

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Church and Community: Bridging the Gap to Create a Culture of Acceptance
and Inclusiveness**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Matthew L. Brown

Lynchburg, Virginia

February 2024

Copyright © 2024 by Matthew L. Brown
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Mentor: Juan Dugan, D. Min

Reader: David Wheeler, PhD

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Matthew Brown

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Spring 2024

Mentor: Dr. Joshua Dugan

This DMIN project helped St. Paul High Street Baptist Church develop a community engagement team that helped them reestablish its long-lasting relationship with the community surrounding the church. Certain issues within and outside of the church were discussed that had led to a lack of community engagement within recent years. A community engagement team was put together to help bridge the gap between the church and its surrounding community. To help with this, several community engagement team events were held, and surveys were given to both church and community members. Through the successful completion of this project, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church was able to reestablish itself within the community and now serves as a resource to other churches that are trying to build relationships with their community.

Key Words: Church, community, community engagement, church growth, team building, Great Commission

Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
Ministry Context.....	1
Problem Presented.....	7
Purpose Statement.....	8
Basic Assumptions.....	10
Definitions.....	10
Limitations.....	12
Delimitations.....	13
Thesis Statement.....	13
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	15
Literature Review	15
Church Decline and Culture.....	15
Community.....	20
Changing Tradition.....	21
Finances.....	27
Theological Foundations	29
Theoretical Foundations	38
Conclusion	42
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	44
Intervention Design	44
Implementation of Intervention Design	51
Community Engagement Team.....	51
Community Engagement Team Pre-Intervention Mindset.....	52
Community Engagement Team Church Survey.....	55
The Great Commission Sermon Series.....	56
Community Cookout & Survey.....	58
Community Prayer & Praise.....	59
Community Fun Day.....	60
Beyond The Walls.....	61
Pre-Intervention Church Meeting.....	62
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	64
Implementation of the Intervention Design	64
Community Engagement Team.....	64
Community Engagement Team Church Survey.....	68
The Great Commission Sermon Series.....	70
Community Cookout & Survey.....	72
Community Prayer & Praise.....	76
Community Fun Day.....	77

Beyond The Walls.....	79
Community Engagement Team Post – Intervention Mindset.....	80
Attendance Graph	82
Post – Intervention Church Meeting.	83
Post-Intervention Survey Results	83
Community Members	83
Church Members.....	85
Pastor.....	86
Impact	87
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	88
Research Implications	88
Research Applications	94
Research Limitations	97
Further Research	99
Bibliography	101
Appendix A – Project Overview	105
Appendix B – Consent Form.....	107
Appendix C - IRB Approval Letter / Waiver Page.....	109

Tables (if needed)

1.1 Attendance Graph

82

Abbreviations (if needed)

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

High Street *St. Paul High Street Baptist Church*

Engagement Team *Community Engagement Team*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

While the history and tradition of a church are undoubtedly important, sometimes, members of churches can spend more time focused on their past instead of the present and the future. Further, focusing on history and tradition can sometimes cause a church to be hesitant when looking at new ministry methods. Due to this mindset, many churches suffer and have experienced a significant membership decline.

This chapter will begin by looking into the membership decline of St. Paul High Street Baptist Church through the years. The chapter will discuss the history and context of the church, as well as probable action steps that can take place to help the church. It assumed that one of the main reasons that High Street has experienced decline is because the church has not always been welcoming and accepting of everyone. Further, the church needs to do better as it relates to connecting with community members. Intervention must occur because the church should be where anyone can come and worship the Lord. The gap between St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and the surrounding community must be bridged.

Ministry Context

At 137 years old, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church is one of Martinsville, Virginia's oldest and most historic churches. St. Paul High Street has stood the test of time in a city full of churches with different denominations and has been a beacon of light in its community and the entire city. Martinsville has a population of around 13,500 people and is full of churches. There are currently approximately 275 churches in Martinsville. Throughout the years, while many churches have formed and others have closed their doors, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church has still stood and strived to do the work of the Lord.

In 1885, a small group of men and women began to assemble in Mrs. Peggy Redd's home to organize the church. Every week, people would gather in a home to sing, pray, and talk about the goodness of God. Although there were many challenges, their strong faith and unity organized the church. Not long after people gathered, the first pastor was chosen and led the church until 1889. The tenure of the second pastor lasted from 1889 until 1892, and then the third pastor led from 1892 through 1909. During the term of that pastor, the congregation built the first church building in 1898, and this was monumental not only for the church members but also for the community in which the church was built, which is still known as the Fayette Street Historic District.

Since about 1900, the Fayette Street area has been a well-known section within Martinsville. Also, the African American population is heavily represented in this area. Further, Martinsville has an African American population of about 48%. With such a large population, this area became very popular among blacks during segregation because it was one of the few areas where blacks felt comfortable and accepted. During segregation, this area consisted of black-owned schools, businesses, doctors' offices, recreational entertainment, and many other things where blacks were welcomed. Since it became a place that was very vibrant and booming for black-owned businesses, the Fayette Street area was well known throughout the state and even the country. In fact, during entertainment events, famous black musical artists would come to perform for an event known as the June German Ball.

While things look different on Fayette Street today than they did many years ago, the memories remain. Due to its rich history, Fayette Street was recognized with a historic state highway marker. While most black-owned businesses no longer exist, many churches on the Street still exist. Including St. Paul High Street Baptist Church, there are currently nine churches

on Fayette Street. While the church's name might sound strange to some since it is in the Fayette Street district, it sits on the corners of Fayette and High Street, thus the name High Street.

From 1909 through 1922, the church had six other pastors lead it. In September of 1922, the church's longest-tenured pastor, Rev. Hezekiah Morris, began to lead and took the church to a new level. Arguably, Rev. Morris is one of the most well-known pastors in the church's history and the Martinsville area. During his 49 years at the church, High Street was very active in the community and had a membership of over 800 people at one time. The church at the time was known as one of the leading churches in the Fayette Street district and the city of Martinsville.

After great success and growth, the church was remodeled under Rev. Morris in 1942. However, the church endured one of its most challenging times when the building was destroyed by fire in 1957, and they had to worship in a local school until the present church was rebuilt and completed, holding the first service in April 1959. In what could have turned out to be an event that discouraged the people, the congregation stuck together and continued to trust God.

Rev. Morris retired in 1971, and Rev. John Powers Jr. pastored until he retired in 1985. The church's second-longest tenured pastor, Rev. William Shackleford, began his tenure in January 1986. Rev. Shackleford continued to build on the legacy and tradition established by Rev. Morris and continued by Rev. Powers. During the term of Rev. Shackleford, the church's membership continued to thrive and remained consistent at around 550 people. The church thrived because it was very active in the community. The church constantly had community outreach events and, at the time, had its own Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. Community members recognized the church as one committed to winning souls for the kingdom of God. It was a place where everyone was welcome, and the church continued to grow and do well.

After 27 years, Rev. Shackelford retired due to sickness in 2013. This was a sorrowful time for the church to lose its leader after many years and knowing they would again have to go through a pastoral search process. With respect to all the former church pastors, Rev. Morris and Rev. Shackelford are often credited and recognized as the two who moved the church forward.

After the retirement of Rev. Shackelford, the church had an interim pastor from June 2013 through June 2016, when its current pastor, Rev. Matthew Brown, began his tenure. The church membership looks drastically different now than it did years ago, with a current active member enrollment of about 140 people. Several factors have contributed to the decline of membership, such as the rise of other churches in the area, persons moving away, and death.

The church has suffered significant losses throughout the years. Former pastor Rev. Shackelford once shared with the current pastor Rev. Brown that he once counted that he had eulogized and buried over 270 members, and that is when he lost track and estimated that the number was probably much higher. Although the numbers look much different now, Rev. Brown has continued to build on the history and legacy of the church. A great sign of this was when the church received new members on Rev. Brown's very first Sunday as pastor.

While continuing to build on the church's legacy, one of the early challenges for Rev. Brown was figuring out how to move the church forward while still holding on to and not compromising the church's history. St. Paul High Street Baptist Church is a historic church in a historic district; for some members, this means more than anything else. Rev. Brown has had to be very strategic with how he has moved the church forward to avoid having some think that he was trying to ignore the history of the church. One of the main areas that Rev. Brown wanted to help move the church forward was to get back active in the community.

Throughout the years, because the church was full of college-trained educators, black business owners, and many more well-known community people of high status, the church was considered by some to be a "silver stocking" church where only a particular group of people were accepted. While this was not always the case with the church, as members started to experience success and climb the corporate ladder, the look and feel of the church began to change. This change has also affected church membership because community members do not want to be a part of a church where they do not feel welcome. Since his tenure started, it has been Rev. Brown's goal to change the view and mindset of the community as it relates to St. Paul High Street Baptist Church.

In 2017, Rev. Brown introduced, and the church accepted its new motto, "Intentionally Living, Loving, and Learning Together." The goal for Rev. Brown was to get the church to be intentional in everything they did. He wanted the church to understand the importance of loving and learning with those one lives with and worships with. The mindset of Rev. Brown was that if the church became more intentional about how they did things, it would first help those already a part of the church, and then they could focus on those outside the church. Early on, Rev. Brown noticed a significant issue: while he loved the people, and the people loved him, they all did not love each other. He knew the first step to changing things was working on things on the inside before focusing on the outside.

After four years under Rev. Brown's leadership, the church made some changes, and the church began to look, feel, and function as it had never done before. For example, being a church of high status, members always dressed very dignifiedly. Seeing that this could be why some people choose not to attend church, a straightforward change was that each month, the church had a dress-down Sunday so that people could come to church and feel more comfortable

without the fear of judgment because of what they had on. This change was received so well that the church currently has casual dress during the summer months of June, July, and August, and even during the other months, there is no set expectation of how people should dress; this has made members and visitors from the community feel comfortable. However, while visitors feel more comfortable, much work must be done.

First, the church still lacks some in its community efforts, so to help deal with this, Rev. Brown has led the church to start doing quarterly community events and has encouraged members to get more involved and active in the community. Secondly, and a significant concern for the pastor, is that history has seemed to repeat itself among some members because a mindset of entitlement has resurfaced. While some members have no problem with it, others are not as accepting of people from outside the church as they should be. Some members can, at times, become possessive and territorial of the church that they attend.

For example, during one of its outreach food events, one of the church leaders was very rude to a community member to the point where the community member addressed their concerns with the pastor and stated that they were turned off from the church. The pastor has since been very determined to re-establish the church's relationship with the community and to become a place where everyone feels loved and accepted no matter the color of their skin, where they come from, what they look like, what they smell like, or their economic status.

With the help of God, Rev. Brown and the church have made great strides inside and outside the church. However, just when things seemed to be going as well as they ever had, the world was shaken by a global pandemic that affected the way of life of everyone. The pandemic forced the church to stop all in-person activities and to do everything in the virtual space, which

it had never done before. After several months of functioning this way, the church could return to in-person activities, but not without challenges.

The pandemic caused some church members to become even more cautious and possessive of the church. Rev. Brown is now striving to get members to return to the church and try to reach out to the community, but the membership must help. The church cannot have any mindset of entitlement if they are to move forward beyond the pandemic. Rev. Brown is doing his best to break any stereotypes about the church and is striving to help the church to be intentional in how they live, love, and learn. By doing this, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church can soar to higher heights and deeper depths and can be a blessing and a place of promise for men, women, boys, and girls of all ages and races.

Problem Presented

The universal church comprises those who have confessed their sins and have been saved by grace through Christ Jesus. The Bible teaches that the responsibility and charge of those who have found Christ is to spread the good news to those seeking Him. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case because not all churches are always friendly and welcoming.

Due to the adherence to history and tradition, an environment and atmosphere have been created that has hindered the church's growth and affected its reach in the community. While this is not always the intention of any church, in some places, this has created an us versus them mindset between the church and the world. However, St. Paul High Street should be willing to be an example to other churches by helping to mend this divide between the church and the community. The church must be ready to reach beyond its walls to welcome those who seek to know Jesus. The church should be a place where anyone seeking Christ can attend.

In a world where many people are lost and looking for help due to spiritual, financial, mental, physical, or emotional issues, churches should be a place where they can turn for help. Even those struggling with drugs, alcohol, or abuse should be able to turn to the church; this is especially important for St. Paul High Street because there are persons within the Fayette Community who are dealing with these types of issues.

High Street Baptist Church is located in the Fayette Community, so the people of the community should be able to turn to the church in their time of need. However, many people in the community do not feel comfortable with the church because they feel they will be judged, so the connection that should exist does not. However, in the past, High Street was very well connected with the community, but through the years and for various reasons, things changed, becoming a significant problem. This connection between church and community must be re-established, which can benefit both the church and the community. The problem at St. Paul High Street Baptist Church is that members exhibit exclusiveness and are not always accepting of individuals outside the church.

Purpose Statement

This DMin action research project aims to develop a community engagement team to create a renewed connection between the High Street Baptist Church and the community. The church needs to understand how exclusiveness has hindered its growth; this research will provide examples to explain this. For example, the pastor once received a complaint from a community member visiting the church that they did not feel comfortable and that some members did not seem friendly. The pastor will address this and allow input from other members who may have heard similar comments.

Along with many other churches, High Street is in decline because they are not growing, and part of the reason they are not growing is that they are not the type of church that is open to everyone. The pastor aims to do a lot of preaching and teaching on love and acceptance to help with this. While some churches say that their doors swing open on welcome hinges, this is not the case because many people outside the church have been shunned and rejected. Also, at times, the world feels shut out from the church. Too often, people of certain ages, colors, or races are not accepted. In some cases, the drunk, drug addict, and whoremonger are also not accepted.

Further, persons with unclean backgrounds or who may live an alternative lifestyle are not always welcome; this is problematic because there is a considerable population of people like this within the community surrounding High Street Baptist Church. While walking into the church, members often pass by community members whom they should contact and offer a helping hand. Members should not walk past those who need to be helped because they probably were once helped as well. The pastor will work to get church members to realize that all unsaved people living in certain conditions are not looking for handouts; sometimes, they need a hand-up. The church should bring them in and help them get their life back on track.

The Bible instructs God's children to live harmoniously and be kind to one another. Jesus himself not only dwelled among His followers but also dwelled among thieves and prostitutes. Unfortunately, High Street Baptist Church has become a place where believers have closed their spiritual eyes and lost sight of the Great Commission. Some saved members have forgotten they were once unsaved and needed to be reached.

Over 137 years ago, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church was established to share the good news of Jesus with those outside the building. It cannot wait for those who are not saved to come in. Through proper teaching, training, and hands-on interaction, High Street will stop

acting as if they are an exclusive country club. Instead, it will be a place where all men, women, boys, and girls are welcome. High Street must establish a consistent connection with the community so they can do the relevant and effective ministry that Christ desires. Community members who are unsaved and looking for a church home must know that the church will not reject them because of their sins. However, while the church will accept them, they will be taught the importance of seeking forgiveness for their sins. Church and community members will be taught the true meaning of love. Jesus was a friend of sinners, and that is how He reached and saved them, so the church must follow that example.

Basic Assumptions

In over six years of leadership, the current pastor has successfully led change within the church. The church has ventured into uncharted waters that some probably thought impossible. Since the pastor has the influence of most within the church, as long a plan is put together that is very direct and intentional, it can be assumed that the church will change its ways, become more mission-minded, and accept people from outside of the church. Further, being a community-oriented church is nothing new for the church; they just got away from their ways. It can also be assumed that the current pastor has a different plan for the church's future than his predecessor. The pastor fully believes that anywhere one has been before, one can get back. Therefore, St. Paul High Street can return to being the community church it once was.

Definitions

This project discusses recent issues with St. Paul High Street regarding its relationship with the community surrounding the church. The pastor of St. Paul High Street wants the church to be more inclusive and more intentional in how they do things. Being more inclusive means being accepting of everyone. Accepting does not mean agreeing with a person's sin; it does,

however, mean accepting and loving them no matter their sins. Through love and acceptance, the church can help people overcome their sins. Also, to be intentional is to do everything with purpose.

To better explain the aim and direction of the church, this project may use some terms or make statements that may not sound familiar to everyone, especially those not part of an African American church. The key terms highlighted in this project that are very significant are the black church, inclusivity, intentional, and the great commission.

Black church. A black church is often referred to as an African American church. This church is comprised of primarily people of color and, in many cases, is in a community occupied by people of color. Traditions in the black church can date back many years and are usually passed down from generation to generation. The black church was formed to enhance the quality of life for African Americans by giving them opportunities for fellowship and social interaction since those opportunities were restricted during the Jim Crow era.¹ The black church has been and remains influential in black culture. Many people of color's values and belief systems are heavily based on the teaching received in the black church.

Inclusivity. Inclusivity is one of the main points of this project. St. Paul High Street Baptist Church has sometimes not been welcoming due to feeling like they were an exclusive group. However, inclusivity involves being open to an opportunity to profoundly impact those one might not otherwise come in contact. The goal for St. Paul High Street Baptist Church through this project is for the church to be more inclusive.

¹ Robert A. Wortham, *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Sociology of the Black Church and Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 24.

Intentional. Upon becoming the pastor of St. Paul High Street Baptist, Rev. Matthew Brown wanted to change the mindset of the people and how they viewed doing ministry. His goal was to get the church to think and act intentionally. The church motto is *Intentionally Living, Loving, and Learning Together*. Being intentional in faith and the context of this thesis is defined as clearly understanding the purpose of how and why certain traditions and practices exist. Even when frustrations and troubles exist in our times, being intentional means having a deliberate process of engaging self and others to act out things that can mutually influence a real change of heart.²

The Great Commission. While the Bible does not use the words *Great Commission*, Christians have used the phrase to describe Jesus's command before ascending into heaven.³ This command that Jesus gives can be found in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus instructs His disciples to spread the gospel to all people and to lead them to salvation. Although these instructions were given to the disciples, this should be the goal of every Christian.

Limitations

Limitations to this thesis project could be church leaders' and members' unwillingness to be more inclusive. Church leadership could also be reluctant to participate in implementing change within the church. With this mindset, leaders and church members may lack the desire to plan and execute the plan that leads to more inclusive practices in the church. Further, limitations could include limited participants willing to provide insight into the source of long-practiced traditions already present in the church. One fear is that there could be a divide between

² Stan Amaladas, *Intentional Leadership: Getting to the Heart of the Matter* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 31.

³ Jonathan Leeman, and Mark and Dever, *Understanding the Great Commission* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 1.

members willing to change certain aspects of the church ministry and those unwilling to make and accept any changes. Finally, the pastor hopes he will not be left alone when doing the necessary work for change.

Delimitations

Delimitations include the demographic area in which this thesis project will be implemented. St. Paul High Street Baptist Church is centrally located in the city and has easy access to the entire community. The church was once known as a community-minded church; however, things have changed over the years. Since the church once had great relationships within the community, the hope is that these relationships can be re-established. Also, the way the plans of this project will be put together and executed will be monitored and controlled by the pastor and other church leaders. Finally, due to training, the community engagement team selected by the pastor and on the front line in the community representing the church will be those who know how to reach people of any age or race adequately and appropriately.

Thesis Statement

If St. Paul High Street Baptist church becomes more inclusive, more people will accept Christ as their Savior, and the church will grow. Many believers have adopted the idea that to be welcoming of all is to welcome and be accepting of all their sins. As believers, it is imperative to understand that inclusivity does not mean that the church is embracing sin or that the church is accepting of all the beliefs and opinions of the world. Although St. Paul High Street Baptist Church does not condone sin, it must love the sinner.

It is believed that St. Paul High Street can return to being more of the community-minded church it used to be in years past. The church will return to being a place that opens its doors to all, and many lives will be positively affected. This is possible, but members and leaders must

work together to accomplish this and keep an open mind. Due to the exclusiveness of the High Street, many souls have gone unsaved, and many have fled from organized religion.

Further, St. Paul High Street should welcome all people, including those deemed sinners. Jesus came to be the world's Savior and met people where they were so that all might be saved. Believers are called to be like Jesus, which means being inclusive in our churches and presenting a welcoming atmosphere for those seeking Jesus. High Street must be welcoming and willing to go out and fulfill the Great Commission.

St. Paul High Street Baptist Church will follow a plan that includes training leaders on how to do ministry outreach and identifying the right persons to do ministry outreach. The church will also plan and hold different events to allow the community, church leaders, and members to engage and get to know each other better. To help aid this, the pastor will put together a community engagement team.

The newly appointed community engagement team will work alongside the pastor to change the scope of things in the church and to look at how things can be done differently to reach out to those who are not saved. If the community engagement team does its work effectively, then the problem of exclusiveness and non-acceptance of outsiders will be addressed. Through constant interaction, the hope is that a connection will be formed, or rather re-established, between High Street Baptist Church and the community that will last for years. Through this connection, many lives will be changed, and many souls will be saved.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

When Jesus created the church, it was meant to be a place accepting and loving of everyone. Jesus was known as being a good leader, but what made him a good leader was that he accepted everyone. He displayed this type of leadership to His disciples, and it is what He expects from churches and church leaders today. The world is full of unsaved people; many seek a church to call home. However, many are rejected because they do not fit a specific mold. This literature covers how churches need to be more accepting of people and why this must change.

Church Decline and Culture

While churches should undoubtedly be open to persons regardless of age or race because this is what Christ desires, churches must also recognize and understand the reality of church decline. More than 350,000 churches are registered in the United States, and two out of every three are declining or plateauing in attendance.⁴ The church decline is not just a church issue but a cultural one.⁵

All through different denominations, churches are on the decline across America. While the reasons for the decline of churches may vary, this is a common issue that should be addressed. Not only has church decline become an issue, but the perception of religion has also changed. Now, people are growing more anxious about the decline of the church and the demise of whole religious structures.⁶ If action is not taken, then the decline will likely get worse.

⁴ Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 5.

⁵ Bill, Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 49.

⁶ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

Perhaps one of the reasons why church decline has not been addressed is because some churches and their leaders refuse to accept that their churches are in decline. Further, what can sometimes complicate this issue is when certain members and leaders realize it while others do not, or they do but refuse to acknowledge it. However, some want to jump in and turn things around once the decline is acknowledged.⁷

On the other hand, for some churches to admit that their church is in decline may mean that they must admit that some things about their church need to change. Many congregations, denominations, and most religious institutions steadfastly avoid the terrible news they must face before good news can be proclaimed.⁸

Denial is a significant issue regarding church decline because many leaders and members refuse to accept its reality. Our church is not declining, which is something that many people say when they refuse to accept the decline.⁹ Due to this mindset, a church may not be as open and accepting of other people because if they feel that their church is not declining, they may not feel an urgency to attract new people to be a part of the ministry.

Some authors even discuss that some members become possessive of their church and, therefore, are very cautious of accepting people they may consider outsiders. Again, this is something that needs to be addressed.

How can a church and its leaders disregard people who want to get to know Christ and become a part of the church because of how they look, smell, and dress or because of the color of

⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁸ Jeffrey D. Jones, *Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches* (Bethesda, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 16.

⁹ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 18.

their skin? This is one of the main reasons why some churches are in decline; they have shut people out to the point that now, the only people who remain at the church are those who have been there for a while. Instead, churches must recapture the biblical vision that we can change the world through the Spirit's power, and by doing so, we can experience a transformed world.¹⁰ This can only be done once churches get to the point of being a place where everyone is welcomed and made to feel comfortable. This is something that must take place in all churches, but especially in African American churches.

Like churches of all races have been faced with issues to handle, such as church decline, predominantly African American churches have experienced a tremendous decline over the past few years, and even more since the COVID-19 pandemic. Some people have argued that the Black Church is dying or, even worse, dead.¹¹ There can be numerous reasons for this. Still, two that stand out are that black churches tend to hold the past in high regard, which sometimes prevents the church from moving forward, which can affect the church's mindset regarding new ministry efforts that will attract new people to the church. If this trend continues, the church risks deep splits, losing more members, and declining ministry activities.¹²

While it does not apply specifically to the black church, famed author Thom Rainer, in *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, states, "The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero."¹³ The danger of a

¹⁰ Craig L Blomberg, and Elisabeth A. Sbanotto Nesbit, *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 59.

¹¹ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), Page I.

¹² *Ibid.*, 151.

¹³ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 18.

church being more focused on its past instead of the present and future is that it very well may cause a church not to have a more significant impact on its community.

Author Emmett G. Price III addresses this in one of his books. He suggests that since the church has lost some influence on the black community, it has harmed young people.¹⁴ Perhaps attracting young people is an excellent place to start if a church wants to address church decline, and maybe they can learn something from others on how to do this. Price talks about modern corporations hiring consumer research firms to look for new social and cultural trends developed by youth so that they may be the first to align themselves with youth preferences.¹⁵ To better understand youth, perhaps churches need to become better at understanding culture.

As culture changes, the church must consider what changes it can make. Some churches have declined because while the culture and demands of their communities have changed, they have stayed the same. Thom Rainer aligns with author Emmett G Price II in that the church must regain its influence on the community, and this can be done by understanding cultural trends. Understanding cultural trends will greatly help churches that want to turn things around and experience growth instead of decline.

However, our retreat from impacting culture has turned many churches into social clubs for religious observation, and due to this, churches decline, and some die.¹⁶ This notion that some churches have become social clubs is why some churches are not acceptable to some people because a certain status is expected to become a part of the club.

¹⁴ Emmett G. Price III, *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.H3: I3, 2011), 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Becoming a Welcoming Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 52.

What has happened to the church? How did churches go from being a place where everybody was accepted to now being a place where some people are essentially turned away? Furthermore, the question must be asked: Is this why some people are no longer interested in the church, which has led to a decline? While persons certainly play a big part, they cannot be considered the sole reason for the decline of the church. Twentieth-century activities such as cars, radios, and televisions have also contributed to the decline of the church.¹⁷ Although these play a significant part, as the authors have stated, the lack of the church's understanding of culture has led to a decline.

The church must be willing to pivot into a new direction to win souls instead of losing them. As many authors have suggested and agreed on, churches must understand the importance of culture. As Nancy Head suggests, "If the only target of our efforts is the political realm and we neglect the culture around us, society will not change for the better. The decline will continue."¹⁸

Once churches understand the culture and communities around them better, they will be able to align their ministry efforts with the needs of the culture so that the church is growing instead of declining. Still, even with this in mind, the question may be asked: Why is Christianity on a steep decline in North America? Could it be that, in part, we have failed to take people through the process?"¹⁹ The answer may be simple: We cannot take people through a process if we do not accept them into the church and are willing to carry them through it. However, this

¹⁷ R. Gill, *The Empty Church Revisited 2nd ed.* (Routledge, 2003), 2.

¹⁸ Nancy E. Head, *Restoring the Shattered: Illustrating Christ's Love Through the Church in One Accord* (Newburyport, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2019), 15.

¹⁹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, Rod, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 797b.

will call for changes, and tradition can sometimes get in the way of the changes that need to be made.

Community

For changes to be made, not only do churches understand the culture, but churches must also identify with the needs and concerns of their community. While conducting research concerning the black church, one team began by asking what we think we know about our community, and what we believe anecdotally based on our experiences in our local communities?²⁰ This is an essential question for all churches to consider because how can the church impact the community without knowing its needs?

If a church wants to be effective at making changes in its community, it must be able to relate to and understand the community's needs. However, the scary thing about needs in a community is that they are constantly changing. For example, in the Black community, after the pandemic, black people have been struggling due to trauma associated with unexpected loss and transition.²¹ This is not to say that other races were not affected as well, but the black community was hit very hard, and many of those affected looked to the church for help. Due to this, if a church was not prepared by knowing the needs of the people, those in need left and went to another church for help.

For many years, churches have, at times, been guilty of trying to spoon-feed people what they think they need. For example, during the pandemic, when many schools were virtual, churches should have identified that some households did not have access to the internet, and even in some that did, the parents did not have the knowledge necessary to help their children.

²⁰ Brianna K. Parker, *I Still Believe in The Black Church* (Mansfield, TX: Black Millennial Café, LLC, 2022), 8.

²¹ Parker, *I Still Believe in The Black Church*. 9.

Also, churches sometimes assume that everyone who comes to the church is looking for a handout such as money. However, some people need a hand up. If the church wants to impact its community, it must be aware of the needs and strive to meet them.

In John 5:6, Jesus encounters a lame man and asks him, "Do you want to be made whole?" This should be the church's approach to the community, asking, "How can we help you? How can we serve you? What are your real needs?"²² Further, a church should know how the community feels about them and their tradition. While being mindful of this, the church must shift focus away from just the four walls and look at the community. What if the effectiveness of the church was measured by how far the church community reaches out instead of only by how much the auditorium fills up?²³

Changing Tradition

In many churches, especially the African American Baptist Church, upholding tradition is very important. Many churches are rooted and grounded in their tradition; in many cases, tradition keeps some churches from making necessary changes. Just like some members deny that their church is on the decline, the same can be said about tradition and that some members deny certain traditions being a hindrance to their church. Some members are confused and often want to hang on to tradition because it makes them feel safe and comfortable.²⁴ Sadly, some church members and leaders would probably prefer to break a commandment before they change something about their tradition. However, it is a process that takes time, even when change is accepted.

²² Parker, *I Still Believe in The Black Church*. 11.

²³ Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*. 20.

²⁴ Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church*. 22.

Change can be a big adjustment for some people, so it must be done slowly. Thom Rainer suggests that leading change in the church is like eating an elephant, one bite at a time.²⁵ Ironically, some members view change as eating an elephant, thinking it is impossible or should not take place. Again, tradition is a big reason some members are against any change.

Along the same lines of being in denial about their church, some people will totally refuse any type of change no matter what. For example, in one church, whenever any internal or external force mentioned any change, some members responded that they would die before they changed.²⁶ Making such a statement may sound harsh, but this is the mindset of many when it comes to church tradition.

Having a mindset that refuses to change for the improvement of the church can be very detrimental. While discussing dying churches, Rainer asks, “How can routine and tradition get in the way of a church fulfilling its purpose?”²⁷ Well, in a world that is constantly changing and with various cultures, to fulfill its purpose, the church must sometimes be willing to adapt and change things to become more effective, but in case of cases, tradition will not allow this to happen.

Tradition has held some churches together for many years; they feel that getting away from it could do more harm than good. They value their tradition and hold to heart the values that are a part of it. Some congregations' values express the biblical and theological tradition that founded and sustained the church.²⁸ Therefore, many of these congregations believe it will

²⁵ Ibid., 40.

²⁶ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. 6.

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. 55.

continue to work if tradition has worked for this long. While this is the mindset of some within congregations, others think about this differently.

While some church members prefer to stick solely to the church's traditions instead of making changes, others are willing to make changes if it means that the church will move forward and be able to do ministry better. To this point, some traditional models of Christian education have underperformed because they need to think more strategically about how disciples grow.²⁹

Sadly, this has aided in church decline around the world because sticking to tradition seems to, at times, have more importance than growing disciples. This is not to say that tradition cannot grow disciples. However, a church must be willing to go beyond its tradition and do things differently if it means growing and training disciples, especially if it wants to reach specific age groups like millennials.

Individuals born between 1982 and 2000, known as millennials, have become disinterested in traditional church experiences.³⁰ Some traditional church experiences are not exciting to them and cannot hold their interest. Tradition has, in some ways, limited how a church creates an atmosphere inviting to those of all ages, but this does not mean that some churches have not tried. Sadly, some churches have excellent programming and outreach efforts, but they have still been unable to attract, retain, and spiritually develop many millennials.³¹

One possible reason the church has had trouble keeping younger generations in the church is that it has not revamped or changed its programs. For example, author Brianna Parker

²⁹ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), 3e.

³⁰ Joshua L. Mitchell, *Black Millennials & the Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018), 2.

³¹ Mitchell, *Black Millennials & the Church*. 2.

thinks that Sunday School would be perfect for millennials and Gen. Z. if churches revamped it because those age groups love fellowship.³² In the past, Sunday School was a great gathering place for young people, but like many other ministries in the church, it has fallen off through the years and become less effective.

Further, another thing that could potentially help churches do things differently is if they change how people view their church. For some, the view of the church in the past has been shaped by the focus of historians, and that power struggles made a better story than everyday community interaction.³³ This mindset should change because community interaction will always be critical to a church's growth.

Also, as stated earlier, culture can play a significant part in how churches do ministry, and understanding culture is necessary when it comes to having interactions with the community. Still, some will refuse to understand culture because they know it may be attached to change. However, just as churches are declining, those persons may eventually be as well. Sean Oliver-Dee compares those who might have an objection to change to dinosaurs.³⁴ Dinosaurs, of course, are extinct.

While many may dispute change due to tradition, others are all for change, especially if it means improving the church's ministry outreach and advancing the church. Those who think like this understand that we constantly undergo fundamental and incontestable generational and

³² Parker, *I Still Believe in The Black Church*. 64.

³³ Sean Oliver-Dee, *God's Unwelcome Recovery: Why the new establishment wants to proclaim the death of faith* (Chicago, IL: Lion Hudson, 2015), 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

societal change.³⁵ One thing that any church or church leader cannot deny is that the world is changing. Further, it has even been said that change is inevitable with every passing era.³⁶

Since change cannot be avoided, thankfully, some churches and leaders are committed to embracing change and moving beyond tradition if it means that it will benefit the church. The authors of *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities* even discuss how some have decided they will not cling to tradition if it no longer serves its original purpose.³⁷ Again, as most of these authors agree, tradition is not bad. However, it can sometimes hold a church from making progress regarding outreach and bringing new souls into the kingdom.

One area in which some churches have changed their traditional ways to attract more people is with their music. Regarding tradition, some churches are very particular about the type of music they allow. Some churches have now altered their music, along with their order of service, dress codes, and service times, to attract and excite new potential members from the Hip Hop generation.³⁸ This movement will undoubtedly help churches grow and become more attractive to outsiders.

Another issue that often comes along with tradition is service length. Traditionally, church services in the Black community lasted anywhere from 2 - 3 hours, but the pandemic and virtual church changed how long people are willing to sit in a worship service. Younger

³⁵ Price III, *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide*. 25.

³⁶ Harold L. Senkbeil and Lucas V. Woodford, *Church Leadership & Strategy: For the Care of Souls* (Ashland, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 37.

³⁷ Blomberg and Sbanotto Nesbit, *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities*. 258.

³⁸ Price III, *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide*. 93.

generations want to be able to attend service and be uplifted for the week within a reasonable amount of time. Churches that want to reach the lost in their community must consider service times and what takes place during the service.

Often, people are not drawn to particular churches because they are quickly turned off by certain types of music, dress codes, or other rules that may be in place due to tradition. However, churches should be willing to make necessary changes to impact their communities. Community ministry is essential as it will allow churches to join hands and connect with anyone, regardless of their faith tradition.³⁹

Community ministry will put any church on the right path to growing and helping solve the issue of church decline. Community ministry means going beyond tradition and the four walls of the church to reach the lost, which is what one wants and desires. God has enabled us as transformed people to go out and recover humanity and help change the world.⁴⁰ This means churches must be willing to accept and help change people no matter where they come from, what they may look like, their age, or their race.

Churches are to welcome strangers and offer them refuge, shelter, and hospitality.⁴¹ Luke 14:23 states, “And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

³⁹ Head, *Restoring the Shattered: Illustrating Christ's Love Through the Church in One Accord*. 23.

⁴⁰ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill, *Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

Once a church begins to understand its culture and community and moves toward doing things differently, plans and procedures should be implemented to ensure that things are done correctly and effectively. Although not easy, a church can genuinely impact its community if they commit to it. In fact, with a robust framework and a good image, Nancy Head believes that a church can change society.⁴²

The good news is that the church already has the message to change society; it must just look at how it is delivered. The church must keep in mind, though, that ministry beyond COVID-19 will be in a consistent fluctuation.⁴³ However, even with the fluctuation of things, there is a way for effective ministry to be done, but for some churches, money will be used as a reason or excuse for why changes cannot be made.

Finances

While change is needed to avoid more church decline, the authors address another area that can be an obstacle for some churches: their finances. While salvation is free and available to anyone, there is a cost for certain ministry efforts. Not only is there a cost in terms of money, but also time. It has been stated that money and time are the two most crucial resources on Earth.⁴⁴ Therefore, leaders may use both as excuses for why a church cannot further its ministry efforts in the community.

As it relates to time and money being essential to creating change within a change, the types of people identified will again have an issue with it. Those in denial about the church dying

⁴² Head, *Restoring the Shattered: Illustrating Christ's Love Through the Church in One Accord*. 89.

⁴³ Parker, *I Still Believe in The Black Church*. 149.

⁴⁴ Amoakoh Gyasi-Agyei, *Fulfilling the Great Commission Through Godly Love: A Practical Guide for Effective Visitation Ministry for Loving Churches* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2015), 18.

and refusing to admit that change is needed are the same ones who will have a problem with a church using funds in places and for people outside of the church. The church spends more money on the fraction of people sitting in the seats than the mass of people beyond the walls.⁴⁵

Sadly, in some churches, a pattern has developed where funds are only used for the church and to keep the members happy instead of funding the Great Commission.⁴⁶ Using funds to keep members happy means that funds are typically given to the members instead of putting money into the community. Thom Rainer even talks about a church that had become so inwardly focused that one of their significant expenses was subsidies for members who did not need any subsidies.⁴⁷ For a church to become more active in its community, the members cannot be inwardly focused regarding the budget.

In a constantly changing world, churches should always be prepared for the unexpected; therefore, a working budget is essential. The same applies to a church's finances, just like plans must be implemented to make changes. The best strategic plans will set several immediate and near-future goals focusing on time, energy, and finances.⁴⁸ This is needed because the budget is also a significant concern for the churches rooted in tradition. As it relates to being more accepting of outsiders, churches should consider providing a budget to different groups within the church to help plan community projects.⁴⁹ However, while budgets are essential, a church with an efficient budget can still fail to fulfill its mission.

⁴⁵ Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*. 72.

⁴⁶ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. 36.

⁴⁷ Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church*. 94.

⁴⁸ Senkbeil and Woodford, *Church Leadership & Strategy: For the Care of Souls*. 41.

⁴⁹ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*. 184.

Sometimes, churches get so caught up in money, tradition, and the list goes on that it is easy for them to forget who they are working for and why they are doing what they do. In the Bible, Paul teaches that everything is about Jesus and that it is possible for a church to have a healthy budget, good worship, relevant preaching, and a thriving family ministry, among other things, and still be in danger of failing in the mission of making disciples.⁵⁰ Jesus must always remain at the forefront of any and everything a church does.

Putting Jesus first and seeking Him will help a church on its mission to win souls and get more outsiders inside it. Also, by putting Jesus first, He will ensure the church has what it needs to run smoothly. If a church wants to accomplish its mission of going out and winning souls, it should make every effort to be sure that finances are available.

Overall, the research that has already been done and that will be done for this project will be very beneficial to St. Paul High Street and prayerfully to other churches as well. The intervention being proposed to help the church change how it accepts people will look at what research has to say and use it to put proper plans and procedures in place to help the church move forward. Also, church leaders and members will be surveyed before and after the project to get their opinions on how things changed after the intervention.

Theological Foundations

Currently, in Christianity, there is a need for more inclusiveness in our churches. An entire generation has left or is not entering churches because they do not feel welcome there. Inclusiveness in the church is imperative if we continue to reach the nations with the gospel. Churches need to become more adaptive. Being adaptive means that the ministry sees the church

⁵⁰ English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus*. Pg xxiv.

as Christ's body, the home for everyone God has called.⁵¹ The church's job is to welcome in all that God has called and go out and get them.

This is the entire mission of the church: to go out into the nations and spread the gospel. The Great Commission found in Matthew 28 speaks of this win. It says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. (Matt 28:19-20).⁵² The words of the Great Commission have long been the battle cry to inspire Christians to go into the world, make disciples, baptize new converts, and help them grow in their faith by introducing them to the profound truths of the Bible.⁵³ This is the key to going out.

To fulfill Jesus's instructions, church leaders must be willing to be inclusive. Too often, people feel rejected by churches. Rejection wreaks havoc on people's lives, which prevents them from experiencing the fullness and blessings of God.⁵⁴ Church leaders and members should want people to experience the wonderful life that God has in store for them. Any church leader who agrees to push for a more inclusive church will accept an exciting yet challenging role.⁵⁵ While challenging, church leaders can be assured that God is with them. God is constantly producing

⁵¹ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church (Youth, Family, and Culture): Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 14.

⁵² Unless noted, all Scripture is taken from the New King James Version.

⁵³ Tom Blackaby, *The Commands of Christ: What It Really Means to Follow Jesus* (Boston, MA: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 8.

⁵⁴ John Eckhardt, *Destroying the Spirit of Rejection: Receive Love and Acceptance and Find Healing* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016), 9.

⁵⁵ Commission on Religion and Race. 2016. *Guidelines Advocates for Inclusiveness: Value and Empower All Persons for Full Participation in Church and Community* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 18.

pastors, lay leaders, and congregations that are working effectively in making new disciples for Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

The challenging role that leaders should choose to take on is what Jesus instructed His disciples to do. Jesus was invested in the authority His Father gave Him, and therefore, He stated that the world was the mission field because it was full of many for whom His blood was shed.⁵⁷ Since Jesus shed His blood for everyone, everyone should be welcomed into His church. Romans instructs us to “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you” (Romans 15:7). Jesus would like us to be more thoughtful as Christians towards those we may be different from.⁵⁸

The Bible teaches that the body of Christ comprises those who have acknowledged and accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. However, many others have not accepted Jesus and need to be reached. Therefore, there must be an understanding in our churches that anytime anyone comes who has not accepted Jesus, they feel welcomed and accepted to the point that they do not feel judged or rejected and will want to come back again. However, the tradition in the church has led believers to believe that those who enter must already believe how the church believes and thinks the way the church thinks; this is not biblical, and this thinking is dangerous to the church.

For example, what if a sick or hungry person tries to attend a church? Will the church accept them or turn them away? The Scripture says, "For I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in, I was naked, and you

⁵⁶ Paul D. Borden, *Assaulting the Gates: Aiming All God's People at the Mission Field*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 16.

⁵⁷ Curtis Mitch, and Sri Edward, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010,) 590.

⁵⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Letter to the Romans: A Short Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 155.

clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me" (Matthew 25:35-36). The world is full of people who are sick, hungry and need help in general. The fate of the nations that the church is instructed to go out into will be determined by how Jesus's followers spread the gospel and do so in the face of hunger, thirst, illness, and imprisonment.⁵⁹ The world needs more people that are willing to help others. Helping others is something God wants people to do.⁶⁰

Some churches refuse to help those hurting because they have never done it before, or they used to do it and just got away from it for one reason or another. While interpretation can be different from one individual to the next, the teachings of the Bible are clear on the matter of the believer's role in winning souls for Christ. The Bible teaches that the believer is to follow Jesus and be made a fisher of men, meaning anyone can come in. The Bible says, "whosoever will" (Revelation 22:17). It has also been argued that Scripture makes repeated and explicit calls for Christians to have a particular concern for the stranger and to welcome them as if serving Jesus Himself.⁶¹

Some churches have not accepted the mindset of allowing anyone to come because it may require change. Change is more complex than it once was, however.⁶² It may require a willingness to forego tradition that has hindered the church from growing by reaching out to the masses. When considered an object, tradition means whatever is delivered or transmitted and is

⁵⁹ Sean Douglas O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*. Preaching the Word. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), 1159.

⁶⁰ Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry* (New York, Ny: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005), 4.

⁶¹ Matthew Soerens, Jenny Yang, and Leith Anderson, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 203.

⁶² Rev. Dr. Gary V. Nelson and Peter M. Dickens, *Leading in Disorienting Times: Navigating Church and Organizational Change* (Danvers, MA: Christian Board of Publication, 2015), 76.

called objective tradition. However, this is called active tradition when considering the act or the way an object is propagated and transmitted.⁶³

Tradition in the church, specifically the Baptist church, has been the reason that many have left the church. Many of these traditions are not biblical and are simply acts that have been passed down from one generation to the next. While the church does have covenants that are adopted as the fundamental beliefs of specific denominations, the Bible is ultimately what should govern the body of Christ. Instead of churches coming up with their traditions with no biblical backing, they should “keep the traditions that were delivered to them” (1 Corinthians 11:2).

If the church holds firm to biblical tradition and teaching, and through prayer and guidance of leadership that God sends, inclusiveness will come naturally to the body of Christ. The church should never "neglect to show hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2). The church should be where everyone is accepted.

Since God has poured out His love on churches and unworthy members, they, in return, should be ambassadors for Him, and this can be done by displaying the same love for others that God has shown.⁶⁴ Love is what the world needs and the church needs to give it. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Further, churches are supposed to “bear one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

Perhaps churches could love each other better and those outside of the church better if tradition did not hold them back. This is not to say that tradition is wrong and should not be a part of religious practices; however, it is the responsibility of leadership and followers of Christ to determine whether these traditions contradict the Bible's teachings. Many people have been

⁶³ George Agius, *Tradition and the Church* (Ashland, OH: TAN Books, 2005), 1.

⁶⁴ Michael E. Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 85.

turned away from church because tradition would not accept them. However, God does not care about church tradition. God has just required the church to "keep His commandments" (John 14:15).

Further, the church should remember that God accepts everyone, no matter who they are. Romans reminds the church that "God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:11). If God is that way, the church should also be that way. It is not the church's job to judge and disqualify people; only God can judge. God can see the real faces of people.⁶⁵

The church needs to allow Jesus' love and forgiveness to fill their hearts and guide their steps, and if that happens, they may be more willing to listen and try to understand those who are not saved without hedging their values.⁶⁶ For the church to become active and engaged with the communities that they are in, they must create an atmosphere of love where everyone is welcome and able to feel the presence and joy of the Lord.

The African American church's role in the community has become so subjective to its occupants that it has opened the door for negligence related to our responsibility to the people of the community. The African American Church has mastered the art of pulling dead bodies out of the bottom of the river, but we need to go upriver and see who is pushing these bodies into the river. In Jeremiah 22, God sends Jeremiah to the top of the river to challenge the king to do what is right for the community. Challenging the king is hard because once someone has benefitted from a lie, it becomes harder to persuade them to accept the truth, which will negate the benefits of the lie they have received.

⁶⁵ Maico M. Michielin, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans by Karl Barth: With an Introductory Essay by Maico Michielin* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 45.

⁶⁶ Choco De Jesús, *Love Them Anyway: Finding Hope in a Divided World Gone Crazy* (Chicago, IL: Charisma House, 2021), 12.

Nevertheless, we see that the prophet is sent directly to the table of power to confront the king. Likewise, God is speaking now to the African American Church and encouraging us to engage our communities to have access to those who make laws and influence laws. We must be involved in the political process because it directly affects the communities God has called us to serve. However, engaging those with political influence should not be for personal gain but for real community change. It is not beneficial to the community for those in the African American Church to have the mayor's cell phone number if that access does not result in restorative justice. Bryan Stevenson stated that "justice is love going public." God calls us to demonstrate love by our willingness to show up for others. Jeremiah understood that what the leader does in moderation, the followers do in excess, so Jeremiah chose to lead by example.

As with any assessment, it is only as good as one's willingness to accept what the inspection reveals. Many organizations spend enormous amounts of time money assessing the problem, only to reject the findings because of pride. These organizations continue to be disengaged from the community. Most uncompleted tasks are not a sign of incompetence, but a lack of acceptance of the truth revealed from further assessment. The longer the church takes to make the adjustment, the more it risks living beneath their God-given purpose.

Verse 3 in Jeremiah 22 emphasizes the importance of thinking and acting in opposition to tradition. This different thinking should result in different interactions with the community that first bring about repentance and are then restoration. Ephesians 4:25-29⁶⁷ The word of God reads, "Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. ²⁶ "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, ²⁷ nor give place to the devil.²⁸ Let him who stole steal no longer, but

⁶⁷ Ibid

rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

Repentance is not going cold turkey but replacing what one was doing with something new. Restoration gives back or replenishes what has been lost or stolen. Repentance and restoration was precisely what Jeremiah was challenging the king to do and what God is charging the African-American Church with, challenging the powers today to do through advocacy and interactions with the community. Jeremiah 4:3⁶⁸, "This is what the Lord says: Be fair-minded and just. Do what is right! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! Do not mistreat foreigners, orphans, and widows. Stop murdering the innocent!"

Do what is right! Help those who have been robbed! Rescue from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! These are all clear prophetic commands that cannot be negotiated. The prophet tells the king to do what is right. This is the boldness that the African American church must have if it expects to be taken seriously and see the engagement and restoration desired in our communities. There is no passive approach to sustainable change because the culture has been so ingrained that it must be uprooted and replanted. There must be a deconstruction of this mindset in the church before we can begin to build back better.

The king was faced with an ultimatum, "Do what is right or watch what you built become rubble and a laughing stock!" That same ultimatum stands today, we are to do what is right and what God calls us to do in this current time and our current context. We must fight the more

⁶⁸ Tyndale House Publishers. Holy Bible: New Living Translation. Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.

immense powers to change the climate and conditions God has called us to minister to and save. It is not enough to pull their bodies out of the water and offer them salvation. We must holistically rescue these individuals before they are pushed into the river, leveling their quality of life with the abundant life God has promised each of us.

Next, Jesus allows His convictions to dictate his direction. In other words, Jesus had the discipline to be different. Jesus knew that he needed to go through Samaria, even though Jews did not travel through Samaria and did not associate with the Samaritans. Jesus was committed to following His Father's directions and extending compassion and help to everyone. According to John 16:13, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."⁶⁹ In turn, this commitment demanded His direction, causing Jesus to enter Samaria and, ultimately, the Samaritan village of Sychar.

This is probably why the Jews did not mingle with the Samaritans. However, Jesus was on assignment. He did not allow what the other Jews felt about the Samaritans and what they believed about associating with them to dictate his route or negate what He thought His Father was telling Him to do. This reminds us that we do not launch out in someone else's litigated idea about our lives or the lives of others. Furthermore, we should not hang out in someone else's hang-ups and not move in someone else's misunderstandings of the mission God has us on.⁷⁰ If we hold fast to this, God will clarify our associations.

This text allows us to accept that certain dogmas have created community stigmas. In verse 9, the woman is surprised that Jesus even associates with her because she is a Samaritan.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Bishop L. Spenser Smith

This is due to the dogma of the time. Dogma is a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly accurate. In our society, a lot of dogma and stigma fuels prejudices. In our community, we often view Mexican as rapists and drug dealers, NFL players that protest are seen as SOBs, and as seen in our criminal justice system, black men wearing hoodies and eating skittles are threats. These are all barriers to people receiving God's love and Christ's compassion by those of us who profess Christianity here on Earth. Sometimes, despite being recipients of God's grace and mercy, we let stigmas prevent us from extending that same grace and mercy to others despite our shortcomings and downfalls.

We can learn a lot from Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. Jesus's obedience and commitment to be different ultimately led Him to where the meeting would occur. As a result, the stage had already been set for God's transformative power to change this woman's life. Even still, Jesus did not allow the stigma associated with Samaritans, nor the woman's condition, sin, and past, to stop Him from extending compassion and love. This, in turn, allowed the woman to receive God's transformative, life-altering power in her heart. Likewise, God is calling us to remain obedient and committed to God's call on our lives to be salt and light to all we encounter, despite what they look like, where they have been, what they have done, or their condition.

Theoretical Foundations

Jesus has already set the framework for the church regarding community relations. While it is okay for churches to develop ideas and their mission and vision statements, they must not forget that the ultimate mission has already been given: to go out into the nations and win souls. While Jesus was known as a great teacher and preacher, one of His greatest attributes was that His ministry consisted of going where the people were. Jesus did not make the twelve apostles stand at a crossroads and ask people to come to listen to Him preach the gospel in the temple on

the weekends. However, instead, He was out among the people, making connections and having conversations all day, every day.⁷¹

Likewise, the church needs to do the same. The days of waiting for people to come to the church are over, but the church needs to go to them instead. Sadly, with 168 hours in a week, most churches focus 90 percent of their resources on one to two hours on Sunday morning, leaving people to figure out the other 166 to 167 hours on their own.⁷² However, for the community to be receptive to the church, the church needs to be sure that they have cultivated an atmosphere that is welcoming to everyone. Following the framework of Scripture and the instructions of Jesus will help lead the church in the right direction.

The first step that the church needs to take is to eliminate any cliques that may exist and to be sure that the congregation and church leaders are committed to being more inclusive of both the saint and sinner—being accepting of the saints and sinners helps to bridge the gap between church and community. Also, the integration of representatives and resources whose primary focus is outreach, and the consistent evaluation and reevaluation of these resources are needed and would play an essential role in implementing this necessary change. Tradition cannot be a hindrance to the change occurring and being effective.

Previously, tradition has hindered the progression of the church in moving toward more generational-appropriate means of encouraging interest in the church. Some members have believed that the church would have to stray too far from its core beliefs to become more community-minded, but this is not the case. For this project, the community engagement team created will specifically concentrate on outreach that focuses on the central community where

⁷¹ Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*. 2.

⁷² Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*. 2.

the church is located. The team will meet often and, using Scripture as the framework will come up with ideas to reach the community like never before. Also, focus groups will be created with the church and community members. By creating focus groups and working with the community, inclusiveness will become more of a common thing.

Inclusiveness must be viewed as a ministry within the church. Data suggests that some people are not attending church because they do not feel like it is relevant to their lives.⁷³ Some of these people feel that the church is irrelevant because they feel uncomfortable there because the church has not met their spiritual needs. However, following Jesus' example of inclusiveness and not being concerned by affiliations or status will provide an essential foundation for those who desire to serve.

A desire to serve is necessary, and those who want to do it must also have the heart to serve. When God calls and leads individuals to use their talents to create new and innovative ways to excite people for Christ, the results will be favorable. The church and the community will both be made better.

To get favorable results, leadership will require biblically and socially focused training. Often, when it comes to doing work, especially within a community, a church is just biblically driven; however, this is not enough. The church must fully understand the dynamics of its community. Doing so will ensure that the community engagement team members are equipped to handle any questions or concerns that may arise from church and community members during their ministry work. While the result will not be easy, it is very doable, and the church and community will be blessed.

⁷³ Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*. 16.

To reconnect church and community, St. Paul High Street must follow the framework laid out, and the community engagement team must be very intentional about their work.

Following the example of Scripture, the church must accept everyone without judgment. It must be willing to feed the hungry, minister to the lost and brokenhearted, and clothe the naked. The church must be an agent of change in a world of hurting people, crime, chaos, and calamity.

Being an agent of change means doing whatever it takes within the limits of the church to better the community surrounding the church, even if it means going beyond tradition. However, if the church chooses to do some things that may not align with its tradition, it must still remember that they are representing Christ. Churches cannot substitute ministry for marketing in such a way that there is entertainment instead of equipment. The church should be willing to do things differently to reach lost souls, but they must not stray too far away from their foundation.

Christ must always be the focus. The church must follow Christ and let Him lead the way for the community to unite. One of the best things that can happen for the church and the community is for them to work together. St. Paul High Street Baptist Church members must extend an olive branch to the people in the community, and prayerfully, they will be well received. Working together, the church and community can help each other for years.

As the days and years go by, time is undoubtedly crucial because no one knows how long it will be before the Lord returns, and that is why the church must work now. Scripture encourages believers to “work while it is day because night cometh when no man can work” (John 9:4). When the Lord returns, the dead will rise, and those that are still alive will be caught up in the rapture and so it will be too late to work then. The Lord is giving believers time to do what He has asked them to, so time must not be taken for granted. St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and other churches and believers must commit to going out into their communities and

the world to win as many souls as possible. The first step to winning souls in the world is for the church to start in its community.

Conclusion

With a framework in place and a community engagement team to carry out the framework, the future looks promising for connecting church and community. The current problem at St. Paul High Street is that members exhibit exclusiveness, but plans are in place to change this. The goal is for a community engagement team to work with the pastor to create a renewed connection between the church and the community. In restoring this connection, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church will be a place that is inviting and welcoming to everyone. Through this newly formed connection, the church and community will improve. More importantly, through this connection, many people will know who Jesus is and be saved.

While aiming to connect with the community and save souls, the church must continue to be intentional. For example, while salvation is free, ministry costs. The church must set aside resources for the community engagement team. Also, church members and leaders must be committed to this cause and willing to do things they may have never done before. The church must never forget that Jesus wants the church to go out and meet people where they are. Although this may be new for some, it must be done. Those church members do not believe that "rocking the boat" is unhealthy, and in today's environment of societal change, this mindset can lead to stagnation and decline.⁷⁴ The church must speak up and be active. Jesus desired to proclaim the gospel through words.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ W. Benke, L.E. Stevens, and D.L. Loudon, *Church Wake-Up Call: A Ministries Management Approach That is Purpose-Oriented and Inter-Generational in Outreach* (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 2.

⁷⁵ Jay W. Moon and Bud W. Simon, *Effective Intercultural Evangelism: Good News in a Diverse World* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 100.

While this project aims for St. Paul High Street to better connect with its community, down the road, St. Paul High Street will serve as a model and example to other churches as to how they connect with their community. Thankfully, the church does not have to create anything from scratch; they need to follow the instructions of Jesus in the Bible and just make them relevant. The real business of life is to glorify God and be used by Him to transform unbelievers into people whose great delight is knowing and trusting Him.⁷⁶ With a committed pastor, church family, and community engagement team, better days await St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and its surrounding community.

⁷⁶ Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 16.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this project will be designed to address the problem of the strict adherence to traditions and exclusiveness that is hindering the church's growth and the ability to reach the surrounding community effectively. The goal for this project will be to move the church beyond the tradition of being inwardly focused and to explore ways to move outside of the four walls of the church building to engage with this community.

Therefore, this chapter will explain the processes by which a community engagement team will be selected, and they will explore methods that can be used to address the problem. Through a combination of a team, church leadership, and the church body, plans will be put in place to move the church forward and being successful at community engagement, while also serving as an example for other churches that may be looking for ways as to how they can get more active and involved in their community.

Intervention Design

The intervention design for the project will consist of the pastor of St. Paul High Street Baptist Church developing a strategy for putting together a community engagement team. The team will be put together so that the work will be distributed evenly so that all the work does not fall on the pastor or church leadership. This will be a major help for the pastor because in some churches, the bulk of ministry work falls on the pastor or those in a paid or formal leadership role. However, this is not sustainable and is not a good practice to follow because this can easily lead to ministry burnout of the pastor or other church leaders. When the work becomes the responsibility of only one or two people, it can be burdensome to those individuals, and it also allows a lot of gifts, talents, skills, and personalities to go to waste. The more people that are

active and participating will enhance the probability of planning and carrying out a successful intervention.

Everyone serves a different role in the body of Christ, and this is something that the pastor has been talking about for time. Therefore, setting up a strategy that allows feet, hands, toes, arms, legs, and the rest of the body to work together to get the job done is essential. Therefore, teamwork will be a strong focus of this intervention. The Bible offers an example of teamwork. From start to finish, the Bible shows that the Creator of the universe worked with a team.⁷⁷

God, the Father, is a part of the Trinity. The Trinity: The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is the ultimate picture of a ministry team.⁷⁸ All three work together in sync as a team. Each person of The Trinity is present with the other and has complete knowledge of the other.⁷⁹ An example of them working together and having knowledge of the other can be found in the Bible, which says, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). This passage also refers to the Good Shepherd, which carries a distinctively messianic reference.⁸⁰ Following this Biblical example of teamwork, the Pastor will work with a team of people for this intervention. This is in the hopes that the team approach will be more effective and engaging than if the Pastor were to implement the intervention. In fact, church leaders sometimes ask the pastor what can be done to help

⁷⁷ Ryan T. Hartwig and Warren Bird, *Teams That Thrive: Five Disciplines of Collaborative Church Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 44.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2020), 82.

⁸⁰ J. B. Lightfoot, *The Gospel of St. John: A Newly Discovered Commentary*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 191.

around the church to take things off of his plate so this will be a great time for him to delegate tasks to other people.

The community engagement team will consist of around 10 people, including the Pastor, other church leaders such as deacons and trustees, as well as other members of the congregation. The team members will be individuals familiar with and invested in the church's mission and vision and interested in moving the church forward. The team members will be selected through in-person interviews, which the Pastor will conduct at the church. Interviews will consist of critical questions related to church growth and thoughts on inclusiveness and will remain confidential between the pastor and the chairman of the board of deacons.

It is essential to create a team that is dedicated to church growth and expansion. It is also essential to create a team that has no prejudices or can look beyond their prejudices to reach everyone in the community, not just those that fit a particular image or imaginary criteria. In fact, persons that are on the team must even be willing to agree to disagree at times, or even to disagree without being disagreeable in what is in the best interest for the church. Through the interview process, those who prioritize tradition and the current church culture over reaching new souls and the community at large will be questioned about their mindset and if they are willing to change. This will be important because the right mindset will be needed to be a part of the team.

After conducting the interviews, the Pastor will notify those selected to be a part of the team with specific dates and times that the team will meet to begin its work. Each team member will be encouraged to review their calendar and alert the pastor of any scheduling conflicts. One of the primary roles of the pastor at the start of the intervention will be to develop a mindset in the people on the team that God has entrusted them to be missionaries cleverly disguised as good

neighbors.⁸¹ The community engagement team must be willing to be good neighbors to reach those in the community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to eventually get those on the outside of the four walls to enter the church building to worship and fellowship amongst everyone. Often churches expect persons to come inside right away, but instead churches must be willing to go outside into the community and meet people where they are.

During the initial meeting of the appointed community engagement team, a simple consent form will be passed out to be signed by each participant. The form will be explained in detail. Further, each participant will be asked to keep a journal of their thoughts and interactions to bring back to the team during meetings to share and prompt further dialogue related to the group's action plan. The pastor will talk about the importance of sharing thoughts and ideas, as well as constructive criticism if needed. This journal will help everyone keep track of any ideas they may have and to take notes of what happens in meetings and any activities that take place. At the end of the intervention, the notebooks will be collected by the pastor so that any useful information can be used in during the writing that will take place about the intervention.

To begin efforts to take an inclusive approach, the community engagement team will work alongside the Pastor to identify which areas must be addressed. To address a problem, those involved must be aware of the problem.⁸² In a future meeting, the engagement team will educate the church body on the interventions that will be taking place and the reasoning for their implementation. The team will inform the church body of its recommended plans to create and revamp church ministries related to traditional practices and outreach efforts. This will occur by

⁸¹ J. R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, *Ministry Mantras: Language for Cultivating Kingdom Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 233.

⁸² Ernest Easley and Jordan Easley, *Resuscitating Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), 6.

offering the church body a point of contact who is a member of the engagement team to provide education and address any questions or concerns that might arise from the church body. An engagement team designee will also be assigned to provide weekly updates via the established church communication methods to ensure members feel informed.

Further, informal interviews will be conducted by the engagement team to attempt to uncover any biases of current members regarding inclusiveness. This will help get to the root of the problem and identifying where the pastor and others in the teaching ministry need to focus their Christian Education curriculum. A specific effort will be made to try to boost the church's morale to have more ministry and mission-minded members related to the desired outcomes. Good church morale will help members be more excited about what is happening. Building morale will help the church create an atmosphere of love and acceptance and this will be needed throughout the intervention process. Having an atmosphere of love and acceptance among those already in attendance will only help create a similar atmosphere once community members start attending.

Jesus was the perfect example as to how the church should love. Jesus has shown how to love, look, feel, and help.⁸³ This effort will also encourage church members to be more present and active on social media and in the community. By stretching themselves to be more present and engaged on social media and in the community, church members are opening themselves up to share more of the love of Jesus with people they would not normally engage. Being more involved in the community will mean being active and present at community meetings and being

⁸³ Paul E. Miller, *Love Walked among Us: Learning to Love Like Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2014), 19.

willing to participate on local boards if opportunities become available and the pastor will encourage this.

The pastor is also planning both a sermon series and a Bible study series that will focus on tradition, inclusiveness, and outreach that will encourage and educate the church membership to look at how they let their light shine and spread love. This is what Jesus wants and requires of His children in a dark world that needs some light.

After brainstorming, informal interviews, and meetings the community engagement team will have, work will begin to re-establish the church's relationship with the surrounding community through ministry outreach efforts. It will be asked that the team start by assessing the community's needs to understand its dynamics better because any work that is done needs to be intentional.

It is also essential for the church to meet the community's actual needs instead of guessing what the community needs from the church. Assessments will be conducted through face-to-face conversation with community members; this engagement will show the community that the church is invested and is putting forth the time and effort to hear them. The team will run two to three community outreach and engagement events based on feedback received during face-to-face discussions with community members. Events may include but are not limited to food giveaways, health fairs, and clothes closets.

Finally, the pastor is already planning a *Beyond The Walls* service that will bring Sunday morning worship service outside so that the surrounding community can walk up and engage with the pastor and church members. Some community members may not feel comfortable coming inside the church building, so this will allow them to attend service. The service will be open to anyone, and food will be served afterward. Jesus will be the service's focus, and anyone

who is unsaved will be told to invite Jesus into their life. People need Jesus because they will always be lost without Him and never realize their God-given potential.⁸⁴

After completing at least two community engagement activities, the community engagement team will meet again and conduct informal interviews with the church and community members to gather information and feedback to complete a final analysis of the impact of these activities on the relationship between the church and the community. It will be imperative to look at any progress made to determine next steps with the community. Some of the questions that may need to be asked are: Do the community members feel accepted? How have church members felt about the intervention? Has the church gained any new members because of the intervention? These questions and many more will need to be answered.

Prayerfully, the church and the surrounding community will be better off after the intervention. While the goal is to better the connection between St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and the community, saving souls cannot be forgotten. For this to happen, the community engagement team members, other church leaders, and members should be dedicated. Christians must have an unrelenting desire to witness.⁸⁵

Witnessing will play a major role during the intervention because witnessing must take place at any event that is held. Having this unrelenting desire to witness to others and to go beyond tradition can make all the difference in the success of the project. The community engagement team must genuinely have a heart for the community and must desire to see the members of the community saved and in fellowship with a church, even if it is not at St. Paul High Street. If the pastor, community engagement team members, church leaders, and church

⁸⁴ Adam Hamilton, *Leading Beyond the Walls* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 16.

⁸⁵ Gene Edwards, *How to Have a Soul Winning Church*. Chicago, IL: Barakaldo Books, 2020), 133.

members are not genuine and committed, and are not on one accord while putting God first, then the project will not work.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Community Engagement Team

The first step of the intervention will be for the pastor to assemble the community engagement team with hopes that they will help lead the way and sort of oversee the intervention. Their sole purpose will be to engage the church and community. Through prayer, the Pastor will select the community engagement team members using a combination of church leaders and lay members. Also, to help get more people involved, the pastor will try and select persons that typically do not participate in things. Further, the pastor will look to add persons to the community engagement team that he feels can relate to community members.

Once members are selected to be a part of the team, meetings will be planned and held for the pastor to lay out the vision and purpose of the team. During the initial meetings, the pastor will discuss the importance of confidently and will get all team members to sign consent forms that will explain what they are taking part in and if it will be ok to use any of their responses during as a part of the intervention.

Along with signing consent forms, the pastor will also put together a survey for engagement team members to fill out that will serve to get their thoughts about the church and community before anything is ever done. The survey will consist of between 10 - 15 questions and will help the pastor gather the thoughts of the team. As a part of the questions, the survey will ask the team members about the Great Commission to see if the team members understand its importance and how it will play an important role during the intervention.

The final number of questions on the survey will be decided by the pastor. However, some of the questions that will be asked will deal with church membership, cooperation in the church, visitors in the church, the church atmosphere, the community surrounding the church, church leadership, and the Great Commission among other things. The pastor does not want the survey to have too many questions so he will be very intentional about choosing what questions will go on the survey.

During the initial meeting of the community engagement team, the pastor will ask team members to complete the survey and to be as open and honest as possible while assuring them that no names will be listed on the survey as it serves as a different purpose than the consent form. The plan for the survey will be not only to get team members thoughts, but the feedback given will help with the planning of the intervention and what things will look like moving forward.

Engagement Team Pre-Intervention Mindset

While the pastor will be very intentional about the persons that are selected to be a part of the community engagement team, he will be sure that they have the right motive and mindset for team and that they are concerned about the overall health of the church moving forward. Often in churches, marketing takes the place of ministry to increase numbers within the church. The pastor will work to ensure that the community engagement team members understand that being a part of the team and engaging with the community is not solely about increasing church attendance. The pastor will push the narrative that every person that attends church is not saved and so therefore, having high attendance numbers during the intervention will not be as important as winning souls is.

To help with this mindset, the pastor plans to remind the community engagement team members that putting Jesus first and lifting Him is what will keep people to the church and saved. By putting Christ at the forefront of everything that they will do during the intervention will not show their commitment to Christ, but it also set the tone for the entire congregation to follow. Also, community members will see that the church puts Christ first at everything that they do.

The mindset of putting Christ first will constantly be reinforced due to the that Christ died for the sins of the world and He is the reason why conducting an intervention is even possible. Putting Christ first will mean that everything that the community engagement does will point back Him. There will be no room for selfish motives or personal gain, everything that takes place must be about Christ and Him alone. Putting Christ first is what will make every community event, every sermon, and every conversation that takes place impactful and meaningful.

Also, the mindset of putting Christ first during the intervention will only help bring together church and community members because this will give the church an identity to back its purpose for the intervention. More importantly, Jesus was known to be a friend of sinners and the unsaved and to community engagement team should have this same mindset as well. Having this type of mindset during the intervention will allow for effective community engagement events that will foster an atmosphere where the spirit of Christ will be present which should make it easier for the gospel message to spread no matter what event is taking place.

Further, by committing to putting Christ first, this will hopefully help keep the community engagement team members, as well as the pastor on track because they if they ever question what or who they are doing it for then they will be reminded that it is all for Christ. This

commitment should be visible to community members so that they will understand that the church is Christ centered.

By choosing to be Christ centered, each community engagement team member will be showing the pastor that he can trust them throughout the intervention process. Also, this will show the pastor that they are not self-centered. More importantly, community members hopefully will be able to see and understand that as well. Community engagement team members must be very intentional about their actions because once identified, community members will be watching them.

Along with being Christ centered and mindful of their actions, the pastor will be using the Apostle Paul as a spiritual example for the community engagement team members to follow. Paul will be a good example for the team members to follow because he knew how to share spiritual truths about Christ in such a way that was very impactful and that did not take about from the Christ first mentality.

The pastor will talk about the mentality of Paul in the Bible when he compared himself to Apollos because they both were not strangers to spreading the gospel. Paul will serve as an example because he understands that no matter how much work he did, ultimately it is God that will bring growth. Again, this is why the pastor wants the community engagement team members to put Christ first. Meetings will be planned, events will be planned and held, but they will only be successful if God steps in and takes control of them.

However, sometimes events are not successful because the motive behind the events are not right in such a way that churches are more concerned about numbers then they are about the priorities of their ministry. Any church that focuses more on the number of people that attend their church instead of being concerned about how many people are saved and converted, they

have forgotten about their purpose of winning souls to Christ and making disciples and this is why the pastor plans to do a lot of teaching and preaching on the Great Commission which talks about going out into the world to reach the lost, baptize them, and then they can go out and make other disciples.

While saving souls, making disciples, and connecting church and community will be the soul aim for the intervention, the pastor believes that focusing on ministry instead of numbers will also encourage church members to be more involved in what is taking place. Sometime when a church is more concerned about numbers, members can sometimes get lost in the crowd and feel as if they are nothing more than just a number. However, the intention of the pastor is to be sure that this does not happen at any time during the intervention because he trusts that each community engagement team member, and each church member will develop and keep the right mindset of putting Christ first and letting Him touch the heart and mind of each person that the church will encounter.

Finally, the mindset of not being concerned about numbers that the pastor plans to push and continue to reiterate throughout the intervention should create an environment that both church and community members feel comfortable, and no one will feel as if the pastor or the church has ulterior motives. More importantly, God will be pleased and will bless what the church is doing because whenever He is put first, He will always take care of His church and will be sure that everything goes according to His plan and purpose.

Community Engagement Team Church Survey

After a group of meetings and filling out their own survey, the community engagement team will work together to put together a survey that will be giving to all members of the church congregation. This survey will be very important as it will aid in the planning of the intervention

that will take place. This will also allow church members to feel as if they are involved and that all the work is not being done just by the pastor and the community engagement team.

The questions that will be a part of the church survey will be put together by the community engagement team with input from the pastor. The team will also take time to decide on the best way to distribute the survey and if they want the surveys in paper form or if the survey will be made available in a digital format or not. The goal will be for every active to complete a survey.

The community engagement team will work to come up with questions that ask members how they feel about the church and how they feel about the community. Community engagement team members really want to be able to understand how church members feel. Also, a question will be asked about the Great Commission to see how many members not only know what it is, but more importantly, how many understand it and if they feel that the church does work that relates to it.

To get as many members as possible to complete the survey, the community engagement will work to get surveys into the hands of active members that have been sick and are unable to attend church on a regularly basis. One thing that has helped with church attendance even if not in-person is the church streaming its services online. The community engagement team will aim to get as many surveys as possible completed and then go through them so that further intervention planning can begin as soon as possible.

The Great Commission Sermon Series

As a part of working towards a successful intervention, along with putting together a community engagement team and having them complete surveys, as well as having church members complete surveys, the pastor plans on preaching a series on the Great Commission. The

pastor plans to do this series because he believes that the Great Commission will play an important part in the success of the invention as it relates to the community engagement team and church members understanding the purpose of the project.

The sermon series will be a month long and each message will be focused on the Great Commission. The pastor will also utilize bible study as another avenue to get this message out surrounding the Great Commission as it relates to the intervention that will take place. The purpose of the sermon series will be for the pastor to fully explain and expound on the concepts and ideas of the Great Commission. The pastor will also use the answers gathered from the community engagement team and church surveys about the Great Commission to help him plan the series.

Leading up to the first Sunday of the series, the pastor will talk about the upcoming series and will encourage church members to familiarize themselves with the text so that they can be prepared for the sermons. The pastor plans to display a lot of excitement about the series believing that each sermon will have a positive impact on the church and will serve as spiritual boost for the community engagement and church members.

Along with using the sermon series to get church members on board with the intervention, the pastor aims for the congregation to see that they cannot simply just preach and teach gospel, they must live it every day of their lives. Through the sermons, church members will not only be taught the Great Commission in detail, but they also will be challenged to get more involved and to be walking and living witnesses for Christ.

At the completion of the sermon series, the pastor plans to work with the community engagement team to start planning and carrying out community events that will hopefully make way for a better relationship between the church and the community. With a proper

understanding of the Great Commission, the pastor should find laying out his vision to the engagement team and church members much easier.

Community Cookout and Survey

The first community outreach event that the community engagement is planning to have is a community cookout. The team feels that this will be an event that will draw a lot of people because it involves food. The plan will be for community engagement team members, along with other church members to set up in the open lawn beside the church to draw the attention of community members that are either driving or walking by.

While a plate of free food is what will be used to try and draw attention, the community cookout will more importantly serve as an opportunity for the engagement team members to talk with community members to get to know them better. Church members will also be invited to the cookout; however, the intention and understanding will be that community members will be served first as this will be a time for the church to give back to the community.

If successful and community members show up for the free food, the community engagement team plans to use this setting as an opportunity to not only get to know the community members, but to also get their feedback as well. Along with the pastor, the community engagement team members will put together a survey for community members to complete before or after they have their meal.

The survey that community members will be given will serve as a pre-intervention interview and will consist of only 3 - 5 questions. Questions will be asked that pertain to the church's current involvement in the community to see how community members feel about the church. The community members will be asked about any current or past interactions that they have had with members of the church and how it made them feel. Interactions will be explained

to be considered as inside or outside of the walls of the church. To make the community members feel comfortable with being open and honest, they will be ensured that the answers to their questions will remain confidential.

The goal of the interviews during the community cookout will be for the community engagement team members to gain insight into how community members feel the church is doing as it relates to being a welcoming environment, caring for the community through engagement efforts, and what community members would like to see from the church all while creating an atmosphere where church and community members can mingle together. Overall, the community cookout will not only give the engagement team a good idea of what community members think about the church, but it will help the team with the planning of its next event which will be a community prayer and praise service.

Community Prayer & Praise Service

The second community engagement event that the community engagement team is planning will include members of St. Paul High Street, as well as other local pastors and churches. The plan for this event is not to not only bring together the community that surrounds the church, but the entire Martinsville-Henry County community. Also, this will create an avenue for other churches to come together in and to foster an atmosphere of fellowship not just with church members, but with community members as well.

The community engagement team brought the idea to the pastor to plan this service due to a string of violent crimes, homelessness issues, sickness, death, and mental health issues in the community. The pastor agreed and has set up a meeting with another local pastor to discuss these issues and to share the intervention and events that the church is working on. The plan will be for a community prayer service to be fully planned that will be geared around togetherness and

bringing together local churches and community members regardless of race and denomination. The goal will be to bring together as many churches as possible and to choose the best day, time, and location as possible.

To ensure that churches attend, and community members attend, flyers will be created to be hung around town and to be passed out in all local churches. Local radio stations will also be asked to announce the event and people will be asked to serve the flyers on their social media pages as well. During the posting and passing out of flyers, persons will be made aware that the overall goal is for church and community members to come together to bombard heaven with prayer that covers the community and to let unsaved community members know that there are several churches available to them.

Community Fun Day

During the planning meetings, the community engagement team thought that it would be important to have something engaging for all ages of the community. Therefore, an idea was presented, and planning was started to have a community fun day. The community engagement team wants to have an event that is not so focused on church related things, but rather a time when church and community members can together for a time of fun and laughter with the goal of showing community members that you can be saved and still have fun at church.

In hopes of having a successful community fun day, the community engagement team contacted several local businesses to see if they would be willing to donate things to the church. To enhance the atmosphere, the community fun day will include a DJ to play music that is appropriate for all age groups and that includes more than just gospel music. Also included in the plans for the fun day is food, and games that anyone can participate in, and door prizes. Flyers

will be posted around town and signs will be posted outside of the church to help people on the day of the event.

Beyond The Walls

Although other events to engage the community have been planned, the pastor wants to have a service that can take place outside so the community engagement team is working to hold a final community event in the church parking lot. The pastor's idea for this service is to engage the community in worship with the expectation that unsaved souls will give their life to Christ. To help with this outside service idea, the pastor will consult with pastors that had services outside during the pandemic to see how things should be done.

The mindset of the pastor is that a lot of community members walk past the church and so an outside service will hopefully be attractive enough for them to stop by because some may not feel comfortable coming inside the church building. A weekend will be chosen and put on the church calendar for the service to take place and hopefully the weather will cooperate. Church members will be encouraged to spread the word about the service, and they will be told that they will be able to stay in their cars or sit in lawn chairs that they can bring.

The community engagement team believes that this service will be a great opportunity to engage in worship with community members. Plans are being made to ensure that all persons that attend the service who are not members will be given a gift bag. The pastor believes that this service will be a prime example of what doing ministry beyond the walls of the church looks like. Further, this service may lead to other churches having services outside to attract community members as well.

Pre-Intervention Church Meeting

Once the pastor completes putting together the community engagement team, and after the community engagement team has completed all its initial meetings and planning for the community events, a church meeting will be held for all the details to be provided to the church body. In the African American Baptist church, although the pastor, and other church leaders have an authority and lead the way, typically any type of major decisions, purchases, or activities are presented to the entire body, which sometimes even includes a vote where the majority must rule. The pastor does think this will be a problem though.

On the day of the church meeting, the pastor will meet an hour before with the deacons of the church to brief them as to what all will be discussed during the meeting and to update them on the progress that has been made with the community engagement team and what its purpose will be. The pastor will lay out all the plans that have been developed by the community engagement team and he emphasize how important it will be for the deacons to be very active and supportive in the months that are ahead. Having the deacons follow the vision of the pastor and the community engagement team will create a spirit of unity within the church. Also, seeing the deacons involved and excited about the community engagement team and upcoming community engagement events may excite other members as well.

After meeting with the deacons, the pastor will start the church meeting with the sole purpose of talking about the intervention and what will be taking place in the upcoming months. The pastor plans to first let the congregation know that he met with the chair of the deacon's months before to get him on board with the intervention and the reason behind why the intervention will be taking place.

The pastor then will introduce the community engagement team and explain what their purpose will be over the next few months. This will be a time for the congregation to see who they can go to with questions or ideas other than the pastor. The pastor will even allow for members to ask any questions or to express concerns at this time and will solicit their support and prayers for the success of the intervention. To encourage this, the pastor will take about the history of the church and why being actively involved in the community is very important. While explaining why community engagement is important, the pastor will advise church members that this will be an opportunity for the church family to grow closer together as well.

Further, the pastor will explain each community engagement event that the community engagement team is planning on having and will give possible dates for each event. The pastor will stress that while church members are invited to attend every event and are encouraged to attend, the purpose is to reach those outside of the church walls. Also, due to the magnitude of some of the events that are planned, the pastor will have a signup sheet for any members that would like to volunteer to help at any events that are held.

Finally, before ending the meeting, the pastor will ask the congregation members to spread the word once the community engagement event flyers are posted so that the events are well attended. More importantly, the pastor will lead the congregation in prayer, and will ask a special blessing upon the community engagement team members that God will keep them, and that He might get the glory through the work that the church will be doing.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Following months of meetings, planning, and strategizing, the community engagement, with leadership from the Pastor, successfully carried out the intervention of engaging the church and community. After reviewing survey answers the community engagement team was very excited and eager to get started. The hope for the team was that after the community events, community members would feel more welcomed at the church and that church members would be more welcoming of community members.

Further, while engaging church and community members, the community engagement wants to serve as a living example of the Great Commission. Not only are community members now more open to coming to the church, but many souls have also been saved and baptized. The moral and atmosphere of the church is now better than it has been in a very long time and this is due to the work that was done by everyone.

This chapter discusses the initial meetings of the community engagement team, the surveys that they completed, as well as surveys that were completed by church members. To help get the intervention started, the pastor conducted a sermon series on The Great Commission which will be discussed in detail. Also, each community outreach event that was held will be highlighted. Finally, the chapter discusses how church attendance looks since the outreach events took place and will talk about the post-intervention church meeting that took place at the conclusion of the intervention.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Community Engagement Team

The pastor selected a community engagement team that included a mixture of church leaders and members. Also, some of the members were selected to get these members more

involved with the church, and because the pastor felt as if they could relate to community members. Members were selected, and several meetings were held to explain their purpose and what needed to happen. All team members signed consent forms and then were asked to take a survey about community engagement.

The survey was completed by members selected to participate in the St. Paul High Street Baptist Church community engagement team. The survey consisted of questions regarding the church's involvement in the community and asked questions regarding team members thoughts on how they felt the church was doing with community engagement, what the church can do to engage the community better, and on the engagement team's knowledge of the Great Commission, and the church's role in engaging the greater community.

Community engagement team members were asked to complete this survey during the team's initial meeting. The survey was instructed to be completed to the best of their abilities with open and honest answers. Community engagement team members between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-two completed the survey. The survey consisted of ten questions that could be answered in any way. Members were asked to answer all questions in the survey. No additional instructions were provided. The objective of the survey was to get initial thoughts from the community engagement team members so that the team's approach to planning activities could be addressed.

Question one asked team members how long they had been a St. Paul High Street member. Question two asked members if they believed that there was a spirit of exclusivity within the church. In question three, members were asked if they were to visit St. Paul High Street Baptist Church as a first-time visitor and if they believed that they would feel welcomed. Question four asked members if they believed the church cares for its surrounding community,

while question five asked members if they felt the surrounding community is sometimes overlooked.

Each team member answered question one of the survey regarding how long they had been members of Saint Paul High Street. Members responded with time frames between one and twenty-six years. Question two had a one hundred percent response of yes from engagement team members as to whether they believe that, at times, there is a spirit of exclusivity within the church. Engagement team members responded to question three, with fifty percent answering yes and fifty percent answering no to whether they would feel welcomed as first-time visitors to St. Paul High Street Baptist Church.

Responses to questions four and five, whether the surrounding community of Saint Paul High Street is cared for by the church or has been overlooked, resulted in sixty-six percent saying yes and thirty-four percent saying no. The reason for responses from members was that the church had had community giveaways and family and friends' days in the past. Further, responses commented that the church no longer assists the community regarding food, clothing, shelter, or other ministry outside the church walls.

Moving further in the survey, question six dealt with visitors and community members who may have alternative lifestyles and if they felt church members practice the biblical principles of love and acceptance. Question seven asked members if they knew and understood the Great Commission and if they believed that church members knew the meaning. Question eight asked members to list something they would like to see the church do in the community. Question nine discussed the rich history of Saint Paul High Street and asked members if they believe that the church must be more engaged with the community and more accepting and

inclusive to continue to grow and move forward. Question ten asked engagement team members what immediate steps they could take to get the church active in the community.

Question six of the survey had a one hundred percent response of yes. Engagement team members felt that St. Paul High Street accepts individuals with alternative lifestyles and practices showing love and acceptance. Discussion responses to this question reflected that members feel that while the church loves and accepts the individual, they do feel strongly about the importance of the individual, understanding that their lifestyle may not be in accordance with God's law.

Members responded to question seven, which dealt with their understanding of the Great Commission, with seventy percent answering yes and thirty percent answering no. Of the members that answered yes, six truly understood the Great Commission themselves based on their survey responses. This also led to a discussion in one of the team meetings about the Great Commission, with one team member suggesting to the pastor that a sermon or Bible study be done discussing the Great Commission.

Question eight of the survey showed that community engagement team members agree that to continue to grow the church, the church must become more inclusive and engaged with the community. However, the pastor made a point that doing community work should be just about increasing membership numbers. Questions nine and ten of the survey asked engagement team members about the church and what they would like to see regarding events ministry outreach. The top responses were a community cookout, a community prayer event and revival, and door-to-door community outreach.

The community engagement team survey results reflected that members felt that while the church is engaged with its community, much work remains to be done. The community engagement team agreed that their efforts would be focused on creating ways to engage the

community and creating an ongoing ministry whose primary focus will be community outreach and engagement. A total of ten community engagement team members completed the survey.

Community Engagement Church Survey

One of the first steps the community engagement team took to start the intervention after completing their own survey was to have church members complete a survey to get their thoughts on community engagement. Team members felt that hearing from church members would be necessary when planning community events. The survey allowed team members to get church member's thoughts about the church and the church's engagement with the surrounding community.

The survey was completed by St. Paul High Street Baptist Church members with questions that pertained to the church's involvement in the community and to get their thoughts on the Great Commission. Members were asked to pick up a survey and complete it after morning worship service to deter them from filtering responses based on who they believed would receive the responses. It was instructed that the survey be completed to the best of their abilities and that their answers be open and honest. Participants were instructed that no names or identifiers should be included. Members between the ages of eighteen and eighty-six completed the survey. The survey consisted of seven questions with possible true, false, or unsure answers. No additional space was provided for further comment, and members were asked to answer all questions in the survey.

Further, assistance was made available for members with special needs, but those assisting were asked to refrain from assisting in any way with answering the questions and only to provide reading or writing assistance. No additional instructions were provided. The objective

of the survey was to get insight into how members feel the church is doing as it relates to being a welcoming environment, being inclusive, and being involved in community engagement efforts.

Question one pertained to whether members felt St. Paul Street Baptist Church cared for its community as a collective body. Question two asked members if they believed that there was a spirit of exclusivity within the church. In question three, members were asked if they believe St. Paul High Street Baptist Church presents a welcoming environment for members and guests.

Question four was centered around the surrounding community and asked members if they believe that the church sometimes overlooks community members. Question five was a statement to which members responded to whether they agree that Jesus loves and accepts everyone and that the church should do the same. Question six asked members if they knew and understood the Great Commission. The seventh question asked members if they felt St. Paul High Baptist Church needed to be more inclusive.

Question one of the survey had a response of one hundred percent, answering that they do believe that St. Paul High Street, as a collective body, cares about its community. Question two responded seventy-four percent answering true, twenty percent answering false, and six percent answering unsure whether there is a spirit of exclusivity within the church.

Members responded to question three, with eighty-nine percent answering true and eleven percent answering false as to whether members and guests feel welcome when attending St. Paul High Street Baptist Church. Responses to question four, whether the surrounding community of Saint Paul High Street is sometimes overlooked, resulted in sixty-six percent saying true and thirty-four percent answering false. The response to question five, which dealt with whether Jesus loves and accepts everyone and if the church should as well, had a response of one hundred percent true.

Members responded to question six, which dealt with their understanding of the Great Commission, with sixty-two percent answering true and thirty-six percent answering false. The statement in question seven dealing with inclusivity had a response of ninety-two percent, which responded true, and eight percent responded that they needed clarification.

After looking at the survey results, there was evidence that some survey participants needed clarification on some of the language. Responses to survey questions from members reflected that members believe that Saint Paul High Street does not have an environment of exclusivity and that members and visitors are or should feel accepted amongst the congregation.

Further, the survey results reflect that members feel that the church is engaged with its community and that its ministry extends outside the church's walls. While the church has had community engagement in the past, there has not been an ongoing effort or ministry dedicated to the community's continued engagement in the church. It is important to note that evidence suggests that some members need to learn or understand what the Great Commission is. A better understanding of the Great Commission and its instruction on the church's responsibility as a body to the community and world may have swayed responses in some members as it relates to how they feel that the church is doing. A total of seventy-eight members completed the survey.

The Great Commission Sermon Series

After reviewing the results of the church and community engagement team pre-intervention surveys, the pastor concluded that a sermon series was needed on the importance of reaching out and reaching people before any community engagement events occurred. The Great Commission would be the basis of this month-long sermon series. This series would explain the Great Commission in detail and talk about the importance of these instructions from Jesus

himself. The sermon series included sermons that were entitled *Go, Go Teach, Which Side Are You Are On*, and *Searching For The Lost*.

The sermon *Go* laid the foundation of the series and began to explain what The Great Commission was and what it meant. The main aim for the Pastor to the congregation was that to fulfill these instructions; the church must be willing to go out into the community. This was a significant point because, as the Pastor suggested, many churches are great at gathering but not so much when it comes to going. By the end of this sermon, the congregation had a better understanding of why it is essential to go out beyond the four walls of the church.

The following sermon in the series *Go Teach* dealt with what Christians must do once they go out. The Great Commission text instructs Christians to go out and teach, and this was the basis of the sermon. Jesus instructed the disciples to go out and teach people about Him so that they would be saved and baptized. The Pastor emphasized the importance of going out into the community to teach and reach the lost. The sermon was summarized by telling the congregation that they were to go where they had never been before and do what they had never done in hopes of reaching those they had never met.

The sermon, *Which Side Are You On*, challenged the congregation to choose to be on the Lord's side by going out and ministering to others. While still referring to the Great Commission, the text from Matthew 25 about judgment was used to encourage the congregation. In the text, Jesus is preaching about feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, taking in the stranger, and clothing the naked. In essence, Jesus said that persons who do these things would inherit eternal life while others would not. Choosing these things will require the congregation to go out.

Finally, *Searching For The Lost* was a sermon that used the text from Luke 15 that talked about *The Lost Sheep*. The sermon's point was to let the congregation know that the point of

going out and teaching for God is to find the lost sheep, those who are unsaved. The thesis of the message was that while the world may not think so, to God, all souls matter, and if lost souls' matter to God, they should matter to Christians too. The Pastor revealed to the congregation that the text teaches that Jesus is more concerned with the one lost sheep than the ninety-nine that were safe, and that should be the focus while going on into the community.

After the Pastor completed the sermon series, he met with the community engagement team to get their thoughts on how it went. After discussion with the team and them sharing some of what they had heard from congregation members, it was agreed that they were ready to move forward with the intervention of engaging the church and community. Also, some of both congregation and engagement team members admitted that they had never heard the great commission broken down in detail before and so it really helped them understand what it really meant and how important it is for Christians to follow.

Understanding the need to reach out to the community, the Pastor, along with the community engagement team, revisited the events that had been planned that they felt would benefit the community and serve as a chance for the church members to engage with the community. The team was careful to be very intentional so that the events would be influential and allow for an opportunity for a difference to be made. The hope is that a difference would be made in the church and outside within the church community.

Community Cookout and Survey

The first community outreach event that was held was a community cookout. At the event, members of the engagement team and other church members set out in the front of the church right by the road to draw in community members who were driving or walking by. While persons were enticed by the fact that they were receiving a free plate of food, it also presented an

opportunity for the engagement team to talk with community members. Although church members were encouraged to attend this event, the intention was for the church to give back to the community and to serve them first.

Feeling that community members would show up for the free food, the community engagement team felt that this would be the perfect chance to get to know and talk with community members and, more importantly, get their thoughts about how they feel about the church. To do this, the Pastor and team members came up with a survey for community members to take. While community members were waiting on food or sitting down to eat, engagement team members took time to talk with them and get them to complete the survey.

The pre-intervention interview was conducted by members of the community engagement team with community members in the surrounding area of St. Paul High Street Baptist Church with questions that pertained to the church's involvement in the community. Community members were interviewed and asked to answer interview questions based on their interactions and experiences while attending church at St. Paul High Street Baptist Church or community events held by the church. It was instructed that the interview questions be answered to the best of their abilities and that their answers be open and honest. Participants were instructed that no names or identifiers would be included.

Community members between the ages of eighteen and seventy-four were interviewed. The interview consisted of four questions. Community members were asked to provide answers to all questions in the interview. The objective of the interviews was to gain insight into how community members felt the church was doing as it relates to being a welcoming environment, caring for the community through engagement efforts, and what community members would like to see from the church.

Question one pertained to whether community members had ever attended St. Paul High Street and if they felt welcome and accepted. Question two asked community members who had not attended St. Paul High Street but had attended another church in the surrounding community if they felt welcome and accepted at that church. In question three, community members were asked if they felt St. Paul High Street Baptist Church cares for its surrounding community. Question four asked community members what they would like to see St. Paul High Street Baptist Church do for their community.

Question one of the survey had a one hundred percent response, with forty percent of respondents reporting that they had attended St. Paul High Street and sixty percent reporting that they had not attended St. Paul High Street. Of those who responded that they had attended, community members felt that while they did not feel that they were not welcome, only some members went above and beyond to introduce themselves and welcome them to St. Paul High Street as a guest or make them feel that their presence mattered.

Question two had a response of sixty percent reporting that they had not attended St. Paul High Street and forty percent having attended. Of all respondents, one hundred percent had attended another church at least once. Of those who had attended a church before, all reported that they felt somewhat welcome at the churches that they attended due to their reason for attendance being related to a special occasion such as a family reunion or a holiday like Christmas or Mother's Day, or the occasion being specifically related to community outreach.

Community members responded to question three, with seventy-four percent responding that they do believe that St. Paul High Street Baptist Church cares for its surrounding community and twenty-six percent reporting that they had no opinion on whether the church cares for the community but feel community events make them feel loved and cared for by the church. More

importantly, community members reported that being engaged with church members regarding their thoughts on the church's involvement in the community makes them feel more inclined to attend. Many even stated that churches had never asked how they felt and what they would like to see in the community. Further, one lady was so pleased with the fact that someone took the time to listen to her concerns for the community that she attended the church for the first time on the following Sunday.

Question four of the survey regarding what community members would like to see St. Paul High Street do in the community received a one hundred percent response. Community members reported that what they would most like to see from the church is more engagement that does not involve church attendance due to feeling that they do not have the right attire or status to enter the church. Community members also reported that they would like to see community activities where church leaders and members were more approachable to talk about God and the church, how and why Saint Paul High Street Baptist is the church that they should choose to attend, and how it is set apart from other churches in the community.

Further, one community member reported that they would like to see the church offer more help to the community to get to a place where they can focus on their relationship with God. They verbalized that many community members do not have their basic needs met and that it is hard to focus on anything else when their lives are in that state. A discussion was had about the church maybe having events to help community members get their lives back on track, but not just in a spiritual way.

A review of the community member interview results reflects that community members believe that Saint Paul High Street has work to do regarding its reputation in the community regarding engagement and inclusiveness. While some work has been done, there is much room

for growth. Also, the interview results reflect that community members feel that the church is trying to reach out to its community. Findings from the community member surveys helped the community engagement team begin planning other community engagement events and understanding the community's needs as it relates to the church. A total of thirty-five community members completed the survey.

Overall, the community cookout was a great success. It was a day where church and community members were able to come together, fellowship, and get to know each other better. The chance to sit and talk with community members was an opportunity that could not be passed up. The community cookout and survey helped lay the foundation and provided a roadmap for the engagement team to continue making strides to engage the church and community.

Community Prayer & Praise

The second community engagement event that was held not only included the pastor and members of St. Paul High Street but also brought together several local pastors and churches for a community prayer event. Following a string of violent crimes, homelessness issues, sickness, and death, the pastor of St. Paul High Street met with another local pastor about these issues and to share about the community work that the church was engaged in. During the conversation, the idea of having community prayer service was birthed.

The community prayer and praise service took place on a Thursday evening at St. Paul High Street Baptist Church, with the theme being *Light In Darkness-Pastors & Community Covering Our Community*. The service brought together over 12 local pastors and churches. Not only was each church's congregation invited, but flyers were passed out and posted throughout the community to get people who were not members of any church there. Before the event, the pastors met to develop plans and outcomes for the services. The anticipated goal was to cover the

community in prayer and let unsaved community persons know that there are churches available to them.

Rev. Brown, along with other area pastors agreed that the community was showing increased activity of drugs, crime, violence, and other things that can bring harm to the community. In fact, local newspaper articles confirmed these thoughts with articles written on these issues. For these reasons, the pastors agreed to come together and lift the community in prayer with prayer subjects covering unity, churches, schools, government, families, the safety of children in the home and streets, drugs and violence, bullying, physical and mental health, the unsaved, and wars, wildfires, and the world.

On the night of the service, the sanctuary was full of persons of all races and denominations, saved and unsaved, and it was very spirit-filled. It was one of the biggest crowds that had been in the church in many years during a time that a funeral was not being held. Lives were certainly changed that night, and it also led to some unsaved community members visiting St. Paul High Street and some of the other churches that were represented on that night.

The service showed that the persons of different backgrounds, races, and religions can come together and work together for the greater need of others. The atmosphere in the service was one that would be hard to explain to anyone that was not in attendance. It truly was an unexplainable night of prayer and praise where many souls were touched and transformed and this included persons that were already saved, and those that were not.

Community Fun Day

Following the community cookout, and the community prayer service, a community fun day was held, and this was done in conjunction with the church celebrating 138 years. The goal for this event was not so much to focus on surveys or church-related ideas but rather just to bring

church and community together for a day of fun, food, and fellowship. The idea here was to show community members that it is okay to have fun, even at church. The community engagement team wanted everyone in attendance to feel comfortable and to be comfortable with each other.

To help with the atmosphere and ensure everyone felt comfortable, the church hired a DJ to play music throughout the event. Music could be heard by all those driving or walking by the church, and while hearing the music, they could see signs that were posted along the road. Along with the music, the event included various free food, fun games for all ages, inflatables for children and adults who wanted to participate, and door prizes.

The community fun day was a great success as it created an opportunity for the church and community to engage outside a typical church environment. Both church and community members applauded the efforts of the pastor and the church for putting together such an event. Also, not only was the event suitable for bringing together church and community members, but because of the amount of work and planning that went into the event, the community engagement team had to get some other church members to volunteer, and this allowed some for members to get to know each other better as well. Members getting to know each other better and getting along only created a better atmosphere for the community.

The spirit of unity and togetherness displayed by church members working together flowed into the atmosphere and everyone got along and had a great time together. Further, the event showed community members how church members can be normal and are able to have fun just like anyone else. Often, people outside of church think that church is boring, and that saved people do not like to have fun, but the community fun day certainly dispelled that myth.

Beyond The Walls

The final community engagement event that was held by the church and the community engagement team was a church service outside in the church parking lot. The idea for this service was to not only be able to engage with community in fun as with the other events, but to engage with them in worship in hopes of winning souls to Christ. The Pastor and community engagement team thought about how some churches had service in the parking lot during Covid and thought that this idea could be replicated with the purpose of having community members attend a service without having to come inside the church building.

Also, a lot of people walk past the church daily and so this would provide an opportunity for those persons to hopefully come be a part of the service as they are walking by. A lot of the people that walk by or hang out around the church are even known by some of the congregation. The pastor even also tried to be sure to always speak and sometimes have conversations with community members as they are passing by.

The community engagement team along with the pastor picked a weekend where the weather seemed promising and began to plan. The team got together and planned for the service to be in the parking lot with the idea that persons could stay in their cars or sit in chairs that were set up. Chairs were placed, a podium was set up along with microphones and speakers and the beyond the walls service was held and was a great success.

Not only did the community engagement team look at this as an opportunity to engage in worship with the community, but they thought about the great feedback that came from the community prayer and praise service. The service was attended by church and community members, and special gift bags were given out to anyone in attendance that was not a church member. The service was a great example of what going beyond the walls inside of the church

looks like and some of the same community members that had been present at the other community events were in attendance and seemed to enjoy themselves.

Thankfully, the weather on the day of the service was very nice. The sun was out, and it was about 70 degrees. As the sun shined on the church parking lot, it seemed as if God himself was smiling down on the service as if He was pleased with so many people, saved, and unsaved coming together for the same purpose. The nice weather only enhanced the service atmosphere. The pastor also talked about the great commission in his sermon.

At the end of the service the pastor and the community engagement team made sure to try and speak to all the visitors, especially those that were recognized as attending some of the previous events. This made them feel important because it showed them, they their faces and some names were remembered. Community members seemed very appreciative to how receptive the church was of them, and they seemed to enjoy the gift bags that they were given as well. However, some of the church members seemed just as happy to have community members there.

Engagement Team Post – Intervention Mindset

Although it wasn't the goal before the intervention took place, the community engagement events proved to be effective in increasing church attendance and creating a sense of belonging among community members. Prior to any event, the pastor let community engagement team members know that the intervention was more about ministry than it was growing the church. Thankfully, by actively engaging in the community and reaching beyond the boundaries of tradition, Saint Paul High Street Baptist Church became a place of spiritual support for community members.

Further, active involvement from the church congregation instilled a sense of purpose in members and strengthened relationships amongst the congregants. Through the efforts of the

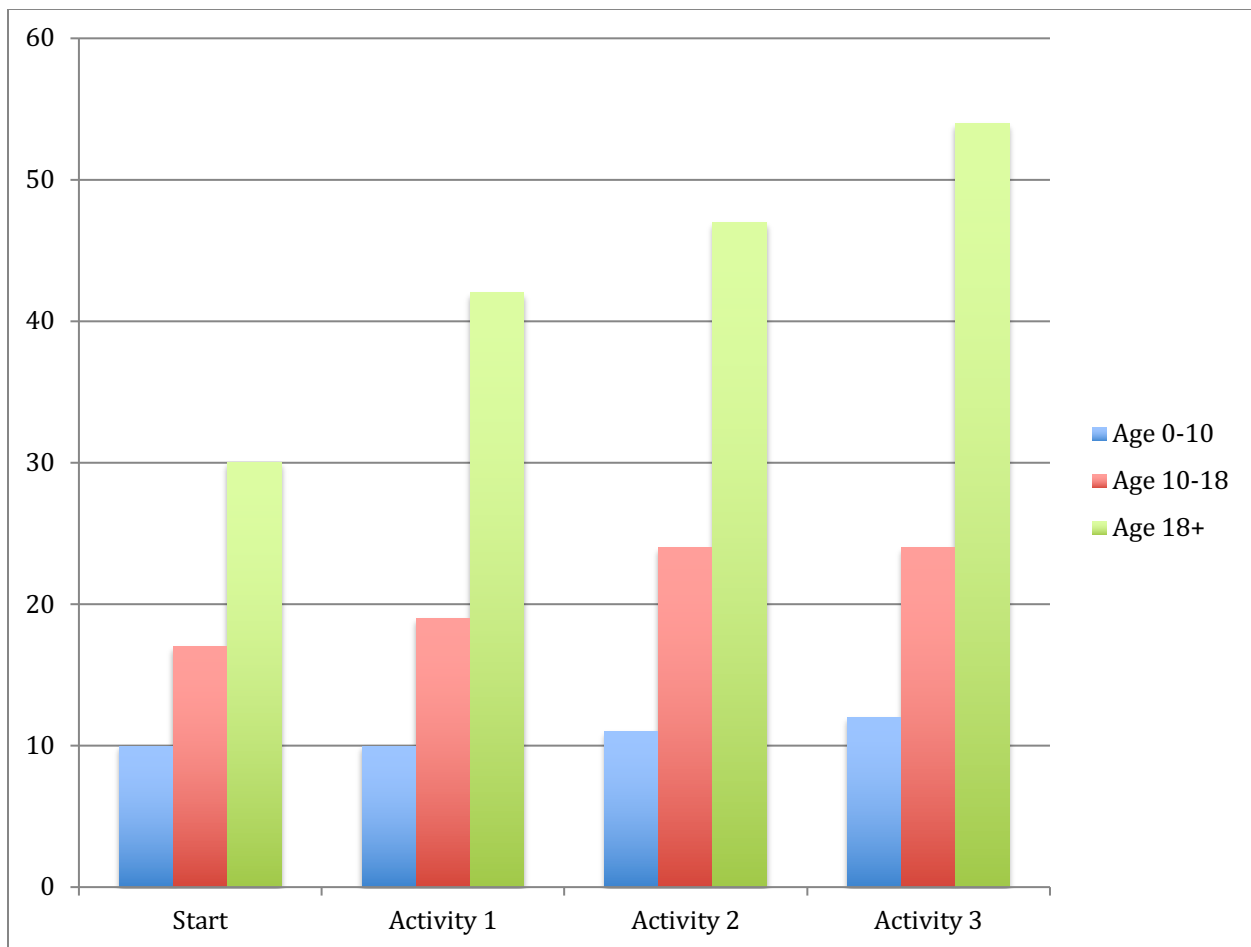
community engagement team and congregants, a newfound spirit of unity now can be felt within the congregation. In fact, a certain can even be felt in the parking lot before approaching the church building and people now have an excitement about whenever they come to worship.

A review of church attendance reflected a notable increase in attendance upon the completion of the community engagement activities. Furthermore, community feedback suggested that many community members were drawn to the church because of the community engagement events and felt an increased sense of inclusivity within the congregation.

The results of this intervention further highlight the importance of ongoing community engagement with the by meeting people where they are and extending an invitation for engagement and involvement, the church was able to reach a more diverse population of people and create meaningful relationships. The community engagement also strengthened the relationship with the community as a whole and will directly impact the sustainability of the church.

More importantly, it showed the community engagement team how putting God first yields positive results and now they will forever have a mindset of putting God first. The team saw that by putting God first in the planning of the events, that He intervened and made sure that each event was not only a success. God simply watered what the church was planting. Church attendance increased because of the community events and activities and has remained steady.

The graph on the following page shows and example what church attendance looked like before the intervention and how it increased throughout the first three community engagement events.



Post Intervention Church Meeting

Just like a meeting was held before the intervention, a post intervention church meeting was held. This meeting gave the pastor and the community engagement team members a chance to give a report on everything that had taken place over the past few months. Before the meeting with the church body, the pastor again met with the deacons first to go over everything that would be discussed.

The meeting allowed the pastor to publicly thank the community engagement team members, church leaders, and church members for their prayers and their support during the intervention. The pastor made it known that none of what had taken place would have been possible without everyone getting on board and working together for the greater good of the church and more importantly for the Kingdom of God.

Before the meeting concluded, the pastor let church members know that follow up surveys would need to be completed by church members and community members so that thoughts could be gathered and reviewed by the pastor and the community engagement team. The pastor let the congregation know that the purpose of the post-intervention surveys was to simply track to be sure that the church had made a difference and that hopefully some community perceptions of the church had been changed due to the recent community engagement.

Post-Intervention Survey Results

Community Members

After completing the four community engagement events, community members were sought out to get their thoughts on how they thought things went. Community members were asked to give feedback on their thoughts on St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and its recent

involvement in the community. Feedback was provided by members of the community who attended services at St. Paul High Street Baptist Church after they attended one or more of the community engagement events. Members asked those who provided feedback questions of the community engagement team. Guest attendees were asked two questions that acted as follow-up questions from the pre-intervention survey.

Question one asked guests if they felt welcome and accepted during their visit to St. Paul High Street Baptist Church. Question two asked guests if they felt St. Paul High Street Baptist Church cares for its community. These questions were very similar to the ones that were asked before the community events.

Guest attendees' responses to questions were positive and led to further engagement. Guest attendees responded that they felt welcomed by members when they arrived, and that the environment was accepting. Guests noted that they were greeted at the door by ushers with smiling faces, and once seated, they were approached by multiple members of the congregation who introduced themselves and thanked them for coming. One guest attendee noted that they had thought of not attending service because they did not have what they deemed as "church clothes" to wear, but they were presently surprised that members were dressed in casual attire.

Further feedback from guest attendees noted that they felt inspired by the message during the service and planned to attend services again. They were also pleased to be greeted by and spoke with the Pastor after the service. One guest attendee noted that they have had experiences attending Saint Paul High Street Baptist Church where they felt that they were judged for their appearance and felt that they did not belong there and, therefore, had decided they would not be attending again. However, they noted that their current experience was not the same as in the

past and that they felt that the community engagement activities had changed their mind and made them want to come back and attend their community church.

Church Members

Community engagement team members asked Saint Paul High Street Baptist Church members the follow-up questions of the community engagement team after the completion of the three community engagement events and the sermon series that the Pastor taught. Members provided feedback on their understanding of inclusiveness in the church and the church's role as it relates to the Great Commission.

Members provided feedback that reflects that they have a better understanding of the Great Commission and that they feel that while Saint Paul High Street Baptist Church may have previously been exclusive in the eyes of the community, they now believe that through community engagement and the teachings of the Pastor during the sermon series, they feel they have a better understanding of their own biases. One member noted that they previously felt that practices such as dressing in specific attire were expected from all who attend church and that proper dress is a form of "giving our best to God." However, they now feel as if their attendance in service is more important than what they have on while there.

Another member responded that she better understands what it means to be inclusive and show love to those who may have alternative lifestyles, even if she disapproves. She added that she has learned that God's love surpasses our understanding and that, as Christians, we are tasked with bringing all souls to Christ. She even used, for example, a young man who typically hangs out around the church. Before, she would avoid him, but now she speaks to him and even invites him to church.

Also, one member felt that they had realized through the community engagement events that Saint Paul High Street had a reputation for being a church for people who had it all together. He added that this process had opened his eyes and made him determined to ensure that all guests who enter the church will know that they are welcome and accepted and that Saint Paul High Street is a place for all who seek Jesus. He also stated that he feels that certain people in the congregation should share their testimonies of what God had done for them because they will help certain community members.

Pastor

While the Pastor did not complete a pre- or post-survey, his thoughts before the intervention lined up well with the surveys suggested. The Pastor felt that not all the members understood what the Great Commission was and that this needed to be discussed more. In fact, in early conversations that he had with some members, his theory was proven to be true. However, after the sermon series and the community engagement events, the Pastor noticed a change in how church members treated community members. They seemed to be more open and accepting, as well as being in touch with their own imperfections.

Also, community members have visited the church more and seem more comfortable since the community events. Further, two community members have since joined the church and very active members. While there is still much work that needs to be done, the Pastor was very pleased with the community engagement team's work and enjoyed hearing the feedback from the intervention. More importantly, the project allowed for church members to become closer with each other and learn more about each other while working together to impact the community.

Impact

Each of the community engagement team events were intentionally and strategically planned. With much prayer and God's help, each event not only went well but made an impact on not only the community members but church members as well. The pastor heard from some church members that they were impacted probably more than some community members were. The pastor was so pleased that the church and community engagement team had worked together to help make a difference in the lives of others. While using the Great Commission as an example and guide to bring church and community together, the hope is that the church made a connection that will have a lasting impact for years.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

After months of prayer, meetings, planning, research, and community events, a better relationship now exists between St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and its surrounding community. The goal of engaging church and community that was set at the start of the intervention was not only accomplished but exceeded the expectations of all those involved. St. Paul High Street Baptist Church is now in a better place spiritually and relationally because of the work that was done to engage with the community. Further, the community is now a better place and feels more included in the hearts and minds of the church because of the events that took place.

Research Implications

The St. Paul High Street Baptist Church community engagement team conducted a survey to engage the church and community. The team aimed to create a welcoming environment for community members, aiming to serve as a living example of the Great Commission. The survey included questions about the church's history, exclusivity, and accessibility to welcome first-time visitors. The survey also revealed that the church has had past community giveaways and family and friends' days but does not aid with food, clothing, shelter, or other ministry efforts outside the church walls.

The survey also revealed that the church accepts individuals with alternative lifestyles and practices of love and acceptance. Members felt that while the church loves and accepts individuals, they also recognize the importance of their lifestyles in accordance with God's law. They also strongly understood the Great Commission, with seventy percent of the team members answering yes and thirty percent answering no. The survey also revealed that the church must become more inclusive and engaged with the community to continue growing. The top responses

from the survey were a community cookout, a community prayer event and revival, and door-to-door community outreach.

Despite the church's engagement with its community, the team agreed that much work remains to be done. They will focus on creating ways to engage the community and an ongoing ministry focusing on community outreach and engagement. The survey results indicate that the church is engaged with its community, but much work remains. The pastor, along with the community engagement team members agreed that work must continue beyond this intervention.

A survey was conducted among 78 St. Paul High Street Baptist Church members, revealing that the church cares about its community. The survey results showed that members believe the church does not have an environment of exclusivity and that members and visitors should feel accepted within the congregation.

The survey also revealed that members feel the church is engaged with its community, and its ministry extends outside the church's walls. However, no ongoing effort or ministry has been dedicated to the community's continued engagement in the church. Some members need to learn or understand the Great Commission, which may have swayed responses in some members.

Question six of the survey had a 100% response of yes, as engagement team members felt St. Paul High Street accepts individuals with alternative lifestyles and practices of love and acceptance. Members felt strongly about the importance of the individual, understanding that their lifestyle may not be in accordance with God's law.

Question seven of the survey had a 70% answer and 30% answer, with six truly understanding the Great Commission themselves. This led to a discussion in one of the team meetings about the Great Commission, with one team member suggesting to the Pastor that a sermon or Bible study be done discussing the Great Commission.

Question eight of the survey showed that the church must become more inclusive and engaged with the community to continue growing. The top responses from the survey were a community cookout, a community prayer event and revival, and door-to-door community outreach.

A survey of 78 St. Paul High Street Baptist Church members revealed that they believe the church cares about its community. However, 74% of the members answered true or false about the presence of exclusivity within the church. 85% of the members felt welcome when attending the church, and 66% felt the surrounding community was overlooked. Most members agreed that Jesus loves and accepts everyone, and the church should also. The survey also revealed that 62% understood the Great Commission, and 92% agreed with the statement about inclusivity.

The survey results suggest that the church is engaged with its community, and its ministry extends beyond its walls. However, ongoing effort or ministry has yet to be dedicated to the community's continued engagement. Some members need to learn or understand the Great Commission, as a better understanding of its instruction on the church's responsibility to the community and world may have swayed responses in some members. This suggests that some members need to learn or understand the Great Commission to understand better the church's role in the community and the world.

The pastor completed the Great Commission sermon series and met with the community engagement team to discuss its success. After hearing from congregation members, they agreed to engage the church and community. The pastor and community engagement agreed to plan three to five events to benefit the community and allow church members to engage with it. The

team intentionally ensured that the events were influential and could make a difference. This approach aimed to reach out to the community and make a positive impact.

A survey was conducted among 35 community members, with most of them (100%) having attended St. Paul High Street Baptist Church. The survey revealed that while some members went above and beyond to welcome attendees, others felt somewhat welcome due to special occasions or community outreach.

The survey also revealed that 74% of community members believe St. Paul High Street Baptist Church cares for its surrounding community. In comparison, 26% had no opinion on whether the church cares for the community but felt community events made them feel loved and cared for. Engaging with church members about their thoughts on the church's involvement in the community makes them more inclined to attend.

The survey also revealed that community members would like more engagement without church attendance, where church leaders and members were more approachable to discuss God and the church, how and why Saint Paul High Street Baptist is the church they should choose to attend, and how it sets itself apart from other churches in the community.

One community member expressed a desire for the church to offer more help to the community to help them focus on their relationship with God, as many members do not have their basic needs met. A discussion was held about hosting events to help community members get their lives back on track, not just in a spiritual way.

The survey results indicate that community members believe that St. Paul High Street has work to do regarding its reputation in the community regarding engagement and inclusiveness. While some work has been done, there is much room for growth. Additionally, the interview

results reflect that community members feel the church needs to improve its communication and outreach efforts to serve the community better.

The pastors of the community were concerned about increased drug, crime, and violent activities. They decided to gather and pray for unity, churches, schools, government, families, children's safety, drugs, violence, bullying, physical and mental health, the unsaved, wars, wildfires, and the world. The sanctuary was filled with people of all races and denominations, both saved and unsaved. The event was a success, as it provided an opportunity for church and community members to engage outside the typical church environment. Both church and community members applauded the efforts of the Pastor and church for organizing such an event. The event also allowed the community engagement team to get to know each other better, creating a better atmosphere for the community. The event was a success, bringing together church and community members and fostering better relationships.

The community engagement team conducted events to gather feedback on St. Paul High Street Baptist Church's recent involvement in the community. Feedback was provided by community members who attended services after attending one or more events. The feedback was then used to follow-up questions from the pre-intervention survey.

The guest attendees were asked if they felt welcome and accepted during their visit to St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and if they felt St. Paul High Street Baptist Church cares for its community. The responses were positive, leading to further engagement.

Guests felt welcomed by members, and the environment was accepting. They were greeted by ushers with smiling faces and were approached by multiple congregation members who introduced themselves and thanked them for coming. One guest attendee was surprised to find members dressed in casual attire, which surprised them.

Further feedback from guests indicated that they felt inspired by the message during the service and planned to attend services again. They were also pleased to be greeted by and spoke with the Pastor after the service. One guest attendee had previously experienced judgment and felt unwelcome at the church. However, the community engagement activities changed their mind and made them want to return and attend the church.

The community engagement team at Saint Paul High Street Baptist Church conducted three events and a sermon series focusing on inclusiveness and the church's role in the Great Commission. Members provided feedback on their understanding of the church's role in the commission and their biases. They felt that their biases were better understood through community engagement and the teachings of the Pastor during the sermon series.

One member felt that proper dress was expected from all attendees, but now they prioritize attendance in service over personal appearance. Another member understood the importance of inclusivity and showing love to those with alternative lifestyles, even if they disagreed. They learned that God's love surpasses our understanding, and that Christians are tasked with bringing all souls to Christ.

One member realized that the church had a reputation for being a place for people who had it all together, and this process opened his eyes and made him determined to ensure that all guests were welcome and accepted. He also suggested that certain congregation members share their testimonies of what God has done for them, as they will help certain community members.

The Pastor conducted pre- and post-surveys to assess church members' understanding of the Great Commission. He found that not all members understood the commission and needed more discussion. After the sermon series and community engagement events, the Pastor noticed a change in how church members treated community members and increased visits. The Pastor

was pleased with the community engagement team's work and enjoyed receiving feedback from the intervention.

Each event was strategically planned and positively impacted both community members and church members. Some church members felt more impacted than others. The Pastor was pleased with the collaboration of the church and community engagement team, using the Great Commission as an example to bring church and community together. The church hopes to create a lasting connection with the community.

Research Applications

Thanks to the commitment of its community engagement team and the church membership, St. Paul High Street Baptist Church was able to successfully implement and put into action the vision and intervention design given to them by their pastor. From the onset, the church showed a commitment to not only engaging with its community, but also improving the relationships that already existed within the church by presenting opportunities for persons to work together to advance the church.

The pastor and community engagement team worked well together to present opportunities to the church membership to serve its community. To make sure that this was done effectively, plenty of research was done including surveys and interviews to get a better understanding of church and community members. Getting feedback from church and community members helped the pastor and community engagement team better plan events that would have an impact on everyone involved. The feedback received from all the surveys and interviews, as well as feedback from all the events that were held allowed the church to continue making progress within its community.

Progress has continued since the intervention was completed because many church members developed a new mindset as it relates to non-members attending church. Not only are church members more accepting of outsiders now, but many also even took on the task of inviting guest to church on a regular basis, especially those that they recognize from the community outreach events that were held.

Not only was the church and the immediate community surrounding the church affected by the intervention, but other churches as well. Other local churches took note of what St. Paul High Street was doing and reached out to the pastor to get feedback on thoughts and ideas that they had for their own church. The pastor of St. Paul High Street and another local church even agreed to connect and work together on future community projects, with one event already being planned.

Not only has the one event already been planned with another local church, but the community engagement team still exist within the church. Although many meetings have not been held, the team is still in place for when the pastor wants to continue doing more community work. The pastor has some ideas are laid out for the future. In the meantime, the church has continued to strive to fully be committed to the great commission.

Further, the church has been dedicated to not only saying, but living their church motto of *Intentionally Living, Loving, and Learning Together*. This was preached and taught along with the great commission and so the mindset still exists within the church body. By keeping this mindset and continuing to engage with the community, the church has made a commitment to not only be concerned about a person's spiritual being, but being concerned about them spiritually, mentally, emotionally, financially, and relationally. Showing community members

that they are cared about in every area of their life has only made them feel more comfortable at or around the church.

At one time, many years ago, this is the model that St. Paul High Street Baptist Church followed, it was a church that ministered to the total person. The church was so successful at reaching people and winning souls that the church membership got up to almost 1,000 people and the church was very active in the community. However, through the years, many persons passed away, more churches opened, and people were led in different directions while on their spiritual walk with Christ. Although the church looks different now and the numbers are drastically different a few members still view the church as if it is the same church that it was many years ago but that is simply not the case. Although things are much different now, one thing that the current church has in common with the church years ago is that the church and its members are back active in the community and making a difference.

Before the intervention, it could be argued that church was only concerned about a person's spiritual being, but that is no longer the case. The pastor even held a bible study entitled *The Church and Mental Health* that a lot of people benefited from. In fact, the bible study was such a great hit, that pastor was asked by several members to continue teaching more about mental health issues in the church.

Moving forward, the church will continue to be inviting to both members and non-members. The goal of the intervention was for the church to better engage with its community and not only was that done, but more importantly, souls were saved, and lives were changed. The church has a renewed commitment to its community now that will benefit both for years to come. The life and spirit of the church is better now than what it was prior to the intervention and that is because the mindset of the people has been changed. Now, St. Paul High Street Baptist

Church can help other churches develop their own outreach plans to be able to impact the community.

Research Limitations

While St. Paul High Street Baptist church was successful with engaging with its community, it was not always a smooth process, and the same may be true for other churches that try to do the same thing. Several limitations may present themselves to the leadership or whoever is in charge that may hinder or slow the process of engagement. Although there were not a lot of limitations for St. Paul High Street, some did exist.

First, the pastor had to be very clear on his intentions for the project to get the leadership and church members to understand and be willing to buy in. The pastor not only had to explain why the project was being done, but also, why the project was needed. For the pastor, the project was more than a requirement for school, but he really had a desire to help the church and the surrounding community. The pastor had spent time praying and taking notes of things in the church and the community that led him to want to complete the project. Thankfully, the leadership was fully on board with the pastor's vision. However, this could be a challenge in other places if everyone is not committed to the project.

Also, the pastor had a concern that a lot of the work during the intervention would fall into his lap, but that was not the case as the team really stepped up and did their part. Also, many other church members volunteered at the events that were held and this made things easier on everyone that was involved. This showed the pastor that he does indeed have people that he can depend on when things need to get done.

Another limitation could have possibly been finances. Although the pastor did not plan on spending an enormous amount of money on the project, he did want money to be an issue as

why certain things were not able to be done. Again, this is why it was very important for the pastor to be very clear on sharing his vision with the church leaders. In most churches, whenever money is being spent people want to know where the money is going, and what its being used for. For the project, the pastor taught about being a blessing and giving back to the community. The church ended up seeing first-hand how this was true as because while the intervention was being done, before the community fun day event was held, the church received a major financial donation. In return, the church took some of those funds and poured back into the community. While this may not be the case for every church, even if money is a limitation, there are other things that can be done that are less expensive that can still be impactful.

Although most of the leaders were on board with the pastor's vision, one limitation was the people in leadership or church membership that were not initially on board with how the vision was going to be carried out. For example, during the community cookout, some members were not in attendance because the message had been spread that the cookout was for the community. However, the pastor had to reiterate that members were more than welcome to attend, but it was the community members that would be served first. Although the cookout went well, the pastor was not pleased with the turnout from church members and therefore had to make sure the message was clear and understood for future events.

Finally, one limitation that the pastor was worried about was how the church would be received by the community. However, except for only a few people, the community was very receptive to the work that the church was trying to do. To help with this, the pastor and the community engagement team tried to be very clear with community members about their intentions. Some members were even concerned about security and safety during the community events that were held, but thankfully no issues were had.

While there could have been several limitations to hold the church back from the work they were trying to do, thankfully, things went smoothly. This is not to say that things were easy and that problems did not arise, but no problems or limitations presented themselves that could not be handled by the pastor, community engagement team, or church members. Once the church made a commitment to help bring the pastors vision to pass, they tried to be prepared for any limitations that may come about.

Further Research

Moving forward, St. Paul High Street Baptist would like to stay involved with its community. For this to happen, the church will try and stay aware of the needs of the community and community members. With the community engagement team still being intact, there are possibilities for other events to be held, but the church wants to be very intentional about anything that they do so that can be sure that they are being effective.

To help with being very intentional in their future planning, the church will continue to put God first and let Him lead the way. In fact, the church theme for 2024 is *Following His Plan – Fulfilling Our Purpose*. Following His plan simply means putting Him first at everything and by following Him the purpose of the church will be fulfilled. By following God, the church will continue to make a difference in the lives of many people that will bring glory to God.

Further, the church has created ways to be more visible, attractive, and accessible to the community such as holding a weekly prayer call and having active social media pages. The plan is for the community to have access to the church even when special events are not being held. Leaders of the church have also become more visible and vocal in city council meetings and local school functions. The church wants the community to see they are willing to be active outside of the church walls.

To ensure that the church stays active and continues to stay engaged with the community, the pastor has had talks with church leadership about expanding the community engagement team or even changing members on a rotating basis to make room for fresh ideas. This will call for proper training and an understanding of what the team is in place for. The church does not want the work to stop now, but rather to just be the start. The leaders have discussed what sustainability looks like for the community engagement team and how the church can stay relevant in changing and challenging times. The church understands that it must keep up and stay current with the times so that it does not get left behind.

One major thing that church leaders have discussed is the importance to continue to listen to church and community members. For example, maybe do yearly surveys to see how people are feeling about the direction of the church. The church never wants to get back to a point where there seems to be no community engagement. Therefore, the church will strive to continue to look for ways to impact the community which may include and not be limited to research, community events, and special services.

Since the project has been completed, the church now has a better understanding of who they are and who God called them to be. They understand that their mission is fulfilling the great commission. The world is full of lost souls that need to hear the good news about Christ. In fact, the church does not even have worry about going far into the world because there are souls that need to be saved right in its own community. The best days are certainly ahead for St. Paul High Street Baptist Church and as God continues to bless them, they are committed to blessing others within their community for years to come.

Bibliography

- Agius, George. *Tradition and the Church*. Ashland, OH: TAN Books, 2005.
- Amaladas, Stan. *Intentional Leadership: Getting to the Heart of the Matter*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
- Anyabwile, Thabiti. *Reviving the Black Church*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.
- Blackaby, Tom. *The Commands of Christ: What It Really Means to Follow Jesus*. Boston, MA: B&H Publishing Group, 2012.
- Blomberg, Craig L., and Nesbit Sbanotto, Elisabeth A. *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Borden, Paul D. *Assaulting the Gates: Aiming All God's People at the Mission Field*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009.
- Briggs, J. R., and Hyatt, Bob. *Ministry Mantras: Language for Cultivating Kingdom Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Letter to the Romans: A Short Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021.
- Catterton Allen, Holly. *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*. Chicago, IL: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018.
- Clark, Chap. *Adoptive Church (Youth, Family, and Culture): Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.
- Commission on Religion and Race. *Guidelines Advocates for Inclusiveness: Value and Empower All Persons for Full Participation in Church and Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016.
- De Jesús, Choco. *Love Them Anyway: Finding Hope in a Divided World Gone Crazy*. Chicago, IL: Charisma House, 2021.
- Douglas Sean O'Donnell. *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Earley, Dave, and Dempsey, Rod. *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2013.
- Earley, Dave, and Wheeler, David. *Evangelism Is* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.

- Easley, Ernest L., and Easley, Jordan. *Resuscitating Evangelism*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020.
- Eckhardt, John. *Destroying the Spirit of Rejection: Receive Love and Acceptance and Find Healing*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016.
- Edwards, Gene. *How to Have a Soul Winning Church*. Chicago, IL: Barakaldo Books, 2020.
- English, J. T. *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020.
- Forrester, Mark, ed. *Trending Up: Social Media Strategies for Today's Church*. Ashland, OH: Salubris Resources, 2017.
- Gill, Robin. *The Empty Church Revisited*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003.
- Green, E. Michael. *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- Gyasi-Agyei, Amoakoh. *Fulfilling the Great Commission Through Godly Love: A Practical Guide for Effective Visitation Ministry for Loving Churches*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2015.
- Hamilton, Adam. *Leading Beyond the Walls*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Hartwig, Ryan T., and Bird, Warren. *Teams That Thrive: Five Disciplines of Collaborative Church Leadership*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Head, Nancy E. *Restoring the Shattered: Illustrating Christ's Love Through the Church in One Accord*. Newburyport, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2019.
- Henard, Bill. *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization*. Nashville, Tn: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- Jones, Jeffrey D. *Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches*. Bethesda, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015.
- Jones, Nona. *From Social Media to Social Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020.
- Kim, Grace Ji-Sun, and Hill, Graham. *Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018.
- Leeman, Jonathan, and Dever, Mark. *Understanding the Great Commission*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.

- Lightfoot, J. B. *The Gospel of St. John: A Newly Discovered Commentary*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- Michielin, Maico M. *A Shorter Commentary on Romans by Karl Barth: With an Introductory Essay by Maico Michielin*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.
- Miller, Paul E. *Love Walked among Us: Learning to Love Like Jesus*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2014.
- Mitch, Curtis, and Sri, Edward. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Mitchell, Joshua L. *Black Millennials & the Church*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018.
- Moon, W. Jay, and Simon, W. Bud. *Effective Intercultural Evangelism: Good News in a Diverse World*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021.
- Nelson, Rev. Dr. Gary V., Dickens, Peter, Nelson, V Gary, and Dickens, M Peter. *Leading in Disorienting Times: Navigating Church and Organizational Change*. Danvers, MA: Christian Board of Publication, 2015.
- Oliver-Dee, Sean. *God's Unwelcome Recovery: Why the new establishment wants to proclaim the death of faith*. Chicago, IL: Lion Hudson, 2015.
- Parker, Brianna K. *I Still Believe in The Black Church*. Mansfield, TX: Black Millennial Café, LLC., 2022.
- Poythress, Vern S. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2020.
- Price, Emmett G., III. *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011.
- Rainer, Thom S. *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Rainer, Thom S. *Becoming a Welcoming Church*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- Rainer, Thom S. *We Want You Here*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- Rainer, Thom S. *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.

Senkbeil, Harold L., and Woodford, Lucas V. *Church Leadership & Strategy: For the Care of Souls*. Ashland, OH: Lexham Press, 2019.

Soerens, Matthew, Yang, Jenny, and Anderson, Leith. *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Unruh, Heidi Rolland, Sider, Ronald J., Sider, Ronald J., and Unruh, Heidi Rolland. *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005.

Warnock, Raphael G. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013.

W. Benke, L.E. Stevens, and D.L. Loudon, *Church Wake-Up Call: A Ministries Management Approach That is Purpose-Oriented and Inter-Generational in Outreach*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001.

Wortham, Robert A., ed. *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Sociology of the Black Church and Religion, 1897–1914*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017.

APPENDIX A

Research Project Overview and Design	
Step 1 Week 1	Conduct interviews with individuals for potential community engagement team members.
Step 2 Week 1	Assemble a team of 10 individuals consisting of the pastor, other members of church leadership, and church members.
Step 3 Week 2	Conduct the initial meeting of the community engagement team to discuss expectations of team members and have consent forms signed.
Step 4 Week 2	Provide journals to team members and provide instructions on brainstorming and document of interventions.
Step 5 Week 2	Conduct educational question-and-answer session for church members.
Step 6 Week 2	Assign community team members as points of contact for church members.
Step 7 Weeks 2-3	Conduct engagement team meeting to discuss community engagement.
Step 8 Week 3	Implement initial community engagement activity per intervention team.
Step 9 Week 3	Pastor begins sermon and bible studies series centered around inclusiveness and tradition.
Step 10 Weeks 3-8	Ongoing week community engagement team meetings.
Step 12 Week 7	Conduct community activity selected by engagement team.
Step 13 Weeks 3-8	Evaluation of current plans.
Step 14 Weeks 3-8	Encourage ongoing weekly journal documentation of engagement team.
Step 15 Week 7	Conduct "Reclamation Sunday" service.
Step 16 Weeks 7-8	Meet with church leadership and finalize plans for ongoing implementation.
Step 17 Week 8	Conduct meeting with engagement team to discuss final thoughts on implement changes and community activities.
Step 18 Week 8	Conduct in person exit interviews with intervention team participants as well as church and community members.
Step 19 Ongoing	Analyze information received.
Step 20 Ongoing	Present information via final thesis project.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Church and Community: Bridging the Gap to Create a Culture of Acceptance and Inclusiveness

Principal Investigator: Matthew Brown, School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a member of St. Paul High Street Baptist Church.

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

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

This study is to solve the problem of exclusivity and adherence to tradition at St. Paul High Street Baptist Church.

The purpose of the study is to discover barriers and promote an environment of inclusiveness in the church.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Be a member of a community engagement team.
2. Participate in weekly meetings for 8 weeks.
3. Provide weekly feedback for 8 weeks.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

It will benefit the church of which you are a current member.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/o shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and kept for three years.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

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

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I agree for the person named below to take part in this study.

The researcher has my permission to audio or video record the person named below as part of their participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Printed LAR Name and Relationship to Subject

LAR Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 3-28-2024

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1125

Title: Church and Community: Bridging the Gap to Create a Culture of Acceptance and Inclusiveness

Creation Date: 2-19-2023

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Matthew Brown

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision
				No Human Subjects Research

Key Study Contacts

Member	Joshua Dugan	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	██████████
Member	Matthew Brown	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	██████████
Member	Matthew Brown	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	██████████