

EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE STRATEGIES AND
ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN A SMALL
COUNTY IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES:
A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

COLEMAN F. SMOAK, JR.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty
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ABSTRACT

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RESEARCH CASE STUDY
Under the direction of PAMELA A. LARDE, PH.D.

This dissertation explores the strategies of Southern Baptist churches which contribute to the competence of their lay leadership. It examines the procedures for evaluating lay leaders' knowledge of church doctrine and goals, as well as their motivation for pursuit of successful ministry. The research assessed Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States through a qualitative case study with the primary research instrument being one-on-one, semi-structured interviews of church staff. The researcher sought an understanding of these churches' practices to ensure that lay leaders are equipped for their ministry positions with regard to their leadership approaches, knowledge of church doctrine, and alignment with church goals. The project embraced a constructivist epistemology and a theoretical framework based on the Situational Approach to Leadership. The outcome of the project is an assessment of the local churches' lay leadership evaluation procedures or lack thereof. Also discussed are avenues for future research.

The research found that many churches' lay leadership training programs were narrowly focused and based on tactical instead of strategic goals. The churches in the study are not utilizing the Situational Leadership model which encourages one-on-one

assessment of development levels and mutual goal setting. Further, no church in the study conducts structured classes in doctrine for the laity; rather, they are relying on the congregation to learn dogma from the sermon.

The study encourages future research into how the paradigms of pastors and members are being constructed and persisting in the local church's culture. Plus, the study calls for a mixed methods, longitudinal study to measure the effects of employing Situational Leadership and formal instruction on the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 in these churches.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background of the Study

God has given us a book comprised of divinely-inspired writings through which human authors convey theological points. Its contents are “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).¹ For believers, this text guides daily lives and provides assistance in sanctification. Its words, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, convict the unbeliever and direct his or her path to the true source of salvation and reconciliation with God. One supposes that Christians would long for a deeper understanding of who and what God is and would embrace a study of the document which He has furnished.

Over and over, however, church members fail to search Scripture for understanding. Worse, they misquote and misuse passages, and thereby, they mislead others who seek to pursue living according to God’s direction. People, who profess to have been Christians for decades, are unaware of their cursory knowledge of Scripture; yet, they boldly declare what they view as facts about the faith, negatively affecting the spiritual lives of others in the church and the community at large.

The church should not take lightly miscommunication regarding the faith. Repeatedly, the Bible’s authors warn of this practice. “... there will be false teachers among you” (2 Pet. 2:1). “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*, Copyright 1973, 1978, and 1984.

called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). Some in the church are receptive to incorrect teaching. “... I am afraid that ... your minds may somehow be led astray ... For if someone comes to you and preaches ... a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough” (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

Scripture commands the church to guard against false teaching within its ranks. “As I urged you ... stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer” (1 Tim. 1:3). One cannot overstate the importance of attending to this duty. History demonstrates the extreme misuse and misunderstanding of Biblical teaching. A failed artist and former corporal in the military in Europe used Jesus’ teachings to lead to the greatest devastation of an ethnic group. He said, “My feelings as a Christian point me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter ... who once in loneliness, surrounded only by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them.”²

One may criticize the use of Hitler’s stated opinion as hyperbole, but the church members’ misunderstandings coupled with their unbridled audacity to challenge those who possess a differing view harms the church’s reputation and effectiveness. The church must assess its practices and deficiencies in an effort to ascertain why so many of its members have an incorrect comprehension of the church’s doctrine.

² Adolf Hitler, in a speech in Munich, Germany, on April 12, 1922, as found on www.humanitas-international.org/showcase/chronography/speeches/1922-04-12.html; quoted in Eric J. Bargerhuff, *The Most Misuses Verses in the Bible: Surprising Ways God’s Word is Misunderstood* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 15.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher's experience with Southern Baptist churches indicates that little, if any, training is provided to lay leadership. These volunteers are asked to fill positions as ministry leaders but are left to their own imaginations and designs as to how to lead. Worse is the lack of doctrinal training or any assessment of the lay leaders' doctrinal beliefs. Routinely, churches place Sunday school teachers and small group leaders in positions where they have a great influence on others' Christian walks; yet, no one assesses their competence in Christian dogma. Few Southern Baptist churches catechize members, and numerous congregates have little knowledge of the denomination's espoused beliefs. Barna notes that this "lack of spiritual knowledge and wisdom has resulted in a body of believers that is both incapable of applying their faith in daily circumstances and unable to persuasively share their faith with those who so desperately need it."³ Barna offers a sobering opinion saying that "... when the Lord examines a church ... His analysis will hinge on the depth of the people's commitment to making their faith real and pure."⁴

Studies demonstrate this dearth of doctrinal knowledge. According to a study performed by the Barna Research Group *via* telephone interviews in 2001, Baptists responded better than other denominations in their answers to basic doctrinal questions but only by a small margin. "Of the Baptists surveyed, 57% believed works play a part in salvation, and 45% believed Jesus was not sinless. Only 34% of Baptists thought Satan

³ George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches: Being Strategic in Your God-Given Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999), 130.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

was a real being ... [and] 66% considered the Bible to be totally accurate.”⁵ Commenting on another Barna survey in 2002, Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said,

Asking the general population any number of questions about orthodox doctrine is going to lead to a very confusing picture ... The more significant challenge is doctrinal confusion in the church. That’s where we should properly start with our concern. We shouldn’t expect that lost people would be experts in Christian doctrine, but we have every reason to expect that healthy disciples would be well-grounded in biblical truth.⁶

In 2006, George Barna noted the most significant findings of his group’s research during that year. Barna stated that American Christians do not use their faith as a critical part of their decision-making processes and that Americans do not emphasize spiritual growth. Another finding of the research was particularly disturbing:

Evaluating spiritual maturity remains an elusive process for clergy as well as individuals. Across the nation, the only measure of spiritual health used by at least half of all pastors was the extent of volunteer activity or ministry involvement. Adults were no more consistent in their self-examination of their spirituality.⁷

A headline from Barna’s website displays a reason for part of the problems facing the church, “Americans Draw Theological Beliefs from Diverse Points of View.”⁸ In the article, Barna says, “The passing on of a Christian heritage from one generation to the next appears to be rapidly dissipating in America. Our continuing research among

⁵ Tim Ellsworth, “Barna Study: Baptists, others adrift in doctrinal beliefs,” August 13, 2001, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/barna-study-baptists-others-adrift-in-doctrinal-beliefs/>.

⁶ Michael Foust, “Barna: Doctrinal confusion abounds; Mohler: Church key to discipleship,” October 14, 2002, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/barna-doctrinal-confusion-abounds-mohler-church-is-key-to-discipleship/>.

⁷ Barna Group, “Barna Lists the 12 Most Significant Religious Findings,” December 20, 2006, <https://www.barna.com/research/barna-lists-the-12-most-significant-religious-findings/>.

⁸ Barna Group, “Americans Draw Theological Beliefs From Diverse Points of View,” October 8, 2002, <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-draw-theological-beliefs-from-diverse-points-of-view/>.

teenagers and adolescents shows that the trend away from adopting biblical theology in favor of syncretic, culture-based theology is advancing at full gallop.”⁹ Another part of the church’s problems stems from political views and their influence on belief. Yancey and Quosigk, in studying the views of progressive and conservative Christians discovered what they term “an important insight ... that progressive Christians and conservative Christians have diverged so much in their core values that they ought at this point to be thought of as practitioners of two separate religions.”¹⁰ These coauthors add,

Based on this research, we highlight here that progressive Christians emphasize political values relating to social justice issues as they determine who is part of their in-group; they tend to be less concerned about theological agreement. Conservative Christians, however, do not put emphasis on political agreement in order to determine if you are one of them—their major concern is whether you agree with them on core theological points.¹¹

The church should expect this diversity of views and opinions of church doctrine in its membership. Without assessment of lay leaders’ beliefs, incorrect doctrine may be communicated to those under their leadership.

Many Southern Baptists would be surprised by the fact that Baptists have a history of utilizing catechisms. Charles Spurgeon, known as the Prince of Preachers, revised the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, which had been developed by Benjamin Keach and based on the 1647 Westminster Shorter Catechism. Spurgeon’s revision was developed in 1855 and has 82 questions and answers.¹² In its introduction Spurgeon says,

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ George Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), ix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² Roger McReynolds, ed., *Spurgeon’s Catechism* (Columbia, SC: Dream Publishing, 2018), Summary on Back Cover.

“I am convinced that the use of a good catechism in all our families will be a great defense against the increasing errors of the times.”¹³ Jonathan Watson notes,

There is a sense in which all catechesis is retrospective, for catechesis always looks back to the person, work, and teachings of Jesus Christ. The catechist’s motto is aptly summed in Paul’s declaration about the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3 ... Further, Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples by “teaching them to follow all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). [In addition] (a)ll catechesis is prospective in that it anticipates growth in understanding, repentance, faith, and, ultimately, greater conformity to the image of Christ in the lives of those instructed.¹⁴

In recent years, many Baptists have encouraged a return to catechism. First Baptist Church of Tallassee, Alabama, has developed one based on the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000.¹⁵ Tom Nettles, a recognized Baptist historian, encourages churches to return to catechesis. He notes one of his reasons for this belief: “... some who profess Christian faith are so experience-oriented that their view of spirituality makes them antagonistic to precise doctrine. Any attempt to inculcate systematic arrangement of truth is considered either divisive or carnal.”¹⁶

This qualitative research case study does not ask whether catechisms are employed nor does it advocate their use. However, given the documented misunderstanding of Southern Baptist doctrine, the research seeks to understand the procedures in place in Southern Baptist churches to assess lay leaders’ competence

¹³ *Ibid.*, Introduction.

¹⁴ Jonathan D. Watson, *In the Name of the Lord: Four Models of the Relationship between Baptism, Catechesis, & Communion* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 95 and 146.

¹⁵ Baptists Can Use Catechisms Too, April 3, 2013, betweenthehours.sebts.edu/index.php/2013/04/03/Baptists-can-use-catechisms-too/.

¹⁶ Home Publications Journals, *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry*, JDFM 4/2, An Encouragement to Use Catechisms.

(knowledge) of and commitment (motivation) to advocate the beliefs outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to explore the strategies and procedures implemented in Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States, to equip the lay leadership and to assess the doctrinal and church-goal-related competence and commitment of lay leaders, especially Sunday school teachers. In order to perform this exploration and to understand the strategies and procedures of these churches, this qualitative research study addresses three research questions: (1) what strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership; (2) what strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these lay leaders, as defined by Blanchard's Situational Leadership model; and (3) what strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence in and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined by the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000?

Overview of Research Design

This research utilizes the qualitative research method which lends itself to understanding the way people approach their leadership actions based on the way they interpret their organizational environment.¹⁷ Qualitative research employs an inductive

¹⁷ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 16.

process in which data are gathered and used to build concepts.¹⁸ Quantitative research stands in contrast to this research method because of its cause-and-effect approach. The meanings that people give to their situations are reflected in their actions and may not be evaluated properly through quantitative research. This qualitative research case study seeks to understand the participants' reasons for why and how processes are being implemented based on their understanding of the situation in which they find themselves.

Creswell and Baez discuss the nature of qualitative research and declare it suitable to explore central phenomena.¹⁹ The central phenomena explored in this qualitative research study are the procedures implemented to assess followers' knowledge of and motivation to perform their ministries. The research was pursued in an open-ended manner and examined multiple perspectives which produced contrasting views.²⁰ These pursuits fit within the qualitative research genre.

Interpretive Framework—Constructivist Epistemology

As a Christian, the researcher believes that there is absolute truth and that it is grounded in and personified by Jesus Christ, the Son of the triune God. This is the correct basis for moral frameworks which should guide the ethical rules of life. However, a positivist epistemological approach, in which an absolute truth is sought, may not yield answers to the reasons for behavior in the complicated cultural settings in this case study.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ John W. Creswell and Johanna Creswell Baez, *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2021), 6.

²⁰ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 6-7.

Schutt defines constructivism as a “methodology based on questioning belief in an external reality [and that] emphasizes the importance of exploring the way in which different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs.”²¹ John and David Creswell point-out that Crotty identified that “humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—we all are born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture.”²² This applies to the culture in which one finds himself in an organization, as well. A major determinant of leaders’ actions may be uncertainty avoidance by which the leader decides it is better to act out of safety and security rather than to urge difficult actions by their associates.²³ In other words, the leaders’ actions are guided by acceptance of the culture around them rather than an absolute stance for what is best for the organization. Therefore, the researcher believes that a constructivist epistemological approach should be pursued in this case study because, often, actions of leaders are socially constructed based on the leaders’ interpretation of reality in their organizations.²⁴

Theoretical Framework—Situational Approach to Leadership

George Barna states, “You can overcome many deficiencies in a church’s ministry and organization, but *you cannot compensate for the lack of good leadership*. Nothing will cripple or even destroy a church more completely than the absence of

²¹ Russell K. Schutt, *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, 9th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019), 370.

²² M. Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1998); quoted in John W. and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2018), 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 355.

²⁴ Merriam and Tisdell, *op. cit.*, 9.

effective leadership” (emphasis in original).²⁵ The situational approach to leadership requires that leaders assess the development levels of their followers based on their levels of competence and commitment to the tasks at hand.²⁶ This assessment allows the leaders to adjust their leadership, adopting the role of director, coach, supporter, or delegator, with each of these roles requiring varying levels of directive and supportive behavior.²⁷ Church members and people, in general, have different levels of knowledge and commitment to their assigned responsibilities. According to Northouse, leaders, in order to apply properly the situational approach to leadership, must determine their followers’ level of competence in a given area and their motivation level to achieve the organization’s goals.²⁸ Based on this assessment, the leader should adjust his approach regarding the extent to which he is directive or supportive.²⁹

If the church ministry leader does not have a proper understanding of *why* he believes *what* he believes, he cannot lead others to proper belief and application, and the church’s goals fall short. Unfortunately, the church fails repeatedly in the realm of theological training. Again, Barna says that this problem “is pervasive within the community of believers: *Christians don’t know the content of their faith and show little concern about their ignorance*” (emphasis in original).³⁰ Moreover, a question of motivation arises regarding leadership. Are the church’s leaders leading or caretaking?

²⁵ Barna, *Habits, op. cit.*, 55.

²⁶ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 8th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019), 95.

²⁷ Ken Blanchard, Patricia Zigarmi, and Drea Zigarmi, *Leadership and the One Minute Manager: A Situational Approach to Leading Others*, Updated Edition (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 53 and 61.

²⁸ Northouse, *op. cit.*, 95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Barna, *Habits, op. cit.*, 129-130.

Are they being authentic or transactional only? Are they leading from a higher purpose or are they pursuing an easier path to job retention? Are they following the lay leadership paradigm of Exodus 18 by empowering and endorsing lay leadership?

All churches would be hard-pressed to accomplish their work without laity who are willing to volunteer as lay ministry leaders, but pastors and church leaders cannot have effective lay leaders without employing three skills that Blanchard and his coauthors call goal setting, diagnosis, and matching.³¹ Clear goals must be set, development levels of lay leaders must be evaluated, and leaders must adapt their own leadership approaches to the level of knowledge (competence) and motivation (commitment) of the lay leaders under their supervision.³² This qualitative research study seeks to explore and understand this assessment and adaptation in the bounded case.

Research Setting and Context

This qualitative research applies the case study approach. It examines the leadership practices used in a real-life, contemporary setting in seeking answers to this study's research questions.³³ The study was conducted within a bounded system, several Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States.

Many Southern Baptist church volunteers are asked to fill positions as ministry leaders but are left to their own designs as to how to lead. Worse is the lack of theological training, even for Bible study leaders. If Bible study leaders cannot articulate

³¹ Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership*, *op. cit.*, 23.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ R.K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014); cited in Creswell and Poth, *op. cit.*, 96.

why they believe *what* they believe, how can they motivate others to spread the gospel? Moreover, how can the church ensure that the true gospel is being communicated? Without proper training and testing, the church is empowering potentially pseudo-transformational leaders.³⁴ Are the lay leaders' desires for training being assessed? Should not teachers be requesting the church to train them in correct doctrine, and should not clergy be highly concerned that teachers are conveying proper Biblical knowledge?

To explore why and how this need for proper instruction is being addressed, the case study approach is particularly helpful. John and David Creswell say that a case study allows for deep analysis and evaluation of a program or process.³⁵ Schutt cites Geertz and notes that the goal of case study research is the creation of a thick description that "provides a sense of what it is like to experience [a] setting from the standpoint of the natural actors in that setting."³⁶

Research Data Sources and Collection Methods

This research gathered data from several Southern Baptist churches in a particular county. The research included larger urban churches and smaller rural churches taken from a convenience sample consisting of the 47 Southern Baptist churches identified by the county's Baptist Association. This larger group is a convenience sample or what Schutt calls availability sampling, "a nonprobability sampling method in which elements

³⁴ Northouse, *op. cit.*, 165.

³⁵ John W. and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 14.

³⁶ Clifford Geertz, editor, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30; cited in Schutt, *op. cit.*, 373.

are selected on the basis of convenience.”³⁷ The churches from which participants in the study were chosen included those who replied to letters sent to the churches in the convenience sample indicating their willingness to participate. Positive responses were received from ten of the total of 42 letters mailed, which were followed by emails and voicemails encouraging participation. Five of the churches in the convenience sample did not have pastors at the time of the study and were not included in the mailing. The participants represented larger urban churches and smaller rural churches. Lay leaders in these churches are not identified easily from available sources. Therefore, snowball sampling was pursued by asking the participating clergy to recommend lay leaders in their churches who may be candidates for interviews. No lay leaders, who were willing to participate, were found.

The names of individual participants and churches are known only to the researcher, who transcribed the recorded interviews. Once the transcripts were compared to the recordings to verify their accuracy, the recordings were deleted. The transcripts and other documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer. They are to be destroyed and deleted three years after the research study. Any references to the participants or their churches are by fictitious names, only.

Personal Interviews

The study began with one-on-one, semi-structured interviews of pastors and a minister of education from several of the Southern Baptist churches in the county, including larger urban churches and smaller rural churches. The interviews gathered

³⁷ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 169.

information regarding lay leadership training conducted by the pastor, other clergy, or lay leaders, the type or category of training (leadership, theological, other), whether it is voluntary or compulsory, one session or periodic, and whether the clergy believe the training is effective in achieving the church's goals. Interview questions included a category utilized in the event that no training is offered in order to explore the reasons for its absence and the pastor's expectations if the training was offered.

The interviews were conducted at the churches where the interviewees serve. Prior to the interviews, each participant was given a Pre-interview General Information Form, which was gathered by the researcher at the time of the interview. The form is attached in Appendix A.

Pilot Interviews

Before the research study began, pilot interviews were conducted with a church pastor, a Sunday school ministry team leader, and a Sunday school teacher. These individuals were from two churches which are not included in the research study. The pilot interviews were held in order to hone the interview skills of the researcher, finetune the interview questions, and practice data coding and analysis. Based on the results of the pilot interviews, interview questions were amended to gather additional data regarding the theoretical framework of the research study. Additionally, analysis of the pilot interviews' data produced code lists, themes, and categories which are discussed in "*Data Coding and Analysis*," below.

Publicly Available Information

Documents used in the study included information about the churches published on their websites, in social media, or displayed in the churches, *e.g.* mission and vision statements, goals, staff information, or other information about the church. Participants were informed of the researcher's desire to utilize such information, and it is used only with the participants' permission.

Data Coding and Analysis

With the consent of the interviewees, audio recordings were made. Transcriptions were produced in order to obtain a word-for-word, written record of each interview. During the interviews, the researcher made notes in order to capture key statements, unusual phrases, and perceptions. After each interview, the researcher completed a summary form.³⁸ During the summary process, the researcher added interpretive and reflexive comments.

Transcripts of the interviews were coded manually by dividing the text into segments and identifying themes. From each of these theme sections, codes were developed. Codes were reduced by looking for overlap and redundancy. As each interview's transcript, notes, and summary were reviewed, the identification of new or similar themes and codes was sought.³⁹ The researcher did not use computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis. Interviews were conducted with participants and two tests were satisfied: completeness and saturation. They were complete when enough data had been

³⁸ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 421.

³⁹ Creswell and Baez, *op. cit.*, 162-171.

collected to obtain a sense of the meaning of the themes. Saturation occurred when data were repeating and additional information was no longer being learned.⁴⁰

As noted above, analysis of the pilot interviews produced a code list with themes, as well as categories which were examined in the research interviews. *A priori* codes from the research's theoretical framework of the situational approach to leadership included competence (knowledge), commitment (motivation), and assessment (evaluation). Enumeration codes, words or phrases repeated across the pilot interviews, were sought, and inductive codes emerged from the data. Moreover, the researcher learned from the results of the pilot interviews that the research interviews should include inquiry surrounding methods of evaluation of competence and commitment of the teachers and that the researcher may want to consider providing a list of leadership methods which the interviewee could consider for his answer in identifying his leadership style.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative research case study explores the strategies and procedures in place in Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States, utilized by clergy and ministry leaders to evaluate lay leaders' competence in and commitment to Southern Baptist doctrine as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000. The results of this research can be used by churches participating in the study and other Southern Baptist churches to identify the need for training of their lay leadership in doctrine and to assess their strategies and procedures for evaluating their lay leadership.

⁴⁰ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 173.

This training and assessment, properly performed, may assist the local church in becoming more effective. To cite Barna, yet again, effective churches “(g)et people involved in systematic theological growth.”⁴¹ However, offering a class is not enough because the class will fail if not led by someone with the proper expertise.⁴²

Researcher Role and Assumptions

The researcher acted as the main instrument of data collection and analysis. As Merriam and Tisdell note, this allows for human interpretation of the data including the nonverbal information conveyed by the interviewees.⁴³ However, because the researcher is a member of a Southern Baptist church and a lay leader in a local church, great care was employed to ensure an etic view as much as possible. As Merriam and Tisdell emphasize, “The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspective, not the researcher’s.”⁴⁴ These authors continue,

... the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that can have an impact on the study ... it is important to identify them and monitor them in relation to the theoretical framework and in light of the researcher’s own interests, to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data.⁴⁵

Therefore, an evaluation of this researcher’s biases and their potential effects is warranted.

Much has been written about biases that can affect any research study. For example, the research may suffer from selection bias or response bias because the study population was not impartially selected or the group who participated over-represented a

⁴¹ Barna, *Habits, op. cit.*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁴³ Merriam and Tisdell, *op. cit.*, 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

certain element.⁴⁶ Data analysis bias or confirmation bias may occur by interpreting data in a manner that supports the researcher's preconceived theory or by removing data that contradict his hypothesis.⁴⁷ The researcher may reinforce his mental models through question-order or leading-question bias which influences the participants' answers to subsequent questions.⁴⁸ Further, the researcher must guard against acquiescence bias, which occurs when a participant provides a response that he believes is in agreement with the researcher's point of view, and social desirability bias, in which the interviewee answers falsely because he thinks that a particular response would be better accepted by the researcher.⁴⁹

This study's researcher had to consider the possibility of the foregoing biases as they may relate to his own mental models concerning the roles of lay leaders in the church and how those leaders should be assessed. Senge defines mental models as "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how to take action."⁵⁰ He goes on to posit that these mental models can cause a failure to accept new insights or practices due to the fact that they conflict with one's views of how things should be done.⁵¹ Based on his experiences in Southern Baptist churches, the researcher began this study from a certain perspective

⁴⁶ Christopher J. Pannucci and Edwin G. Wilkins, "Identifying and Avoiding Bias in Research," *Plast Reconstr Surg*. 2010 August; 126(2): 619-625. doi:10.1097/PRS.0b013e3181de24bc.

⁴⁷ Louis Principe, "8 Ways to Rule Out Bias in Qualitative Research," Civicom Marketing Research Services, September 26, 2022. <https://www.civicomrs.com/8-ways-to-rule-out-bias-in-qualitative-research>.

⁴⁸ Shivane Shah, "7 Biases to Avoid in Qualitative Research," Editage Insights, January 3, 2019. <https://www.editage.com/insights/7-biaes-to-avoid-in-qualitative-research>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990), 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

regarding the selection of lay leaders, their training, and the evaluation of their competence and commitment.

Lay leaders or ministry leaders are members of the local church, as distinguished from clergy, who are in charge of certain duties and, in many cases, groups of people, who assist in carrying out the ministries of the church. These include, but are not limited to, Sunday school teachers or Bible study leaders. The ministries of the church are teaching, fellowship, worship, serving, evangelism, or subsets thereof. Lay leaders, because of their positions and influence, hold sway over the development of fellow believers' advancement in understanding and walking in the faith. These leaders act as role models for those being disciplined, irrespective of whether the leaders intend to be, and many of their followers view them as arbiters of truth regarding church doctrine. However, in the researcher's experience, lay leaders receive little training, and they are not evaluated as to their levels of knowledge or motivation required to perform their assigned tasks successfully.

The researcher sees this study's theoretical framework, Situational Leadership, as containing the fundamentals of how to lead people. In order to ensure that prospective or existing lay leaders will perform or are executing their jobs well, Situational Leadership's principles of assessment of a worker's development level, along with a corresponding adjustment in leadership style by the supervisor of the lay leader, are particularly helpful. Therefore, the researcher had preconceived ideas regarding how this process should work.

First, as a group, church leadership should develop vision, mission, and goals for the church as a whole, along with methods for pursuing the congregation's comprehension and buy-in of these statements. Second, lay leaders should be instructed in how each ministry fits into these goals. Third, each lay leader, existing and prospective, should be assessed individually by the pastor, other member of clergy, or lay ministry leader, regarding competence and commitment. Competence includes knowledge of church doctrine, understanding of Scripture's teachings, and whether the leader has established goals for the lay leaders' efforts which mesh with the church's mission. Commitment refers to the lay leader's motivation for performance. The importance of this factor cannot be overstated. Assessment of commitment should be an ongoing process. Blanchard *et al.* say that motivation is key. Maybe the leader has discovered that the task is harder than expected, the leader's efforts have not been properly appreciated, or the lay leader has become bored with the job.⁵²

Fourth, each lay leader and appropriate supervisor should mutually agree upon the supervisor's leadership style based on the lay leader's development level, whether this style should be more directive or more supportive. Fifth, this should not be a one-and-done conversation. Periodically, meetings should occur between supervisor and lay leader to discuss progress, and there should be regular group-learning sessions, *e.g.* Sunday school teacher meetings, in which goals are reviewed and instruction is given to increase the lay leaders' competence and commitment. Attendance at these meetings should be mandatory. Otherwise, the lay leaders' tasks and efforts may be seen as

⁵² Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership, op. cit.*, 37

unimportant. The researcher has not experienced this application of Situational Leadership in the churches where he has served as a lay leader, but he was optimistic that he would discover such practices in the Southern Baptist churches whose leaders participated in the study.

The predispositions of the researcher precipitated the use of certain techniques to overcome the potential for biases as described above. The first practice was reflexivity which, according to John and David Creswell, involves addressing past experiences and how those experiences shape interpretations.⁵³ The researcher maintained a journal during the data collection process that included recording the researcher's reactions and concerns from the interviews. Creswell and Baez note that the researcher's reflexivity causes him to contemplate how his own background may affect data analysis and "the likely impact the study will have on readers and how the participants may react to the study."⁵⁴ Secondly, the researcher was constantly aware of the possibility of selection bias, in particular a subset of this prejudice known as backyard bias. The researcher has detailed knowledge of the participants' church polity, being a member of the same Protestant denomination; so, he chose a convenience sample that reflected this polity and was in close proximity. Studying one's own backyard has risks and benefits. According to Creswell and Baez,

One argument against studying your own backyard is that you have predetermined expectations of what you will find ... on the other side [of the argument] in your own backyard you will have easy access to data, and it will be

⁵³ Creswell and Creswell, *op. cit.*, 184.

⁵⁴ Creswell and Baez, *op. cit.*, 235.

convenient for you to collect data ... because it is your backyard and you are familiar with the situation, you may have more detailed and better data.⁵⁵

The researcher, also, took other steps to subdue potential biases. In order to decrease the level of researcher bias, interviews were not conducted with members of two churches in which the researcher has been an active lay leader. Further, two of the participants were asked to validate the summaries of their interviews for accuracy. Moreover, peer review was employed. An individual with a Ph.D. in Leadership, who had been a fellow doctoral student during the time that the researcher was involved in classwork for this degree, was asked to review some of the transcripts for data coding and analysis. (See “Issues of Trustworthiness,” in Chapter 3, which discusses Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, Transferability, and Triangulation).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations include the fact that all of the churches are Southern Baptist; all are in the same county; the sample included only the churches who responded positively to requests to participate from the convenience sample chosen by the researcher; and other theoretical frameworks could have been chosen.

Limitations include the size of churches; sex of the participants; education level of the participants; income level of the congregations; and the ethnicity of churches.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined.

Situational Approach. A leadership theory, also known as Situational Leadership® II, as outlined by Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Nelson. It opines that, based on an assessment of followers' levels of competence and commitment, leaders adjust their leadership styles, adopting an approach that reflects various levels of directive or supportive behavior.⁵⁶

Competence. The level of ability or knowledge to perform a task.

Commitment. The level of motivation to perform a task.

Directing style. Highly directive and low supportive leadership behavior.

Coaching style. Highly directive and highly supportive leadership behavior.

Supporting style. Highly supportive and low directive leadership behavior.

Delegating style. Low supportive and low directive leadership behavior.

Baptist Faith and Message of 2000. A statement of belief adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000.

Urban. For purposes of this study, locations within incorporated municipalities. No city within the county in which these churches are located, has a population greater than 10,000 according to the 2020 US Census data.

⁵⁶ Kenneth H. Blanchard, Drea Zigarmi, and Robert B. Nelson, "Situational Leadership After 25 Years: A Retrospective," *Journal of Leadership & Org. Studies*, 1993; 1; 21 DOI: 10.1177/10717919930100104.

Organization of Dissertation

This introductory chapter presented an overview of the study through description of the background, purpose, approach, significance, delimitations and limitations, and vocabulary of the research. Chapter 2 constructs the theoretical framework of the study through a review of literature related to the research questions. Chapter 3 describes the research employed to conduct the study, with particular attention to the methodology and technique applied to data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the study results in the form of data generated and analyzed through application of the research design. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of study findings and conclusions related to the research questions and reviewed literature. This concluding chapter also addresses the implications of the findings for practice and research, as well as leadership. Following these chapters are an Epilogue, Appendices, and a Bibliography.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies and procedures, implemented in Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the southeastern United States, to equip the lay leadership and to assess the doctrinal and church-goal-related competence and commitment of lay leaders, especially Sunday school teachers. The study sought answers to three research questions:

(1) What strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership;

(2) What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these lay leaders, as defined by Blanchard's Situational Leadership model; and

(3) What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence in and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000?

The study was designed as a qualitative research case study of Southern Baptist churches located in a small, mostly rural county in the Southeast, and it employed one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with nine pastors and one minister of education. The study also conducted a literature review of related research and theory in the areas of lay leadership training and participation and the situational approach to leadership.

It is the responsibility of pastors and other church leaders to ensure that the members are educated in the church's doctrine.

It was [Jesus] who gave some to be ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

Paul, near the end of his life, challenges Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman ... who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Scriptural knowledge remains crucial for pastors and lay leaders, especially Sunday school or Bible study teachers. As Jesus states, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). What follows are summaries of what the literature says about the need for properly trained lay leaders and how to assess and evaluate their competence and commitment.

This chapter reviews the literature addressing research and theory related to the study in the areas of the importance of effective church laity, laic education, laic participation, volunteer satisfaction, and the study's theoretical framework, the situational approach to leadership.

A summary analysis of prominent themes and findings within the reviewed literature is presented at the end of the chapter.

Review of the Literature

Lay Leadership, Volunteers, and General Leadership Issues

A number of researchers and writers emphasize the importance of an effective church laity. Fox is the editor of a book which is a compilation of comments of various

authors describing reactions to a publication of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2005 that discussed development of lay ministry in the Roman Catholic church. It may be used as an example of how all churches are recognizing the importance of lay leadership training.⁵⁷ In this book, McCord notes that the publication describes itself as “a common frame of reference for ensuring that the development of lay ecclesial ministry continues in ways that are faithful to the church’s theological and doctrinal tradition and that respond to contemporary pastoral needs and situations.”⁵⁸ Also in this book, Wcela defines Christian ministry as

the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realize the kingdom of God. The church is not built up merely by the acts of the official ministers of the presbytery but by many kinds of services, more of less stable or occasional, more of less spontaneous or recognized ...⁵⁹

Hansens performed a qualitative study of three Wesleyan churches in the Midwestern United States gathering data from members to assess the qualities of effective leadership that led to growth in those churches.⁶⁰ She states that “(s)uccessful organizations establish bonds based on mutual trust, dedication and commitment to the organization.”⁶¹ She concludes, “Lay leaders bring skills from outside the church that enable them to apply that skill within the church. Lay leaders outnumber the pastoral staff allowing for the workload to be spread across several people, thereby lightening the

⁵⁷ Zeni Fox, editor, *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Pathways Toward the Future* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

⁵⁸ H. Richard McCord, Jr. in Fox, *op. cit.*, 3.

⁵⁹ Emil A. Wcela in Fox, *op. cit.*, 34.

⁶⁰ Alice R. Hansens. (2015). *Factors and Qualities of Layperson Leadership Influencing Church Growth: A Multiple Case Study* [Doctoral Dissertation, Capella University] UMI 3704443.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

load for all and allowing others a place to both serve and belong (*sic*). Lay leaders are the most important contributing factor to the attendance growth of a church.”⁶²

Many note the lack of laic education in the church, including their level of understanding Scripture. Graham concludes that the purpose of the church is not to gather people of like minds, but to evangelize the world. The church has not been able to balance laity’s contributions to worship and the practice of Christianity in the secular world. She cites research that suggests that some of the problems of laity development are a lack of laity education programs in the church to overcome laity’s resistance to learning and lack of an intellectual approach to faith.⁶³ She goes on to quote Bliss, who “is uncompromising in complaining about much of what passes for training in local churches or conflates competence in fulfilling church duties within the vital and primary task of enabling the laity to carry out their worldly vocations ... what the laity lack is ... basic equipment in understanding what it means to be a Christian.”⁶⁴ Graham also cites Gibbs and Morton who note that “the church has become ossified—frozen into a holy huddle—such that it has forgotten to serve the needs of those outside. The church has failed to articulate or build a sufficiently robust theology of the laity because it has been too pre-occupied with its own maintenance.”⁶⁵

There are churches which ignore the need for the laity’s input in designing their education programs. Davis studied churches that declined in education program

⁶² *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶³ Graham, Elaine (2017). “Luther’s Legacy: Rethinking the Theology of Lay Discipleship 500 Years after the Reformation.” *Ecclesiology* 13, 324-348.

⁶⁴ K. Bliss, *We the People* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1963), 52; quoted in Graham, *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶⁵ M. Gibbs and T. Ralph Morton, *God’s Frozen People: a book for and about ordinary Christians*, 2nd American ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 9; quoted in Graham, *Ibid.*, 333.

participation and concluded that a “process of learning, planning, and a collaborative development of an education program” increased the number of members who became lay leaders which attracted others to participate.⁶⁶ He used participatory action research, which stresses active participation by individuals in identifying and solving problems. This project involved 178 leaders and more than 1,000 members of a very large church in the Southern United States. The research was enhanced by participants visiting other churches to observe and note others’ education programs. As a result of the visits, participants reflected on their church’s education program and their roles in it. In other words, they were assessing, to some extent, their competence and commitment in order to improve their own program.

Boyer took a different approach by performing a sociorhetorical analysis of Exodus 18 as it relates to developing authentic small group leaders and concluded that authentic leadership was needed for discipleship development.⁶⁷ Boyer cites Bergler’s 2012 report on the “juvenilization” of Christianity in the United States and says that there is a need for more substantial discipleship.⁶⁸ Boyer also quotes Eims when he says, “Unfortunately, many leaders do not understand the process of making disciples or leadership development.”⁶⁹ Quoting Osborne: “The basic evangelical fallacy of our generation is ‘proof-texting,’ that process whereby a person ‘proves’ a doctrine or

⁶⁶ Davis, D. (2007). Learning our way: Engaging laity through large-scale participatory action research. *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 4(1), 48-62. Doi:10.1558//jate2007v4i1.48.

⁶⁷ Boyer, Stuart W. (2017). Towards Developing Authentic Small Group Leaders: A Sociorhetorical Analysis of the Book of Exodus 18 [Doctoral Dissertation, Regent University] ProQuest 10599583.

⁶⁸ Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012); cited in Boyer, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); cited in Boyer, *op. cit.*

practice merely by alluding to a text without considering its original inspired meaning.” Boyer adds, “Osborne made clear that the purpose and intent of hermeneutics involves understanding and allowing the God of the Word and the Word of God to speak, rather than the opinions of the preacher.”⁷⁰ The first principles (those derived from the themes induced from Boyer’s data) reveal that leaders’ personal development requires a humble attitude with a resolution toward lifelong learning and development.⁷¹

Crossley posits, “Perhaps what is missing from much traditional training [in the church] is the nurturing of the Biblical leadership skills that so often make all the difference to the well-being of a local church.”⁷² Churches languish because their leaders are not trained properly.⁷³ “Many churches long for thoroughly equipped men of God, well-grounded in Scripture, to lead in a God-honouring direction.”⁷⁴ The church must employ educational methods that result in disciples who have doctrinal knowledge which allows them to teach and correct error in others’ beliefs in a reasoned manner.⁷⁵ Crossley advocates a mentoring relationship between pastor and potential church leader so that skills are honed and assessed.⁷⁶ He cites Paul in saying that “shepherds are responsible for all teaching given throughout the church, whether in the context of worship, evangelism, children’s work, informal contact, or any other sphere ... the shepherds are

⁷⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 23; quoted in Boyer, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Boyer, *op. cit.*

⁷² Gareth Crossley, *Growing Leaders in the Church: The Essential Leadership Development Resource* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2008), 17.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

... answerable to God for the maintenance of sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3-4).”⁷⁷ Further, Crossley quotes Berghoef and DeKoster who stress, “Do not confuse knowledge with understanding. One may know much, yet understand little.”⁷⁸ In the promotion of teaching the entirety of Scripture, the author quotes Davies, “Isolated texts are no substitute for a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and are no evidence of submission to what the Bible teaches.”⁷⁹

Lay leaders are key in evangelism and church growth. Hadaway examined “breakout churches” in Southern Baptist congregations. These are the churches which break their plateau in membership. He states, “Greater congregational conservatism may create an environment which is more receptive to the actions necessary to break off the plateau.” The study found that the keys to this action were evangelism and goal setting.⁸⁰ This process includes the coordination of church education, other programs, and leaders both clerical and laic. Hadaway says, “... it would seem that the primary goal of the pastor in leading the church to growth is that of a catalytic motivator, who leads the church in the proper direction and is able to motivate lay members to do the necessary work.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁸ G. Berghoef and L. De Koster, *The Elder's Handbook: a practical guide for church leaders* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 1979), 25; quoted in Crossley, *op. cit.*, 102.

⁷⁹ Davies, “Reformation for elders and deacons,” 5; in Crossley, *op. cit.*, 228.

⁸⁰ C. Kirk Hadaway (1991). “From Stability to Growth: A Study of Factors Related to the Statistical Revitalization of Southern Baptist Congregations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (2): 181. Doi:10.2307/1387212.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Dreibelbis concluded that effective churches had members who were actively involved in the church's ministries.⁸² He examined responses to a Lilly Endowment research project entitled, "Toward a Higher Quality of Christian Ministry," noting how church members described their experiences based on whether they believed their clergy were actively or passively engaged. He states that "effective congregation members reported *active engagements* about 65 percent more often than struggling congregation members ..."⁸³ The author found that effective clergy delineated duties of church leaders so that people could apply their abilities, as well as their interests. He points out that lay members are more highly educated than in the past and that typical church members come from a diversity of cultures. Dreibelbis says, "Effective clergy are aware of the networks of communication and influence that are centered in long-established parish members and in elected or appointed holders of key positions. They observe carefully how key people in those networks respond to actual or proposed changes."⁸⁴ Part of the conclusion and challenge: "We need ... lay people ... who will rely on their own strong sense of agency and will be clear, consistent, quick, collaborative, [and] decisive."⁸⁵ Dreibelbis offers a sobering thought in his conclusion, "The process by which we learn to embody the gospel in the community is the same process by which the people form and

⁸² Dreibelbis, J. (2010). From maintaining to building communities of faith. *Anglican Theological Review* 92(1), 147-155. Retrieved from: <http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

grow in Christ.”⁸⁶ This is a reason why proper evaluation of the church’s lay leaders, especially teachers, is so important.

Rogers in his *Diffusion of Innovations* discusses how change is embraced by organizations. He notes that one should recognize that every group contains opinion leaders, some who are innovative and others who are against change.⁸⁷ However, the “most striking characteristic of opinion leaders is their unique and influential position in their system’s communication structure: they are at the center of interpersonal communication networks.”⁸⁸ Leaders must locate and use these opinion leaders effectively.⁸⁹

Woolfe discusses the need to develop leaders in every organization if the organization expects to survive in the future. The author stresses leadership development based on biblical principles using as examples Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon. He proposes allowing leaders in training the opportunity to exercise leadership skills early in their careers and that their mentors must be constantly providing guidance but in a coaching posture.⁹⁰

Hougland and Wood embark to answer two questions that they believe research has failed to answer regarding the influence that church members’ participation levels have on commitment to action. They state,

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 27.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Loren Woolfe, *The Bible on Leadership: From Moses to Matthew: Management Lessons for Contemporary Leaders* (Nashville: AMACON, 2002).

First, to what extent must members' participation involve actual influence on decision-making if it is to produce benefits for the organization? In other words, is participation alone sufficient to maintain the vitality of local churches? Second, might members' involvement in decision-making inhibit implementation of the organization's values? Underlying the second question is a concern that widespread participation might limit leaders' flexibility in implementing the goals of the local church.⁹¹

Citing Knoke, the researchers say, "Churches' social control systems and other structural characteristics are important because they affect members' ability to exert influence over the direction of any organization's affairs."⁹² The data for Hougland and Wood's study were obtained in the early to mid-1970s. They came from church documents, interviews, and questionnaires completed by members and lay leaders in churches of seven Protestant denominations, and 44 churches agreed to be involved. Two hundred four lay leaders participated along with more than 2,100 lay members. Hougland and Wood concluded that it is not participation alone that leads to growth in membership and social action involvement. Churches must give consideration to members' influence over decisions.⁹³ This declaration is as applicable today as it was in the 1970s.

Garverick explored the factors affecting the satisfaction of church volunteers in their ministries. In his literature review, he quotes Williams and Gangel who state, "The motivational factors that activate internal motives to lead individuals to fulfill God's purpose are proper for believers ... the key will be to encourage those motives that bring

⁹¹ J.G. Hougland & J.R. Wood (1982). Participation in local churches: An exploration of its impact on satisfaction, growth, and social action. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21(4), 338-352, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1385523>.

⁹² David Knoke (1981). Commitment and detachment in voluntary associations. *American Sociological Review* 46: 141-158; quoted in Hougland & Wood, *op. cit.*

⁹³ Hougland and Wood, *op. cit.*

biblical fulfillment to people.”⁹⁴ Garverick adds that volunteer organizations must harmonize the pursuit of mission with the volunteers’ sense of satisfaction in their work. He says, “... the continuing engagement between local church leadership and its volunteers must be ongoing and multi-faceted.”⁹⁵ Garverick performed a qualitative case study of the staff and volunteers of a Wesleyan church in the Midwestern United States. The main focus was to ascertain how church volunteers experienced satisfaction in their ministries. This was accomplished through group interviews. According to Garverick, “The group interview method is most appropriate for this study in that collective group input is necessary to gain a broader understanding of local church volunteers’ experience satisfaction in their local church.”⁹⁶ He found that church volunteers achieved more satisfaction in their roles when leaders provided vision, direction, and planning. Some volunteers noted that they were dissatisfied if given too much liberty to fulfill their roles and believed that without leadership’s direction their roles were aimless. Further, the researcher suggested that further study was needed related to volunteer satisfaction and spiritual maturity as motivations for volunteer ministry.⁹⁷

A study by Malinen and Harju indicates that, for volunteers to make significant contributions to their organizations, they need to know how their roles contribute to the

⁹⁴ DE Williams and KO Gangel, *Volunteers for Today’s Church: How to Recruit and Retain Workers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 95; quoted in Paul E. Garverick (2013). “How Volunteers Experience Ministry Satisfaction in the Contexts of a Local Church and its Organizational Leadership: A Case Study.” EdD diss., Indiana Wesleyan University.

⁹⁵ Garverick, Paul E. (2013). “How Volunteers Experience Ministry Satisfaction in the Contexts of a Local Church and its Organizational Leadership: A Case Study.” EdD diss., Indiana Wesleyan University.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

organization's mission.⁹⁸ The researchers conducted their study in New Zealand and had 221 participants. They sought, in addition to demographic data, the participants' satisfaction level in their volunteer positions, engagement with the work, their perceptions of the organizational support they received, how committed they are to their particular organization, and how likely they were to cease volunteering. They found that "volunteers who feel supported are likely to want to reciprocate such provision of resources by being more present in their role, for example, by showing higher levels of engagement."⁹⁹ They add, "Volunteer organizations should focus on ways to increase volunteers' perceptions of the support they receive."¹⁰⁰

Morris quotes Howard Snyder: "Today much of the church moves with a massive misunderstanding of its own nature and mission ... Many believers still operate with a static, institutional understanding, seeing the church as buildings, meetings, programs, and professional clergy and special techniques of communication, evangelism and church growth."¹⁰¹ Morris says, "The church leaders ... are constantly faced with the challenge of leading people to look beyond the material and see changed lives that follow after the heart of Christ." He continues, "The church finds her meaning and purpose by seeking God's heart, studying God's Word, and participating in God's mission ... Understanding

⁹⁸ Sanna Malinen and Lotta Harju (2017). "Volunteer Engagement: Exploring the Distinction Between Job and Organizational Engagement," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations* 28 (1): 69-89. Doi:10.1007/s11266-016-9823-z.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 68; quoted in Rosevelt Morris (2012). "The Effect of Mission Education on Congregational Community Engagement at Lexington Baptist Church, Lexington, South Carolina." DMin thesis, McAfee School of Theology.

God’s mission for the local church is critical to the message of Jesus Christ and local engagement in the community.” Morris concluded that mission training, based on biblical texts, was effective in encouraging the congregation to become more involved in local missions.¹⁰²

The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000, in Article XI, “Evangelism and Missions,” discusses the church’s mission and provides the biblical basis for this doctrine:

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man’s spirit by God’s Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.¹⁰³

Richards and Hoeldtke use Scripture to develop a theology of church leadership. They conclude that missiological goals are accomplished by the church as a body and that church leaders must understand the dynamics of encouraging member participation.¹⁰⁴

Dougherty performed a study of Southern Baptist churches which found that church growth is related directly to an active membership. The study sought to identify the attributes of the members that contributed to the growth. He found that lay leadership

¹⁰² Morris, Rosevelt (2012). “The Effect of Mission Education on Congregational Community Engagement at Lexington Baptist Church, Lexington, South Carolina.” DMin thesis, McAfee School of Theology.

¹⁰³ The Baptist Faith and Message, A Statement Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000 (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence O. Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980).

contributed heavily to church growth.¹⁰⁵ He notes, “People lose a sense of ownership in a group when they have no say in its operation ... The development of denominational seminaries and clergy certification supplanted lay leadership with religious experts. Congregations hire trained clergy to fulfill the responsibilities that untrained laity performed in past generations.” Also, “Laity, as they increasingly invest in their religion, gain more direct experience to share with family and friends.”¹⁰⁶

Hulbert sought to determine whether a training program for potential church planters was effective and being applied in local churches. In particular, he looked at data collected from lay leaders who had been trained by graduates of the training program. The training program consisted of 15 lessons related to starting a church. The researcher concluded that 20% of the training’s graduates had produced more disciple-makers but that the training program needed to be revised to address the need for additional leadership development tools. Leadership reproductive processes are needed to prompt a church to expand and plant a new church.¹⁰⁷

Douglas, in *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, quotes Blanchard and Hodges: “... ultimately the Great Commission functions as a graduation of the disciples, who have been officially tasked with carrying on the mission of Jesus.”¹⁰⁸ “Jesus makes

¹⁰⁵ Dougherty, K. (2004). Institutional influences on growth in Southern Baptist congregations. *Review of Religious Research* 46(2), 117-131. Retrieved from <http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/journal/13644>.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Hulbert, Darren D. (2004). “Lay Leadership Development in the Context of Church Planting in California Southern Baptist Churches.” DMin diss., Dallas Theological Seminary.

¹⁰⁸ K. Blanchard & P. Hodges, *Servant Leader: Transforming your Heart, Head, Hands, and Habits* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003); quoted in Scott M. Douglas, “Developing Leaders for Pastoral Ministry,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall 2014, 85.

it clear [in Luke 6:40] for those who would come after Him that raising up leaders is about replicating oneself in the protégé, and developing the whole person rather than simply fulfilling a curricula (*sic*).”¹⁰⁹ In discussing living in mentoring relationships, Douglas notes that they involve “regularly practiced spiritual disciplines.”¹¹⁰ Would this not involve biblical instruction?

Pinelli *et al.* state that several sources have suggested that leadership styles and behaviors must be adapted for various generations. However, their study does not agree with this suggestion. Instead, it concludes that followers are attracted to leaders as individuals, not on the generational level.¹¹¹

Barna has performed extensive research tapping current opinions regarding religion. In one Barna conclusion, he expects “to see a widening gap between the intensely committed and those who are casually involved in faith matters.”¹¹² In commenting on Barna’s findings, Mohler says, in an article in the Baptist Press, “We shouldn’t expect that lost people would be experts in Christian doctrine, but we have every reason to expect that healthy disciples would be well-grounded in biblical truth.”¹¹³

Barna, in his book, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*, makes several important points. “Few Christians engage in serious theological dialogue because they

¹⁰⁹ Scott M. Douglas, “Developing Leaders for Pastoral Ministry,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall 2014, 85.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹¹ Nicole R. Pinelli, Julie M. Sease, Kamala Nola, Jeffrey A. Kyle, Seth D. Heldenbrand, Scott R. Penzak, and Diane B. Ginsburg (2018), “The Importance of Authentic Leadership to All Generations Represented within Academic Pharmacy,” *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 82 (6): 637-40. doi: 10.5688/ajpe6694.

¹¹² Barna Group, *Barna Lists*, *op. cit.*

¹¹³ Foust, *op. cit.*

are simply incapable of sustaining a sophisticated conversation about their faith.”¹¹⁴

Barna suggests that for churches to be effective they should become the laity’s seminary.¹¹⁵ “The core philosophy embraced by these churches is that Bible knowledge and application must completely influence a person’s mind and heart in order for spiritual maturity to be achieved.”¹¹⁶ For this to happen, churches must set learning as a priority and the sermon cannot be the only opportunity for this education to take place.¹¹⁷

“Highly effective churches attract and keep great lay teachers because they know what they stand for as a ministry, what a mature Christian looks like, and the route that must be traveled to develop committed students.”¹¹⁸ Barna continues and says that effective churches provide resources to help teachers with their teaching skills, to increase the teachers’ commitment, and to ensure the teachers understand Scripture.¹¹⁹

Theoretical Framework

Northouse notes that Hersey and Blanchard used Reddin’s 1967 3-D management theory to develop their Situational Approach to leadership.¹²⁰ In his work, Reddin identified two orientations of leaders: Task Orientation, a directing of followers’ efforts, and Relationships Orientation, a personal-relationship approach involving respect and mutual trust. Reddin bases his conclusions on the results of three studies, the Ohio State Leadership Studies, the Michigan Leadership Studies, and the work of Bales at Harvard

¹¹⁴ Barna, *Habits, op. cit.*, 130.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁰ Northouse, *op. cit.*, 95.

University, which he opines demonstrate that there are two individual, leadership orientations, task and relationship. However, he avers, based on a review of the literature, that various combinations of task and orientation behaviors can lead to successful organizations, *i.e.* that no one-size-fits-all exists. Reddin puts forth his 3-D Theory which incorporates twelve management types and that reflect differing versions of eight styles: deserter, missionary, autocrat, compromiser, bureaucrat, developer, benevolent autocrat, and executive. One of Reddin's conclusions, important to the research study of this writer, is that "effectiveness is a function of match of style to situation."¹²¹

In discussing followers' development levels and how the leader should react to them, Blanchard and his coauthors note that motivation of the followers is key. "Sometimes people lose motivation when they realize it is going to be harder than they thought. Or maybe they feel their efforts and progress aren't being acknowledged. At other times, people just get bored—they figure the effort isn't worth it."¹²² Leaders, to be effective, must employ three skills, according to Blanchard and his coauthors: goal setting, diagnosis, and matching. Goal setting includes performance planning and day-to-day coaching which, when applied correctly, improves the outcomes of performance evaluation.¹²³ Clear goals must be set, development levels of lay leaders must be evaluated, and leaders must adapt their own leadership approaches to the level of

¹²¹ W.J. Reddin, "The 3-D Management Style Theory: A Typology Based on Task and Relationship Orientation," *Training and Development Journal* (April 1967), 8-16, EBSCO Publishing 2002.

¹²² Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership, op. cit.*, 37.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 25-28.

knowledge (competence) and motivation (commitment) of the lay leaders under their supervision. In assessing a follower's development level, competence and commitment are key factors.¹²⁴

Many have criticized the situational approach as being too simplistic. In actuality, its simplicity leads to ease of application. Blanchard says in his work that he had “always been told by his faculty members in graduate school that his writing wasn't academic enough. He later learned that meant you could understand it.”¹²⁵ Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Nelson revisited Hersey and Blanchard's work in 1993 in an article entitled, “Situational Leadership© After 25 Years: A Retrospective.” It began as the Life Cycle Theory of Leadership and, as stated above, it was an attempt to improve on Reddin's work.¹²⁶ The result was a textbook, *Management of Organizational Behavior*.¹²⁷ “It was in the 1972 edition ... that Hersey and Blanchard first started to use the term Situational Leadership to describe their approach.”¹²⁸

As time and experience progressed, including the receipt of criticism by others, Hersey and Blanchard began revising their model based on feedback from their clients. Blanchard *et al.* note that Drs. Donald Carew and Eunice Parisi-Carew provided the major stimulus to revise the model based on their work in group development theory.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹²⁵ Blanchard *et al.*, Situational, *op. cit.*, 23.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁷ Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*, 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993); cited in Blanchard *et al.*, Situational, *op. cit.*, 23.

¹²⁸ Blanchard *et al.*, Situational, *op. cit.*, 24.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

The revised model, Situational Leadership® II, appeared in 1985 along with a new instrument called the Leader Behavior Analysis.

Blanchard's revised model was published in *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*.¹³⁰ As House includes in his closing argument, "... all theories no matter how good at exploring a set of phenomena, are ultimately incorrect and consequently will undergo modification over time."¹³¹ The model stresses one-on-one interaction between leader and follower to assess the follower's commitment and competence and, in turn, to redirect the leadership style of the leader. The leader adjusts his or her style based on the follower's development level, but it must be understood that the goal is to improve the follower's development level not only to accomplish a task. As Blanchard *et al.* state, "The term Development Level refers to the extent to which a person has mastered the skills necessary for the task at hand and has developed a positive attitude toward the task. We believe that competence and confidence can be developed *when the appropriate leadership styles are used*" (emphasis added).¹³² Further, "We teach ... that skills and knowledge are developed when people receive the leadership style they need from their manager."¹³³ Many lay leaders, especially Sunday school teachers, are not producing learned Bible students because they have become discouraged, and "this discouragement may be amplified due to insufficient training, supervision, and recognition for the job they have done."¹³⁴

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³¹ House, *op. cit.*

¹³² Blanchard *et al.*, Situational, *op. cit.*, 27.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

The situational approach has been applied and studied in numerous areas. For example, VanderVen assessed the potential use of Miriam Johnson's Modified Situational Leadership Model in child development and child care.¹³⁵ As an aside, it is interesting that Hersey and Blanchard's Life Cycle Theory of Leadership found its inspiration from parents' adjustments to child rearing as children matured.¹³⁶ VanderVen's article is critical of attempts to apply the model in a strict sense; however, she notes that follower development and training of workers are crucial in any type of leadership.

Arvidson *et al.* discuss the application of the situational approach in air traffic control in Sweden.¹³⁷ The researchers distributed a modified Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description questionnaire to 635 employees in three units of air traffic control; 309 completed forms were returned. The authors found that, indeed, depending on the development level of the follower, adjustments to leadership styles is important. Further, they showed that leadership styles were adjusted for individual *versus* group situations.

In 2017, the *European Journal of Training and Development* published an article by Zigarmi and Roberts regarding the use of the situational approach for human resource

¹³⁵ Karen VanderVen, "Modeling and Modified Situational Leadership: Some Comments on Johnson," *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 27(6), December 1998.

¹³⁶ Blanchard *et al.*, *Situational*, *op. cit.*, 22.

¹³⁷ Marcus Arvidsson, Curt R. Johansson, Asa Ek, and Roland Akselsson, "Situational Leadership in Air Traffic Control," *Journal of Air Transportation*, Vol. 12, No. 1 -2007.

development practitioners.¹³⁸ In their review of the literature, the researchers conclude, “These theories proposed that, because situations naturally vary, different leadership behaviors are possible and needed in practice. The challenge, then, for leaders is to use the most appropriate behaviors to ‘fit’ the circumstances ...”¹³⁹ A quantitative study was performed with 573 participants, who were a convenience sample who volunteered to participate. The vast majority (74%) were located in Canada and the United States; the remainder were from Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Zigarmi and Roberts used the Situational Leadership® II model for four reasons: it provides a model with ease in assessment based on four quadrants, the model offers four styles of leadership from which to choose, it encourages the development of empirical studies based on four distinct styles, and it provides assumptions about combinations of leadership styles. The researchers used the Leadership Action Profile which is based on the SLII framework “which measures how often respondents’ managers demonstrate directive or supporting leadership behavior.”¹⁴⁰ The study resulted in implications which a leader should note. First, followers need to receive the leadership style they believe they need. Second, leaders need to determine what the followers understand regarding leadership styles. Third, not all followers desire an entirely delegation style of leadership. The researchers

¹³⁸ Drea Zigarmi, Taylor Peyton Roberts. 2017. “A Test of Three Basic Assumptions of Situational Leadership II Model and Their Implications for HRD Practitioners,” *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 Issue: 3, 241-260.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

note, “In some cases, over-delegation not only results in lower performance but also could be seen by the direct report as abdication.”¹⁴¹

Thompson and Glaso set out to refine what they see as ambiguity in the situational approach.¹⁴² They claim that, in the situational model’s discussion of development levels, determining a follower’s knowledge and motivation levels lacks specifics. These researchers, in Norway, performed a quantitative study with a study population of 80 supervisors and 357 followers in ten financial institutions. There was a 91.6% response rate. The questionnaire inquired about performance rating, employee readiness, and followers’ assessment of their supervisors’ levels of supportiveness and directiveness. The study found that both the leader and follower should work separately first and then together to arrive at a mutual understanding of the follower’s competence and commitment to a task.

Claude Graeff has been highly critical of the situational approach. His 1997 criticism was published in *Leadership Quarterly*.¹⁴³ He claims that all versions of the model exhibit inconsistencies. This writer believes that Graeff’s displeasure with the model hinges on his rigidity in interpretation. He states, “The SLII Model appears incomplete in that it only discusses four of the possible nine combinations from the three values assigned to both the commitment variable and the competence variable.”¹⁴⁴

Leadership is both science and art; any reasonable and experienced leader realizes that

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁴² Geir Thompson and Lars Glaso. 2015. “Situational Leadership Theory: A Test from Three Perspectives,” *Leadership & Organizational Journal*, Vol. 36 Issue 5, 527-544.

¹⁴³ Claude L. Graeff. 1997. “Evolution of Situational Leadership Theory: A Critical Review,” *Leadership Quarterly*, 8(2), 153-170.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

followers cannot be placed in boxes in a model along with a corresponding mechanical response in leadership style on the leader's behalf.

Meirovich and Gu, on the other hand, produce empirical evidence of the situational approach's validity.¹⁴⁵ From the discussion of the literature included in their study, one finds numerous reasons for choosing the situational approach to leadership as the theoretical framework for this writer's research project. First, Meirovich and Gu cite Thompson and Vecchio who state, "The theory has stood the test of time in the marketplace of leadership training programs, as it is well-known and commonly used for training leaders."¹⁴⁶ Further, Meirovich and Gu assert that, if a model has characteristics in common with others that can be validated empirically, its own validity is enhanced. Such an overlap occurs with leader-member exchange theory which states that increased follower competency leads to increased autonomy from the leader's directive style. Moreover, the situational approach incorporates parts of followership theory. "Knowing information clearly contributes to employees' abilities in solving problems; commitment to decisions and sharing organizational goals support their willingness."¹⁴⁷ The researchers performed a quantitative analysis of the responses of a convenience sample of 155 graduate business school students in a Northwestern United States state university, all of whom were actively employed. They sought to measure components of readiness (which included motivation and competence), the respondents' leaders' styles,

¹⁴⁵ Gavriel Meirovich and Jian Gu, "Empirical and Theoretical Validity of Hersey-Blanchard's Contingency Model: A Critical Analysis," *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, 20(3), 56-74.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

satisfaction with the supervisors' style, self-perceived performance level, their ability to participate in decisions, and whether the supervisor is leading in an appropriate style. The researchers found that competence for a task, good performance, and job satisfaction are closely related. Further, the study indicates that, when a leader uses an inappropriate leadership style, performance and satisfaction are hampered. Clearly, the situational model's calling for a correct assessment of followers' competence and commitment is critical to organizational success.

Larsson and Vinberg conclude that a common element of successful leadership involves conversations with workers. "Cross-functional discussions and dialogues are held where the leaders seriously listen to and focus on worker ideas, wishes, and points of view."¹⁴⁸

Andres Negro performed research to analyze four leadership models. The researcher concluded that Situational Leadership plays an important role, even in complex organizations, and that this approach to leadership is "an important starting point."¹⁴⁹

Summary

The importance of proper competence strategies and assessment procedures for ensuring an effective laity can be seen in the literature. Lay leadership is vital to church growth, both in numbers and meeting missiological goals. The level of lay leaders'

¹⁴⁸ Johan Larsson and Stig Vinberg (2010) Leadership behaviour in successful organisations: Universal or situation-dependent?, *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 21:3, 317-334, DOI:10.1080/14783360903561779.

¹⁴⁹ Andres R. Negro, "Situational Leadership and Leader Versatility," *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics* Vol. 17(3) 2020, 119-120.

competence (knowledge) of Scripture should be assessed, as well as an evaluation of their commitment (motivation). The situational approach to leadership stresses such assessment and evaluation procedures. The results of these analyses allow for the leader to adjust his leadership style to the individual. Depending on the results of the evaluation, the leader can act either in a more directive or supportive manner. Based on the literature's evidence of the importance of lay leaders' training, this study explores the strategies and procedures utilized by Southern Baptist churches to improve the competence and commitment of lay leaders.

Chapter 3 describes this qualitative research case study's research methodology and includes discussions of: (a) the rationale for the research approach, (b) the research setting and context, (c) the research data sources, (d) the data collection methods, (e) the data analysis methods, (f) the issues of trustworthiness, and (g) the delimitations and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to explore the strategies and procedures implemented in Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States, to equip the lay leadership and to assess the doctrinal and church-goal-related competence and commitment of lay leaders, especially Sunday school teachers. In order to perform this exploration and to understand the strategies and procedures of these churches, this qualitative research study addresses three research questions: (1) what strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership; (2) what strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these lay leaders, as defined by Blanchard's Situational Leadership model; and (3) what strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence in and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined by the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000?

This chapter describes this qualitative research case study's research methodology and includes discussions of: (a) the rationale for the research approach, (b) the research setting and context, (c) the research data sources, (d) the data collection methods, (e) the data analysis methods, (f) the issues of trustworthiness, and (g) the delimitations and limitations of the study. A summary concludes the chapter.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

This research utilizes the qualitative research method which lends itself to understanding the way people approach their leadership actions based on the way they interpret their organizational environment.¹⁵⁰ Qualitative research employs an inductive process in which data are gathered and used to build concepts.¹⁵¹ Quantitative research stands in contrast to this research method because of its cause-and-effect approach. The meanings that people give to their situations are reflected in their actions and may not be evaluated properly through quantitative research. This qualitative research case study seeks to understand the participants' reasons for why and how processes are being implemented based on their understanding of the situation in which they find themselves.

Creswell and Baez discuss the nature of qualitative research and declare it suitable to explore central phenomena.¹⁵² The central phenomena explored in this qualitative research study are the procedures implemented to assess followers' knowledge of and motivation to perform their ministries. The research was pursued in an open-ended manner and examined multiple perspectives which produced contrasting views.¹⁵³ These pursuits fit within the qualitative research genre.

Qualitative research has certain characteristics, according to Creswell. The research collects data from participants in their natural settings, and the researcher acts as the key instrument for data collection. The participants' words with their themes, as

¹⁵⁰ Merriam and Tisdell, *op. cit.*, 16.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵² Creswell and Baez, *op. cit.*, 6.

¹⁵³ Creswell and Poth, *op. cit.*, 6-7.

derived from the interviews, become the data for the study. The participants' meanings of the subjects, probed by the researcher, are sought, not the meanings brought by the researcher. As John and David Creswell note, "This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data."¹⁵⁴

The researcher utilized the personal, semi-structured interview as the primary data collection method in this study. He chose from several types of interviews which could have been employed. Merriam and Tisdell categorize these types by rigidity of structure.¹⁵⁵ Highly structured interviews, essentially, are oral forms of written surveys in which all questions are determined in advance with no variation from the script allowed. At the other end of the spectrum are unstructured interviews. These interviews are informal conversations with no predetermined questions. The researcher who uses this sort of interview can gain information about a subject to explore a phenomenon in order to develop questions to be used in subsequent interviews.

The researcher, in this study, decided to employ the third category for interviews: personal, semi-structured. The researcher, at the outset, understood the facets of his interpretive and theoretical frameworks. Also, he desired to obtain the interviewees' beliefs regarding issues surrounding their specific leadership environments. Plus, the researcher sought to determine whether certain procedures and strategies were in place. Therefore, guiding questions for the interviews were predeveloped. As the same time,

¹⁵⁴ Creswell and Creswell, *op. cit.*, 182.

¹⁵⁵ Merriam and Tisdell, *op. cit.*, 110.

the researcher desired that the conversation flow freely and that new information be discovered by pursuing unscripted questions as prompted by the subjects broached in the participants' answers and comments.

Interpretive Framework—Constructivist Epistemology

As a Christian, the researcher believes that there is absolute truth and that it is grounded in and personified by Jesus Christ, the Son of the triune God. This is the correct basis for moral frameworks which should guide the ethical rules of life. However, a positivist epistemological approach, in which an absolute truth is sought, may not yield answers to the reasons for behavior in the complicated cultural settings in this case study.

According to Chatraw and Prior, a culture includes views that are passed from one group to another and assumptions based on the customs and practices of a group.¹⁵⁶ These coauthors continue their discussion to say that, because of culture, people engage in actions with the right motives but, many times, with terrible results.¹⁵⁷ They state, “If we don’t understand that with which we are engaging—or perhaps better, engaging within—we often limit our ability to effectively interact with people.”¹⁵⁸ Constructivists take culture into account and consider people’s actions to be based on the meanings they

¹⁵⁶ Joshua D. Chatraw and Karen Swallow Prior, *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 23.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

have given to numerous experiences and to perspectives they have constructed as a result.¹⁵⁹

Schutt defines constructivism as a “methodology based on questioning belief in an external reality [and that] emphasizes the importance of exploring the way in which different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs.”¹⁶⁰ John and David Creswell point-out that Crotty identified that “humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—we all are born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture.”¹⁶¹ This applies to the culture in which one finds himself in an organization, as well. Yukl and his coauthors note that leaders determine their behavior, many times, on the level of assessment from others as to what action the leaders should take.¹⁶² A major determinant of leaders’ actions may be uncertainty avoidance by which the leader decides it is better to act out of safety and security rather than to urge difficult actions by their associates.¹⁶³ In other words, the leaders’ actions are guided by acceptance of the culture around them rather than an absolute stance for what is best for the organization. Therefore, the researcher believes that a constructivist epistemological approach should be pursued in this case study

¹⁵⁹ Johnny Saldana and Matt Omasta, *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 128.

¹⁶⁰ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 370.

¹⁶¹ M. Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1998); quoted in Creswell and Creswell, *op. cit.*, 8.

¹⁶² Gary Yukl, William L. Gardner, III, and Nishant Uppal, *Leadership in Organizations*, 9th ed. (Uttar Pradesh, India: Pearson, 2020), 236-237.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 355.

because, often, actions of leaders are socially constructed based on the leaders' interpretation of reality in their organizations.¹⁶⁴

Theoretical Framework—Situational Approach to Leadership

The situational approach to leadership requires that leaders assess the development levels of their followers based on their levels of competence and commitment to the tasks at hand.¹⁶⁵ This assessment allows the leaders to adjust their leadership, adopting the role of director, coach, supporter, or delegator, with each of these roles requiring varying levels of directive and supportive behavior.¹⁶⁶ Church members and people, in general, have different levels of knowledge and commitment to their assigned responsibilities. According to Northouse, leaders, in order to apply properly the situational approach to leadership, must determine their followers' level of competence in a given area and their motivation level to achieve the organization's goals.¹⁶⁷ Based on this assessment, the leader should adjust his approach regarding the extent to which he is directive or supportive.¹⁶⁸

Are church leaders correctly assessing their lay leaders' levels of knowledge of how to lead their particular ministries and responding with appropriate levels and types of training for these lay leaders? Have clergy ensured that those lay leaders, to whom they are entrusting the discipling of others, understand the doctrine of the church? How is this being accomplished? As Northouse notes:

¹⁶⁴ Merriam and Tisdell, *op. cit.*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Northouse, *op. cit.*, 95.

¹⁶⁶ Ken Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership*, *op. cit.*, 53 and 61.

¹⁶⁷ Northouse, *op. cit.*, 95.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

In any given situation, the first task is to determine the nature of the situation. Questions such as the following must be addressed: What goal are followers being asked to achieve? How complex is the goal? Are the followers sufficiently skilled to accomplish the goal? Do they have the desire to complete the job once they start it?¹⁶⁹

If the church ministry leader does not have a proper understanding of *why* he believes *what* he believes, he cannot lead others to proper belief and application, and the church's goals fall short. Moreover, a question of motivation arises. Are the church's leaders leading or caretaking? Are they being authentic or transactional only? Are they leading from a higher purpose or are they pursuing an easier path to job retention? Are they following the lay leadership paradigm of Exodus 18 by empowering and endorsing lay leadership?

All churches would be hard-pressed to accomplish their work without laity who are willing to volunteer as lay ministry leaders, but pastors and church leaders cannot have effective lay leaders without employing three skills that Blanchard and his coauthors call goal setting, diagnosis, and matching.¹⁷⁰ Clear goals must be set, development levels of lay leaders must be evaluated, and leaders must adapt their own leadership approaches to the level of knowledge (competence) and motivation (commitment) of the lay leaders under their supervision.¹⁷¹ This qualitative research study seeks to explore and understand this assessment and adaptation in the bounded case.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership, op. cit.*, 23.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Research Setting and Context

This qualitative research applies the case study approach. It examines the leadership practices used in a real-life, contemporary setting in seeking answers to this study's research questions.¹⁷² The study is being conducted within a bounded system, several Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States.

Creswell and Poth define case study research as

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (*e.g.*, observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes.¹⁷³

This research study fits within this definition well.

As stated in Chapter 1, many Southern Baptist church volunteers are asked to fill positions as ministry leaders but are left to their own designs as to how to lead. Worse is the lack of theological training, even for Bible study leaders. Unlike other denominations, few Southern Baptist churches catechize members; so, numerous congregates have a poor understanding of church doctrine. If Bible study leaders cannot articulate *why* they believe *what* they believe, how can they motivate others to spread the gospel? Moreover, how can the church ensure that the true gospel is being communicated? Without proper training and testing, the church is empowering

¹⁷² R.K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014); cited in Creswell and Poth, *op. cit.*, 96.

¹⁷³ Creswell and Poth, *op. cit.*, 96-97.

potentially pseudo-transformational leaders.¹⁷⁴ Are the lay leaders' desires for training being assessed?

Stackhouse says,

The ignorance of the general public about the fundamentals of the Christian faith is regrettable. The ignorance of the churchgoing Christians about the fundamentals of the Christian faith ... is scandalous. Christians are somehow expected to think and feel and live in a distinctive way, as followers of Jesus, without being provided the basic vocabulary, grammar, and concepts of the Christian religion.¹⁷⁵

Paul notes that those who are to teach have been entrusted with the gospel (1 Thes. 2:4) but that Christians must ensure that the correct gospel is being taught (Gal. 1:8-10). Paul recognizes that many students may be willing to accept something other than the true gospel (Gal. 1:5-7), and he warns the Corinthians to beware of those who teach a different gospel (2 Cor. 11:3-5). Teachers in the church are judged by a higher standard (James 3:1). Therefore, should not teachers be requesting the church to train them in correct doctrine, and should not clergy be highly concerned that teachers are conveying proper Biblical knowledge? As Blanchard and his coauthors note, "... leadership happens anytime we influence the thinking, behavior, or development of another person."¹⁷⁶ Are clergy and lay leaders dismissing the impact of their leadership? As Crossley says,

¹⁷⁴ Northouse, *op. cit.*, 165.

¹⁷⁵ John G. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 193; quoted in Mark A Maddix, Jonathan H. Kim, and James Riley Estep Jr., *Understanding Faith Formation: Theological, Congregational, and Global Dimensions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 21.

¹⁷⁶ Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2016), 23.

Pastors and teachers are among the gifts given to the church of Christ. They are responsible “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:12-13). This can only be achieved through the faithful preaching and teaching of the Word of God, thus educating the people in “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 4:13, 15-16; 2 Tim. 2:15).¹⁷⁷

To explore why and how this need for proper instruction is being addressed, the case study approach is particularly helpful. John and David Creswell say that a case study allows for deep analysis and evaluation of a program or process.¹⁷⁸ Schutt cites Geertz and notes that the goal of case study research is the creation of a thick description that “provides a sense of what it is like to experience [a] setting from the standpoint of the natural actors in that setting.”¹⁷⁹

Research Data Sources

This research gathered data from several Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States. The research included larger urban churches and smaller rural churches taken from the 47 Southern Baptist churches identified by the county’s Baptist Association. This larger group was a convenience sample or what Schutt calls availability sampling, “a nonprobability sampling method in which elements are selected on the basis of convenience.”¹⁸⁰ This group is located within a county within easy traveling distance of the residence of the researcher which provided little difficulty in travel and access to the facilities. Further, these churches are part of the same

¹⁷⁷ Crossley, *op. cit.*, 125.

¹⁷⁸ Creswell and Creswell, *op. cit.*, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Clifford Geertz, editor, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30; cited in Schutt, *op. cit.*, 373.

¹⁸⁰ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 169.

Protestant denomination of the researcher; so, the researcher is more familiar with their type of church polity and the doctrine espoused by them, *viz.* the Baptist Faith and Message of the Year 2000.¹⁸¹ (See “Issues of Trustworthiness,” below, for methods used to mitigate the researcher’s prejudice and bias). The churches from which participants in the study were chosen were to be a stratified purposeful or purposive sample, which illustrates subgroups and facilitates comparisons.¹⁸² This sample was taken from those who replied to letters sent to the churches in the convenience sample indicating their willingness to participate.

The researcher mailed letters, along with Consent Forms and Pre-interview General Information Forms to 42 or the 47 churches in the county’s Baptist Association; five churches were excluded because they did not have pastors at the time of the study. The researcher used email as a subsequent request for response. Notwithstanding these efforts, along with follow up voicemail messages and the urging of some of the participating clergy who prodded other pastors, only nine pastors and one minister of education agreed to be interviewed. Lay leaders in these churches are not identified easily from available sources. Therefore, snowball sampling was sought by asking the participating clergy to recommend lay leaders in their churches who may be candidates for interviews. No lay leaders participated, despite being asked by the participating clergy.

¹⁸¹ The Baptist Faith and Message, *op. cit.*

¹⁸² Schutt, *op. cit.*, 172.

The study proceeded with interviews of these ten clergy members. The researcher decided to use these as his total sample because they included both larger and smaller congregations and were located in urban and rural areas. “Urban” as used in this research means churches located within municipal limits. It must be noted that the largest cities within this county have populations of less than 10,000 according to the 2020 US Census data. Therefore, “urban” means, only, that these churches are located in a municipal area, not that these are in large metropolitan areas.

Irrespective of the failure to attract the number of participants originally sought, data were collected from enough churches and individuals to achieve data saturation. Specifics regarding number of participants and their demographic information are shown in Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter 4.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam and Tisdell point out that, in qualitative research,

ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings. Overlaying both these processes is the researcher-participant relationship. For example, this relationship and the research purpose determine how much the researcher reveals about the actual purpose of the study—how informed the consent can be—and how much privacy and protection from harm is afforded the participants.¹⁸³

Anderson University, like other institutions, has an Institutional Review Board (IRB), which reviews all research study proposals to ensure that they comply with ethical requirements. The IRB’s approval requires that all research using human subjects meet certain guidelines. The IRB process necessitates the submission, by the researcher, of the

¹⁸³ Merriam and Tisdell, *op. cit.*, 261.

purpose of the study, the proposed subject sample, recruitment and selection of the participants, all research procedures, methods of obtaining informed consent, preservation of confidentiality, and benefits and risks to the participants. A copy of Anderson University's IRB Proposal Form is attached as Appendix B.

With regard to confidentiality, the names of individual participants and churches are known only to the researcher, who transcribed the recorded interviews. Once the transcripts were compared to the recordings to verify their accuracy, the recordings were deleted. The transcripts and other documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer. They are to be destroyed and deleted three years after the research study. Any references to the participants or their churches are by fictitious names, only.

Consent forms were obtained from all participants prior to their interviews. A copy of the Informed Consent Form is attached as Appendix C.

Data Collection Methods

Personal Interviews

The study began with personal, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews of nine pastors and one minister of education from several of the Southern Baptist churches in the county, including larger urban churches and smaller rural churches. The interviews gathered information regarding lay leadership training conducted by the pastor, other clergy, or lay leaders, the type or category of training (leadership, theological, other), whether it is voluntary or compulsory, one session or periodic, and whether the clergy believe the training is effective in achieving the church's goals. Interview questions

included a category to be utilized in the event that no training was offered in order to explore the reasons for its absence and the pastor's expectations if the training was offered. The interviews were conducted at the churches where the interviewees serve.

The following interview questions, with appropriate follow-up questions, were asked:

1. What types of staff positions exist in the church? Are additional positions needed?
2. What key leadership issues do you face?
3. How would you describe your leadership style?
4. What volunteer lay leadership positions exist in the church? Are additional positions needed?
5. Does the church provide lay leadership training?
6. What are the key issues being faced in this church?
7. What are the key issues facing this community?
8. Do you believe lay leadership training does or could assist in meeting the church's goals?
9. What procedures are in place to assess lay leadership's, especially Sunday school teachers', knowledge and commitment to proper leadership, church doctrine, and church goals?

In order to gather rich data, each abbreviated answer by a participant was followed by probing prompts from the researcher such as, "Tell me more about ..." or "Please explain what you meant by ...". After receiving the answer to question 5, the researcher pursued

different avenues of inquiry based on whether the church provided lay leadership training. If yes, these questions included: are your expectations of this training being met—in what ways; what difficulties are being encountered in this training; is the church's training contributing to the achievement of the church's goals—why or why not; what types of training could be offered; is the training pursuant to what the lay leaders have requested; is the training compulsory; and do you conduct any formal doctrinal training? If the answer to question 5 was no: why is it not offered; has it been considered or offered; do you believe such training could be helpful; what types of training could be offered; what would be your expectations of such training; what about training in church doctrine; and have lay leadership been asked what training they would like to receive?

Prior to the interviews, each participant was given a Pre-interview General Information Form, and it was gathered by the researcher at the time of the interview. The form is attached as Appendix A.

Pilot Interviews

Before the research study began, pilot interviews were conducted with a church pastor, a Sunday school ministry team leader, and a Sunday school teacher. These individuals were from two churches which are not included in the research study. The pilot interviews were held in order to hone the interview skills of the researcher, finetune the interview questions, and practice data coding and analysis. Based on the results of the pilot interviews, question 9 was added to gather data regarding the theoretical framework of the research study. Additionally, analysis of the pilot interviews' data

produced code lists, themes, and categories which are discussed in “Data Coding and Analysis,” below.

Publicly Available Information

Documents used in the study include information about the churches published on their websites, in social media, or displayed in the churches, *e.g.* mission and vision statements, goals, staff information, or other information about the church. Participants were informed of the researcher’s desire to utilize such information, and it was used only with the participants’ permission.

Data Coding and Analysis

With the consent of the interviewees, audio recordings were made. A transcript was developed in order to obtain a word-for-word, written record of each interview. During the interviews, the researcher made notes in order to capture key statements, unusual phrases, and perceptions. After each interview, the researcher completed a summary form.¹⁸⁴ During the summary process, the researcher added interpretive and reflexive comments.

Transcripts of the interviews were coded manually by dividing the text into segments and identifying themes. From each of these theme sections, codes were developed; codes are labels assigned to text passages which are similar. Codes were reduced by looking for overlap and redundancy. As each interview’s transcript, notes,

¹⁸⁴ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 421.

and summary were reviewed, the identification of new or similar themes and codes was sought. This process is described by Creswell and Baez as “conventional data analysis.”¹⁸⁵ This was followed by theme development. Themes are “broader categories of information composed of a group of similar codes to build evidence of support.”¹⁸⁶ The researcher did not use computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis. The interviews satisfied two tests: completeness and saturation. They were complete because enough data were collected to obtain a sense of the meaning of the themes. Saturation occurred because data were repeating and additional information was no longer being learned.¹⁸⁷ Despite the fact that evidence of these two tests was occurring early in the process, all ten interviews were conducted.

As noted above, analysis of the pilot interviews produced a code list with themes, as well as categories to be examined in the research interviews. *A priori* codes from the research’s theoretical framework of the situational approach to leadership included competence (knowledge), commitment (motivation), and assessment (evaluation). Enumeration codes, words or phrases repeated across the pilot interviews, were sought, and inductive codes emerged from the data.

A code list with themes from the pilot interviews:

- Importance of Sunday school and qualified teachers,
- Motivation of lay leaders,
- Training in fellowship and outreach,
- Qualified trainers,

¹⁸⁵ Creswell and Baez, *op. cit.*, 162-171.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁸⁷ Schutt, *op. cit.*, 173.

- No formal doctrinal training,
- No request for lay leadership's input about training,
- No lay leadership suggestions for training desired, and
- Practicing Christianity outside the church.

Categories, as the same related to the *a priori* codes:

Competence:

- Importance of Sunday school and qualified teachers,
- Training for class fellowship and outreach,
- Knowledge of trainers, and
- No formal doctrinal training.

Commitment:

- Motivation of lay leaders

Both Competence and Commitment:

- Practice of faith outside the church and
- Need for teacher training.

Assessment:

- No requests of lay leaders or suggestions by lay leaders regarding training desired.

All *a priori* codes:

- No formal teacher training held at some churches.

Moreover, the researcher learned from the results of the pilot interviews that the research interviews should include inquiry surrounding methods of evaluation of competence and commitment of the Sunday school teachers.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In order to decrease the level of researcher bias, interviews were not conducted with clergy of two churches in which the researcher has been an active lay leader. Credibility was enhanced by performing ten interviews which produced data saturation, and they covered interviewees from ten churches with differing demographics with regard to size and postal code. Further, two of the participants were asked to validate that the summaries from their interviews were accurate. Moreover, peer review was employed. An individual with a Ph.D. in Leadership, who had been a fellow doctoral student during the time that the researcher was involved in classwork for this degree, was asked to review some of the transcripts for data coding and analysis. Plus, the researcher has no reason to believe that any of the participants were untruthful or disingenuous in their answers and comments.

Dependability

Pilot interviews were conducted ahead of the research study to gauge the effectiveness of the interview questions in eliciting data. The pilot interviews were held with three individuals, including a pastor, Sunday school ministry leader, and Sunday school teacher. The pastor was from a Southern Baptist church in a neighboring county, and the other two individuals were from a Southern Baptist church in the county but not included in the research study. The results of these pilot interviews are described above.

Confirmability

Throughout the research study process, the researcher maintained a journal and notes, striving for critical reflection and reflexivity. The researcher, through this activity, attempted to suspend his mental models and preconceived ideas about the phenomena being studied.¹⁸⁸ As the primary instrument of data collection, the researcher acknowledges his biases from his developed meanings and perspectives based on his own culture and environment as the same applied to his lay leadership in other Southern Baptist churches.

Transferability

Qualitative research does not identify truths that can be applied as generalizations to other groups.¹⁸⁹ However, qualitative research does present findings that are descriptive and content-specific.¹⁹⁰ This qualitative research case study, through deep and rich descriptions of the data collected, makes it possible for others to consider whether the actions and processes of the participants are being employed in their own church situations, as well.

Triangulation

Interviews were pursued until all initially-scheduled interviews were held and data saturation was achieved. Data coding and analysis confirmed that themes were

¹⁸⁸ Senge, *op. cit.*, 174 *et seq.* and Creswell and Baez, *op. cit.*, 8.

¹⁸⁹ Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019), 205.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

recurring. The researcher utilized peer review as a validation of data coding. An individual with a Ph.D. in Leadership, who had been a fellow doctoral student during the time that the researcher was involved in classwork for this degree, was asked to review some of the transcripts for data coding and analysis. Further, summaries of the interviews was shared with two of the participants, both of whom agreed with the findings.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations include the fact that all of the churches are Southern Baptist; all are in the same county; the sample included only the churches who responded positively to requests to participate from the convenience sample chosen by the researcher; and other theoretical frameworks could have been chosen.

Limitations include the size of churches; sex of the participants; education level of the participants; income level of the congregations; and the ethnicity of churches.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provides a description of this research study's methodology. The study utilized the qualitative research method which seeks to understand the participants' reasons for why and how processes are being implemented based on their unique understanding of the situations in which they find themselves. In particular, the study seeks to explore and understand why and how clergy and lay leaders employ strategies and procedures to ensure their ministry leaders are equipped with the knowledge and tools to carry-out their ministries properly. The study employed a constructivist epistemological, interpretive framework because beliefs and culture

influence the actions of people in specific environments. Additionally, the study utilized the situational approach to leadership as its theoretical framework lens. This approach requires that leaders evaluate their followers' competence in and commitment to their tasks which, in turn, allows the leaders to adjust their leadership roles to use varying levels of directive and supportive behavior.

This qualitative research case study used a sample from a much larger convenience sample in a bounded case of the Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the Southeastern United States. Semi-structured, one-on-one, personal interviews were used as the principal data collection method. Transcripts were produced and used for data coding and analysis.

Issues of trustworthiness were addressed including credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and triangulation. Moreover, the delimitations and limitations were discussed.

In the next chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed including detail of the data analysis with its recurring themes. The intent of this qualitative research case study is to contribute to the knowledge of how Southern Baptist churches can improve the ability of their lay leaders to lead their church ministries, thereby enhancing the spread of the true gospel message.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies and procedures, implemented in Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the southeastern United States, to equip the lay leadership and to assess the doctrinal and church-goal-related competence and commitment of lay leaders, especially Sunday school teachers. The study sought answers to three research questions:

(1) What strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership;

(2) What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these lay leaders, as defined by Blanchard's Situational Leadership model; and

(3) What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence in and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000?

The study was designed as a qualitative research case study of Southern Baptist churches located in a small, mostly rural county in the Southeast, and it employed one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with nine pastors and one minister of education. The study also conducted a literature review of related research and theory in the areas of lay leadership training and participation and the situational approach to leadership.

This chapter presents a summary of the data generated by the study.

Presentation and Summary of Data

The demographics regarding the churches in the sample and the clergy of those churches who participated in the study are provided in Tables 1 and 2, at the end of this chapter.

The churches show a diversity in size based on average attendance, ranging from 325 people down to a Sunday morning attendance of seven persons. The data indicate a variety of income levels, as well. They range from lower middle to upper middle class. In order to preserve church anonymity, the table does not list the dates these churches were established, but again, there is a wide range. Two of the churches were established in the 18th century and one as late as 1998. One item of commonality does not appear in the table; the congregations consist of almost all Caucasian members. Only three of the churches reported that they have non-Caucasian attendees, and none of the three indicated that these minorities were more than 5% of the congregation.

Clergy demographics display a wide range, also. Education levels extend from Associate Degree to Ph.D., and years on staff at the current church run from a tenure of 27 years down to two. Further, all participants in the study are male and Caucasian. Once more, to aid in anonymity, the rows in Tables 1 and 2 are not in the same order, and the churches and clergy are not in the order of the alphabetical listing of the participants' pseudonyms reported in the findings from the data analysis. The researcher has chosen not to provide more detailed descriptions of the participants; in a small rural county, additional detail could allow these clergymen to be identified easily.

As far as the interviews are concerned, all participants displayed an attitude of wanting to aid in the researcher's study, and they responded in a professional manner. They were thoughtful, open, and positive in their responses. They did not display somatic behavior in conflict with their remarks.

A summary of the results of data analysis is shown in Table 3, at the end of this chapter.

General Comments from Data Analysis

As with the demographics, interview data reflect contrast between the various churches in answer to some of the interview questions. In general, the churches with a larger staff tend to have more advanced training programs for their lay leaders. The church with the greatest number of average attendees has the largest staff, which includes someone dedicated to the church's education program. This church's training programs for lay leadership are extensive, including regular training for Sunday school teachers. However, larger size does not mean that this church fails to experience many of the problems of the remainder of the churches in the study.

Findings from Data Analysis

The following are the findings from the data collected as the same are related to the research questions. It should be noted that the labels for the subsections reflect the overall meanings of the participants' responses and that, in some cases, the participants did not use the exact wording of the subsection's label. Additionally, only one participant could be termed loquacious; the rest had to be prompted to expand on many of their initial responses.

Research Question 1: What strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership? For this research question, the researcher identified three key themes, including Existing Lay Leadership Training, Success of the Training, and No Training in Some Churches.

Existing Lay Leadership Training

“I’m not equipping them for their ministries.”

Theme No. 1 is Existing Lay Leadership Training. Many participants responded affirmatively when asked whether they provided lay leadership training. They divided their training programs by lay leadership groups. For example,

For deacons. Five of the participants responded that training for deacons had been pursued. Caleb says, “For the deacons’ training, it’s a lot of trial and error.” He has utilized the state convention’s deacon education materials, pastor-led fellowship training, and “some scriptural training.” Eddie has instructed deacons from Lifeway materials and has facilitated some book studies, “to get them to understand more about what their biblical role is.” Caleb, also, pointed out his deacons’ failure to understand their role. Adam noted his training of deacons. He says, “I have taught several books on deacon family ministry. I have taught evangelism to the deacon board. I have taught some other periodicals that I have used through the years ... I have taught them spiritual gifting.” Adam believes, however, that something is lacking. He said, “I’m not equipping them for their ministries.”

For youth and children's leaders. Eddie is particularly concerned about the training of the church’s youth and children's leaders, and he says that they should “take

their jobs more seriously ... They see children ministry today still as a fun time, daycare so the speak.” His focus centers in appropriate behavior with minors, pedophilia recognition, and the sexual issues under consideration by the Southern Baptist Convention. Daniel echoed these concerns about training in the area of sexual abuse.

For adult Sunday school teachers. Daniel said that he had led training on “just basic teaching abilities, how to communicate, how to teach the Scriptures, in particular, and apply them to individuals’ lives.” He said that he had done this in a four-week series on Sunday nights. Ben said that his Sunday school director, a member of laity, “attempts” to hold quarterly meetings on how to teach the upcoming lessons. He adds that the Sunday school director “at least one time a year ... [has] more of a structured, very formal training, nuts and bolts kind of [session] ...” During this time there may be a discussion of how to prepare and present a lesson and elicit responses from students. When asked how they knew that teachers were biblically sound, Daniel, Ivan, and Kyle said they had attended classes personally, and Eddie meets with new teachers before they start: “I meet with every leader before they are given the task of whatever that ministry is and let them know what’s expected out of them.”

Summary of Existing Lay Leadership Training. Where training is being pursued, it tends to be narrowly focused on the particular area of lay leadership. Only one participant said that any training in how to lead a group of people is being conducted.

Success of the Training

“It has worked for the minority.”

Theme No. 2 is Success of the Training. Adam said that the training “has contributed to the success of the church, even though the numbers don't show what I would like them to show.” He went on to say, “It has worked for the minority.” Ben remarked, “Shamefully, I do not provide enough leadership training.”

Joe has seen the success of training in one lay ministry, which requires 50 hours of training at the outset and ongoing annual training. However, he voiced a particular concern. After pointing out the priority of Sunday school by saying, “Every Sunday school teacher is the pastor of a little congregation, [and] Sunday school is a little church within itself and is very important,” he follows by saying that training of Sunday school teachers and others is not attended by those who need it. He expresses these non-attendees' views as, “I've already been teaching; why would I need to attend training?”

Summary of Success of the Training. Participants do not have particular measurements to gauge the success of their training programs. Seven of the participants were quick to offer that they have training for their lay leadership, but as can be seen in the comments about the training's success, they do not seem to be able to point to that success in concrete ways especially as the training applies to Sunday school teachers. Plus, there is a concern about the lack of attendance at the training sessions.

No Training in Some Churches

“I don’t know what to do to train leaders.”

Theme No. 3 is No Training in Some Churches. Four participants said that no training in leadership was being conducted. Franklin woefully stated that lay leadership was nonexistent in his church; so, there are no leaders to train. Caleb remarked that when it comes to training of Sunday school teachers, “There are not enough hours in a day for that.” When asked whether Sunday school teachers understood how their roles contribute to the goals of the church, he responded, “I would like to think that they do, but sometimes I wonder.” Daniel stated that teachers “would benefit from a regular, structured meeting.”

Henry displayed the most frustration in this area. He commented, “I don't think we give people what they need, [but] I don't know what to do to train leaders... Sunday school has become almost nonexistent.... I held some leadership training when I first arrived, but people would not attend out of stubbornness.” He says further that his church does not have any [true] leaders and that people follow those with whom they feel comfortable. Ivan said that he needs training in identifying lay leaders and investing in them.

Summary of No Training in Some Churches. In churches where no training is being pursued, there exists an acknowledgement of its need, but unfortunately, in some cases, there is a lack of knowing how to proceed.

Research Question 2: What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these leaders, as defined by Blanchard 's Situational

Leadership model? For this research question, the researcher identified three key themes, including Leadership Style, Assessment and Evaluation of Sunday School Teachers, and Future Lay Leadership.

Leadership style

“... a lack of vision is a hindrance.”

Theme No. 1 is Leadership Style. No participant said that his leadership style was adjusted to the followers' development level as demonstrated by the followers' level of competence and commitment, which is a hallmark of the situational approach to leadership. Kyle came closest by indicating that he is a “relational” leader, working with people one-on-one. Also, he understands that goals of each ministry must be matched to the goals of the church. He opined that his church needs to revisit its vision and mission statements and ensure that each ministry is seeking to align itself with these overarching statements.

Ben characterizes himself as a motivator, visionary, and supporter, and he understands that he must be cognizant of the tempo of his followers when it comes to change. “I’ve got to slow down and let them grasp the vision,” he says. Adam identifies as a coach, but he says that “a lack of vision is a hindrance” to the church's progress. Likewise, Caleb sees himself as a coach but also a collaborator and a “big picture guy, leading for the big picture and then having people help me come up with the steps.” Eddie stated that he is a director and a coach but that there is no true goal setting in his church. Henry echoed these remarks by saying that he is a supporter, but that his church has no real vision or goals. Franklin explained that his role as leader is hampered by the

fact that, prior to his employment, his congregation was too tied to one leader and this led to major upheaval. Ivan views his leadership problems as a deficiency in his own education, which did not address potential lay leadership issues, adequately.

Summary of Leadership Style. The participants did not identify their leadership styles easily. Most had to be prompted by the researcher's providing certain styles from which to choose. The researcher offered, as choices, the styles discussed in Situational Leadership: director, coach, supporter, and delegator. Most participants chose one or two styles they pursued. No participant indicated that he adjusted his leadership style based on the follower's levels of competence and commitment.

Assessment and Evaluation of Sunday School Teachers

"... it's one of those things that has slipped through the cracks."

Theme No. 2 is Assessment and Evaluation of Sunday School Teachers. Seven participants' responses indicate that no formal evaluation of a teachers' competence or commitment is in place. This includes four of the churches cited in the answers related to Research Question 1 saying that they have leadership training. Ben and Caleb stated that their Sunday School directors do not attend classes to assess the teachers. Ben says, "It's one of those things we have done in the past ... Unfortunately, it's one of those things that has slipped through the cracks." Ben, also, could not answer the question of what curricula were being taught. Caleb and Daniel stated that their Sunday School directors only order materials and keep up with total attendance. Henry conducted some training on how to teach, soon after his arrival at his church, but stopped because of lack of interest. As another reflection of a lack of assessing and fostering teacher competence,

Eddie said that there is no evaluation of what is being said in class and that, while classes have assistant teachers, none of the assistants were capable of leading new classes if they were formed.

Adam stated that there was no formal teacher evaluation process in his church, but he adds, “I do know that those teachers are very biblically solid.” He continues, “I have sat down with all of our teachers. We have discussed back and forth about doctrine very clearly.”

Three participants’ statements lend credence to the need for such evaluation and assessment. When asked whether his Sunday school teachers know how their roles contribute to the goals of the church, Caleb answered, “I would like to think that they do, but sometimes I wonder.” Kyle said that he had removed two Sunday School teachers in his career because they were teaching false doctrine. Moreover, Henry, in commenting on one teacher's competence and commitment, said that this teacher

had deconstructed to the point of no faith ... [I learned] that he was teaching almost borderline Christian stuff, but he had such a big class and such a big following ... they were just eating it up ... some of them because it was not anything deep. They didn't have to think. They were not challenged.

Summary of Assessment and Evaluation of Sunday School Teachers. Seventy percent of the churches in the study are not utilizing the Situational Leadership principles of formal assessment and evaluation regarding the development levels of their lay leaders, in particular their Sunday School teachers.

Future Lay Leadership

“I’m tired of being asked to do stuff.”

Theme No. 3 is Future Lay Leadership. Many of the participants voiced concern about the number of members involved in lay leadership and an uneasiness about finding future lay leaders.

Aging out. Ben, Caleb, and Daniel are troubled by older leaders aging out. Caleb goes on to add that some of the leaders have been in their positions so long that they're burning out. Daniel notes that most of his congregation are “in their late stages of life.” This is acknowledged by Ben who says, “[For some things] you’re going to have to call upon some of your senior adults who have been and still are good leaders, but for some, sometimes for some present-day issues, they may be a bit slow in responding ...” It should be noted that Joe says that the aging out problem is no worse than it has ever been.

Time constraints and priorities. When it comes to new, younger, lay leaders, Ben said that much of the problem is tied to time constraints connected to work schedules and children. He states, “... time constraints have them to where, you know, maybe during the week, it’s more difficult to call upon them.” Kyle agrees: “They have lives outside the church [and] struggle with having leadership roles in the church.” Adam adds that he needs new leaders and that the church's methods must change to foster young people's involvement in church. He says,

Some of the growth we’ve had in our community ... has been younger growth that are, at this particular point in time ... have not come to the point of having interest in their spiritual life ... I think the biggest trouble we’re having is the limited amount of people that are willing and qualified because we have some senior people that feel like, you know, it’s time for me to step back ... But then we have younger folks that are not mature enough or do not have the desire to

spend the time, you know, teaching and situations such as this. And I have to admit that it bothers me because it is a lack of desire to grow spiritually and become strong.

Adam also sees a problem of commitment and says that members believe staff should do the work. He cites the attitude as “I’m entitled to the benefits ... but don’t want to put out a whole lot of effort.” Kyle termed today’s church members’ view of participation as “consumer Christianity.” Caleb repeated this sentiment and says that the general position of many can be expressed as “I go to church ... that’s all I need to do.” Joe summarizes the problem as a lack of proper priorities. He says,

The distraction of the American public is the biggest [problem] right now. Everybody’s got so many things they could be doing ... COVID gave them a chance to try something outside [church attendance] ... The people who have left your church aren’t mad ... In fact, they don’t even think they left. But they’re not coming back ... They’re not even going to come back at Easter.

Eddie, Ivan, and Henry believe that lay leaders are in a rut, performing tasks with little motivation to improve. “Student and children [ministry] leaders need to take their jobs more seriously,” says Eddie. He adds, “We don’t have members who will not commit, but it’s a problem with procrastination.” Ivan interjects, “Many Sunday school teachers lack commitment to go beyond the printed lesson.” With obvious frustration, Henry says, “We don’t have any leaders ... the deacons [for example] are just there because they have to be.”

Volunteers. Five of the participants expressed concern about overloading volunteers. Caleb ponders, “How far can you push volunteers ... because we’ve had a lot of volunteers just walk away?” Ivan states,

Relationships with volunteers I’ve found to be tenuous ... People have one bad experience and they bolt. I’ve seen one who has left the church simply because of

one bad experience and they just left. Didn't tell me why ... just said it didn't work.

Henry says that he is having trouble getting volunteers and that one told him, "I'm tired of being asked to do stuff." Daniel says that a volunteer exit experience has caused him to be "hypersensitive to it." He adds,

You have about 10% of the people that are doing all the work, and so we try to be mindful of that when we say we need help here ... because I know there's a handful of people [who are going] to say, 'Let us help,' even though they're already doing fifteen other things.

Joe voices a surprising position on this subject. "In the past," he says, "I've worried about how far to push." Now, he is not worried about the volunteers. He has taken the attitude that, if a minority of the members are volunteers and they want to overload themselves, it's okay with him.

Summary of Future Lay Leadership. Participants are concerned about their churches' future lay leadership. Many existing leaders are aging out. Younger members do not seem to be stepping up to take their places. The participants see the reasons for this phenomenon as younger members' time constraints and misplaced priorities. The participants, for the most part, are reluctant to press people into service because of a fear of driving off volunteers.

Research Question 3: What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence in and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000? For this research question, the researcher identified two key themes, which include A Broad-brush Approach and A Desperate Need.

A Broad-brush Approach

“... all members have written copies.”

Theme No. 1 is A Broad-brush Approach. Interview questions on this topic sparked interesting and diverse responses. Ben has presented some doctrine in Wednesday night sermons but stated that he does not believe the teachers need such training. Eddie said that no class and no sermon series on the Baptist Faith and Message has been conducted, but that “all members have written copies.” Five of the participants indicated that the Baptist Faith and Message has been addressed in a sermon series, but no formal classes have been offered. Adam added, “They know what it says ... they know what they believe ... now as to quality ... that’s a different thing.”

Daniel said that, once, he began a sermon series on this topic, but stopped in the middle. He realized that his deacons needed more formal instruction, and he has begun a bimonthly class for the deacons as a part of their meetings. In a statement that reflected his concern about his members’ biblical knowledge but a love for their spirit, Daniel stated, “This church historically has been weak in doctrine and strong on practical ministry.”

Summary of A Broad-brush Approach. With small exception, churches in the sample are placing little emphasis on structured doctrinal training for the laity.

A Desperate Need

“The congregation suffers from biblical stupidity.”

Theme No. 2 is A Desperate Need. The researcher asked all ten participants, “What percentage of your congregation could have a sophisticated conversation

regarding their faith?” He explained that, by sophisticated, he meant a discussion that would be deeper than “Jesus is the only way to heaven, and salvation is a gift not obtained by works.” In other words, “How many of your church members could back up their beliefs with Scripture?” All participants indicated that this was a very small percentage.

Adam stated his concerns that his congregation is “not good at one-on-one evangelism” and that “25% to 30% of our congregation are really strong spiritually and I would say 70% are still drinking milk.” Caleb said that only “a few” could have a sophisticated conversation about their faith. Daniel said that his church was weak in doctrine; he added that the congregation is “immature doctrinally and spiritually,” and that “15% to 18%” could have a conversation, in which they could cite Scripture to support their beliefs. Further, he expressed a concern that they “don't see the connection between doctrine and life.”

Eddie said that the members “haven't got to the meat part” and that only a few could explain their faith. His concern about a lack of Scriptural knowledge has prompted him to use material on apologetics in his youth classes. Franklin expressed a concern that his members are “too easily misled” and that, when he arrived, he found that the church was not organized on biblical principles.

Henry said, “We've got a lot of trees, but few fruit bearers ... [People] have missed something ... the congregation suffers from biblical stupidity ... [and] they don't really care to know.” Henry stated that only 7% to 10% of his congregation could discuss their faith in more than a cursory manner.

Even Joe and Kyle, who have the most well-structured Sunday schools and other ministry programs, expressed concern in this area. Kyle remarked that a recent men's biblical book study revealed a need. "People who are longtime believers expressed concern that they had now seen things they didn't know," he said. Joe said that maybe 5% of his congregation can have a sophisticated discussion about their faith and that only 30% to 40% of his deacons could have such a discussion.

Ivan said, "A handful could back up their beliefs with Scripture." He added that when it comes to doctrine, training in eschatology is especially needed because some of his members had justified their beliefs by quoting from LaHaye and Jenkins' Left Behind book series.

Summary of A Desperate Need. Notwithstanding their failure to provide it, many of these participants acknowledge the need for doctrinal training for the laity. They, embarrassingly but forthrightly, state that few of their congregation could have a sophisticated conversation about their faith.

Overarching Theme Related to all Research Questions

From the interviews and data generated by all three research questions, the researcher identified a key theme, which is a Resistance to Change.

Resistance to Change

"... locked into one method."

Apathy and complacency. Many of the participants are confronted with congregations dominated by an attitude that not only reflects but embraces resistance to change. Adam remarked,

Change can open up a new can of worms ... [It's] just a lack of desire to learn and the lack of willingness to move forward ... a lot of apathy and complacency ... They really just want to be satisfied with "I have made my commitment [to Christ]. I don't want to change a lot of things in my life and I just want to be comfortable, and if I try to step out beyond that, it's going to create ... it's going to throw me into facing a need to grow, become stronger, but if I begin to do that, then I might [have to] put a lot of energy out."

He goes on to place the blame for this attitude on what people have witnessed: "A lot of times [it's] what people have heard, what young folks have seen ... in church life and what young folks have not only seen but heard about leadership and what leaders face."

Caleb said that each time he convinces the members to try something new, "They keep wanting to go backwards." Daniel stated, "There's a desire to maintain the status quo ... not really wanting to change anything ... They're just wanting to do the exact same thing over and over again." Ivan averred that his congregation is "locked into one method." He added, "They are very self-centered ... They keep following the same folks ... and just keep rolling along." Franklin adds, "I don't think they were ever taught to do very much other than show up."

Insiders versus outsiders. A part of the problem was identified by Daniel, who said that the majority of the members represent a multi-generational group who see change as not honoring tradition. He says,

Because the congregation is an older congregation and many of them have grown up here for several generations, I think they see a connection between them and their people ... with the way we do things or the way they have done it historically, and to change something, then, is to break off that tradition or that family connection.

This was highlighted by Henry, who said that 60% of his church were related to the same individual.

Eddie also said that his church was inward focused because they had never been trained to reach outward. Ivan stated that his congregation expected outsiders to come to them; after all, they *know* where the church is located in their community. Franklin remarked that it is a matter of insiders *versus* outsiders and that even *he* was viewed as an outsider. Henry discussed a Sunday School teacher who was very learned in his approach and understanding of Scripture. Unfortunately, attendance in his class has dwindled, in part because people said it was too hard, but in reality, because the teacher was viewed as an outsider.

Additionally, Henry said,

They like doing things for themselves, not for others ... They just do what they are used to doing ... [People in church] have missed something ... they missed the relationship [with Jesus] part of it ... I think that especially in America, we have just so watered down the opportunity, the way we experience Jesus, but also the call Jesus puts in our life that it has just become meaningless.

Christian Nationalism. Three participants added another dimension to the insider *versus* outsider paradigm. Henry noted “Christian nationalism” as a problem in his church. Daniel said that many of his church members do not understand that America cannot be equated with Christianity: “I think it comes from a good place, a good desire to see the America that many of them grew up in, but I think it’s hard for them to separate Christianity from American.” Finally, Ivan said that a wrong view of patriotism and honoring past military conflicts “hinders the spread of the gospel” and that many “have made an idol out of this country and an idol of veterans ... We’re appreciative of their service, but it’s been elevated to a point that it takes the place of God and worship, and that should not happen.”

Summary of Resistance to Change. The participants' churches are plagued with apathy, complacency, and an inward focus. Seven of the ten participants were extremely candid about this problem. They were animated during this discussion, and their frustration with their congregations was obvious. The researcher was amazed at the frequency with which this topic arose during the interviews.

Summary

This chapter provides a description of data analysis which can be summarized in seven descriptions. The findings indicate that (1) where lay leadership training exists, it is narrowly focused, (2) where no lay leadership training exists, there is acknowledgement of its need, (3) most churches, in the sample, are not utilizing the Situational Leadership principles of assessment and evaluation of their Sunday school teachers, (4) churches are concerned about future lay leadership, (5) churches are placing little emphasis on structured doctrinal training, (6) clergy understand that there is a need for doctrinal training, and (7) churches are plagued with apathy, complacency, and inward focus.

In the next chapter, these findings are discussed as they relate to the literature. Also, the researcher's conclusions and recommendations are enumerated.

Table 1. Demographics of Churches in Sample.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>	<u>Avg. Edu. Level</u>	<u>Avg. Income Level</u>	<u>Average Age</u>
Rural	150	High School	Middle	45
Rural	55	High School	Middle	60
Rural	7	High School	Lower Middle	60
Rural	75	High School	Middle	65
Rural	45	High School	Lower Middle	68
Rural	60	HS/College	Upper Middle	60
Urban	100	High School	Lower Middle	55
Urban	150	College	Upper Middle	45
Urban	240	College	Middle	40
Urban	325	College	Mid/Upper Mid	55

Table 2. Clergy Demographics.

<u>Education Level</u>	<u>Years in Ministry</u>	<u>Years at this Church</u>	<u>Number of Prior Churches</u>
Associate	15	2	3
Bachelor	12	3	2
Bachelor	26	26	0
Master	38	27	1
Master	35	20	2
Master	17	9	3
Master	33	8	1
Master	22	10	2
PhD (ABD)	9	3	2
PhD	37	25	3

Table 3. Summary of Data Analysis.

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Summary Finding Number</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Codes*</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1	1	Existing Leadership Training Success of Training	training deacons men ministry teachers child ministry	7 participants said they had training focused on groups
1	2	No Formal Leadership Training	no training	4 participants had no formal structured training programs
2	3	Use of Situational Leadership: Leadership Style	leadership style director coach supporter delegator goal setting vision/mission	only 1 participant came close to saying he was adjusting to a person's development level
2	3	No Structured Evaluation Process for Teachers	assessment evaluation	7 participants have no formal program 3 clergymen visit classes periodically
2	4	Future Lay Leadership	motivation commitment lack of desire entitlement priorities time constraints aging out volunteers	all but one participant stated a concern about future lay leadership 5 participants are particularly concerned with pushing volunteers too hard

3	5	Doctrinal Training	doctrine Baptist Faith & Message	5 have taught doctrine in sermons, only 5 have had no instructions at all
3	6	Need for Doctrinal and Biblical Training	competence ability knowledge doctrine	9 participants recognize the need for better biblical understanding
All	7	Resistance to Change	status quo resistance inward focus insiders vs outsiders apathy complacency	7 participants are concerned about the congregation's apathy, complacency, and absence of motivation to change

* *A priori* codes are in boldface type.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies and procedures, implemented in Southern Baptist churches in a small county in the southeastern United States, to equip the lay leadership and to assess the doctrinal and church-goal-related competence and commitment of lay leaders, especially Sunday school teachers. The study sought answers to three research questions:

(1) What strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership;

(2) What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these lay leaders, as defined by Blanchard's Situational Leadership model; and

(3) What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence in and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000?

The study was designed as a qualitative research case study of Southern Baptist churches located in a small, mostly rural county in the Southeast, and it employed one-on-one, semi-structured, personal interviews with nine pastors and one minister of education. The study also conducted a literature review of related research and theory in the areas of lay leadership training and participation and the situational approach to leadership.

This chapter presents a discussion of findings and conclusions related to this research purpose.

Summary of the Study

This study investigated the existing lay leadership training strategies and procedures in the bounded case described above.

Chapter 1 introduced the research through description of the background, purpose, approach, significance, delimitations and limitations, and vocabulary of the study.

Chapter 2 reviewed literature about theory and research related to the study in the areas of the effectiveness of church laity, laic education, laic participation, volunteer satisfaction, and the study's theoretical framework, the situational approach to leadership.

Chapter 3 detailed the design of the study through description of the rationale of the research approach, its setting and context, the research data sources, data collection methods, data analysis methods, the issues of trustworthiness, and the delimitations and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presented and summarized data generated by the study design in alignment with the study's research questions.

This final chapter will discuss a summary of the findings related to the research purpose and reviewed literature. Chapter content will discuss conclusions and implications of the study for practice, leadership for the advancement of learning and service, and future research. Following this chapter are an Epilogue, Appendices, and a Bibliography.

Summary of the Major Findings

Research Question 1: What strategies and procedures are utilized by Southern Baptist churches to equip lay leaders for their ministry leadership?

First, the interview questions related to this research question received responses which offered themes around existing lay leadership training for specific groups such as deacons, youth and children's leaders, and adult Sunday school teachers. The participants, however, struggled to provide evidence of the training's achievements, expressing their beliefs about its benefits as more of a feeling than an objective measure. Second, four of the participants stated that no lay leadership training is being conducted. There are two summary findings which are derived from these responses.

Summary Finding 1: Where training is being pursued, it tends to be narrowly focused on the particular area of lay leadership. Only one participant said that any training in how to lead a group of people is being conducted. Also, participants do not have objective measurements of the training's success.

Lay leadership training must be focused on more than limited tasks. For example, Sunday school teachers' training should be expanded to involve more than how to teach. Based on Barna's research indicating a disappointing level of understanding of Scripture among Baptists, churches should be concerned with the lay leaders', especially teachers', knowledge of Scriptural content. Barna urges churches to furnish the resources not only to help with teaching skills but to increase their own biblical competence.¹⁹¹ As Douglas

¹⁹¹ Barna, *op. cit.*, 143.

notes, it is more than following Sunday school materials.¹⁹² Lay leaders should be focused on making disciples for Christ. Jesus makes this clear in the Great Commission (Matt. 28).

Bliss notes that the laity are missing a comprehension of the basics of being a Christian.¹⁹³ The church must assess the teachers' Scriptural knowledge to ensure that they are teaching their students all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20). One of the churches examined in the study expresses this idea on its website: "Our passion is to equip the believers for the work of the ministry until we all attain maturity in the fullness of Christ." Another church states its mission as "reaching and reproducing people for Christ."

Summary Finding 2: In churches where no training is being pursued, there exists an acknowledgement of its need, but unfortunately, in some cases, there is a lack of knowing how to proceed.

Clergy, themselves, need training in leadership and its application. Participants' statements accentuate Eims' opinion that many do not understand how to develop leaders.¹⁹⁴ Further, as Crossley notes, the church fails to emphasize the leadership skills outlined in Scripture.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, as Hulbert learned, there exists a need for leadership development tools in order to carry out the church's goals.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Douglas, *op. cit.*, 85.

¹⁹³ K. Bliss, *op. cit.*, 52.

¹⁹⁴ Eims, cited in Boyer, *op. cit.*, 2.

¹⁹⁵ Crossley, *op. cit.*, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Hulbert, *op. cit.*

Research Question 2: What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess the competence and commitment of these leaders, as defined by Blanchard 's Situational Leadership model?

In order to draw out answers to this research question, the researcher posed inquiries which shifted the conversation to personal leadership styles and the basics of the situational approach to leadership such as: assessment and evaluation of followers' abilities and motivations, along with a corresponding leadership style adjustment. The interviews yielded the themes of leadership style and teacher assessment and evaluation.

Only one participant follows some precepts of Situational Leadership in that he pursues a relational approach, working with people one-on-one, and that he knows that church goals must be pursued across ministries. The remainder labored to identify their leadership styles, and none discussed style adjustment based on followers' needs. Further, most of the churches have no structured, teacher evaluation system.

Summary Finding 3: Seventy percent of the churches in the study are not utilizing the Situational Leadership principles of formal assessment and evaluation regarding the development levels of their lay leaders, in particular their Sunday School teachers.

Churches must properly assess those in whom they place their trust to teach Scripture and shape the Christian walks of fellow believers. As Crossley notes, churches struggle as a result of improperly trained leaders.¹⁹⁷ One cannot expect members to grow in faith and understanding without an evaluation of their teachers. Dreibelbis notes that,

¹⁹⁷ Crossley, *op. cit.*

for congregations to be effective, church leaders must be actively engaged with the members.¹⁹⁸

Reddin advocates one-on-one evaluation of followers.¹⁹⁹ One cannot design a group training session and expect improvement in results if these group sessions are not followed by meetings with individual teachers so that the leaders' leadership styles can be adjusted for individual needs. Blanchard *et al.* stress that performance improves when followers receive the leadership style they require.²⁰⁰ Plus, VanderVen and Arvidson note that leading of workers must be tailored to the individual.²⁰¹ The challenge is to find the appropriate style, according to Zigarmi and Roberts.²⁰² Moreover, Meirovich and Gu concluded that inappropriate leadership approaches impeded performance and worker satisfaction.²⁰³

Interview questions related to the situational approach also generated the theme of a concern about future lay leadership. There were discussions regarding current leaders' aging out, as well as time constraints and prioritization of church work among younger members.

Summary Finding 4: Churches are concerned about future lay leadership.

New lay leaders must be actively recruited and developed. Hansens opines that lay leaders can bring skills they utilize outside the church and that utilizing them helps

¹⁹⁸ Dreibelbis, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁹ Reddin, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁰ Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership*, *op. cit.*

²⁰¹ VanderVen, *op. cit.*

²⁰² Zigarmi and Roberts, *op. cit.*

²⁰³ Meirovich and Gu, *op. cit.*

the workload and fosters church growth.²⁰⁴ However, these new leaders must understand how their lay leadership positions contribute to the church's goals, according to Malinen and Harju.²⁰⁵ Hadaway points out the key role of goal setting across all church programs in motivation of the laity.²⁰⁶

Indeed, clergy need new lay leaders, but once found, they cannot leave them to their own devices. As Woolfe notes, mentors must be present providing advice as coaches.²⁰⁷ Pinelli *et al.* concluded that people are attracted to leaders individually, not on a generational level.²⁰⁸ So, lay leadership can be developed from younger generations if proper leadership styles are employed for their development.

Research Question 3: What strategies and procedures are utilized to assess these leaders' competence and commitment to church doctrine, as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000?

Most participants demonstrated by their remarks that they have placed little emphasis on formal training in church doctrine. If it is pursued, normally it appears as a sermon topic, not in structured classes. So, the most prevalent theme is a broad-brush approach. Yet, these participants woefully discuss their congregations' lack of doctrinal knowledge. This leads to two summary findings.

Summary Finding 5: With small exception, churches in the sample are placing little emphasis on structured doctrinal training for the laity.

²⁰⁴ Hansens, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁵ Malinen and Harju, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁶ Hadaway, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁷ Woolfe, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁸ Pinelli *et al.*, *op. cit.*

Doctrine should be addressed in a structured setting. Crossley states the church's education program must address doctrinal education that enhances the members' ability to teach correctly and detect false doctrine.²⁰⁹ Maddix *et al.* aver that churches should be learning spaces in which members can understand how to join their faith with biblical truth.²¹⁰ Barna notes that, in order for spiritual maturity to happen, churches must have learning as a priority and the sermon cannot be the only learning opportunity.²¹¹

Summary Finding 6: Notwithstanding their failure to provide it, many of these participants acknowledge the need for doctrinal training for the laity.

Members need to know the basics of their faith and be able to defend their beliefs. As Barna notes, the church should act as the laity's seminary.²¹² Citing Osborne, Boyer reminds his readers that the church must instruct its members in proper Scripture interpretation, basing their understanding of their faith on the Bible rather than quoting the preacher's or others' opinions.²¹³

A Common Concern of All Participants

During the interviews, little time passed before the participants began lamenting their congregations' participation levels. The emerging theme was resistance to change, and the participants explained the problem through descriptions of apathy and complacency and an insiders *versus* outsiders culture.

²⁰⁹ Crossley, *op. cit.*, 16.

²¹⁰ Maddix, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 139.

²¹¹ Barna, *Habits, op. cit.*, 134.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Osborne, cited in Boyer, *op. cit.*

Summary Finding 7: Churches are plagued with apathy, complacency, and an inward focus. *Church leaders must take steps to confront the congregations' resting on past laurels, desire to be members of an echo chamber, and belief that Jesus' call to service does not apply to them.* Richards and Hoeldtke note that the spreading of the gospel should be a churchwide activity which can be accomplished if leaders understand how to prompt member participation. However, the church's action will not occur based on an individual's vision without membership buy-in.²¹⁴ The membership must be involved in developing the church's goals, according to Dougherty.²¹⁵ The churches' social control systems need to be examined to determine whether they are restricting member involvement in decision-making.²¹⁶ The congregation, however, must be urged to set goals that reach beyond their own maintenance.²¹⁷

Conclusions and Implications

The researcher found that the overarching concern of all the participants fails to be inscrutable. Each interview brought to the surface the concern of the lack of participation by the congregation in the church's ministries. This was expressed in different ways whether the interviewee voiced the problem as apathy, complacency, priorities, or time constraints.

Lifeway Research's Aaron Earls covers this topic in an article in 2022. He says, "Pastors often deal with churchgoers with strong opinions, but they're much more

²¹⁴ Richards and Hoeldtke, *op. cit.*

²¹⁵ Dougherty, *op. cit.*

²¹⁶ Hougland and Wood, *op. cit.*

²¹⁷ Gibbs and Morton, *op. cit.*

concerned about the people in their congregations who don't seem to care much at all.”²¹⁸ This opinion reflects the answers of 75% of pastors in a Lifeway survey.²¹⁹ Why has the church become complacent and how can it be addressed?

A complacent attitude is as old as the people of God. The prophets call out a people that are carelessly secure (Eze. 16:49) and at ease, wonton, and arrogant (Isa. 32:9, 11; Amos 6:1). The church naturally experiences tension between itself and the world as Jesus warned in His farewell discourse (John 15:19). This tension is exacerbated by the church leader's failure to ensure Scripture-based instruction in the church's education programs. The theme of the book of James expresses the conclusion that correct orthodoxy leads to proper orthopraxy. However, the congregation will not embrace proper Christian practice without a concerted effort to improve lay leadership for their guidance.

Howard Teibel's comments about organizational groups' ability to accept change should be considered by the participants in this study. Briefly, Teibel notes that one-sixth of a group will never change, while another one-sixth can serve as change agents or champions, whom the leader can easily convince to follow his vision and to fight actively for change. This leaves two-thirds of the congregation who would be willing to pursue change of direction if they understood the benefits and how they can be involved.²²⁰ The remainder of the conclusions, herein, address the actions which can be pursued to change

²¹⁸ Aaron Earls, “Apathy in Churches Looms Large for Pastors,” Pastor Views, Lifeway Research, May 10, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/05/10/apathy-looms-large-for-pastors>.

²¹⁹ Lifeway Research phone survey of 1,000 US Protestant pastors conducted March 30-April 22, 2022.

²²⁰ Teibel Education Consulting, teibel.com/podcast127, Nov. 30, 2015.

the issue of complacency, which according to Kotter, is an attitude never to be underestimated.²²¹

Recommendations

First, leadership development must become a priority. Paul’s admonition to Timothy was to equip the saints (Eph. 4:12-16), and this exhortation applies today. Hayashi notes, “Several years ago, Lifeway ... surveyed more than 2,000 pastors ... 92% [of them] said, ‘Training and development are critical to the health and growth of the church,’ however, [only] one in four churches had any plan to do so.”²²²

The principles of Situational Leadership, if practiced, may improve lay leadership which, in turn, may enhance proper biblical instruction. The employment of goal setting, diagnosis, and matching, as advocated by Blanchard *et al.*, would improve the quality of lay leadership if utilized in collaboration with those leaders individually. This means that lay leadership training must move beyond small niches, such as how to teach a lesson.

Situational Leadership requires one-on-one engagement, mutual agreement on goals, and adjustment of the leader’s style based on the follower’s development level. These specifics cannot be ascertained by a one-size-fits-all training program. Part of the problem of complacency may be the belief of the lay leaders that they are being ignored. Clergy, using Situational Leadership principles, could provide training to improve lay leaders’ confidence and to encourage them by recognizing their performance.²²³

²²¹ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 44.

²²² Jonathan Hayashi, “Why Churches Don’t Value Leadership Development,” Dec. 27, 2017, <https://www.biblicalleadership.com/blogs/why-churches-dont-value-leadership-development>.

²²³ Blanchard *et al.*, *Situational*, *op. cit.*

Second, new methods must be employed to enlist younger members of the congregation to engage actively and to accept leadership roles. This includes accommodating the time constraints of young families. Younger generations, Millennials in particular, are the most educated generations in the United States.²²⁴ Many have assumed leadership roles in their secular careers, and their leadership skills can be utilized by the church. They cannot, however, be expected to conform to schedules of yesteryear. Young families are more mobile and highly value family time and activities, and therefore, they accept more time commitments outside the church. The church should recognize that younger parents can perform tasks such as teaching or attending discipleship classes only when church childcare is available and that they will not have nighttime routines interrupted on evenings before school. To attract younger lay leaders, serious leadership development should be employed, in which their education levels and contributions are appreciated. Plus, inflexible requirements for the church's lay leaders, such as attendance at all evening services, must be relaxed.

Third, Situational Leadership's advocacy for teacher assessment and evaluation must be pursued. One cannot assume that long-time teachers are doctrinally literate. As an old adage warns, one must consider that much mileage may have been accumulated traveling in circles rather than making real progress. Repeating a remark of Berghoef and DeKoster, "Do not confuse knowledge with understanding. One may know much but

²²⁴ Thom and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 3.

understand little.”²²⁵ Some of the participants in the study remarked that teacher training was not well attended and that either the teachers did not believe it was needed or they would not attend out of obstinance. Leaders should utilize Situational Leadership principles to determine the reasons for this lack of attendance. Not only must competence or knowledge be assessed, but motivation or commitment, as well. Maier laid out that $\text{Performance} = \text{Ability} \times \text{Motivation}$.²²⁶ Situational Leadership requires that a person’s motivation must be evaluated. Long-time teachers can be burned out and some are leading simply because they have done it so long. These persons’ motivation must be improved or they must be removed from their positions.

Finally, there must be an organized, structured effort to teach church doctrine.

The participants’ estimation of how few members could have a sophisticated conversation about their faith is astounding and embarrassing. For too long, churches have neglected formal education in doctrine, as if it were a bad thing. Regarding the efficacy of American religious belief, Hummel cites Tocqueville as saying, in 1831,

Either I am badly mistaken or there is a great store of doubt and indifference hidden underneath these external forms ... Faith is evidently inert; enter the churches (I mean the Protestant ones) and you hear them speak of morality; of dogma not a word, nothing that could in any way shock a neighbor, nothing that could reveal a hint of dissidence.²²⁷

May the 21st century be the time that Southern Baptists end this trend.

²²⁵ Berghoef and DeKoster, *op. cit.*

²²⁶ M. Maier, “Assets and Liabilities in Group Problem Solving,” *Psychological Review* 74, 239-249; quoted in Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 6th ed. (Hoboken: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 20.

²²⁷ Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle Over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 49.

Future Research

The Southern Baptist churches in this study or other similar churches provide an excellent context for future research both directed to understanding the constructivism reflected in the actions of pastors based on their perceptions of their congregation's culture and their comprehension of what should change. For instance, what is causing the dearth of attendance at teacher training sessions? A possible explanation may lie in fear or a culture with an absence of psychological safety. Many lay leaders may suffer from early, school-related trauma and display scolionophobia. Others may demonstrate sophophobia or even epistemophobia, an irrational fear of knowledge because they do not want to know certain things, such as learning that a long-held belief is incorrect. It may not be anxiety that prompts leaders' nonattendance at training sessions. Some teachers may be displaying the Dunning-Kruger Effect in which they overestimate their own competence based on a small amount of knowledge.²²⁸ Research by those specializing in such areas would be of great value in understanding existing paradigms.

Also, there should be research exploring the effects of the adoption of Situational Leadership programs to develop lay leadership in these churches. The research could employ a mixed methods, longitudinal study. It could begin with a survey instrument to measure the congregation's opinion of their lay leadership, the congregation's ministry participation levels, and knowledge of church doctrine. This could be followed by Situational Leadership training for the church's staff and lay leaders. Methods employed

²²⁸ J.M. Kruger and D. Dunning. (1999). "Unskilled and Unaware of it: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-assessments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77(12), 1121-1134.

for this training may consist of a pastor- or lay leader-led book study, such as an examination of *Leadership and the One Minute Manager* or a series of training sessions on Situational Leadership facilitated by someone from outside the church.²²⁹ Other methods, of course, may be pursued. This could be followed by a formal training series on doctrine based on the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000. After an appropriate period of time, as set by the researcher, the survey instrument could be retaken to assess the effect of these actions.

Finally, this study could be replicated in another county with participants from other Southern Baptist churches. An interesting variable may be to interview only lay leaders. Also, churches with different congregational ethnicities could be included.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study and discussed them as they are related to the reviewed literature. These findings are that (1) where lay leadership training exists, it is narrowly focused, (2) where no lay leadership training exists, there is acknowledgement of its need, (3) most churches, in the sample, are not utilizing the Situational Leadership principles of assessment and evaluation of their Sunday school teachers, (4) churches are concerned about future lay leadership, (5) churches are placing little emphasis on structured doctrinal training, (6) clergy understand that there is a need for doctrinal training, and (7) churches are plagued with apathy, complacency, and inward focus.

²²⁹ Blanchard *et al.*, *Leadership*, *op. cit.*

The study revealed that the panoptic view of these participants, ten clergymen in Southern Baptist churches in the Southeast, was the complacency of their members regarding church participation. This chapter listed four conclusions and recommendations as to how the adoption of Situational Leadership in these churches could address this apathetic attitude toward participation and learning. These include the use of Situational Leadership to develop leaders through one-on-one engagement, the recruitment of new, younger lay leaders taking advantage of their secular leadership skills and education levels, formally evaluating teachers' competence and commitment, and providing structured doctrinal instruction.

This concluding chapter has provided a summary of the study, a summary of the major findings as related to the research literature, the conclusions and implications based on the major findings, and suggestions for further research. The study demonstrates the need for the application of Blanchard's Situational Leadership model to develop lay leadership in Southern Baptist churches, as well as the need for additional doctrinal instruction.

EPILOGUE

After this research was completed, a Southern Baptist magazine was issued with the theme of Confessing the Faith. The magazine's editor, Jeff Robinson, pens an article which describes the need for healthy churches to adopt and follow confessions of faith. He provides an overview of Baptists' compilation of their doctrinal statements dating back to 1689. Importantly, the author notes that churches must avoid inclusion of biblical interpretations that are not settled issues among believers. He states, "... a wise and well-articulated church confession ... avoids unnecessary sectarianism by refusing to take a hard line on so-called 'third-tier' issues such as the timing of Christ's return, specific details of the millennium, preferred English Bible translations, and those similar."²³⁰

Robinson further expands his ideas in another article in the same issue. He advocates the avoidance of two extremes: a fundamentalist approach which "tends to operate as if every theological issue is of first importance ... [and] liberalism [which] tends to operate as if no first-order issues exist."²³¹ He offers in conclusion, "Confessions of faith should function as guardrails, not a straitjacket."²³²

This researcher has averred that believers, in order to practice their faith properly and to further the spread of the gospel, must know *why* they believe what they believe by basing their beliefs on Scripture. Pastors should ensure that their congregations

²³⁰ Jeff Robinson, "6 Ways Confessions of Faith Promote Church Health," *The Courier: Informing and Inspiring South Carolina Baptists*, Vol. 155, No. 9, 5.

²³¹ Jeff Robinson, "How Narrow Should the Confession Be?," *The Courier*, *op. cit.*, 10.

²³² *Ibid.*, 11.

understand the doctrine of the church as laid out in their denomination's confession of faith. As Peter Beck says,

[The historical] confessions were ... used to train ... our pastors and disciple our parishioners as to what we believe the Bible teaches. In so doing, the Baptist Faith and Message does more than provide a summary of what Southern Baptists believe. It shapes what we believe. It defines who we are. It defends our convictions and our churches from external challenge.²³³

Without structured training in the Baptist Faith and Message, Southern Baptist churches will continue to focus on the third-tier issues that foster the insiders *versus* outsiders paradigm which is evident in the churches in this study. Clergy must obtain the proper leadership skills to ensure that lay leadership are not only schooled in proper orthodoxy but that they are leading others in proper orthopraxy, thereby reducing friction over petty issues that hinder the church's growth.

²³³ Peter Beck, "'I Am Southern Baptist': A Confessional People and their Confession of Faith," *The Courier*, *op. cit.*, 9.

APPENDIX A

**Pre-interview General Information Form
For Clergy**

Information about you:

Name:

Job Title:

Current Church (Name and Address):

Number of Years in this Position:

Total Number of Years in Ministry:

Education (please list degrees & colleges):

Previous Churches where you were on staff (Church, Position, From/To):

Information about your current church:

Year Established:

Current Membership (on the roll):

Active Members: Sunday Worship:

Sunday School or Bible Study:

Your comments regarding past and current church growth or decrease in membership:

To the best of your knowledge:

Average age of active membership:

Average education level of active membership (high school, college, graduate degree, other):

General demographics of active membership:

Ethnicity (majority and percentage of other ethnicities):

Socio-economic characteristics (lower, middle, upper middle, or upper class):

APPENDIX B

Anderson University Institutional Review Board IRB Proposal Cover Sheet

Project Title: Exploring the Leadership Competence Strategies and Assessment Procedures In Southern Baptist Churches in a Small County in the Southeastern United States: A Qualitative Research Case Study

Anticipated Dates for Data Collection (research cannot begin before HSC-IRB approval):

Start: May 1, 2023

End: August 1, 2023

Principal Investigator: Coleman Smoak

Email:

Faculty Advisor (if any):

Email:

Additional researchers and email (if any): _____

PI Status:

Faculty Staff Student Not affiliated with Anderson
University

Name of external funding agency (if any) and proposal title (if different from above):

(Optional) Review Status and category: (Please see instructions for more information)

____ qualifies for self-determination. Category: _____

____ is exempt from IRB review. Category: _____

____ qualifies for expedited review. Category: _____

____ requires full IRB review. Category: _____

I certify that the statements herein are accurate and complete. I agree to protect the rights and welfare of the human participants taking part in my research, to abide by University guidelines for securing informed consent, to safeguard the confidentiality of my research data, and to inform the chair of the HSC should any changes in the research protocol or human participant issues arise during the course of this research.

(Signature of Principal Investigator)

(Date)

Only for faculty advisor or sponsor working with PI:

I have reviewed this application and will oversee this research in its entirety.

(Signature of Advisor/Sponsor)

(Date)

(Signature of Dean or Provost)

(Date)

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR
Exploring the Leadership Competence Strategies and Assessment Procedures in
Southern Baptist Churches in a Small County in the Southeastern United States:
A Qualitative Research Case Study

You are invited to participate in a research study to improve the knowledge base regarding the lay leadership training practices of Southern Baptist Churches in your county. The person conducting this study believes that its findings would benefit those who want to improve their laity training programs. This study poses no risk beyond that which you normally experience in carrying out your tasks in your church environment. Any data collected from you will be anonymously reported and will be kept confidential.

This study is being conducted by Coleman Smoak, who is pursuing his PhD in Leadership with a concentration in Christian ministry. A research project is a requirement of that degree. You were selected as a possible participant because you indicated your interest in your response to a letter which was sent to all the Southern Baptist Churches in the county or because you were suggested as a participant by your pastor.

If you decide to participate, we will collect the completed Pre-interview General Information Form and proceed to a personal interview with you. This interview should last for approximately one hour.

Information collected through the General Information Form, such as your name, current church name, previous churches in which you have served, and any other information which could be used to identify you, if the information was disclosed, will be kept in a password protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet. The person conducting this study is the sole person who will have access to the information you provide, either in the completed form or in the interview. In the report of the study, participant numbers and church numbers will be used instead of names. Recordings of interviews will be deleted after a written transcript is developed, and these transcripts will be shredded three years after the project's completion.

Your decision whether or not to participate is completely up to you. Plus, you have the right to withdraw your permission at any time, even after the study begins.

If you have any questions, I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, the Principal Investigator, Coleman Smoak, can be reached at [Telephone Number] or [Email Address].

Initials of Participant and Investigator _____

Informed Consent
Page 2

For more information regarding your rights as a research project participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee/Institutional Review Board by phone or email. The HSC Chair, Dr. [Name of Chair], can be reached at [Telephone Number] [Email Address].

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OF NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's Signature Date

Investigator's Signature Date

Print Name

Print Name

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