want to share your life with someone in the blessed state of Christian marriage, but all Christians should remember that marriage doesn't make them better or more Christian.

Analysis of the Micro-Project

The process of creating a blog is probably one of the easiest endeavors to undertake. The process of creating a pastoral counseling blog that will create the best possible space for positive outcomes to a group of second-generation Egyptian-American Christians living in a major metropolitan area is much more difficult. Finding the best hosting site and layout were where the easy questions stopped. The process brought to light so many questions on how to best reach this particular audience using a pastoral counseling blog.

In this process the research clarified that while blogs are still popular and even growing in popularity, the readership level for the arguably small age range of membership in The Risen Refuge Church still provided a challenge. Even though both Millennials and Gen-Z are constantly on their phone and mobile devices, they don't use them in the same fashion. Millennials tend to stay with one or two ways of getting information, while Gen-Z like to hop around to whatever is new or popular among their friends. Even though they are relatively close in age, pointing them to the blog requires different tactics.

It was also discovered there is an extra step in the process before getting to providing pastoral counseling via a blog, which is to educate the readers to what pastoral counseling is and how it can be helpful. This is likely going to be an ongoing process as more and more of the younger second generation Egyptian-American kids grow up not knowing what pastoral counseling is. It is likely that as this pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church continues, it will become more known and more common, making the explanation less needed.

However, it doesn't seem this will happen quickly or that future blogs on the importance and benefit of pastoral counseling will completely cease to be needed.

One of the final and more difficult parts of the process was discovering the importance of the length of each blog and the regularity of new blog posts to readership. Thanks to site analytics, the data correlations have been shown between blog length and readership, as well as consistency in new posts and readership. Why this happens has not shown up in any of the research found, but the connection seems to be undeniable. Longer blog posts have more readers. Blogs that consistently post on a regular basis have more readers. This means that in order for a pastoral counseling blog to effectively reach the readers, pastoral counselors will need to write a new blog post at least once a week, and post it on the same day every week. Interestingly, this is a lot like what pastors already do on a weekly basis, as they prepare a new sermon every week and deliver it to their congregation at about the same time on the same day every week.

Conclusion

This blogging micro-project provided good findings that are helpful to the development of a pastoral counseling program at The Risen Refuge Church. A pastoral counseling blog will be a beneficial part of a larger pastoral counseling program for this church. It is even likely that the success of this pastoral counseling blog will multiply the effectiveness of other parts of the pastoral counseling program for this church. One of the biggest factors in the multiplication effects from this pastoral counseling blog is the limited age range of the members of this congregation that resonates well with this form of communication and information gathering.

It is also of interest to note the potential this pastoral counseling blog has developing a stronger relationship between the congregation and the pastor. Pastors do not often get many

opportunities to become more personally known to the broader congregation. There are those in every church who get to know the pastor more personally, because of their positions in the church, in its ministries, or simply because they volunteer a lot. Those who simply attend once a week and try to do a Bible study here or an outreach there, do not often get to form a closer bond with their pastor. By utilizing personal anecdotes and illustrations, the people in the church can come to know more about their pastor and develop a stronger relationship with their pastor, which could in turn lead to them being more comfortable with the idea of seeking in-person pastoral counseling.

CHAPTER 4: MICRO-PROJECT THREE

Introduction

Creating a pastoral counseling program for a new church plant can be as simple as stating to the congregation from the pulpit on any given Sunday that the pastor is offering pastoral counseling, and then let the Holy Spirit move to grow this ministry. However, this would not fit the deeper meaning of biblical instructions for how pastors care for their flocks. Scripturally, a pastor is supposed to be an overseer and faithful steward of the church (Titus 1:7, ESV). Being a faithful steward requires more than simply notifying the parishioners that a ministry or opportunity exists. It requires planning, forethought, informed decision making, communication, encouragement, commitment, and of course prayer. Much like when Jesus told the large group of people who were following him the parable of the cost of building a tower, he clearly describes how the one who builds without first counting the cost will be ridiculed (Luke 14:29-30).

In these and other biblical examples, it is clearly shown that the Lord doesn't call pastors to do ministry haphazardly. To that end, when creating a pastoral counseling program for a new church plant, it is important to do the research and make informed decisions based on valid data as well as prayerful consideration given to the leading of the Holy Spirit. To be clear, this does not mean that the decision making process for pastors should put equal weight on empirical data and Spiritual direction. It simply means that when pastors are called to follow God into what seems to be an impossible ministry, they should know that it seems impossible because they have considered it for themselves, done the work in planning the ministry, and have committed themselves to giving their all to the task that God has ordained, and God will complete.

The Risen Refuge is a church that was officially founded January 30, 2022. Since 2014, The Risen Refuge was an English-speaking ministry of The Eastern Christian Free Methodist

Church, which is an Arabic-speaking church in Jersey City that was established by Egyptian-Americans in 1973.⁸² The pastor for the Eastern Christian Church was approached by the English-speaking group, and they requested to use the sanctuary on Sundays to hold their own full Sunday worship meetings.⁸³ This was blessed, and that meeting continued, grew, and even started ministries of its own until they received their first ordained pastor who was appointed in December 2018. By the grace of God, and through the commitment of this group, they survived Covid, and came out of it as a fully autonomous church.

While The Risen Refuge Church was given prayers and support by The Eastern Christian Church, they were left on their own to devise how they should run and administer themselves. This gave them a lot of freedom, but it meant they lacked some of the basic understandings of work of a church. One of these areas is the lack of a knowledge of the purpose and benefits of pastoral counseling. The parent church has a vibrant pastoral counseling program that is not publicized or even articulated, as it is simply known as part of the church.⁸⁴ Partly because of the lack of articulation, the members of The Risen Refuge Church have developed an organization where there is no understanding of the benefits of a pastoral counseling program.

Justification

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. To address this problem, a podcasting micro-project was conducted in order to ascertain if this platform would provide a beneficial outcome as part of

⁸² Mina Gabriel, interview by author, July 1, 2020.

⁸³ Gabriel.

⁸⁴ Raif Azab, interview by author, April 21, 2022.

a larger program to provide pastoral counseling that would help this church understand and receive the positive benefits of a pastoral counseling program. Podcasting as a medium for providing pastoral counseling was chosen as a micro-project for this problem primarily due to the specific cultural and generational makeup of The Risen Refuge Church. The membership and makeup of those regularly attending weekly Sunday meetings at The Risen Refuge Church are urban young adults who are second-generation Egyptian-Americans. The oldest member of the church turned 32 years old in 2022, and while there have been older visitors who have attended regularly for months at a time, they have not made this church their home. The only exceptions to this are the pastor and his wife, one of the founding leaders from The Eastern Christian Church who still regularly attends, and one man in his sixties from the community who attended regularly over the past few years, however, he went on to glory in November 2022.

As an urban Millennial and Gen-Z, Egyptian-American group, The Risen Refuge Church fits into the demographics of podcast consumers.⁸⁵ This group is characterized as being always connected via the internet and smart-phones, and constantly on the go.⁸⁶ They fill their days with activities and meetings with friends and extended family through group chats and social media coordinated almost entirely on their phones. Any pause they get in their day-to-day routine is filled with games, music, videos, and podcasts that are always available in their pockets. Even in the church environment, there is an ongoing struggle to keep the attention of this group that will quickly move to something on their phone at any lull in the program. The Risen Refuge Church,

⁸⁵ “Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024,” Statista, February 23, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1123105/statista-amc-podcast-reach-us>.

⁸⁶ “How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith,” Barna, last modified October 15, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith/>.

along with some leaders from The Eastern Christian Church, have been able to combat this by using apps in ministry to encourage Bible reading, and coordinating special church events.

Peer Review

The plan for conducting this podcasting micro-project in order to research a solution for the problem of the lack of a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church was reviewed for its efficacy and to address any issues that may arise during the course of the research. The resulting contributions provided encouragement and beneficial guidance on how to conduct this micro-project in a manner that will provide the best possible evidence to determine if podcasting could be a part of the solution to this problem.

Phil Nason, a doctoral student with Liberty University noted that podcasting as a part of a pastoral counseling program could be very helpful considering the audience that makes up The Risen Refuge Church. “If this is the target audience for podcasts, and this is your church membership, that seems like a natural fit for getting out important information.”⁸⁷ When considering the demographics of who listens to podcasts regularly, and which generational groups are growing in listenership according to data conducted from 2017 to 2021, the Millennial and Gen-Z groups make up a continually growing percentage which was more than half of all the listeners in in 2021.⁸⁸

Nason also presented a potential concern as it pertains to creating a space for pastoral counseling on a public medium where part of the counseling process involves confidentiality.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Phil Nason, discussion board post, Canvas, November 17, 2022, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/331666/discussion_topics/3271466?module_item_id=41454166.

⁸⁸ “Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024.”

⁸⁹ Nason.

In traditional counseling, especially in private one-on-one or couple's counseling, but often even in small group counseling sessions, confidentiality is essential to creating a space where those in need of help can feel free to be more honest and open. This kind of candidness in these conversations is essential to the program, which involves the counselor understanding the whole of the clients problem to the best of their ability in order to provide processes that may help the client to navigate through the problems to a more healthy place.⁹⁰ Nason asks, "how you will deal with private matters usually found in counseling settings on such an open forum as podcasting. For example, how does a podcast give me a sense of privacy if I need to work through my grief of losing a child?"⁹¹

The answer to addressing this possible problem is to limit the podcast episodes format to a solo podcast, a co-host podcast, or even guest or small group podcasts, where everyone involved is instructed ahead of time to keep any and all confidential information to themselves. Additionally, the best way to ensure privacy is maintained in a pastoral counseling podcast is to keep all episodes as pre-recorded, in order to review and edit out any comments that might bring up topics that could be a breach of confidentiality. Since a lot of control is lost in formats that allow for listeners to call in, or formats that are live, these formats will not be used at all in this pastoral counseling podcast.

Part of the nature of podcasting as a pastoral counseling ministry are the technical aspects of recording, editing, and uploading each episode. Especially important is the recording part of creating an episode, as a good recording makes the editing process easier. Nason provided some suggestions on some best practices for getting a clean recording, and an article titled "12

⁹⁰ Nason.

⁹¹ Nason.

Methods to Eliminate Podcast Background Noise.”⁹² Nason noted two suggestions that stood out to him from this article. “Use a dynamic mic, and add acoustic treatments to the audio room you are using.”⁹³ Easily the most important part to recording a quality podcast is having a good microphone.⁹⁴ While podcasts can be recorded, and even edited, on a smart-phone, doing so will be apparent in the poor audio quality of the published episode. A relatively small expense of a good quality dynamic microphone is worth the initial investment.

Additionally, sound-proofing the room used for recording is the second most important part of getting a clear recording. Most microphones are sensitive enough to pick up sounds in the background that a person may have gotten used to, and tunes out automatically. Passing traffic outside may not register to the person who hears it all the time, but it will get picked up through the microphone and be very distracting to a listener. The quieter noises of a fan, or a fishtank, or an upstairs neighbor, are all sounds that will get picked up and can become distractions for listeners. Dr. James Zabloski, a professor at Liberty University, agrees with Nason, and recommends creating a space with as much sound-proofing as can be afforded. This can even be accomplished on a budget through using some inexpensive and common items. “As far as ambient noise, you have to pad the room. Blankets, pillows, carpeting, wall hangings ... anything that will absorb the sound is crucial.”⁹⁵

⁹² Dennis, “Got Podcast Background Noise? Here’s How to Eliminate Ambient Noise,” Castos, last updated June 7, 2021, <https://castos.com/podcast-background-noise/>.

⁹³ Nason.

⁹⁴ Kevan Lee, “Podcasting for Beginners: The Complete Guide to Getting Started With Podcasts,” Buffer, Accessed November 3, 2022, <https://buffer.com/library/podcasting-for-beginners/>.

⁹⁵ James Zabloski, discussion board post, Canvas, November 17, 2022, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/331666/discussion_topics/3271466?module_item_id=4145416.

Implementation

Explanation of the Processes Involved in Launching a Podcast

Most podcasts don't start with an established audience, and therefore need to answer some questions at the outset regarding what their podcast will be about, and who their intended audience is going to be.⁹⁶ It is only after answering these starting questions that other steps in the process for launching a podcast should be considered. Once the content and the intended audience is established, the description for the podcast can be written. In the world of podcasts, the description is the most important thing because it attracts listeners to a new podcast.⁹⁷ When it comes to the process of launching a pastoral counseling podcast, these two questions still need to be answered, but it is a slightly different process than for those who are coming into podcasting with a purely blank slate.

The content for this podcasting micro-project is pastoral counseling and the primary audience is the congregation of The Risen Refuge Church, but those are still too broad to be helpful during the rest of the process. During the consideration of the audience for the pastoral counseling podcast for this micro-project, the primary audience was determined to be those who regularly attend The Risen Refuge Church. Two secondary audiences were also identified. The first was determined to be those who used to attend but stopped over the years either due to Covid or any number of other reasons, but still have some connection with the church. The other secondary audience was identified as those who are part of the high school youth group and are not attending the full Sunday meetings or are not actively involved in church activities.

⁹⁶ Colin Gray, "How to Start a Podcast: Your Lightning Fast, No-Sweat Guide for 2022," The Podcast Host, September 1, 2022, <https://www.thepodcasthost.com/planning/how-to-start-a-podcast>.

⁹⁷ Gray, "How to Start a Podcast."

With the audiences in mind, the content was further specified to focus on pastoral counseling that addresses the concerns, needs, and struggles of the young adults and youth who are dealing with problems relative to their generation, as well as focusing on the struggles they have as second-generation Egyptian-Americans who want to fit in with their American friends, while still honoring the cultural traditions of their parents. Armed with this information, a description was written to target this audience and give a short introduction that would encourage the target audience to listen to the podcast because they feel there is something of value in it for them personally.⁹⁸

The podcast for this micro-project was created to research podcasting as another possible solution to the problem that The Risen Refuge Church doesn't have a pastoral counseling program. In a previous research for this same problem, a blogging micro-project was completed and found to have positive potential as a helpful part of a larger pastoral counseling program that included blogging as well as traditional in-person pastoral counseling. As such, it was decided that the podcast for this micro-project would use the same name, and concept that was used for the blogging micro-project in order to connect these two ministries as part of a larger pastoral counseling program. The theme of the podcast was chosen to connect the audiences with something they personally know about their pastor, which is his prior military service. This podcasting micro-project is called "Faith of the Centurion," and it can be accessed here:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/faith-of-the-centurion/id1654743079>.

The next step was determining the format, length and tone of the podcast based on the more focused content that had been determined, while keeping the target audience in mind. The format of the podcast has to do with answering questions like how many hosts will the podcast

⁹⁸ Gray, "How to Start a Podcast."

have, and how will the information be presented. While there are not set types of formats, Colin Gray at The Podcast Host website has a simple yet inclusive list that covers the basics: solo, interview, cohost, documentary, roundtable, and fiction.⁹⁹ These formats are fairly self explanatory, and for the podcast created for this micro-project, the solo format for episodes was chosen to be the standard format for two main reasons. First, it makes it easier to produce weekly episodes when there is only one person's schedule involved.¹⁰⁰ Second, having only one host allows for shorter episodes, which creates a better fit for the intended length based on considerations made for the audiences.

The length for the podcast episodes is entirely up to the podcast creator. The online radio and podcast website, Stitcher, says the average listener stays connected for 22 minutes.¹⁰¹ "TED Talks have an 18-minute maximum because scientists believe we can't hold our attention on a single presenter for any longer before we check out."¹⁰² With that in mind, it is important to know your audience. The audience for The Risen Refuge Church are in the category of people who are good to listen for short bursts before they are ready to move on to the next thing, so this podcast will use a single-host, focus topic format with a target length for the episode used in this micro-project set at 10 minutes.¹⁰³ This is a target, and not a firm standard, as the actual length of each individual episode will vary from that 10 minute mark based on the needs of the message in each particular episode.

⁹⁹ Gray, "How to Start a Podcast."

¹⁰⁰ Gray, "How to Start a Podcast."

¹⁰¹ Lee, "Podcasting for Beginners."

¹⁰² Lee, "Podcasting for Beginners."

¹⁰³ "The Art of the Short Podcast," Anchor, updated May 4, 2021, <https://blog.anchor.fm/create/short-podcasts>.

The tone of the podcast is a result of considering both the content and the audience. The tone for this podcast micro-project was decided to be a calm, reassuring, and hopeful tone, as the audience is already full of stress and energy. If this pastoral counseling podcast can provide a sense of calm for just ten minutes in their week, that time may help them directly with a message of hope or encouragement in that moment. It also may encourage them to take that same time out of other days to seek a calm space and reach out to God for the hope or peace they need. Additionally, Glen Weldon from NPR advises podcasters to stay authentic and leave room for discovery.¹⁰⁴ By being authentic in each episode, the listeners will connect more with the pastor they already know, and that connection can help to make what is a new ministry feel less awkward.¹⁰⁵ Also, leaving room for discovery will allow for being open to receiving feedback the listeners, which in this case can happen directly as those who are part of the primary and secondary audiences all personally know the podcast host and can give comments or feedback directly.

Podcast episodes are the simply audio broadcasts that can be listened to via the internet. Because they are audio recordings, that are stored on a hosting site and published, or broadcast, on one or many different apps, there is a learning curve when it comes to launching a podcast. In short, those who wish to start a podcast need a way to record audio, edit the audio, export the audio to a usable format, upload the audio to a hosting site, and publish the audio as an episode on the podcast.¹⁰⁶ There are many good websites, podcasts, and YouTube videos where podcasters who have years of experience can walk a new person through the process, and share

¹⁰⁴ Glen Weldon, *NPR's Podcast Start Up Guide*, (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2021), 260.

¹⁰⁵ Weldon, 260.

¹⁰⁶ Gray, "How to Start a Podcast."

advice on pitfalls based on their experiences. Based on the experience gained through this micro-project, it is a good idea to work through the process, even when it doesn't make sense. In this way, those who are starting a new podcast will make mistakes, and gain a better understanding of how to launch a podcast through their mistakes.

It should be evident that the most important element in this process is the audio. According to Kevan Lee, who wrote an online article "Podcasting for Beginners," "audio quality begins and ends with a microphone."¹⁰⁷ There are a wide range of options for microphones from using a the microphone on any smartphone, to spending thousands of dollars on a microphone.¹⁰⁸ The cost of the microphone and related equipment for this micro-project was kept under \$100 by finding a new suspended Pyle condenser USB microphone with pop filter on sale. The audio editing was done with the free Apple program, GarageBand, because it is both free and recommended as a quality program for editing podcasts.¹⁰⁹

The hosting site used was also chosen based primarily on the host's preference as most of them are easy to use, so the difference came down to cost for paid services, and what additional services were offered.¹¹⁰ This podcasting micro-project used the free hosting services of RSS.com after reviewing multiple hosting sites and finding this one to be the most intuitive. Also, while many hosting sites try to make it simple for the podcaster to publish to many platforms, RSS.com seemed to have the simplest process for sharing this podcast to all of the biggest platforms used for listening to podcasts.

¹⁰⁷ Lee, "Podcasting for Beginners."

¹⁰⁸ Lee, "Podcasting for Beginners."

¹⁰⁹ Lee, "Podcasting for Beginners."

¹¹⁰ Lee, "Podcasting for Beginners."

Evaluation of the Efficacy of a Podcast Ministry

The data for the usership of podcasts, globally and in the United States show a constant increase in listeners that doesn't seem to be slowing down. In the United States the number of podcast listeners has grown steadily from 46.1 million listeners in 2017 to 82.7 million listeners in 2021.¹¹¹ The same research also projected these numbers to increase to 100.1 million listeners in 2024.¹¹² While podcasts have not totally saturated the American population, research shows that three quarters of the American population have heard of podcasts and 28 percent of Americans listen to podcasts on a weekly basis.¹¹³ More than three quarters of Americans who listen to podcasts use their smartphone, while about 25 percent use a web browser and only six percent use a tablet.¹¹⁴ Currently the majority of podcasts listeners are from the Millennial and Gen-Z generations, and the current podcast ethnicity is made up of 59 percent Caucasians with other ethnicities sharing the rest of podcast listeners in America.¹¹⁵

All of this points to an open opportunity to reach the Americans in ministry through podcasting. As mentioned in the section above concerning how to launch a podcast, if some attention is given to discerning the audience, refining the focus of the content, and creating a system where a podcast ministry can be consistently updated with new episodes, podcasting as a ministry has a lot of potential to become a positive ministry. This is seen by how many podcasts are out there that are registered in the "Religious" category. According to Podcast Insider, nearly

¹¹¹ "Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024."

¹¹² "Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024."

¹¹³ Daniel Ruby, "39+ Podcast Statistics 2022 (Latest Trends & Infographics)," Demand Sage, December 3, 2022, <https://www.demandsage.com/podcast-statistics/>.

¹¹⁴ Ruby.

¹¹⁵ "Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024."

15 percent of all podcasts, about 92,000 podcasts, are registered in the “Religious” category.¹¹⁶ Religious podcasts have also seen dramatic increases in listenership, growing by more than 30 percent per year from 2009 to 2019.¹¹⁷ It should be noted that while this is a positive trend it is still not equal to the listenership for other categories.¹¹⁸

Podcasting in general is a growing platform for reaching audiences outside of Sunday worship services. Podcasts can reach listeners where they are, in a meaningful way that can result in a positive ministry for churches who spend the time to put together a regularly published quality production. A simple search of Spotify clearly shows that there are many podcast ministries reaching their audiences through podcasting. The local church may not get the following that top performers on Spotify’s list shows, but local churches should remember that is not their purpose, nor their target audience. Establishing a regular listener base from within the local church’s target audience is a successful podcast ministry for the local church.

Explanation of Value of Podcasts for Pastoral Counseling

Podcasting for pastoral counseling creates opportunities that don’t often present themselves in the normal week to week, month to month, year to year activities of the church. One of the difficulties for pastors who want to provide pastoral counseling to their congregations is when to do it? Sunday mornings sermons, in most congregations, don’t lend themselves to the often incredibly emotionally charged topics that are brought up in the course of pastoral counseling. The pulpit isn’t the right place to speak to topics like marital infidelity, feelings of failure in a relationship, the lingering sometimes debilitating pain years after the loss of a loved

¹¹⁶ “Podcast Stats Soundbite: 3 Surprising Stats about Religious Podcasts,” Podcast Insider, January 14, 2019, <https://blubrry.com/podcast-insider/2019/01/14/3-surprising-podcast-stats-religious/>.

¹¹⁷ “Podcast Stats Soundbite: 3 Surprising Stats about Religious Podcasts.”

¹¹⁸ “Podcast Stats Soundbite: 3 Surprising Stats about Religious Podcasts.”

one, or even the common struggle of wrestling with faith in a God when surrounded by pain or the constant battle with anxiety or depression. Crafting a sermon for some of the more emotionally and spiritually difficult topics may result in causing more damage in those who are going through these problems being faced with their unresolved emotions in a public setting, or it can be watered down so much as to not be so emotionally charged, but at the same time lose all potency to affect any positive change. However, these topics can be discussed privately, in a one-on-one format, while maintaining all confidentiality as the parishioner takes time away from everything to listening to a podcast by themselves through their headphones.

Those were just examples, and not all pastoral counseling episodes need to be so specific. Podcasting for pastoral counseling also gives the counselor opportunities to speak more generally to broader topics and provide encouragement and tools for helping those struggling with some of these problems. There can be many episodes used to cover broader topics like marital counseling, family counseling, spiritual counseling, co-dependency, anxiety, depression, employment counseling, and more. Any one of these could become a series of short episodes that focus on specific issues within these broader topics.

It should be noted here again, as was mentioned earlier, that this is not intended to replace the need for in-person psychotherapy sessions, or even pastoral or Christian counseling. In fact, it is a good practice, and maybe even necessary, when podcasting an episode on topics where a listener may need professional psychotherapy, to strongly encourage seeking professional help and stating that, that episode is not in any way intended to replace receiving professional help in these areas. The value of a pastoral counseling podcast is in reaching the members of the pastor's flock with messages of hope, encouragement, biblical counsel, and guidance outside of the Sunday church meeting.

Explanation of Value of Podcasts for Stated Problem

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. Utilizing the format and flexibility of podcasts to establish one avenue to providing pastoral counseling to the people of The Risen Refuge Church can provide a positive process for reaching this group in a way that both provides beneficial counseling and encourages the use of other counseling programs. The Risen Refuge Church has distinctive characteristics to it that make the whole of those who attend regularly a good fit for reaching through a pastoral counseling podcast.

They have all grown up in an urban environment, specifically the Jersey City and New York City area. This means, they are constantly on the move, and don't believe they have the time to fit in-person pastoral counseling into their busy schedules. It is probable that the primary reason they are reluctant to take the time out of their week for an in-person pastoral counseling session is that they don't yet understand the benefit of pastoral counseling, as they have not experienced it first hand. Also, in the Egyptian, Arabic culture, while their parents would and do often go to pastors or priests for consolation, prayer, and counseling, it isn't something that is spoken about publicly or even among family members. Through the use of pastoral counseling podcasts, the members of The Risen Refuge Church can get a taste of what pastoral counseling is like, and possibly remove some of the ignorance of the benefits of pastoral counseling through regular, easy to listen to episodes.

As a group of second-generation Egyptian-Americans, they are culturally trying to fit in with the American culture, while also not giving up their Egyptian culture. The members of The Risen Refuge Church believe they are more culturally American than they are Egyptian; however, this is more of an indicator of how they see themselves than how they are seen by

others. What that means for this ministry is that they want to be more American and do the things that culturally Americans do. Because the trends are ever growing in America for their peers to listen more and more to podcasts, this group should easily take to listening to podcasts, if they are not already doing so. Especially considering the Millennial and Gen-Z generations already account for more than half of the podcast listeners in America.¹¹⁹

Finally, the membership of The Risen Refuge Church is a devout group of Christians who are dedicated to their worship of God and growing deeper in their faith and understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This group looks forward to special worship events that are held weekday evenings or on the weekends. They have formed their own men's and women's discipleship Bible studies. Many of them already fit in with Christian Americans their age because they regularly listen to sermons from well-known preachers either via podcasts or YouTube throughout the week.¹²⁰ The youth and young adults recently requested a weekly Friday-evening worship and Bible study gathering to explore the book of Revelation chapter by chapter. Even at the high school level they enjoy coming to church to fellowship, worship, pray together, and discuss and learn more about the Bible and why the church believes what it believes. They are already searching through the internet to find more answers and get more information, so placing a pastoral counseling podcast in the midst of where they are already going for answers will create a place for pastoral counseling where they already are going to through the week.

¹¹⁹ "Podcast Stats Soundbite: 3 Surprising Stats about Religious Podcasts," Podcast Insider, January 14, 2019, <https://blubrry.com/podcast-insider/2019/01/14/3-surprising-podcast-stats-religious/>.

¹²⁰ "Barna Technology Study: Social Networking, Online Entertainment and Church Podcasts," Barna, last modified May 26, 2008, <https://www.barna.com/research/barna-technology-study-social-networking-online-entertainment-and-church-podcasts/> Links to an external site.

Evaluation of a Similar Podcast

The Redeeming Love podcast is published weekly by Pastor Victor Adedokun, who serves as the lead pastor for The Redemption House Church in Queens, N.Y. The Redeeming Love podcast has been published weekly for 170 episodes, with the last one airing on May 10, 2022.¹²¹ The podcast on Audacy can be found at this link:

<https://www.audacy.com/podcasts/redeeming-love-48472>.

Pastor Adedokun leads a predominantly African-American church in the urban setting of Queens, and has provided weekly podcasts for his congregation, and others who might not attend his church but have found his podcast.¹²² His podcasts normally average between 10 and 14 minutes in length, and are a single host format. The content of Pastor Adedokun's episodes are biblically based messages on topics relevant to his congregation in order to provide counseling and resources that can be used by his listeners to help them to grow spiritually.¹²³

The Redeeming Love podcast is a similar podcast to the one that was launched in the course of this podcasting micro-project. It is a pastoral counseling podcast, primarily intended to reach an audience of the members of The Redemption House Church, of which the host is the pastor. It is a weekly podcast, released every Tuesday, with a single host and a short format that incorporates a single helpful message based on one or more biblical passages in order to encourage the listeners and give them tools to help them live out their faith daily.

¹²¹ "Redeeming Love Podcast," Audacy, last accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.audacy.com/podcasts/redeeming-love-48472>.

¹²² "The Redemption House," Welcome, last accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.redemptionhouse.org/>.

¹²³ "Redeeming Love Podcast."

Pastor Adedokun's podcast is similar to the research being done in this micro-project in these ways. It is only different in the demographics of his church, and therefore the primary audience of his podcast. His demographics, based on images found on The Redemption House Church encompass a congregation from infants and toddlers to the elderly. Additionally, it is unclear without further research if Pastor Adedokun's congregation are immigrants or second-generation immigrants from another country. Also, while it is not clearly stated, it can be safely assumed that this church is not an outgrowth of a parent church made up of non-English speaking immigrants. These relatively minor differences aside, the pastoral counseling that Pastor Adedokun has done through The Redeeming Love podcast is very close in many aspects to the research that was complete in this micro-project, and it seems that his podcast was a positive ministry that helped his congregation, and likely others outside his church. While there is no data on the number of downloads, or subscriptions it can be determined from the constant run of the podcasts on a weekly basis for about three years and three months that it had a listener base that encouraged Pastor Adedokun to continue recording episodes for this long.

Recommendations for Moving Forward with Podcasts for Pastoral Counseling

Audio broadcasts have been used to extend pastoral ministry beyond the walls of the church for the past 100 years through the technology of the radio.¹²⁴ Sermons, revivals, and special guest speakers were broadcast regularly, which helped those in the immediate area of their church stay connected and receive pastoral care during those times when they couldn't make it to church or be there to attend a special meeting or revival.

¹²⁴ Paul Guggenheimer, "100 years ago, live radio sermons began at Pittsburgh church," AP News, January 9, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/pittsburgh-jerry-falwell-joel-osteen-radio-07ee95e24ea41185557ca8a87d4aee9d>.

As the technology to record audio become more available and more affordable, churches began recording their worship services and sermons. These recording were often duplicated on cassette tapes and distributed to home-bound members, and others who may have been told of a particularly powerful message that the pastor gave on a specific Sunday. This practice continued as CDs became more widely used and the technology made it down to the local church level. Currently, practically every church in America has, or can readily have, the ability to livestream their meetings or sermons, which can be watched or listened to as they are happening, or played back later during the week as time permits.

The technology has come now to a place where pastors can also effectively have their own weekly radio show. While this was done, here and there, by some churches as their local radio stations had the time and allowed the local pastors to come into the station, it is now available and affordable for pastors to host their own radio shows on their own time, in their office, church, or home. Podcasting has brought to pastors the opportunity to provide pastoral counseling to their congregants during the week in a way that few were able to do in the past. As with most new technology, some pastors may be timid about learning a new process, and how to use new programs and apps, and becoming acquainted with the equipment needed for a quality podcast. However, pastoring Christ's flock was never meant to be an easy calling, but it is one that is fulfilling and filled with challenges and struggles that lead to the building up of God's kingdom.

More study into the benefits of podcasting for pastoral counseling would be beneficial for providing pastors with the encouragement and the data to further discover the uses for podcasting in pastoral counseling. The current array of research into podcasting focuses primarily on the

business or marketing aspects of podcasting. Even these show that there is growth overall in the use of podcasting, and that the listener base will only continue to grow.¹²⁵

While some pastors may dismiss podcasting as a part of their pastoral counseling ministry because their parishioners don't fit in the demographics for those who make up the majority of podcast consumers, they might be missing out on opportunities they don't know exists. While the older and more rural churches may seem not to be a fit for this ministry, the data still shows that there is a relatively large amount of listeners who fit into the over 55-year-old category. Also, many of these parishioners have younger family members, children and grandchildren, that they will gladly invite over to teach them how to listen to the new podcast that their minister started.

Finally, churches, all churches, need to be able to reach the Millennial and Gen-Z generations if they are going to be around in another 20 to 30 years. Some pastors felt that the radio broadcasts of sermons that began a century ago would only encourage church-goers to stay home.¹²⁶ However, they found themselves proven wrong as more and more people came to church as the result of a ministry of reaching out to the people through the technology of the radio.¹²⁷ Likewise, a pastoral counseling podcast may be just that ministry needed to bring more people into the church, and to demonstrate to these younger generations that the pastor, and by extension the local church, is willing to try and speak their language, in order to be relevant to their struggles and their concerns.

¹²⁵ "Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024."

¹²⁶ Guggenheimer.

¹²⁷ Guggenheimer.

Analysis of the Micro-Project

This podcasting micro-project has shown that podcasting can be an effective part of a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church, which provided positive help to the congregation, and possibly beyond the local congregation to English-speaking listeners far outside the geographical region of New Jersey. Since the demographics of The Risen Refuge membership is so heavily focused on the Millennial and Gen-Z generations, and the church's culture is made up of second-generation Egyptian-Americans who are trying to fit in more and more with the American culture, podcasting is a tool that fits into their lifestyle, and even into their pockets. While considering this congregation's desire to connectedness and constant activities, podcasting provides a way to step into their daily lives with positive messages of hope and advice on how to manage the problems they are facing when they don't feel like they have the time to make an appointment for an in-person counseling session.

One area that this podcasting micro-project has brought to light as a deficiency in the platform as it pertains to pastoral counseling is the private one-on-one conversations that allow the listeners the opportunity to take a more active role in receiving personal advice that could help them address their problems with all of the nuances involved. The danger in opening a pastoral counseling podcast to call-ins through a live episode format is not worth the risk of possibly broadcasting confidential information in the public sphere.¹²⁸ However, it is possible that through a growing audience of listeners, a pastoral counseling podcast could encourage these listeners to seek personal counseling to help them with their problems in a way that is specific to their individual needs.

¹²⁸ Nason.

This podcasting micro-project has also shown that while creating a podcast as part of a pastoral counseling program may seem easy from the outside, it is more difficult than it may seem to create a podcast that has regularly published quality episodes. There can be a steep learning curve for someone who doesn't already understand the equipment and programs involved with editing and recording, or the process of hosting and publishing a podcast. It is not advised that pastors who want to reach out to their congregations through a podcast ministry should take this on without doing their own due diligence to research the process thoroughly. While it may be presumed that some of the older members of the church may not be reached by such a podcast without help, research has shown that 26 percent of listeners who listen to podcasts on a monthly basis are 55 years old or older.¹²⁹

This podcasting micro-project has shown that an important consideration for an effective pastoral counseling podcast is getting and keeping listeners. Informing the congregation of the existence of a pastoral counseling podcast is often only good enough for those who are currently active podcast consumers. Others have to be educated to what podcasts are, as most of them may have only heard of podcasts or know very little of how to access a podcast. Making the podcast available on as many platforms as possible will help encourage more listeners as some may only be acquainted with one platform or another, and not be willing to learn about or download a new app just for the church's pastoral counseling podcast. Engaging younger generations through regular social media posts with links to the podcast on major platforms like Apple Podcast or Spotify, which are the two most used platforms, will encourage more listeners as well.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ "Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024."

¹³⁰ "Number of podcast listeners in the United States from 2017 to 2024."

The primary consideration in retaining the audience is regular and consistent posting of content. Podcasts, much like the radio shows that preceded them, retain and even gain more listeners if they post new episodes regularly and on the same day or days each week.¹³¹ This is even more important than the audio quality of the episodes or the quality of their content.¹³² Listeners are more likely to shrug off a bad episode than they are to shrug off no episode. Other considerations for retention are choosing the right length, format, and tone, which are the result of knowing the audience. Some may be more interested in a longer length, preferring more information or just having more time. Some may want to hear from only the pastor, while others would love to hear from guests or a co-host on each episode. The tone is also important as some may be seeking to hear a vibrant show, while others prefer a more conversational tone.

Conclusion

More research on utilizing podcasts for pastoral counseling would be helpful to discover more nuances as to how podcasting can be used as part of local church's pastoral counseling ministries. Not every new pastoral counseling podcast is going to be a national or international success with thousands or more listeners. For the members of the local congregation, they may prefer to hear more from the pastor they know and love, than the nationally known preacher. This is a growth area, and one that, with more research, can become a strong ministry even at the local church level. Much like Sunday radio broadcasts were a boon for local churches through the 19th century, and even extended the reach of the work of the gospel far beyond the

¹³¹ Mimi Polner and Kelly Main, "How To Start A Podcast And Make Money In 2022," Forbes Advisor, August 20, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/how-to-start-a-podcast/>.

¹³² Ibid.

geographical area of some of these churches. More research into podcasting as a ministry for pastoral counseling has the potential to benefit many pastors and their flocks.

CHAPTER 5: MICRO-PROJECT FOUR

Introduction

A new church plant means creating new norms for a new group of people do not otherwise have a culture in place that is the church society. A challenge for new churches is creating programs that will be successful for a congregation that hasn't established its own standards for conduct, communication, and coordination. There is a positive aspect to this situation, in that the leader or leadership of a new church can establish new programs and hope to create a norm that will be biblically based and beneficial for the building up of the faith of those people in that congregation. The program can be created, proposed, launched and promoted in the direction that will be helpful to the life and growth of that congregation, and can be marketed in such a way as to get buy in from the majority of the members. This can allow for the freedom of establishing the form and format of a program that is both scripturally sound and proposed to a group that doesn't have any practices that could oppose that form or format.

Conversely, when creating a new program in a congregation that has been established for many years, that new program has the challenge of fitting into the normative structure of that society. It can still be formed in such a way that it is scriptural, but the program will have the best chance for success only if it fits into the structure of the church society that is firmly in place. This may not be what the church leader or leadership have in mind as the best practice for the format of a new program, but for the sake of the success of the program they will need to adjust it to the practices that are established in their particular congregation.

The Risen Refuge is a church that was established January 30, 2022, but it had been a growing ministry within a parent church since 2014.¹³³ As such, it has a history of cultural structure that comes from the parent church, and it has had many years to establish its own societal structure that is not entirely in line with that of the parent church. The Risen Refuge Church used to be an active English-speaking ministry that was established by an Arabic-speaking church in the major metropolitan area of Jersey City, NJ, which is just across the Hudson River from Manhattan.¹³⁴ The parent church, The Eastern Christian Church, is made up almost entirely of Egyptians and Egyptian-Americans, and is sustained by the continued immigration of Egyptians and other Arabic-speaking persons from the Middle-East.¹³⁵ The Eastern Christian Church was founded in 1973 by Egyptian Christians, and has served and grown to meet the needs of the Arabic-speaking Christian community in Jersey City and the surrounding areas.¹³⁶ The parent church is literally made up of the parents of the members of The Risen Refuge Church, who decided more than a decade ago to allow their children to have their own time of worship in the sanctuary and their own language.

This created a unique circumstance where an English-speaking worship space was created as a ministry out of an Arabic-speaking church. The members of this ministry were almost entirely second-generation Egyptian-Americans who had grown up almost entirely in and around the New York major metropolitan area. This group was then officially recognized as a church in the Free Methodist Church denomination in January 2022. However, all it has known

¹³³ Mina Gabriel, interview by author, July 1, 2020.

¹³⁴ Gabriel.

¹³⁵ Raif Azab, interview by author, April 21, 2022.

¹³⁶ Azab.

of doing the work of the church during its time as a ministry consisted of conducting Sunday Services and a weekly outreach ministry to feed the poor in their community. This resulted in a new church that has no pastoral counseling program, but it does have its own normative societal structure into which this new pastoral counseling program should try to fit, in order to have the best chance for success.

Justification

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. This poster micro-project was developed to study how the posters as one part of a multi-faceted pastoral counseling program could provide pastoral counseling messages to the particular congregation. The use of posters to communicate pastoral counseling message was decided upon based on the demographics of this congregation. The Risen Refuge Church is made up almost entirely of Gen-Z and Millennial, second-generation Egyptian-Americans who live in an urban community. Their generational position puts them all in two groups who have both grown up with the internet, and because they are immersed in an urban environment, they are in an always on, always active society, that is constantly connected and constantly bombarded by messaging and advertising.¹³⁷ As second-generation Egyptian-Americans, they respect and still live their lives in ways that are directly or indirectly related to their parents culture, but they identify with the American culture and see themselves as such.¹³⁸ This indicates the need for a pastoral counseling program that provides

¹³⁷ “How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith,” Barna, last modified October 15, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith/>.

¹³⁸ Clinton and Hawkins, 502.

traditional, in-person counseling, while including additional ways of providing pastoral counseling in through avenues that they are more accustomed to using. One likely effective way to meet the Gen-Z and Millennial generations where they are would be by providing pastoral counseling through digital posters via social media, which they regularly use throughout each day.¹³⁹

Peer Review

This research micro-project looks into the use of digital posters as a possible part of a solution to the problem of a lack of a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church which was considered and reviewed with regard to its possible usefulness for this effort. Additional comments were also made as to specific additional processes that may be used in order to create an even more effective and sustainable use of digital posters for a pastoral counseling program. These contributions to this study were welcome and both augmented this micro-project by it's encouragement and sparked thoughts for further consideration.

Clarence Wilson, who is a Doctor of Ministry student at Liberty University, is also an African-American, First Elder for a church that is predominantly made up of Caribbean members. In his context, Wilson has found it difficult to provide counsel when it is needed.¹⁴⁰ Wilson states that in many countries, America included, pastoral counseling is an emerging academic discipline.¹⁴¹ Brooks Holifield, who wrote *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*, instead says that pastoral counseling emerged more than 300

¹³⁹ "How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith."

¹⁴⁰ Clarence Wilson, discussion board post, Canvas, March 24, 2023, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/448057/discussion_topics/3945013.

¹⁴¹ Wilson, discussion board post.

years ago in the American protestant church.¹⁴² Later in the 20th century, a confluence of pastoral counseling and psychotherapy began which led to much growth and debate within and between physicians, psychotherapists, and Christian counselors.¹⁴³ What Wilson is most likely pointing to is the development and growth of the clinical pastoral counseling in the 1950's as a specialization that required additional training, which resulted in certified pastoral counselors who often worked completely outside of the local church.¹⁴⁴ Wilson emphasizes the need for the Christian counselor to deliver biblically based psychotherapy, and do so from a the heart of a born-again Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit and demonstrates knowledge of Holy Scripture.¹⁴⁵ His encouragement for developing a pastoral counseling program that keeps a biblical foundation, led by the Holy Spirit to bring people back into a right relationship with God, and to help lead them into an abundant life with God, is a welcome one.

Wilson also provided his thoughts on how to relieve some of the pastor's burden as it pertains to pastoral counseling, which has merits when taken properly. His advice is two-fold, that a pastor has in their congregation persons who would be willing to shoulder some of the tasks related to pastoral counseling, and that it is a benefit to those persons to give them opportunities to use and gain experience through a pastoral counseling program. "They [Pastors] have a team of gifted, trained, committed lay caregivers ready to minister to hurting people

¹⁴² Loren L. Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁴³ Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 15-18.

¹⁴⁴ Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Wilson, discussion board post.

inside and outside the congregation.”¹⁴⁶ It is important to note that Wilson is specifically referring to lay persons acting as “caregivers” and not trained pastoral counselors.

To the first part, pastors are not the congregation’s sole caregiver, is something pastors should never consider to be an accurate, biblical, or even sustainable process for caring for the flock they have been given. Pastors may look to Peter’s reinstatement in John 21:17 as a command to them concerning the flock for whom Christ has ordained them to care, but the place undue and unbiblical burden upon themselves if they consider this to be a task that is solely theirs to undertake. The command for the lay person to provide love and care for other lay persons is a theme woven through the New Testament in particular as well as the Bible as a whole. For example, the command to love one another can be found in the Gospels, John 13:34, and the Epistles, Romans 12:10. Also we find in the Epistles commands to encourage one another, Thessalonians 5:11, look out for the interests of others, Philippians 2:4, and carry one another’s burdens, Galatians 6:2, which are all written to the entire church.

The way this specifically presents itself in the context of this micro-project is the importance of encouraging, allowing, and training up lay persons to provide Christian care as part of an overall pastoral counseling program. There is no need for specialized training or graduate level education for one person in the church to care for another who is hurting, struggling, questioning, or otherwise in need. It also fits in well within the context of The Risen Refuge Church as they are part of a generation that wants to feel their faith is more words, but also displays itself in action the benefits those around them.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Wilson, discussion board post.

¹⁴⁷ “How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith.”

The second part of this call to use lay persons as caregivers is to build up the next generation of leaders by giving them the opportunity to use the gifts that God has given them.¹⁴⁸ Pastors have many duties they need to attend to, and the one that may often fall to a lower priority is helping the next generation of church leaders and pastors to identify and grow into their calling. This should also include pastoral counselors or Christian therapists.

Implementation

Processes Involved in Choosing Poster Designs

The process that lead to choosing a digital posters micro-project involved considering the audience that the problem statement is intending to reach. This audience is split into a primary audience and a secondary audience, but they both share the same basic demographics, which is what was chiefly considered as part of this process. The primary audience are the members and those persons who are regularly attending, or regularly involved with The Risen Refuge Church. The secondary audience are those who either were a part of The Risen Refuge Church and have stopped attending for one reason or another, or those who are friends or family of members of the church. One distinctive of this church is that it is entirely comprised of second-generation Egyptian-Americans in the Millennial or Gen-Z generations who live in an urban environment.

Researching possible solutions for creating a pastoral counseling program for this particular congregation requires considering how they communicate and what process they use when they are seeking information, advice, and guidance. The Millennial and Gen-Z generations

¹⁴⁸ Wilson, discussion board post.

are immersed in the digital sphere.¹⁴⁹ They go either firstly or entirely to the internet or other digital or online platforms for answers.¹⁵⁰ As such, any pastoral counseling program that wants to be successful will need to meet them where they are, and digital posters are a way to do just that in a way that has strong impact and good retention. The posters created during the course of the implementation of this Micro-Project can be found digitally in this Google folder,

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oaQiS2t2LOIJjZvAJUcsCOMPnnoGm_yW?usp=sharing

and in Appendix A.

Process of Creating Posters

It is simple enough to create a digital poster in theory. In general, all that is needed is an image, some text, and a some kind of application to put them together in the way the creator envisions. However, there have been some marketing posters that only use text, which used to be found a lot more in print newspapers. Some posters have a message simply in the image, and if there is text, it is not important to the meaning behind the poster. Either of these can be used effectively, and either of them could fail completely.¹⁵¹ The point here is that creating a poster that communicates a specific message is much more difficult than simply placing the usual elements on a page and publishing it on an electronic medium.¹⁵²

Creating an effective digital poster has some common elements, deciding on these elements, and how they are placed, or composed, on a background should not be the first step in

¹⁴⁹ Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” Pew Research Center, Last updated March 7, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

¹⁵⁰ Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins.”

¹⁵¹ Mary Lister, “13 of the most persuasive ads we’ve ever seen,” Blog, Wordstream, Last updated December 7, 2021, <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2019/08/13/persuasive-ads>.

¹⁵² Lister, “13 of the most persuasive ads we’ve ever seen.”

the process. Instead, the first step in the process is purposefully thinking about the message and the audience. The message should be clear, simple, and quickly understandable in order for it to be effectively used on a digital poster. While images have been shown to have more stopping power than simply text, it is important to refine the message before moving on to picking an image. Is the message informational or motivational, is a vital question to have answered at the beginning.¹⁵³ Is the intent simply to inform or educate the viewer, or is it to influence the actions or behaviors of the viewer? When that is answered the message should be something that can be communicated in one simple thought.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the message should be tailored to the audience. This means understanding what style or theme the audience likes. This can be generally understood based off demographics or known lifestyles, or it can be done with specific research into the likes and styles of the target audience.¹⁵⁵

With this information, the next consideration of the composition of the elements for the digital poster can be considered. The main elements of a digital poster are the image, the text, and the brand. The image itself is usually the dominant and most powerful aspect of the entire poster. It should convey, all by itself, a sense of the message that is intended to be received by the viewer. If the viewer only has time for a glance at the digital poster, will they be able to relate the basic thoughts or feelings that poster may have invoked?¹⁵⁶ The stronger images have been

¹⁵³ Andrea Hattox, “Hot to make a poster that grabs attention,” Blog, Shutterstock, Last updated June 6, 2022, <https://www.shutterstock.com/blog/how-to-make-a-poster>.

¹⁵⁴ Natalie Wiley, “How to Design a Poster: Example Design & Layout Tips,” Insights, Printivity, Last modified March 9, 2023, <https://www.printivity.com/insights/2020/03/25/how-to-design-a-poster-example-design-layout-tips/>.

¹⁵⁵ Wiley, “How to Design a Poster: Example Design & Layout Tips.”

¹⁵⁶ Dimple Meera Jom, “5 Common Mistakes in Social Media Poster Designing,” Pulse, LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/5-common-mistakes-social-media-poster-designing-dimple-meera-jom>.

shown to be images that have both higher contrast and a sense of symmetry.¹⁵⁷ These images have a more powerful impact on viewers, and they tend to have a longer recall in the viewers memory. The next consideration is the text. Simply putting the message that the viewer is supposed to receive as simple text on an image will likely go unread.¹⁵⁸ The main text on the image should be focused on highlighting the specific point that is to be made or the specific action that is to be taken. The subtext can contain more of the information or more specifics on the desires action or behavior. However, the subtext is not a place to write a paragraph of instructions, or put forth a defense of the position taken. It too should be short, simple, and clear. Even if the reader stops to engage the digital poster, they will likely move on at the sight of a lot of text.

Finally, the brand or logo is usually not a dominant element in digital posters outside of marketing for commercial products.¹⁵⁹ “Believe me, no one really cares about your logo, your company name, or your company's vision.”¹⁶⁰ Branding is important for consistency. Viewers who see another digital poster that belongs to the same organization or church will want to know if it is that same group. The church logo should be placed on the digital poster, large enough and clear enough to be seen if looked for, while also not interfering with the message being communicated.

¹⁵⁷ Alena Kostyk and Bruce A, Huhmann, “Perfect social media image posts: symmetry and contrast influence consumer response,” *European Journal of Marketing* Vol. 55, No. 6 (2021): 1769, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/0309-0566.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ Jom, “5 Common Mistakes in Social Media Poster Designing.”

¹⁵⁹ Wiley, “How to Design a Poster: Example Design & Layout Tips.”

¹⁶⁰ Jom, “5 Common Mistakes in Social Media Poster Designing.”

It is usually best if the consideration for where the digital poster is going to be published is made before the creation process for the posters begins. Depending on what platform the digital poster will be published, the format restrictions and size restrictions may change dramatically.¹⁶¹ Some platforms only allow for square images, while others allow for any format, and other still may be set up for vertical images but allow square or horizontal images as long as they fit into the vertical format. If the plan is to use the same digital posters across multiple platforms, the size and format requirements of those platforms should be checked before creating the digital posters. If there is a common size available, that may be beneficial. If the common size is not the standard for that platform, it is advisable to alter the digital poster so the common size to increase the chance of it being viewed, and not skipped over for this reason. In the end, publishing on multiple platforms may require reformatting the digital poster to fit each platform best.

Finally, the program or app to be used for creating digital posters comes down to considerations of ease of use, flexibility in creativity versus preformatted styles, and cost. There are a good number of low or no cost options available that are easy to use, but they often restrict the users to preformatted styles or a limited selection of creative options.¹⁶² The more autonomy needed in creativity, the more likely the app will not be as simple to use, and it will likely have a higher cost.¹⁶³ Creating effective digital posters can be done well on apps that have low or no

¹⁶¹ Manvi Argarwal, "The complete social media image size cheat sheet," Blog, Social Pilot, Last updated March 27, 2023, <https://www.socialpilot.co/blog/social-media-image-sizes>.

¹⁶² Tashreef Shareef, "Software for Poster Design: 8 Best Apps to Use in 2023," Poster Design Software, Last modified February 22, 2023, <https://windowsreport.com/poster-design-software/>.

¹⁶³ Shareef, "Software for Poster Design: 8 Best Apps to Use in 2023."

cost, but there will be constraints including storage and possibly even watermarks that require a payment to remove.

Value of Posters for Effecting Behavioral Change

Digital posters have a strong potential to effect a change in behavior that is much greater than simple text. Studies have shown the images are more powerful than words. They have been shown to impart more information and have a longer retention. There is a reason that marketing firms for commercial products lean heavily on images or videos, which often have little or no text. Some of these marketing techniques simply use an image or a video that ends with the brand, or product placement. The images displayed are very specifically chosen to create or stir up emotions or desires in the viewer, which is then directly linked to the brand or product. Without the text to possibly cause confusion or impede the desire being created in the viewer by the image, the connection between that impulse and the product is made stronger.

Beyond commercial marketing use of digital posters, nonprofit and charity organizations use posters to increase donations and volunteers. Posters have been shown to change behaviors in persons to sway them toward giving to a cause or volunteering their time to a cause.¹⁶⁴ The research hasn't studied if that behavior change was counter to the persons attitude toward that charity before seeing the poster. In all likelihood, the posters studied had more of an augmenting effect on the viewer, making them more likely to act when they otherwise would not have acted. Regardless, a notable portion of the viewers changed their behavior from solely admiring a charity while never donating or volunteering, to making the decision to donate or volunteer.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Yusuf Bilgin and Önder Kethüda, "Charity social media marketing and its influence on charity brand image, brand trust, and donation intention," *International Society for Third Sector Research* Vol 33 (2022): 1092, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00426-7>.

¹⁶⁵ Bilgin and Kethüda, "Charity social media marketing and its influence on charity brand image, brand trust, and donation intention," 1092.

Value of Posters for Pastoral Counseling

For the purpose of this micro-project that seeks to create a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church, this data is favorable. Digital posters used for pastoral counseling are not aiming at swaying a person who would not have considered Christianity. That is research for another to complete to determine the viability of using poster for evangelism. For this pastoral counseling project, the audience is already a group of believers who may need to have their behavior swayed from a negative thought process or negative actions, to a positive thought process or righteous actions. Something along the lines to moving from despair to hope, changing of an attitude of anger or hate to one of love, or from doubting themselves to faith in Christ.

This benefit has been shown to grow legs when used on social media. Images that are liked or shared on a social media platform gain an added benefit above and beyond the initial positive behavioral change that is communicated through the image itself. Research has shown that the social part of social media actually creates a normative social influence where persons who view the shared or liked content consider the content to be socially accepted because it has already been approved by another in the same social sphere.¹⁶⁶ The perception that this shared or liked image on social media is normal or socially acceptable can predict behaviors even when the person who shared or like the image is not physically present.¹⁶⁷ This means that a digital poster that inspires hope, can grow from one person to the next as it is liked or shared, creating a beneficial consequence that goes far beyond the initial member of the church who saw it first.

¹⁶⁶ Lily Hawkins, Caire Farrow, and Jason M. Thomas, "Does exposure to socially endorsed food images on social media influence food intake," Elsevier Ltd, *Appetite* Vol. 165 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105424>.

¹⁶⁷ Hawkins, Farrow, and Thomas, "Does exposure to socially endorsed food images on social media influence food intake," 2.

Value of Posters for Stated Problem

The problem I seek to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacks a pastoral counseling program. By using the format and versatility of digital posters to create one medium by which to provide pastoral counseling to the people of The Risen Refuge Church, it is possible to provide a method for reaching these people with a positive message that can provide counsel that lifts them up, and reminds or informs them that there is a program for counseling that includes one-on-one visitation if that is what they need.

Digital posters to provide pastoral counseling may seem at first to be a stretch. To be certain, finding any research into the particular use of digital posters or printed posters to communicate pastoral counseling messages came up with nothing. However, both commercial marketing and non-profit or charitable organizations are using digital posters to communicate messages designed to change or augment patterns of behavior.¹⁶⁸ As a church, the purpose of using digital posters would not be to sell something, but to provide something for free. Digital posters have a great potential to be utilized in this way by more churches in order to have a greater impact.

Posters are shown to be able to affect behaviors, and the members and regular attendees of The Risen Refuge Church are constant consumers of digital content through social media apps and websites. With the possible added benefit of these platforms creating social validation of the digital posters, the reach of this avenue for pastoral counseling can extend far out beyond the members of the church.¹⁶⁹ The confluence of these naturally culminates in producing posters to

¹⁶⁸ Hawkings, Farrow, and Thomas, "Does exposure to socially endorsed food images on social media influence food intake," 2.

¹⁶⁹ Hawkings, Farrow, and Thomas, "Does exposure to socially endorsed food images on social media influence food intake," 2.

be used on social media or through other digital means as a helpful part of a pastoral counseling program. While this, in and of itself would not likely be a solution to this problem statement, it seems apparent that pastoral counseling completed through this and other avenues would bring beneficial results to this congregation. It is also likely, while not shown through this research, that regular encounters with pastoral counseling digital posters would increase the likelihood of members of this church seeking in-person counseling.

Recommendations for Moving Forward with Posters for Pastoral Counseling

There is much potential to reach the people in the church where they are during the week with pastoral counseling through digital posters when done with care and attention to the message, the audience, and the platform. It is very likely that the Millennial and Gen-Z generations, who were specifically researched for this project due to the demographics of The Risen Refuge Church, are not the only ones who are active on social media platforms and could benefit from pastoral counseling delivered through digital posters. This author has seen an example of how a picture is worth more than a thousand words played out in an in-person test. This test involved young men and women, mostly recent high school graduates, who were allowed to read a paragraph for five seconds, and then had to provide all the information they could from that paragraph. Then the process was repeated, only the paragraph was replaced with a photo. Overwhelmingly, much more information was given by these young men and women after seeing the photo than reading the paragraph.

The use of imagery for conveying deep and meaningful messages is not a phenomenon restricted to certain generations, or certain ages, or even certain time periods. The use of imagery to convey teach or explain something that is beyond words is also found throughout the Bible. In

the Old Testament the prophets and the songs expressed through verbal imagery thoughts, emotions, and concepts of faith and love and mercy and justice.

God is described in a verbal picture as a strong savior, mighty, and full of love and providing care for His people in Isaiah 40:11 (New International Version), “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” Rather than simply listing that God saves, cares for, provides for, is gentle with, and loving towards His people, the picture that Isaiah provides gives depth and emotion to the meaning. Creating a picture like this helps people to envision this, and feel the accompanying emotions, which will both stay in the hearts and minds of the people much longer than a list would.

Jesus uses parables full of action and images that the people he was speaking with would understand and connect. Jesus’ parables were object lessons that were meant to do more than impart knowledge, but also to give a deeper understanding into the hearts of the people.¹⁷⁰ Jesus said this about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” He painted a picture of something all his hearers would be able to envision to help them to understand the kingdom of heaven better than if he were to simply say it is worth all that you have. The biblical accounts of both teaching and changing peoples behaviors, from hopeless to hopeful for example, along with the modern research on using images to change behavior give strong reasons for further research into using digital posters as part of pastoral counseling.

¹⁷⁰ Mike Megrove Reddy, “Christ the communicator and educator,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* Vol. 98, (2017): 6, https://www.pharosjot.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_26_vol_98_2017.pdf.

There is also potential to have further research on how providing pastoral counseling may reach out to help others beyond the congregation. There are many people outside of the church who would benefit from pastoral counseling but would never come in to a counseling session that they knew was going to be Christ-centered. However, they have Christian friends who create, share, and like Christian posts. Some may think that liking and sharing a scripture verse, or a sermon snippet, or a comforting Christian saying on a pretty picture is not evangelism, or that it doesn't count as sharing your faith or proclaiming the gospel. What they may not understand is the reach that a post like that can have is into the hundreds and maybe thousands of people.

Additionally, it has a normative quality to that simple act. The more these posts get shared, by people that non-Christians know as friends could generate a social change in what is considered to be a normal Christian. Especially for the Millennial and Gen-Z generations who have grown up with social media being a part of their everyday life, a friend's post has meaning and power to it. Posts on social media have the power to tear friendships apart or bring strangers together. It has the power to stir up anger and the power to fill people with compassion. Gen-X and older generations may simply not understand how real social media is to these rapidly aging groups of people.

More than a decade ago, in 2012, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association began to focus on doing online evangelism.¹⁷¹ What they saw was a massive world-wide response to online evangelism with millions of people proclaiming that they had accepted Christ as their

¹⁷¹ Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, "Do digital decisions disciple," Christianity Today, Last modified February 26, 2015, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/march/do-digital-decisions-disciple.html>.

savior through the click of a mouse.¹⁷² The debate continues to how well these decisions are sticking, and how best to get these persons plugged into a local church that can bring them into their families and disciple them, but the response should be eye-opening. The evidence points to the willingness of people to respond to the gospel even when they are all alone with no connection to the world except through their computers or phones. When it is considered clearly, it is in those moments of solitude, when there is no one around to impress, that a person can humble themselves before God, repent, and receive the grace that Christians all over the world enjoy.¹⁷³

If the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association could take their evangelism efforts online more than a decade ago, it is about time to begin researching pastoral counseling through digital posters as well as other online means for the building up of believers. A common problem among pastors is they get a few hours once a week to preach, teach, and reach their congregants with good counsel that will build them up. These few hours simply cannot stand up to the barrage of the world and the devil throughout the week. The good news is that God has provided ways to keep in contact with them that would not have been considered possible just forty to fifty years ago. Thanks be to God.

Analysis of the Micro-Project

This micro-project was intended to be the final project in the process of researching how best to form a pastoral counseling program for the people of The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church. This project has shown, similar to the previous projects, which studied blogging and

¹⁷² Zylstra, "Do digital decisions disciple."

¹⁷³ Zylstra, "Do digital decisions disciple."

podcasting as formats that could be a part of a pastoral counseling program, that digital posters, used on social media and other online platforms, have a great potential to be utilized as part of a pastoral counseling program. In order to have constructive pastoral counseling, the counselor needs to have a connection to the person receiving the counseling. This requires the counselor to know themselves in a deep meaningful way.¹⁷⁴ It also means they should know and understand the cultural context of the person receiving help, if they are to communicate clearly.¹⁷⁵

The research that was completed in the first micro-project, along with all of the supporting data that came from the following micro-projects, point to the people in this church having a culture that views itself as mainstream Millennial and Gen-Z Americans. As such, they are deeply in-touch with digital platforms for almost every aspect of their lives.¹⁷⁶ From the moment they wake up to the alarms set on their cell phones, to how they get their daily news and updates, to what route they will take to work, to where they will get food, to paying for their food, etc. This culture relies on their phones and other digital devices as their first choice for any question they have throughout the day. This includes theological questions, biblical questions, relationship questions, spiritual questions, and more that fall neatly into the kinds of questions or concerns that pastoral counseling is uniquely suited to helping with.

Pastoral counseling has been thought of as that thing that happens in offices not located in churches by certified counselors who are not beholden to any particular church or denomination.¹⁷⁷ Others have discovered and embraced different modes of psychotherapy as

¹⁷⁴ Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 55.

¹⁷⁵ Clinton and Hawkins, 502.

¹⁷⁶ “How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith.”

¹⁷⁷ Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 23.

fitting perfectly with what good pastors and ministers have already been doing for their congregants.¹⁷⁸ However, all of these styles and modes of psychotherapy and counseling techniques have in common the very same thing that has shifted during the era of the Millennial and Gen-Z Christian: presence.

Traditionally, which is to say for as long as pastoral counseling has been practice in any shape or form, pastoral counseling has been accomplished by the counselor being physically present with the person receiving the counseling. The only occasion where pastoral counseling has taken place without both parties being physically present is possibly in letters or the Epistles. Even that only fits into the definition of pastoral counseling in the broadest sense. The challenge then, is to shift from researching new modes for therapy to new mediums for therapy. Certainly there will be benefits to in-person counseling that will not be available through counseling via digital posters, but when the culture is reluctant to make time for an old-fashioned meeting in the pastor's office, a digital poster with a helpful message of hope, or peace, or comfort, is better than no message.

Conclusion

The need for further research on new mediums, such as digital poster, for delivering pastoral counseling is evident by the sufficient amount of research in the field of marketing that clearly demonstrates the power of images to change behaviors and influence people.¹⁷⁹ Using these digital means to communicate pastoral counseling should never be so dramatic or overt as

¹⁷⁸ Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 25.

¹⁷⁹ Kostyk and Huhmann, "Perfect social media image posts: symmetry and contrast influence consumer response," 1750.

to focus on forcefully changing the desires of another. Instead, researchers and pastoral counselors should recognize the results of secular research indicates this is a useful medium for communicating with these and likely future generations to come.

The Risen Refuge Church is unique in many ways that affected the direction and results of this study, which garnered meaningful data. The hope is that others can see these results as call to further study how the people in congregations across the country can be helped, encouraged, and provided beneficial counsel through avenues that would never have been considered before, but are ingrained into the lives of these Christians today.

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECTS

Introduction

In order to address the problem I seek to resolve, which is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in Jersey City lacks a pastoral counseling program, I conducted four Micro-Projects that all yielded constructive results. The Interview and Analysis Micro-Project clarified that the members of the church understood the benefits of pastoral counseling and they also held a desire for a pastoral counseling program. The Micro-Project also illuminated two main roadblocks, which were the believed lack of time to participate in an in-person pastoral counseling session, and that previous to their current pastor, had not had enough time to develop a trust with any former pastor. Since they felt that the later was no longer an obstacle as the current pastor had, had time over the previous four years to grow to know and trust the current pastor, this turned the research to look further into solving the problem of a lack of time for in-person pastoral counseling. This information led to choosing the subsequent three Micro-Projects, which all focused on how to organize a pastoral counseling program for a congregation that desires pastoral counseling but doesn't have time for meetings by employing formats that utilize the internet and social media.

After considering the tight demographics of this group, specifically that of second-generation Millennial and Gen-Z Egyptian-Americans living in an urban environment, Micro-Projects were chosen that would seem to have the best possibility of reaching this audience through digital means based on their trends for consuming information. The result were the following three Micro-Project: Blogging, Podcasts, and Digital Posters. In all, these avenues for delivering pastoral counseling content showed significant promise as part of a pastoral

counseling program, which would also include and encourage in-person, traditional counseling methods.

Assessments

Learning gained from Micro-Projects

The results from these Micro-Projects pointed to a benefit in giving proper consideration to how the recipients of a pastoral counseling program prefer to communicate. After considerations are made regarding how a congregation seeks and receives information, it becomes a matter of creating a pastoral counseling program that effectively reaches more of the congregation because it is communicating via the platforms and processes that they regularly use.

The five people who were part of the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project were chosen to represent the broadest range of this arguably small demographic that make up The Risen Refuge Church. These interviews provided qualitative information, specifically that they believed there is a benefit that could come from a pastoral counseling program, one that they felt would be positively received by the members. However, another thing that was quickly apparent from these interviews was their initial confusion regarding what pastoral counseling is. Four out of the five began answering the interview questions in ways that indicated they did not understand the purpose or function of pastoral counseling. After explaining to them that pastoral counseling is what they understand as secular therapy from a Christian perspective, at three of those four acknowledged they had actually experienced pastoral counseling, however only one of them received pastoral counseling in a formal setting.

Considering this group was chosen specifically to be representative of the whole, it was apparent The Risen Refuge Church would not organically develop a manner of seeking out pastoral counseling mainly because they did not have an understanding of what it was or that it was available to them. To attempt to create a pastoral counseling program that included solely in-person, on-site pastoral counseling would likely not prove successful among a group because of both that lack of understanding, and that, as part of their urban, big-city lifestyle, they were culturally not accustomed to having time in their busy weeks to go out of their way for an hour or half-hour counseling session. Instead, what was needed was to research other avenues that they regularly access to delivery pastoral counseling.

Taking the demographics of the members of The Risen Refuge Church into account, trends indicated that they often read blogs for information and for pleasure. The Blogging Micro-Project results that indicated it was a strong avenue for reaching this group with pastoral counseling content. Blogging as a whole is continuing to grow even after decades of the platform being around, and the data show Millennials and Gen-Z are large consumers of blogs. Using a blog to have a voice that speaks to matters of concern that this group specifically, and people in general, struggle with creates a space where the relationship between the pastor and the congregation can grow, even without being physically present. Blogs, when written properly, allow pastors to have their own voice come through in the written style, much like someone will read a letter from a loved in and hear their voice through the written words. It also allows pastors to bring up topics that they simply don't have time for, or don't feel they can adequately address in a sermon. Blogs can have images and videos to support the post, as well as links to other sites or resources that pertain to the topic. Blogs can be shared, saved, re-read, and linked back to in future posts or across different social media platforms.

However, blogs have the limitation of being essentially one-way communication. There is the option to allow for readers to make comments, but this doesn't replace the back and forth of two-way conversations found in the traditional counseling session. The hope that pushes back on this limitation a little is that some of those who read these blogs may be enticed to speak directly to their pastor about something they read. Blogs also have the limitation due to the lack of body language or tonality in the written word. This may be seen as a limitation, but it may also be a benefit as much of interpersonal miscommunication that happens is the result of misinterpreting the tone of voice or the facial expression.

All of this, the benefits and the limitations demonstrate that this is a viable and useful means for pastoral counseling, and that pastors should take at least as much care in what they say on a blog as they do when they speak to a church member in counseling. While a well-written blog has the opportunity to provide hope to many people who read it, a haphazardly written blog has an equally large audience to dishearten. With prayerful consideration, and care taken in producing the content, the impact that a pastoral counseling blog can have on the people in The Risen Refuge Church could be powerfully beneficial.

Podcasting is newer than blogging, and reflects that in the reach it has to younger audiences. Interestingly, podcasts also have a large base in the older Gen-X group, and all three of these generations, including Millennials and Gen-Z, are continuing to grow in their consumption of podcasts. It is possible the growth of podcasts among the younger generation is because of its integration with social media platforms they are more used to. Podcasts are on YouTube, and linked to from dedicated pages on other platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and even newer platforms like TikTok and Snapchat.

Podcasting as a part of a pastoral counseling program can be used either in addition to blogs or as another alternative for blogging. Traditionally, podcasting is the modern equivalent to the radio talk show, but there are many podcasters that use video as well, and have a large following with that format. One of the benefits that can come from podcasting for pastoral counseling is similar to those from blogging, but with the added benefit of hearing the actual voice or voices. Through the audio of a podcast, pastoral counseling has the added tonality, which can carry more weight and add a depth to the message that could otherwise be more difficult to portray in text. It is also easier to add other voices in to a podcast through using different formats like an interview with an expert, a discussion with a counterpart, or even a call-in show.

Podcasts also have the added benefit of being available to people while on the move. For this ministry, this aspect of podcasting is the biggest benefit of this medium. For a group that is constantly on the move, going to work, or to hang out with friends, to a party, to a family gathering, or to many other activities, having a way to reach them in transit is huge as it is one of the few times in their day not filled with other activities. Like many people, they will fill their time driving, walking, or riding the subway by listening to something on their phones. By providing quality, interesting pastoral counseling podcasts, the members of The Risen Refuge Church can receive messages of hope and encouragement during the week wherever they are.

The limitation of podcasting for pastoral ministry is mostly in the technical aspect of producing quality podcasts. There are apps now that allow for a podcast to be recorded, edited, and produced all on a smart phone, but for podcasts to be truly effective, the quality has to be in both the content and in the clarity of the audio, and these apps do not have the audio quality needed. This may be an obstacle for pastors who do not have the technical skills and training, but

the benefit to podcasting makes this an obstacle that pastors should be encouraged to find a way to overcome either by learning how to produce better podcasts, or by employing a church member who is gifted in this area.

Similar to how podcasts add depth through the spoken word, digital posters add depth in through the power of pictures. A picture is worth a thousand words is a popular saying because it is true. To describe a painting, sculpture, or a dance cannot convey the same power, emotion, or meaning that seeing or experiencing it does. The people of The Risen Refuge Church are constantly on social media through their phones and computers, and almost every social media platform include images, and indeed a few of them were designed to primarily around sharing images. Using social media to share these images with text that convey spiritual, encouraging messages of hope has also become common among many people and pages, and can likely be seen on every social media platform. Creating digital posters that share positive messages of the hope that is found in Christ for people who are struggling with known problems is simply using what is already there with a directed and specific pastoral counseling intent.

Those who work in the secular professions of advertising and marketing know full well the power of images, and how they can persuade, nudge, and even change attitudes in targeted audiences. It has also been shown in studies of non-profit organizations that using images in marketing can increase the likeliness of a person to volunteer or to donate more to that organization. What this means for the ministry to the people of The Risen Refuge Church is that digital posters can be easily placed where they can see them, and that these posters are likely to have a positive affect. Additionally, digital posters can be shared by the viewer to exponentially increase the breadth of the audience reached. By using the church logo, hyperlinks, and QR

codes, digital posters may also become an avenue for directing viewers to other areas of this pastoral counseling program, like the blog, the podcast, and the in-person sessions.

Creating a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church that includes traditional in-person meetings, blog posts, podcast episodes, and digital posters can have a profound, positive affect on the people of this church, and likely even reach into the community with a similarly positive result. For a group that realizes the benefits of pastoral counseling, but does not believe they have the time for traditional counseling sessions, a pastoral counseling program that includes utilizing avenues that reach out to them, where they are through the week, can help deliver hope and encouragement.

Feedback on implementation and assessment of Micro-Projects

The feedback received during the course of these Micro-Projects helped refine processes and clarify specifics of how to conduct each project. In the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project, and the Podcast Micro-Project, there was peer and instructor advice that helped in both the formation and the implementation of the projects. A concern arose while constructing the plan for the interviews regarding how to maintain consistency between each interview, while still allowing for clarity in each answer. Each interview had identical questions for each person to answer, however, should the person not understand the question, or give an answer that the researcher didn't understand, the researcher wondered, should clarifying statements be provided or follow-up be asked? A peer who reviewed this question encouraged the use of follow-up questions in order to obtain the most clarity. This was seconded by the professor who explained that asking the same questions of all the participants was key, but clarifications or follow-up questions should be asked as needed.

A technical question came up in the course of planning for the implementation of the podcast. Podcasts must have good audio quality. Nobody wants to listen to a podcast they cannot hear well, or has all kinds of competing noises that distract from the content. One of the first problems found by novice podcasters is that the microphone records all manner of background noises that are normally ignored when a person is accustomed to the sounds of a space. A peer suggested an article online titled “12 Methods to Eliminate or Minimize Podcast Background Noise.”¹⁸⁰ He noted two suggestions the author made: use a dynamic mic, and add acoustic treatments to the room used for recording.¹⁸¹ The instructor advised similarly to pad the room with whatever was available and could best absorb the sound. During the implementation of the Podcasts Micro-Project, a dynamic mic was used during, but soundproofing the room proved to be too difficult. Instead, a six-sided box was formed out of a foam pad that was just big enough to fit around the mic, with a two-inch opening in front of the mic for the podcaster to speak through. This ended up working better than expected, and the recordings had relatively little background noise.

One peer provided feedback on the Blogging Micro-Project, which added some clarity, and eased some tension. One of the questions going into the planning for this Micro-Project was, what will make this blog stand out among all the other blogs out there. Admittedly, there are a lot of other blogs out there that are far better than the one put together by this researcher. However, a peer who had experience in blogging noted that nearly all of the views he received on his blog were from people who knew him. The thing that made the Faith of the Centurion blog, the blog

¹⁸⁰ Dennis, “Got Podcast Background Noise? Here’s How to Eliminate Ambient Noise,” Castos, last updated June 7, 2021, <https://castos.com/podcast-background-noise/>.

¹⁸¹ Dennis, “Got Podcast Background Noise? Here’s How to Eliminate Ambient Noise.”

created for this Micro-Project, stand out among all the other blogs was that the audience knows the blogger personally – they love him and respect him as their pastor. From that realization grew the plan to make sure the blog was written in a conversational tone, so that the people in the church could hear their pastor when they read the blog.

During the organization phase of the Digital Poster Micro-Project, a peer made a suggestion regarding whether or not to use scripture on the posters. The advice was to not use scripture on the posters in order to not dissuade persons who might be offended. This advice was seriously considered, and the logic seemed sound. It was advised against in order to not make those who are not believers feel uncomfortable or judged, and as a result, ignore what might have otherwise affected them positively. This was given much thought, and the comments were re-read a few times. The decision was made after prayer and after noting that the beginning of the peer's recommendation, he said that his first thought was, of course there should be scripture on the posters. While his reason for not using scripture after that was well thought out, this researcher remembered that there is power in the Word of God, and decided that it should be included.

Possible effects of the Micro-Projects on this ministry

The standard way of performing as a pastor in a traditional church needs to change for a pastoral counseling ministry to succeed. In order for the relationship between pastor and parish to grow, there needs to be more opportunities for the parish to interact with the pastor. However, that presents a problem when the people do not feel they have the time for much interaction with the pastor beyond Sunday mornings and special events here and there. Even home visitation is difficult to schedule, and calling or texting each person individually is not feasible. The Interview and Analysis Micro-Project showed the importance of purposeful and planned

communication, and the Blogging, Podcast, and Digital Poster Micro-Projects all demonstrated they can serve a good platforms for mass communication of pastoral counseling content. The blogs, podcast episodes and posters were all well-received and had an additional affect of reaching outside of the church to people who were not connected to the church. However, that additional unforeseen audience will not change the focus or purpose of these tools for this ministry.

The possible effect of these Micro-Projects is a growth in pastoral counseling through these avenues, and a growth in interest in, in-person pastoral counseling. Likely, the later will be much slower to increase. With a consistent and positive publishing schedule for the blog posts, podcast episodes, and digital posters, all if which should include a link to information about pastoral counseling offered at the church, more people in the church should seek out the pastor for counseling as the need arises.

What was not learned or learned unexpectedly from Micro-Projects

During the course of implementing these Micro-Projects, it was not learned if it was possible to continue all three of these platforms consistently and continually for the long term. Any one of these three would easily add 10-hours to any given work week. While competing this research, it became clear that there is a process that can be followed to keep a consistent posting agenda, and even planning calendars to help a pastor stay ahead of schedule. For one pastor to complete all three of these on a weekly schedule, a task that would require at least 30-hours of work, does not seem tenable. This leads to what was learned, which was not expected. Pastors cannot complete all three of these as part of one pastoral counseling program and still fulfill all of their other pastoral duties. These are a couple possible solutions to this, which involve either working on only one of these per week on a rotation, or getting assistance from others.

It was also not learned how The Risen Refuge Church would interact with blogs, podcasts, or digital posters in the long-term. These were researched for their efficacy based on the demographics of the people in this church, and the cultural information learned about this group specifically during the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project. While trends have shown that there has been a continued increase in the use of these platforms over more than a decade, without a long-term study, it cannot be discerned if these will have a continued benefit through the years. Looking forward, it seems that these avenues for pastoral counseling should be continued as long as they are efficacious, which means there should be a predetermined process in place for reviewing these ministries on a regular basis.

Another point that is important to these platforms that was not learned during these Micro-Projects was how to utilize search engine optimization (SEO) and social media analytics, which drive are needed to make sure the content being published gets on the screens of the people in the church. Monitoring and using SEO and analytics can be so confusing that there are people who are paid to do this in larger companies or contracted to do this for smaller companies. How to use these tools were not researched or discussed in any part of these Micro-Projects.

Finally, it was learned that research into the effectiveness of the use of blogs, podcasts, or digital posters for church ministries is incredibly lacking. Even beyond their use for pastoral ministry, these avenues for other ministries of the church need more research to assist church leaders in properly using them for the work of the Holy Spirit in their churches. Almost all of the information that was gained about these platforms were from secular studies, and much of that came from marketing and advertising. The other abundance of data was practical guidance and information that was created for individuals or leaders of small organizations on how to create a

presence for their group on these platforms in order to generate income or increase visibility and engagement so they can generate income. All of this was useful, but just like there is an important underlying difference between secular counseling and pastoral counseling, there is also a difference between secular and pastoral use of these platforms that should be researched.

Extent to which Micro-Projects addressed ministry problem

The results from these Micro-Projects show that The Risen Refuge Church recognizes the benefits of pastoral counseling and believe a pastoral counseling program would help the church. These results also show that using blogs, podcasts, or digital posters would be an effective way to extend the reach of pastoral counseling for this church, and has the potential to increase interest and utilization of in-person pastoral counseling. The problem that I sought to resolve is that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in Jersey City lacks a pastoral counseling program. These Micro-Projects have addressed this problem, and demonstrated these are three options that could be utilized as a positive part of a pastoral counseling program.

These Micro-Projects have improved the interest in pastoral counseling among the members of The Risen Refuge Church, and have given light to a new direction for a robust pastoral counseling program. By engaging those in the church who show an interest in helping others, and an proficiency on these platforms, the people of the church can become a part of the church's pastoral counseling program. By taking the burden for the creation of content away from the pastor and empowering the people of the church to do the work of the church, even the work of assisting with pastoral counseling, this program can continue for years to come.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the study of this problem, the vision was to address a missing ministry in a newly created church that, while recently planted, had many years of growing

together. However, despite all these years of growing together, and the recognition and blessing to become an autonomous church by the leaders and members of the parent church, they lacked a vital component to their church. The initial vision to addressing this problem was through the creation of a traditional pastoral counseling program that could be initiated, publicized, and grown in this church. After the results of the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project, it became clear that this vision would not fit for this congregation. Due to the ethnic enculturation and the demographics of this group, a different solution needed to be studied.

It was unclear if taking a non-traditional route to providing pastoral counseling would be a valid option to address this problem. Through each of the following Micro-Projects, it became more and more clear that blogs, podcasts, and digital posters can all be used for pastoral counseling for The Risen Refuge Church. Even in the final assessment of these projects, there is encouraging news. Through engaging the people of The Risen Refuge Church in the ministry of providing pastoral counseling through these platforms, they will themselves become a part of the solution to the problem that was set out to be addressed for them.

CHAPTER 7: MINISTRY NEXT STEPS

Introduction

The Micro-Projects completed in the course of researching a solution for the stated problem provided data that pointed to potential beneficial results of using digital communication means to provide pastoral counseling. The benefits shown in these Micro-Projects demonstrate these are not solely areas where future research and consideration would be valuable, but they are currently beneficial for ministry in such a way that pastoral counselors should be encouraged to begin engaging any or all of these as part of their counseling efforts immediately. The problem I sought to resolve was that The Risen Refuge Free Methodist Church in New Jersey lacked a pastoral counseling program. These Micro-Projects have shown that blogs, podcasts, and digital posters can be effectively used as a solution for that problem, and that the planning process for fully implementing them into an active program needs to start straightaway. Additionally, while planning the implementation of these Micro-Projects come new problems - problems that are better stated as ministerial opportunities that offer more chances for learning, growth, and the demonstration of the authority and love of God.

Looking forward, the next steps involve creating and implementing an intentional pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church, planning for a continued evaluation of this pastoral counseling program on a regularly scheduled basis, and encouraging further research into the use of modern communication strategies to deliver pastoral counseling. These Micro-Projects have not yet become established parts of a pastoral counseling program for The Risen Refuge Church. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are considerations to be made regarding the implementation and sustained continuation of these arms of the new pastoral

counseling program. These considerations must be made with the same focus on prayer and careful consideration that was used throughout this research.

Next Steps

Strategic application of learning

The first step in applying the knowledge from these Micro-Projects is to discuss what was learned with church leadership. The research completed in these projects was done openly, and many in the church body have read the blogs, listened to the podcast episodes, and seen the digital posters. Some were even, of course, more directly involved with the Interview and Analysis Micro-Project, providing valuable insight that directed the course of this study. To plan the implementation of a pastoral counseling program without them now, would not be inline with the process, nor would it be beneficial to the success of the program.

Those persons who make up The Risen Refuge Church leadership are in that position because of their love for God, His church, and the continued ministry through the church. As such, they are both influential leaders, and some of the most dedicated servants in the church. Therefore, the results of these projects will be first presented to them, along with a proposed plan for implementation and long-term continuation of this pastoral counseling program. The presentation will contain the impetus for this research, the scriptural defense for this ministry, and the results of these studies, to include the benefits and the difficulties in implementing this program. This meeting will include enough time for thorough questions, and candor will be encouraged in their questions and comments in order to ensure as thorough an understanding as possible can be obtained by those present.

The plan that will be presented to The Risen Refuge Church leadership is to implement all platforms researched in these Micro-Projects over time with the assistance of church members who have been gifted in these areas. The persons involved in each of these parts of this ministry will be included in creating content, formatting, and publishing, again as they have gifts and a willing heart to serve. A pastoral counseling ministry team will be formed to encourage each other and coordinate this new ministry in a way that reaches out to deliver Godly encouragement and hope, while also creating a sense of Christian community among the team members.

None of these platforms will be rushed. Instead, they will be launched after the team has been formed, a process is agreed on, future content has been created, and a reasonable schedule has been made. Patience will be encouraged for the leadership team after the results of the research and the plan for implementation has been presented to them. At the conclusion of the meeting, there will be a time of prayer, followed by a month of prayer and consideration. During this time, they will have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts with the pastor or each other, and ask questions to the pastor as they think of them. Finally, the leadership will come together and bring their thoughts on how to implement this new pastoral counseling program. Changes will be discussed and prayed over, and a schedule for announcing and implementing the program will be decided upon.

Planned evaluation for the continued application in ministry

Considering the next steps after the implementation of the ministry is crucial to the continuation of a pastoral counseling program that endures for the benefit and growth of the members and The Risen Refuge Church as a whole. It is not practical to think that the first plan for this ministry will operate perfectly, and survive over the long-term. Also, not planning for changes or alterations to the initial plan could engender a feeling of failure among the people of

the church when a part or a few parts of the plan do not work as expected. Creating a process of evaluation and alteration that is scheduled ahead of time gives all who are involved in the ministry a sense that unforeseen obstacles or limitations to the effectiveness of their work does not equate to failure. Instead, by knowing and planning for changes, the plans that don't work well can be seen as opportunities for growth and expansion of the ministry, and the plans that work well can be celebrated and lead to giving God praise.

An initial evaluation of each platform will be recommended to take place at six months after the initial post. There is likely to be a desire to know how well the ministry is working almost immediately, but by conducting an evaluation too soon will not give reliable data, and could result in changing something that would otherwise have been beneficial. Depending on the publishing schedule, looking at the analytics for each platform at six months should give at least 12 data points, likely more, and enough time for trends to start to appear. Beyond a word-of-mouth survey, a short written survey with a combination of Likert scale questions and open-ended questions will be created and published through a survey website. With this survey, the team can review both quantitative and qualitative data directly from those people most directly involved in using the pastoral counseling program. After this evaluation is completed, and the subsequent changes or alterations are made, a plan will be proposed to perform similar future evaluations of the ministry on an either annually or semi-annual basis.

Recommendations for future research

More research into the use of digital communication tools and platforms to deliver pastoral counseling is needed. As noted earlier, these platforms are already being used for this purpose without the guidance of research to help pastors with best practices for effective use of these platforms for their ministries. The research that was used for these Micro-Projects was

sufficient for the purpose of addressing the stated problem, but more nuanced and specific information would be beneficial if conducted specifically to address the use of these and other digital platforms for pastoral counseling. While these Micro-Projects focused on the use of blogs, podcasts, and digital posters to communicate pastoral counseling messages, there are many other options that should be explored. One option could be to study the use of social media platforms, and how different platforms may be able to reach audiences with pastoral counseling messages better than others. Also, considering the demographics of the use of different social media platforms, it would be helpful to study if tailoring pastoral counseling content to each platform based on the preferences of the primary demographics for that platform could increase its effectiveness. Also, these studies did not use video platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, Tik-Tok, or others, so any studies that directly address the potential for use of these platforms for pastoral counseling would be valuable.

With the current proliferation of pastoral counseling focused use of blogs, podcasts, and digital posters, a study of the effectiveness of pastoral counseling provided regularly via these platforms would be advantageous for the growth of this area of study. Using analytics, interviews with successful pastoral counselors, and surveys or questionnaires a comparison and analysis of what works and what does not work would bring out some very useful data. Cross referencing this with the current wealth of advice on commercial and private secular use of these same platforms for similar purposes could show how, if at all, pastoral counseling use of these platforms differ from secular use.

How people communicate is changing, and not just in the corporate or media arenas, but it is changing individually and interpersonally as well. It is important to seriously, purposefully,

and prayerfully discern the best way to use these communication tools to provide quality pastoral counseling for the body of Christ.

Conclusion

The same hope that pastoral counselors try to impart to their clients, that there is hope to overcome their problems and their struggles, hope to see the work and the will of God even in the midst of their trials, is the hope that is held to for the use of this pastoral counseling program for the good of the people of The Risen Refuge Church. The desire of this pastoral counseling program is to provide hope and encouragement to the people of this church, and by the grace of God, this research will result in a beneficial ministry that does just that.

The message of the Gospel of Christ is that there is hope in the midst of trials, temptation, sin, pain, and even death. That hope comes from the person of Jesus, and it has been proclaimed since the ascension of Christ and the formation of the very first churches. The Word of God came through the letter penned by the Apostle Paul to the recently planted church in Rome, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13). That is the same hope that is the desire for this newly planted church in Jersey City. The results of these Micro-Projects have led to a solution to the stated problem for The Risen Refuge Church. By aptly using blogs, podcasts and digital posters, alongside traditional in-person counseling, The Risen Refuge Church can have a pastoral counseling program that will communicate the hope found in Christ, which will help the people of the church address their personal, authentic day-to-day struggles, for the glory of God.

APPENDIX A

Digital Poster Micro-Project Images



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