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Shepherds Leading the Flocks: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Church Leaders Managing Church Membership During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Shepherds Leading the Flocks: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of

Church Leaders Managing Church Membership During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Dissertation by

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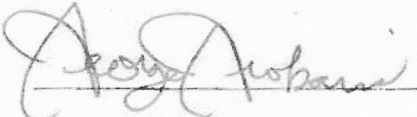
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ABSTRACT

Shepherds Leading the Flocks: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of

Church Leaders Managing Church Membership During the COVID-19 Pandemic

by R'Betrice Phillips

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Methodology: This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach with a socioecological justification with open-ended interview questions investigating the lived experiences of the participants. This study aimed to gather data from sample size 10 church leaders in Los Angeles County, California plus a snowball sampling of referred church leaders who managed during COVID-19. In this study, the collection of narratives through semi-structured interviews provided the data which was analyzed and used to inform the conclusions and recommendations for this study.

Findings: The research findings were the influential intrapersonal and interpersonal practices (a) implementation of personal prayer, bible study, meditation, faith, and worship; (b) purposeful implementation to seek guidance; (c) daily personal implementation; (d) implementation to address personal needs; (e) implementation of collaborative practices; (f) purposeful collaborative efforts to develop mitigate various needs; (g) established meeting frequency; (h) effective collaboration was related to technology, member and non-member relations, and future planning.

Conclusions: Effective church leadership is dependent upon (a) implemented intrapersonal practices during unsettled times; (b)intentional and purposeful practices resulted in guidance

from God; (c) the frequency intrapersonal practice was a key component; (d) benefits of intrapersonal practices included homiletical approaches; (e) implementation of collaborative explored ways to conduct church; (f) the intentional interpersonal practices led to new homiletical approaches; (g) The frequency collaborative communications was key to inter-developmental growth; (f) the benefits of interpersonal practices included new ways of conducting church.

Recommendations: The researcher in this study utilized the findings and conclusions to make the following recommendations to anyone holding an influential church leadership role over members and non-members: (a) develop intrapersonal practices, (b) outline the practices purposes, (c) commit to daily implementation, (d) reflect on the practice benefits, (e) develop collaborative partnerships, (f) commit to relationship building through collaboration, (g) commit achieving effective collaborative outcomes, (h) identify untapped potential and opportunities.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There were many reasons individuals came to the new world, one such reason was the desire for religious freedom. This pursuit of religious freedom meant the goals and roles of these people influenced the birth of America. The influence of this faith-based foundation is recognizable in some of the original American organizations like the well-known fields of education and medicine. Thus, this faith-based foundational role and vision of religious freedom are woven into the very existence of present-day American communities. These communities stretch across the nation and engage with various types of faith-based organizations. One such faith-based organization is the local church, where leaders oversee regular congregational meetings designed "for the purpose of worship, praise, prayer, and the proclamation of the word of God as recorded in the Bible" (Williams, 2018, p. 13). The value of these churches and their leaders was revealed in Wilson's book *Pastoral Ministry in the Real World: Loving, Teaching, Leading God's People*, where he describes leaders, "as influential, respected leaders who watch over God's people, by loving, teaching, and leading them, without regard for personal enrichment"(Wilson, 2018, p. 24). Thus, Wilson's book shines a light on the leadership styles, managerial qualities, decision-making, and experiences of a particular type of church leader known as a pastor.

Regardless of the church leader's title, the importance of the church and its leaders should not be in question; rather, the skills and traits developed by church leaders to facilitate the management of God's people and their membership should be recognized. This understanding can come from the experiences of church leaders who are faced with challenges leading to the unfortunate closure of some churches while other churches thrive. These lived experiences can be gleaned from the various leadership traits and styles recognizable on current social platforms. One author noted the ability of various types of church leaders to manage God's people and their

membership may be in part a reflection of their ability to build favorable lines of communication (Norman, 2019). These lines of communication facilitate the conceptualization of church leaders' roles of taking care of or managing God's people as a foundational aspect of church membership.

The foundational management of church membership includes understanding the expectations of God's people. Therefore, church leaders may need to understand one expectation of church membership can be an individual desire to receive assistance with meeting socioeconomical needs. The importance of the socioeconomical aspect in the lives of church members is discussed by Norman (2019, p. 77), who described it as the use of social capital to access resources within the human networks of American communities, except for instances when forces beyond one's control remove the human network, causing reliance "upon resources through an invisible but trusted network" found in God through prayer. The complexities of meeting the church members socioeconomic needs further complicate church leaders' ability to maintain the lines of communication required to manage membership during a crisis.

The knowledge of experienced church leaders who navigated the complexities of membership and socioeconomic needs can be a valuable resource in the future. As these long-term economic and demographic changes appear differently at different points in time, the church leader's ability to manage during such changes becomes a desirable skill in times of crisis such as the more recent COVID-19 pandemic. A study conducted by Eagle et al. (2022) explored the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the church. However, how church leadership relates to maintaining and growing members during a crisis remains to be explored. Thus, church leaders' abilities to adapt and prevent the possible second crisis of declining church membership may come from understanding how did church leaders managed membership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

According to the Pew Research Center's (2012), study of global religious presence, 84% of the world population reported having a religious affiliation in the 2010, indicating the likelihood of religious affiliation-based experiences among individuals around the world and in America. The foundational and historical religious affiliation and presence in America has been discussed by at least two authors (Edwards, 2016; Gutacker, 2016). Moreover, the ability of church leaders to manage the population's religious affiliations with entities such as the church has an ongoing positive or negative influence and impact on the nation and its communities. As Owens et al. (2020) stated, "The impact of that failure ripples to families and communities, even to those who are not directly associated, that is, there are adverse effects for the entire community, municipality, and beyond" (2020, p. 184). Thus, concerning possible church failure, church leaders face the challenge managing congregations while fundamentally understanding the resource of membership is required to uphold the church's positive supportive influence in communities. Furthermore, Chaves (2004) brings key terms to the discussion on congregations by outlining multiple requirements for successful church management and listing three of the essential resources as "maintaining a membership base, securing adequate revenue, and recruiting talented leaders" (Chaves, 2004, p. 17). These elements point to the complexities of these resources, as each is essential to church health. Rosborough (2015) added to the discussion a subsequent dynamic related to the inclusive and exclusive nature of membership. This dynamic provides significant insight into the membership revenue stream and participation. The ability of church leadership to navigate and manage all of these complexities is a fundamental aspect of congregational membership.

Church Leadership

Concerning the fundamental resource of leadership, it is work considering "buy-in or followership is the hallmark of leadership, because without followership, there can never be any leadership to talk about" (Chauke, 2020, p. 10). This statement reflects the value of church leaders'

ability to influence the stability and sustainability of membership by maintaining a relationship with the affiliates. In previous discussions on the topic, there appeared to be a trend in the discussions of various authors where church leaders adopted management approaches, including the implementation of strategic organizational leadership coaching projects, financial strategies represented by the megachurch, and entrepreneurial charismatic leadership styles (Ellis, 2018; Endacott et al., 2017; Mulder & Marti, 2020). The implementation and experiences of the various management structures by church leaders were brought to the forefront of public view with the televised churches and the development of megachurches.

However, the 1990s and the dawn of the digital age transformed church leadership and membership, giving rise to dynamic and publicized churches and megachurch continuing into the 21st century and required the diversification of church leadership management skills and the charismatic leadership styles. The adaptation to the digital age brought about growth in church leadership and membership, as both relate to the implementation of technological alternatives afforded by modernization through the digital age. Anderson (2020), in his book, *Technology and Theology*, discussed the progression of the use of technology for outreach and membership care.

By looking at the megachurch, the charismatic leadership style, and the implementation of technology, one can consider Sanders' (2020) discussion of the competencies of leadership, where he identified the following management tools related to church revitalization and health: "(1) organizational awareness; (2) team leadership; (3) initiative; (4) conceptual thinking; (5) information seeking; and (6) relationship building" (p. 5). These competencies for church revitalization are an approach to developing church leaders' membership management skills.

Researchers such as Jules (2021) and Hanson (2021)studied church leaders' traits leading to positive effectiveness. The management of membership in the digital may have led to the development of competencies regarding setting and attaining membership initiatives. These types of leaders would be

required to implement initiatives designed to meet membership needs through increased participation. Blanchard and Broadwell (2018) discussed the importance of relationships in the initiative competency required in membership management, whereas Eagle (2016) discussed the benefits and complications associated with the management of membership participation as the church size increases. The evaluation and understanding of leadership management roles have been discussed from different perspectives by various authors (Bleidorn et al., 2019; Clarke, 2008; John & Srivastava, 1999).

Discussions of these church leadership traits are typically accompanied by other aspects of related to their role in the church, such as the business and finance components (Bayton, 2020; Jackson, 2019), accountability (Kirby, 2020), and visionary leadership traits (Antonakis et al., 2003; Wong & Page, 2003). All of these studied aspects of church leadership would not exist without the congregation or church membership. The leadership dynamic is discussed in the book *Spiritual Leadership: A Biblical Theology of the Role of the Spirit in the Leadership of God's People* by David Huffstutler (2016), in which the relationship between leadership and membership is the main component of the church.

Church Membership

As the fundamental resource of church membership is important to the church, it is essential to review the information presented in studies such as the one by MacIlvaine III et al. (2016), which pointed out an decline in church attendance in the West. However, the topic of attendance is also found in the literature on church revenues, thus making it difficult to separate discussions on attendance from discussions on revenues. One such study presented by Forbes and Zampelli (1997) stated, "The importance of attendance at religious services to religious giving is consistently and supported by the literature" (p. 20). The church leaders' ability to manage membership appears to be inherently tied to the management of church revenues; therefore, the management of the increasingly declining in church attendance is essential to the prevention of the increasing decline in other much-needed resources the

church depends on. The effective and efficient management of church resources and infrastructure is discussed by Oosthuizen (2016).

Church leadership management extends beyond the decreased attendance toward overall membership participation. The first source of leadership instruction concerning management is found in the Old Testament (The Holy Bible, 2008). In modern times, at least two authors noted how strong ties to religious activities and a sense of exclusivity through membership affiliation likely led to increasing contributions to religious entities (Forbes & Zampelli, 2013; Rosborough, 2015). Even though revenues are not the main focus here, the ties between its counterpart membership, attendance, and participation are noteworthy elements of church leadership. Authors such as Grim and Grim (2016) and Kidd (2023) discussed these ties as well as the dilemma of membership and affiliation concerns church leadership is facing. The relationship and communication needed to manage these ties are an essential element of leadership, and managing membership becomes essential. In the book *Pastoral Leadership: For the Care of Souls,* authors Senkbeil and Woodford (2021) redirect church leadership from merely the idea of running a church to managing membership by caring for the people.

Socioecological Influences of Three 21st Century Crises on Church Membership

The organization and skill of church leadership is another fundamental resource, and it faces the challenge of managing membership stability and sustainability during economic crises and external environmental pressures. The statistical results concerning church failures and success related to leadership were outlined by Krejcir (2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d). Previous authors have identified three probable external pressures on the church: the recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the cultural decline of spiritual-religious affiliation (Gary D. Badcock, 2016; Jackson, 2019; Johnston et al., 2022; Wuthnow, 1997).

The 2008 Recession

One such external environmental pressure was the publicly documented financial crash occurred in 2008. Grusky et al. (2011) and Hetzel (2011) discussed varying topics related to the economic devastation beginning in 2007, with a marked depression spanning from 2008 through 2009, leading to astronomical unemployment rates and accompanied by a recession, causing loss of income and poverty. The event directly impacted church leaders' manageability of the fundamental resource of revenues needed for stability and sustainability. The invaluable nature of this fundamental resource and the impact of income on the American community's use of public goods has been the subject of research by economists (Brooks, 2018). Although the correlation between income and donating to social causes reflects a greater decrease in secular giving than in religious giving, income does impact the individuals' rate of giving to the church (Brooks, 2018). In the wake of a recession, the financial stability and sustainability of the church suffer. According to various authors, the shaky financial circumstances appear to impact entities where the majority of revenue is derived from voluntary donations as a decline in income influences or leads to a decline in giving (Brooks, 2004, 2018; Jackson, 2019; James & Jones, 2011). The ability to navigate the recession with effective leadership strategies is outlined in studies by Jackson (2019) and Williams (2013), which highlight the church leadership skills required to manage the budget, adding to the already complicated task of managing membership through this crisis.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Another external environmental pressure was the very publicly documented pandemic of 2020, known as COVID-19. According to Bruce et al. (2022) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), it began in China in 2019 and was characterized by a surge in illness, death, loss of employment, income, and health insurance from mid-2020 to 2021. The pandemic's global nature led to international studies on its various impacts on the church (Magezi, 2022; Objantoro et al., 2022). The studies carried out within the United States focused on the pandemic direct impact on the fundamental

resources of membership base, revenues and recruiting leaders the church would require to maintain its stability and sustainability. Two authors discussed how the shelter-in-place shutdown enforced during the pandemic eliminated in-person participation, impacting the membership or attendance of the smaller churches more so than the larger churches with established virtual platforms (Bruce et al., 2022), as church revenues from members declined and creative leadership teams secured other sources for monies such as the PPP loans and experienced a neutral financial impact (Eagle et al., 2022). The experiences of church affiliates during COVID-19 involved participating in virtual religious activities, along with reduced interaction with individuals of similar religious backgrounds. The church leadership's ability to manage this external pressure and provide alternatives for its affiliates determined its survival through the pandemic. Notably, the pre-COVID stability of the church influenced the leadership's ability to strategically position the church for survival (Eagle et al., 2022). The church leaders' managerial skills were put to the test, with some succeeding while others failed to navigate and survive the challenges of virtual membership successfully.

A 2023 Perspective on Nothingarians

The opposing viewpoint and not-so-public concern about church size or affiliation is an ongoing challenge that the church's organizational structure is facing. The decline in attendance and church closures is becoming evident in various denominations. Even though some denominations and churches are experiencing growth, the overall trend in the reduction of religious affiliation is prevalent in various studies (Chaves, 2004; Douglas, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2012; Sanders, 2020). The influx of megachurches may give the appearance of increased attendance or membership; however, the actual attendance rate became stagnant between 1990 and 2005 when compared to the population's rate of growth (Olson, 2009). The Pew surveys of 2006 and 2007 indicate an increase in non-religious affiliation, going from 8% in 1987 to 16% (Pew Research Center, 2007). Although the link between affiliation and attendance has not been outlined, the reduction in the number of religiously affiliated

individuals continues to occur. Conversely, the percentage of individuals in America with no religious preference – with the term "preference" being used interchangeably with the term "affiliation"— has shown an overall trend of continued increase in various studies, starting at approximately 20% in 2012, increasing through 2014, and reaching 29% in 2021 (Hout & Fischer, 2014; Lipka, 2015; Smith, 2021). This downward trend in religious affiliation was reflected in the work of three authors, which revealed the weekly church attendance had a marked decline, going from 47% in 2005 to 25% in 2021 (Olson, 2009; Smith, 2021; Sumpter, 2019).

This change in religious affiliations may continue on its downward slope as the growing number of unaffiliated individuals from the younger generation (1) begin aging, (2) raise unaffiliated children, and (3) tend to become less affiliated rather than more affiliated over time (Lipka, 2015). However, church leaders who manage membership should be aware of possible discrepancies in self-reported attendance or affiliation. As Olson stated, "Actual attendance counts weighed against poll results indicate that many people do not tell the truth in these surveys" (Olson, 2009). The skilled maintenance of lines of communication between church leaders and the congregation becomes essential as the ongoing shifts in attendance and affiliation changes reveal concerns for future membership. Although the decline in membership, attendance, or affiliation may not add to the nothingarians, it may create polarizing politically divided groups in America (Williams, 2023). This polarizing divide may lean into church leadership's management or navigation abilities required to address the effects of the shifts in attendance and affiliation proven to require skills not yet known. Contrary to the idea of a recession or COVID-19 impacting the church, the decline in affiliation may be an overlooked external environmental pressure church leaders will need the management skills to navigate shortly for the rebuilding of a non-polarized church community.

Church Leadership Adapting to Socioecological Influences

Studies on church organizations, church infrastructure, and various church leadership styles are readily available; however, the discussions on the external environment pressures or socioecological influences and church leaders vary based on the different areas of research. The studies about church organizations and finances are prominent. The studies carried out in the United States and abroad, in particular, focus on the financial aspect of managing church membership. One such author discussed the adaptations based on the need for diverse revenue streams in the church to promote sustainability during external environmental pressures such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Tagwirei, 2022). However, Tagwirei (2022) did not discuss church leaders' management of membership during the pressure or the management of the preexisting decline in affiliation. Similarly, another author in the United States discussed the experiences of the socioeconomic impact and financial strategies that church leaders implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic but not the membership aspect related to leadership management (Eagle et al., 2022). Additional studies were found highlighting the fundamental resources of leadership, revenues, and membership, but they do not touch on the valued resources found in the management of membership by the church leaders. Conversely, Thumma (2007) emphasized the value of membership interactions, while Phillip (2022) highlighted church leadership during COVID-19 with a focus on change management. Even though these studies did not discuss adaptations of leadership managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic, they do provide theoretical perspectives.

Church Leadership: Theoretical Foundations

The dearth of studies pertaining to church leadership managing membership may account for the emphasis on theoretical approaches. Authors like Jules (2021), implemented a theoretical framework comprising multiple leadership theories and approaches. This theoretical framework helped in determining successful and effective management practices within the church. Moreover, De Neal (2020) elected to implement a corporate leadership approaches with church

leadership theories to discuss the leadership management dynamic within the church. The theoretical approach provided a practical application of corporate perspective to the study of church leadership dynamics. However, as in the case of Jackson's (2019) application of resource dependency theory, the theories did not specifically discuss church leadership's management of membership during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

One study conducted during the pandemic is of interest here as it focuses on the experiences of church leaders. This study was conducted by Johnston et al. (2022) focused on multiple aspects of the experiences of church leaders during the pandemic, where membership was discussed as a subset of those experiences. The study of various aspects of church leadership with multiple approaches allows for all of them to be placed within the socioecological framework, which consists of five levels, spheres, or domains (depending on the discussion), as those found studies conducted by Kilanowski (2017) or by Scarneo et al. (2019).

Church Leadership: Theoretical Framework

The application of the socioecological framework allows the researcher to interpret data based on the relational exchange of influence between the five levels. The application of this framework can be utilized to interpret the dynamics discussed by Davis et al. (2013). This dynamic application allows for the implementation of a theoretical framework in an area of study with no consensus on how to interpret the findings. The various elements of the socioecological framework are further discussed in the literature review as part of the arduous process of solidifying the framework for this study. The process of reviewing and settling on the theoretical framework is an essential aspect of the interpretation of findings in a qualitative study as discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018).

Statement of Research Problem

Literature on to the church includes discussions on topic of leadership styles and traits (Chauke, 2020; De Neal, 2020; Jules, 2021), membership (Hanson, 2021; Olson, 2009; Sumpter, 2019), and COVID-19 (Bruce et al., 2022; Eagle et al., 2022; Johnston et al., 2022). Some of the studies have discussed various aspects of membership management, leadership tools or platforms, and church leadership; however, the problem is the lack of research on the recent events of COVID-19 related events and church leadership's management of membership during this pandemic, reflecting a need for additional investigation in this area.

One such expository review conducted by Anderson (2020) in his book *Technology and Theology* discussed the implementation of technology by church leaders for the pastoral care of its members. The chapter on the virtual church reveals how the challenges of pastoral care lead membership to the attainment of the spiritual benefits traditionally achieved only by gathering together (Anderson, 2020). Additionally, this book is an inquiry into the connectedness of membership through virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the experiences of church leadership managing membership during the pandemic remain unknown.

The ongoing problem with the lack of research in this area can be seen in the work of other scholars. Two such studies conducted by David Eagle and his colleagues focused on the lived experiences of pastors and clergy (Eagle et al., 2022; Johnston et al., 2022). One of these studies examined the financial impact of COVID-19 resulting from the regulatory limitations on in-person gatherings. This study discussed self-reported financial stability despite the required adaptations to membership gatherings restrictions (Eagle et al., 2022). Moreover, this study did not reveal church leadership experiences in managing membership during the pandemic as a function separate from managing finances. Their additional study looks at the experiences of both pastors and members while they were adapting to COVID-19 related restrictions (Johnston

et al., 2022). This study reviewed the self-reported strategies implemented by church leadership to investigate the leadership strategies and the cultural shift of various traditional in-person member activities. The researchers provided a baseline for future studies as the repercussions of COVID-19 are revealed over time (Johnston et al., 2022). Thus, this provision substantiates the problem of the lack of research into church leadership, membership, and COVID-19.

The recent events related to COVID-19 have led to studies of the church leadership (Johnston et al., 2022) and church membership in relations to the finances (Eagle et al., 2022). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world is evident in studies by Anderson (2020), Eagle et al. (2022), and Magezi (2022), which constitute the building blocks for further exploration into church leaders managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the study by Johnston et. al. (2022) being used as a baseline. However, little is presently known about how church leaders managed membership during the COVID -19 pandemic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Research Questions

What were the experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Sub-Questions

- What were the experiences of church leaders adapting intrapersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- What were the experiences of church leaders adapting interpersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of The Study

The focus of this study was on identifying and describing the lived experiences of church leaders managing church membership during the COVID-19 pandemic based on the five levels of influences under the Scarneo et al. (2019) socioecological framework: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, (c) organizational (d) environmental, and (e) policy. This study is significant because it contributes to the work by Johnston et al. (2022) by further exploring the implemented membership management strategies. Moreover, it was built on the study conducted by Norman (2019), which discussed the importance of communication in the role of church leaders. Finally, this study may identified the impact of strategies based on Anderson's (2020) work as it provided an opportunity for further exploration into the impact of any implemented virtual strategies. The findings of this study support the previous studies on the role of communication and virtual strategies in membership management while serving as a valuable stepping stone for the development of additional church leadership strategies for the implementing news ways for conducting church.

According to a study by Norman (2019), God's role in people's lives does not equate to church membership. This study may provide practitioners with strategies church leaders may implement to reconnect membership and those who seek God during times when socioeconomic needs are unmet. The COVID-19 pandemic is a situation where church leaders need to be equipped to manage the increased supportive role of the church in the communities they serve.

Additionally, this study is significant to practitioners in the field of church leadership as it advances membership management strategies, which may add to the existing membership management strategies utilized in the education of future church leaders.

Definitions

- *Affiliation*: "Affiliation" means to associate as a member, to connect or associate oneself (Merriam-Webster, 2014, p. 21).

- *Attendance*: "Attendance" refers to the person or number of persons attending whereas attend is the act of being present at (Merriam-Webster, 2014, p. 79).

- *Church:* This study utilized William's definition, which is as follows: The researcher uses the term church to designate the local church comprised of a congregation of those who profess faith and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ and meet in a particular location on a regular basis for the purpose of worship, praise, prayer, and the proclamation of the word of God as recorded in the Bible. This group is a subsection of the universal church worldwide and as such there is not just one specified church in any given geographic area. (Williams, 2018, p. 13)

- *Church Leadership*: This refers to the individuals in the church setting with the role or position of influence over others for the voluntary pursuit of the church's mission or vision. It also refers to the leader in the church who "is in a position of influence either paid or voluntary" (Sanders, 2020, p. 12). Additionally, "Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence others for the voluntary pursuit of organizational or institutional objectives" (Chauke, 2020, p. 10).

- *Church Membership:* This refers to the state of being a person identified by the church as enrolled in the church as a member. Membership is the state or status of

being a member, whereas a member is a person baptized or enrolled in a church
(Merriam-Webster, 2014, p. 774).

- *Congregation*: This refers to an assembly of persons, gathering, an assembly of
  persons met for worship and religious instruction, or a religious community
  (Merriam-Webster, 2014, p. 262).

- *Interpersonal*: This refers to the level of influence having people with direct contact
  and communication with the individual at the center socioecological dynamic.
  Additionally, "the microsystem closet to the individual contains the strongest
  influences and encompasses the interactions and relationships of the immediate
  surroundings" (Kilanowski, 2017, p. 295).

- *Intrapersonal*: This refers to the level of influence having on oneself as the individual
  at the center of the socioecological dynamic. Whereas, "the initial theory by
  Bronfenbrenner was illustrated by nesting circles that place the individual in the
  center surrounded by various systems" (Kilanowski, 2017, p. 295).

- *Managing Membership:* This refers to Biblical based shepherding or overseeing the
  flock, congregations, or God's people who enroll in church membership and attend,
  participate, or are affiliated with meetings according to William's (2018) statement
  "for the purpose of worship, praise, prayer, and the proclamation of the word of God
  as recorded in the bible" (p. 13) and address any socioeconomic needs as discussed
  by Norman (2019).

- *Nones:* According to Smith (2021), "Currently, about three-in-ten U.S. adults (29%)
  are religious "nones" – people who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics, or
  'nothing in particular' when asked about their religious identity"(p. 4).

- *Socioecological*: Five levels or spheres of influence with an individual in the center and the four subsequent levels of influence moving outward like rings in a tree based on the type and degree of influence. Kilanowski states the following:

  The socio-ecological model (SEM) was first introduced as a conceptual model for understanding human development in the 1970s and later formalized as a theory in the 1980s. The initial theory by Bronfenbrenner was illustrated by nesting circles that place the individual in the center, surrounded by various systems.

  (Kilanowski, 2017, p. 295)

  Moreover, Scarneo et al. (2019) stated "The socioecological framework was first suggested by Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s as an ecological systems theory and was later redefined by McLeroy et al as a framework to promote health-related behavioral change" (2019, p. 356).

Delimitations

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) discussed the delimitations or delimiting variables concerning the demographic characteristics used to define the target population and sampling frame. The delimiting variables based on the sampling frame for this study were as follows: Los Angeles County self-identified pastors, assistant pastors, or influential educational roles, and snowball referred church leaders who were active during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Organization of the Study

This study aimed to identify church leaders' experiences adapting the influential intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of influence to manage membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first three chapters outlined these elements. Chapter I presents the introduction, the background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, definitions, and delimitations related to this study. Chapter II discusses the background related to church leadership, church

membership, and church leadership facing adversity. Then, Chapter III outlines the design for this research, population, sample, instrumentation, validity, reliability, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years of their existence, church congregations have managed the recurring difficulties associated with securing the resources of leadership, members, and revenues (Chaves, 2004). Chaves (2004) acknowledged these are not the only resources necessary; however, these resources determine the church's health and provide a snapshot of the congregations. The congregational snapshot can reveal the dynamic relationship between church leadership and church membership as an essential aspect of church management. Chauke (2020) discussed this relationship concerning leaders' ability to influence a voluntary desire to act and guide individuals to attain a common vision for the church. As per the definition provided in Chapter II, a church is a group or congregation of people professing the same Christian faith and allegiance who meet in a particular location on a regularly to worship, praise, pray, and proclaim the biblical recount of God's word (Williams, 2018). These groups of peoples, or churches, may be effectively and efficiently managed by church leaders through a vision-based strategic process (Oosthuizen, 2016).

This literature review is meant to provide both the background and a socioecological framework for this study as presented in Figure 1. The review begins with background of church leadership and the role of church leadership in membership management and management during societal transitions. This is followed by an overview of church membership and the three crises membership has faced over the years. The three crises reviewed for this study outline pertinent leadership management challenges and leadership management strategies. Afterward, a review of various perspectives and frameworks used to study church

Figure 1: Literature Review Funnel
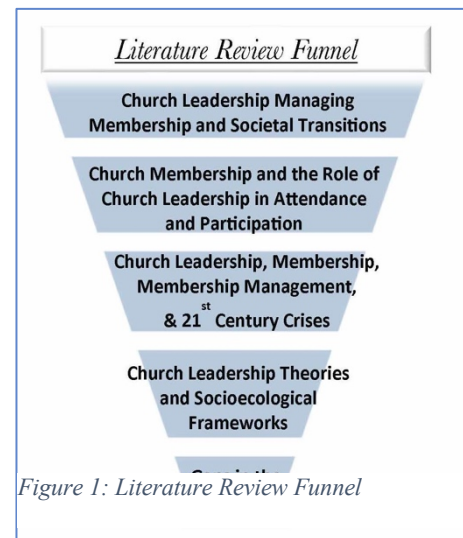
leadership is presented. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter discusses the selected socioecological framework and two of the five domains used in this study.

Church Leadership

The complexities of church leaders' roles have existed since the Apostle Paul's three missionary journeys to establish the first churches (The Holy Bible, 2008). The pastors or church leaders of that time, much like those of today, employed various leadership styles and approaches to managing church congregations and subsequent membership. These leadership styles may be reflective of the intellectual abilities the leader possess. Scarneo et al. (2019) discussed the intrapersonal attribute of an individual's knowledge concerning their own skills, abilities, and limitations. These intrapersonal attributes have been components of various leadership studies both inside and outside of the church setting. Inside and outside of the church setting, the interpersonally skilled church leader is also required to manage both secular and religious beliefs. In the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Edwards (2016) discussed the misalignment between church leaders' beliefs and behaviors concerning the three bridging strategies of (a) religious sequestration, (b) issue minimization, and (c) selective denial. These bridging strategies reflect church leaders' application of intrapersonal skills to reconcile misaligned beliefs and manage church membership.

Although church leadership may need to reconcile beliefs and behaviors to manage membership, the literature reflects a lack of consensus on the theoretical approach utilized to explore church leaders' management and leadership skills. For example, a study carried out in the church setting conducted by Sanders (2020) highlighted leadership development as being related to church revitalization and health. Sanders' (2020) study outlined the intrapersonal competencies of leadership as "organizational awareness; team leadership; initiative; conceptual thinking; information seeking; and relationship building" (p. 5). Another leadership evaluation

tool was presented by Bleidorn et al. (2019), who discussed the measurable personality-based inventories used to understand leadership. An additional set of inventories has been described using the categories of "extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience agreeableness, and conscientiousness" (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 105). The evaluation of leadership does not stop there. Hanson's study provides an evaluation tool of measurable factors, with inspirational leadership being the most favorable factor in building strong lines of communication (Hanson, 2021, pp. 81-82). Unexpectedly, each of these studies reflects the dilemma of understanding leadership either with or without the intrapersonal socioecological aspect. The inability to understand church leadership appears to involve a concern regarding leadership practices. These concerns are outlined by the Apostle Paul, who wrote and worked diligently to instruct and address good and bad leadership practices in the early church (Clarke, 2008).

The value of good church leadership practices is in the leaders' abilities to manage the congregation or membership. This management skill entails interpersonal exchange with the people or congregations who interact with the leaders. Scarneo et al. (2019) discuss the interpersonal domain as follows:

> The theory of normative social behavior proposes that descriptive norms (i.e., perceptions about what other people do) are controlled by injunctive norms (i.e., perceptions about what you are expected to do) as well as the expectations of anticipated outcomes (p. 357).

> Wilson (2018) discussed this interpersonal domain with respect to the biblical uprising in

the book of Acts. The leaders in this setting implemented cooperative leadership techniques by providing the congregation with guidelines and norms for conflict resolution. As Wilson (2018) stated, "The apostles did not micro-manage the men, but empowered them to fulfill their ministry" (p. 19). Another type of interpersonal socioecological influence applied to setting norms is servant leadership. A servant leader approach encompasses the leaders' ability to have a

21

vision and help the people they lead to attain the vision (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018). This section presents some approaches and styles of leadership has implemented to accomplish multiple purposes in the church. With these various approaches and styles, one of the purposes' leaders attempt to accomplish is management of congregations and membership.

Looking at a study of congregations and membership through the interpersonal lens can illuminate church leaders' purposes. An example of this is Ellis' (2018) project, which revealed the impact of skilled leaders through a discussion of the ministry team's service to the congregation. The implications of Ellis' (2018) project point to the value of the much needed yet lacking individual and team-related skills and ability development for church leaders. From the intrapersonal and interpersonal perspective, this skills and ability development may be a fundamental aspect of the role of church leadership.

Church Leadership Managing Membership

The role of church leaders' intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities may support multiple purposes, including the management of the congregation's membership base. Chauke (2020) discussed some leadership abilities in accordance with biblical principles and the ability to be a visionary. The visionary leadership aspect of managing congregations is, in essence, an intrapersonal skill the individual should possess. The intrapersonal visionary skill set is complemented by the interpersonal skill set used to bring people on board with the vision.

Moreover, Chauke also discussed some leadership skills and stated "buy-in or followership is the hallmark of leadership because, without followership, there can never be any leadership to talk about" (2020, p. 10). These two intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences are implemented by church leaders to present a vision and gain followers.

The socioecological influence and implementation of the intrapersonal visionary skill serves specific purposes in the management of the congregation's membership base. According

to Blanchard and Broadwell (2018), "This involves not only goal setting, but also establishing a compelling vision that tells you who you are (your purpose), where you are going (your picture of the future), and what will guide your journey (your values)"(pp. 7-8). The leaders who strive for good practices will assess their intrapersonal visionary skills to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Senkbeil and Woodford, while discussing this aspect of leadership, stated "A good pastor will recognize the importance of leadership, but also its limitations. Sometimes leadership must step aside and let Jesus and his word of law and gospel take priority and be enacted" (2021, p. 10). This aspect of intrapersonal self-evaluation allows biblical values to be the interpersonal guide for managing the congregation's membership base.

The socioecological influence and implementation of interpersonal followership skills serves a purpose in the management of the congregation's membership base through pastoral ministry. Wilson (2018), who discussed various aspects of pastoral ministry, made the following assertion:

> Pastoral ministry is unique because of its calling and specific responsibilities, but at its core, it is ministry. From a New Testament perspective, ministry is participating with God and cooperating with His people in serving others to meet their needs, fulfill our calling, and bring glory to God. (p. 18)

Cooperation with others is the interpersonal exchange leaders incorporate as means to manage the congregation's membership base. There are six ways leaders and congregation display this interpersonal exchange: supporting individuals, couples, and families; spending and supporting the local economy; conducting activities involving non-members; providing academic and childcare support; maintaining outdoor event areas; and providing a safe space for the congregation (Grim & Grim, 2016). The ability to address these interpersonal exchanges,

complemented by intrapersonal skills, may allow church leaders a foundation for managing

membership through cultural and societal changes.

Church Leadership Managing Membership and Societal Transitions

The way church leaders manage members or shepherd the flock has changed from the

Old Testament to the New Testament (The Holy Bible, 2008), and through the digital age

(Anderson, 2020). Shepherding the flock or shepherding the sheep is the biblical role of church

leaders managing membership regardless of the era. "The church needs to react faster to change

and be pro-active rather than re-active to change"(Oosthuizen, 2016, p. abstract). The pro-active

intrapersonal and interpersonal skills took on different forms form the Old Testament to the New

Testament and through the digital age.

The intrapersonal and interpersonal leadership skills in the Old Testament appears to be

the seemingly simple task of receiving God's instructions and carrying out those instructions.

The Old Testament instructions from God included naming the animals, building the ark, and

leading the Israelites to the promised land (Oosthuizen, 2016; The Holy Bible, 2008). The

intrapersonal management abilities included self-discipline and the intellectual insight to

accomplish the goal, while the interpersonal management abilities included cooperation with

others to accomplish the goal. Oosthuizen highlights the magnificence of the Old Testament

management skills with the following statement:

> Another example relates to the management skills that Moses utilized when leading a
>
> huge group of thousands of people and animals out of Egypt. Consider the management
>
> of daily resources, the distribution of food and water, the organizing of and care for
>
> animals as primary transport, the selection of campsites, the general organization of
>
> camping and setting up daily, the emotions of people, the management of relationships,
>
> the division into smaller, more manageable groups, *et cetera.* (Oosthuizen, 2016, p. 77)

The Old Testament leaders did not have Jesus to model the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills afforded to the New Testament Leaders. The New Testament leaders had the advantage of Jesus' modeling leadership in addition to the written word and instructions. The written instruction was carried on by others, including the Apostle Paul, who instructed to the new church (Clarke, 2008). This biblical transition is also discussed by Huffstutler as follows:

> In the OT, leaders were enabled by the Spirit to effectively lead Israel's affairs, and in the NT, Jesus was expected to do the same as Israel's Spirit-anointed king (cf. Matt :3:16-17; cf. Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). Though Jesus announced himself as this (cf. Matt 12:28), it was made clear that the Spirit's work through Jesus' initial ministry omitted the execution of justice against his enemies (Luke 4:18–21; cf. Isa 61:1–2a) and would be of a gentle nature (Matt 12:18–21; cf. Isa 42:1–4). His initial ministry primarily involved the proclamation of the gospel (Luke 4:14–15, 18–21; cf. Isa 61:1–2a). (Huffstutler, 2016, p. 59)

These written instructions and directions allowed the new church leaders to develop the proactive intrapersonal and interpersonal skills required to shepherd the flock or, in other words, manage the congregation.

Although, the New Testament's instruction and socioecological framework do not change, society and culture do. The process of adapting to technology-based societal and cultural changes has been discussed by Anderson (2020), according to whom this introduction of technology to the church included adaptations to fundamental aspects of congregational participation in activities such as worship, communion, and in-person attendance. This means technology in the church has challenged church leaders to improve intrapersonal and interpersonal domains to successfully deliver New Testament instruction and doctrine. De Neal (2020) discusses such successful good or great leaders in relation to the humility-based

leadership of the level 5 leadership theory (L5LT). Additionally, Davis et al (2013) stated the following:

> Intrapersonal qualities focus on having an accurate or moderate view of self - not thinking too highly or lowly of oneself. Definitions diverge most in regard to interpersonal qualities. Intrapersonal definitions have included an array of prosocial qualities, such as modesty, respect, honesty, other-orientedness, willingness to ask for help or accept criticism, recognizing other people's strengths, and having a stance of awe before the sacred. (Davis et al., 2013, pp. 59-60)

Church leaders striving to adapt to societal and cultural changes may have developed humility-based intra/interpersonal skills to manage the congregational resource of membership.

Church Membership

The intrapersonal and interpersonal skills church leaders develop should include understanding what or who they are managing, which, in this case, are the congregations. Chaves (2004), in the discussion of congregations, outlined one of its fundamental resources as "maintaining a membership base" (2004, p. 17). To maintain the membership base, church leaders' intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies may include understanding topics such as attendance and participation.

Sanders (2020) identified the following competencies of leadership: "(1) organizational awareness; (2) team leadership; (3) initiative; (4) conceptual thinking; (5) information seeking; and (6) relationship building" (p. 5). These competencies incorporate the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills church leaders may possess to address the attendance and participation aspects of the membership base.

Role of Church Leadership and Attendance

Relationship-building competency may be an intrapersonal and interpersonal skill church leaders seek to develop. These types of leaders may then fall under the category of pastors who Wilson (2018) describes "as influential, respected leaders who watch over God's people, by loving, teaching, and leading them, without regard for personal enrichment"(p. 24). However, finding a correlation between leadership and attendance has proven to be difficult. In an effort to examine the relationship between leadership and attendance, Hanson (2021) conducted a quantitative correlational survey study and found no correlation between examined leadership styles and attendance. However, the four examined leadership styles included 18 leadership factors, and one these factors had a positive correlation with attendance under the inspirational style (Hanson, 2021). In addition to the relationship-building competency, church leaders may seek to develop this leadership factor.

The inspirational leadership factor was one out of the 18 factors having a positive correlation with attendance (Hanson, 2021). The inspirational leadership factor is a self-reported visionary trait in which the leader identifies the ability "to inspire others with enthusiasm and confidence in what can be accomplished" (Wong & Page, 2003, p. 10). Moreover, the inspirational factor is one of five measured transformational leadership traits in which "leaders energize their followers by viewing the future optimism, stressing ambitious goals, projecting an idealized vision, and communicating to followers that the vision is achievable" (Antonakis et al., 2003, pp. 264-265). These inspirational descriptive factors reflect the intrapersonal self-reflective attribute and the interpersonal ability to navigate the social parameters in leadership roles. These appear to play a role in church leaders' ability to manage the congregation's attendance to maintain the membership base.

Role of Church Leadership and Promoting Participation

Initiative competency may be an additional intrapersonal and interpersonal skill church leaders seek to develop. These types of leaders may be able to "set goals and define strategic initiative that suggest what people should be focusing on right now" (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018, p. 9). These types of leaders may strive to implement initiatives designed to promote participation. One such example of participation promotion is the charismatic leadership model of the *Glass Church* (Mulder & Marti, 2020). The charismatic leadership model was highly dependent on the finances generated from membership using the three-pronged structure of constituency, charisma, and capital (Mulder & Marti, 2020). The other church leadership role was discussed by Eagle (2016) concerning the megachurches' ability to provide greater opportunities for volunteers, staff, and the congregation. However, despite these opportunities, as Eagle (2016) goes on to pointed out, megachurches have a negative correlation with weekly attendance or participation in the megachurch, whereas small churches have a higher weekly attendance or participation. The correlation may reflect the impact of church leaders' role in promoting membership participation.

Grim and Grim (2016) discussed some ways leaders may consider interesting participation initiative drivers. Two of the six ways outlined by Grim and Grim (2016) are the magnet effect and the value of open space. The magnet effect draws on promoting activities designed to increase visitation (Grim & Grim, 2016), while the open space value results in the ability to increase fun, enjoyable, and relaxing outdoor activities. Church leaders who desire to implement such initiatives may seek to develop socioecological intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and traits reflecting success.

The study conducted by Jules (2021) sought to "describe leadership traits that contribute to success within churches or religious-affiliated organizations" (p. 2). Jules (2021) conceded the

difficulty related to measuring effective leadership. However, his process elicited "three themes with twenty-six sub-themes" (Jules, 2021, p. 72), with the three themes being "(1) *members* perception of leadership traits, (2) how the organization view traits, and (3) traits that lead to organization success" (Jules, 2021, p. 73). Moreover, according to Jules (2021), "The analysis shows that a leader's actions, empathy, and social actions produced the greatest results" (p. 107). Additionally, the sub-theme of the initiative was one of the top-regarded perceived traits for organizational success (Jules, 2021, p. 111). The church leader who possesses some of these traits, including initiative, may attain success in the area of implementing participation initiative drivers as a subset of their socioecological skills.

The initiative trait may reflect leaders' need for humility as an intra/interpersonal ability to promote participation. The study by Davis et al. (2013) described humility as an intrapersonal and interpersonal trait needed for community relationships. Further, De Neal's (2020) study also discussed humility as an intrapersonal and interpersonal trait. Although no correlation was found between these traits and the promotion of participation, it appears as though church leaders' maintenance of the membership base can benefit from developing these attributes of the intra/interpersonal influences. In doing so, the leadership may be able to promote participation and make sure the people can "accomplish goals, solve problems, and live according to the vision" (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018, p. 11).

Church Leadership, Membership, and the Influence of Three 21st Century Crises

The socioecological influence of the interpersonal domain on membership is discussed through various lenses, one of which is the resource aspect. Chaves (2004) discussed this aspect as one of multiple, stating, "Congregations perennially face the challenges of maintaining a membership base, securing adequate revenue, and recruiting talented leaders, but these challenges take different shapes at different historical moments" (2004, p. 17). The crisis, as

viewed through the socioecological lens, is perceivable in the study of the black church by Owens et al. (2020), which argued for learning potentially helpful problem-solving strategies from the black community (Owens et al., 2020). The presented strategies and membership maintenance resources can be discussed and viewed as part of the interpersonal domain. In which the interpersonal domain, which dictates the interdependent behavioral aspect of church leadership, congregations, and membership.

Wilson (2018) discussed the interpersonal domain with respect to the people who interact with one another. In the church setting, the congregation and membership are the people who make up the interpersonal domain by interacting with the church leaders. Thumma (2007) points out the megachurch appears to understand the interaction goes beyond membership and relies on participation. Megachurches create opportunities to (a) provide activities for attendees, (b) build interpersonal relationships, (b) educate the congregation, and (c) empower the development and use of individual gifts (Thumma, 2007). The megachurches' interpersonal dynamic is related to interactions with leaders and each leader's intrapersonal domain.

Scarneo et al. (2019) discussed the intrapersonal domain with respect to the individuals the other domains interact with, which, in the church setting, are the church leaders. The exploratory study conducted by Endacott et al. (2017) acknowledged the lack of literature on leadership teams and sought to understand the team attributes of communication and performance as well as church leadership. The study identified the following predictors of high performance: meeting time making critical decisions, seeking God to make decisions, using a process for decision-making, and considering a churchwide perspective (Endacott et al., 2017). These predictors appear to reflect a high-performing leadership team comprised of various leaders with visionary intellectual intrapersonal attributes. Chaves (2004) discusses these types of leaders as talented and a necessary congregational resource.

The intrapersonal and interpersonal attributes of these types of leaders are periodically tested by crises or threats to stability and sustainability. Oosthuizen discusses this and states "because the church functions with fast-changing context and environments and is increasingly influenced by the consumer society, proper analysis of internal as well as external factors that may influence strategic intent need to be identified and addressed" (2016, p. 3). In the church setting, various authors discuss aspects of varying external influencing factors like the recession, Covid-19, and the cultural decline of spiritual religious affiliation (Gary D. Badcock, 2016; Jackson, 2019; Johnston et al., 2022; Wuthnow, 1997).

The 2008 Recession

The most recent publicly documented financial crash occurred in 2008. The economic devastation began in 2007 with a marked depression spanning from 2008 through 2009, which led to astronomical unemployment rates accompanied by a recession with loss of income and poverty (Grusky et al., 2011; Hetzel, 2011). The invaluable nature of the data on the impact of the recession on American communities was examined by economists (Brooks, 2018). This event impacted the stability and sustainability of several communities, including the churches. A type of stability and sustainability within the church setting which is reliant on voluntarism (Brooks, 2004, 2018; Jackson, 2019; James & Jones, 2011). During this crisis, church leadership needed to implement various strategies to address both voluntarism and financial concerns. Oosthuizen (2016) described the strategic aspect of managing the church thus: "Strategic Leadership is considered as an important driver for implementation, especially when dealing with the volunteer participation of members in the mission of the church as an organization" (p. abstract).

Some studies, including the one by Jackson (2019), explored leadership strategies during this crisis. In Jackson's study, two of the four themes revealed through the analysis process were "strategies to respond to external strategic factors" and "strategies to establish internal strategic

factors" (2019, p. 78). This study identified a theme of "external strategic factors," referring to "factors external to an organization that affect strategic management," including but not limited to the ability to plan (Jackson, 2019, pp. 81-82). Further, the study identified a subsequent theme of "internal strategic factors," which are related to attributes such as "budgeting, time management, effective communication, and leadership strategies" (Jackson, 2019, p. 85). These themes may be viewed within the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of influence, whereas these strategic factors are others-centered management styles during a crisis while addressing external and internal factors, including considerations such as intrapersonal and interpersonal influences as a form of humility allowing leaders to respectfully and selflessly focus on the needs of others (Davis et al., 2013).

In a different study by William (2013), the objective "was to seek the lived experiences and perceptions of study participants in order to identify successful strategies for maintaining church operational viability during an economic downturn" (2013, p. 4). Two of the three themes revealed through the analysis process were the "direct effect of the recession on membership and budget" and "communicating the effects of the recession" (Williams, 2013, p. 84). The theme regarding membership and budget was related to the subthemes of members' income, attendance choices, and retirees' stability. The theme of "communicating the effects of the recession" is related to subthemes of financial reports, meetings, sermons, or individual conversations. The intrapersonal and interpersonal influences brought about collaborative strategies to address resource limitations, whereas intrapersonal and interpersonal influences are discussed in the church setting as being "strongly influenced by all other levels of the socioecological framework" (Scarneo et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The most recent health pandemic emerged in 2020 in the form of COVID-19, cases of which were first reported in China in 2019 (Bruce et al., 2022; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). The pandemic's impact has been globally studied by scholars such as Eagle et al. (2022), Magezi (2022), and Objantoro et al. (2022). This event not only had a global impact, but also shook the very foundation of church membership. The shelter-in-place shutdown eliminated in-person participation and negatively impacted smaller churches' membership or attendance (more so than those of larger churches with established virtual platforms), church revenues from members declined, and leadership teams with creativity and the ability to secure other monetary sources such as the PPP loans had a neutral financial impact (Bruce et al., 2022; Eagle et al., 2022). The pre-COVID stability of a church was found to influence the leadership's ability to strategically position the church for survival (Eagle et al., 2022).

The strategic responses to the pandemic were studied by Johnston et al. (2022), who aimed "to provide a more detailed and nuanced look at how pastors and congregations experienced and responded to COVID-19 and its associated restrictions during the early period of the pandemic" (Johnston et al., 2022, p. 376). Two of the three categorical parameters used in the study for the analysis were "re-doing ministry", and "silver linings (opportunities)" (Johnston et al., 2022, pp. 379-380). Further, the strategic leadership management tools included adapted worship, adapted pastoral care, adapted pastoral roles, and embracing different customs (Johnston et al., 2022). These strategies addressing the pandemic restrictions reflect the intrapersonal and interpersonal management styles required to address the pandemic restrictions, whereas the intrapersonal and interpersonal influences are interdependent within the socioecological framework (Scarneo et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on church leadership was studied by Phillip (2022) to identify "the gap in church leadership and the effects of implemented change management strategies to affect internal change while working with smaller budgets and lower revenue streams due to COVID-19" (Phillip, 2022, p. 4). Three of the nine emerging themes in the study were adapting to regulatory protocols, adapting technological uses, and strategic money management. Further, the implemented leadership strategies included "teamwork, maintaining flexibility, and being open to change" (Phillip, 2022, p. 73). The leadership management strategies can be understood within the socioecological framework, whereas the intrapersonal and interpersonal influences are an aspect of the humility needed to develop crucial social bonds (Davis et al., 2013).

2023 Perspective of Nothingarians

The not-so-publicized concern of church size or affiliation is an ongoing challenge faced by the church's organizational structure. Grim and Grim (2016) discussed this as follows:

> Safeguards for religious freedom – including the First Amendment principles of having no established religion and protecting free religious practice – have helped to produce a dynamic religious marketplace, including the ability of each person to have a religion, change religion, or have no religion at all. (Grim & Grim, 2016, p. 3)

Similar to the Grim and Grim (2016) disaffiliation reference, Kidd (2023) also included a referential discussion on the topic of disaffiliation discussion. Notably, both Kidd (2023) and Grim and Grim (2016) found groups of individuals who do not claim any religious affiliation. Particularly, Kidd (2023) discussed religious disaffiliation and used the term "nothingarians" which he explained thus:

> Although it seems to have originated much earlier, as a term for members of the little-known Gortonist sect of Rhode Island, "nothingarian" would come to connote the

irreligious, ambivalent, or unaffiliated person, one whom pollsters of religion today might

call a "none," or person of no organized religion. (Kidd, 2023, pp. 269-270)

The relevance of the aforementioned historical account of the unaffiliated, the nothingarian, or

the none has continued into current church affiliation, membership, and attendance trends. The

percentage of individuals in America with no religious preference – the term "preference" here

being used interchangeably with the term "affiliation"— has continued to increase, going from

approximately 20% in 2012, continually increasing through 2014, and reaching 29% in 2021

(Hout & Fischer, 2014; Lipka, 2015; Smith, 2021). This change in religious affiliations may

continue on a downward slope as the growing number of unaffiliated individuals from the

younger generation (1) begin aging, (2) raise unaffiliated children, and (3) tend to become less

affiliated rather than more affiliated over time (Lipka, 2015). This downward trend in religious

affiliation is also noted in weekly church attendance, showing a marked decline from 47% in

2005 to 25% in 2021 (Olson, 2009; Smith, 2021).

The decline in attendance and church closures became evident with various

denominations around 1996, when even though some denominations and churches were

growing, the overall reduction in religious affiliation was prevalent (Chaves, 2004; Douglas,

2019; Pew Research Center, 2012; Sanders, 2020). The influx of megachurches may give the

appearance of increased attendance or membership; however, the actual attendance rate became

stagnant between 1990 and 2005 when compared to the population's rate of growth (Olson,

2009). The Pew surveys of 2006 and 2007 indicate an increase in non-religious affiliation from

8% to 16% since 1987 (Pew Research Center, 2007). However, discrepancies in attendance must

be noted as a possibility corroborated when considering Olson's (2009) stated "actual attendance

counts weighed against poll results indicate that many people do not tell the truth in these

surveys" (Olson, 2009Section: The Halo Effect). Despite the self-reporting discrepancies,

leadership managing membership is required to address the ongoing downward trend in both affiliation and attendance.

Decline in Attendance and Affiliation

Although a direct link between affiliation and attendance has not yet been found in the literature, the reduced number of attendees may inform church leaders' management strategies. For instance, Douglas (2019), in a study focused on attendance, stated, "The focal point of this research was a comparison between church size (over and under 200 barrier church) and resistance to change"(Douglas, 2019, p. 79). The attendance-based subcategories used to discuss change resistance were "routine seeking, emotional reaction, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity" (Douglas, 2019, p. 79). These hypothesized subcategories based on approximately 200 attendees may also be discussed as intrapersonal and interpersonal elements of the socioecological framework, whereas intrapersonal awareness of the self coexists with the interpersonal norms of actions taken, perceived expected actions, and expected outcomes (Scarneo et al., 2019).

Although a direct correlation between affiliation and attendance was not found, this does not negate the data reflecting a concern regarding membership attendance rates. Although Risborough's (2015) study did not focus on membership, it does indicate a noteworthy relationship between membership and the inclusive or exclusive nature of a congregation. On the other hand, congregational relationships have been the focus of another study. The purpose of the study conducted by Hanson (2021), the purpose of which "was to examine the relationship of congregational growth as measured by average yearly attendance with varying senior pastor leadership styles and factors in the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) churches" (Hanson, 2021, p. 7). The analysis examined the following leadership styles: authentic leadership, servant leadership, and transactional leadership (Hanson, 2021). The subsequent

multiple regression analysis examined 18 leadership factors, with the four significant factors being inspirational leadership, authentic service, inspirational motivational, and openness and participation (Hanson, 2021). These examined styles and factors can be discussed as intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of the socioecological framework. Conversely, the intrapersonal knowledge of one's own capabilities and limitations (Scarneo et al., 2019) is required to function in conjunction with social interpersonal qualities identified by Davis et al. (2013).

The literature did not indicate a direct connection between affiliation and attendance; however, the number of the religiously unaffiliated or nothingarians has increased. In a study of black churches, Owens et al. stated, "Like other populations, membership in the Black Church overall is decreasing" (2020, p. 187). Moreover, a study conducted by Sumpter made a loose connection between attendance and affiliation as it attempted "to outline reasons for dwindling church attendance as it relates to Millennials and offer solutions to make the worship more palatable for the unchurched Millennials" (Sumpter, 2019, p. 5). For this study, an open-ended qualitative survey was used to gather data regarding the demographics, influence of college education, denominations and beliefs, relevancy, trust in the church, and trust in God (Sumpter, 2019). Further, this study also gathered data regarding millennial attendance and desires as "adult ministry, job fairs, and social fellowship" (p. 102). The attendance and desires responses reflect the importance of relationships because "millennials need to feels some connection to the church and those that leave the church usually have no friends or mentors, so they do not feel accepted" (Sumpter, 2019, p. 102). These findings can be discussed within the socioecological framework with consideration for the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains, while an individual's abilities or risk factors, as discussed by Scarneo et al. (2019), may or may not be addressed within the interpersonal qualities of humility presented by Davis et al. (2013).

Church Failure Versus Success

The idea of church failure resulting from people disaffiliating or simply not attending has been an ongoing concern of researchers such as Krejcir (2007b); (Krejcir, 2007c) (Krejcir, 2007a). The first part of this study listed the four major reasons churchgoer leaves their church: "conflict and gossip," "hypocrisy and judgmental attitude," "where do I fit in," and "strife or factions regarding sin" (Krejcir, 2007b, pp. Section:4-9). The second part of this study pointed to the leadership failure of following the model of Jesus Christ to "learn about Him," "grow in Him," and "produce authentic spiritual formation, character, and maturity" (Krejcir, 2007c, pp. Section:14-15). The data used in these studies revealed the appearance of "a disconnect in what the people wanted and what they received from their leadership and what the Bible calls us to, which led to the dysfunctions and breakdowns, then led them to leave, and then caused the church to fail" (Krejcir, 2007a, pp. Sections:5-6). Discussing these findings within sociological parameters may indicate a failure of intrapersonal skills needed to build a supportive interpersonal domain.

This study, which revealed failure due to a disconnect between leadership and membership, also revealed success (Krejcir, 2007d). The residual data listed seven factors responsible for successful churches, namely, being welcoming, educating, having a conflict and sin resolution plan, being of service, learning to live Christian lives, practicing authentic service and worship, and being focused on prayer (Krejcir, 2007d). These seven factors lead to the subsequent factors of Christ-focused leaders; members growing in Christ; pastoral care; ministries in evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship; bible-based vision and mission; understanding and employing members' spiritual gifts; training, discipling, recognizing, and encouraging the leadership teams; addressing conflict quickly; and being authentic leaders (Krejcir, 2007d). Discussing these subsequent findings regarding the successes may indicate the

benefits of intrapersonal skills with a positive support in the interpersonal domain. In both

failures and successes, the intrapersonal is based on self- awareness, as described by Scarneo et

al. (2019), while the interpersonal dimension is based on humility and group norms, as described

by Davis et al. (2013).

Church Leadership Adapting to Socioecological Influences

The literature on the church concerning organizational structures, finances, and

leadership traits and styles is available. One such financial study presented by Forbes and

Zampelli (1997) discussed attendance or membership solely in terms of its relation to church

revenues. This and a subsequent study by Forbes and Zampelli (2013) are aimed to discuss the

revenues related to church membership and not the leadership of those members. These

members' attendance and religious participation increased their support of the church (Forbes &

Zampelli, 2013). As such, these studies highlight the necessity of congregational support, which

church leadership may need to navigate socioecological influences.

Furthermore, literature on the navigation of external pressures resulting from various

socioecological influences is sparse, especially in direct relation to church leadership. Some

studies outlined the connection between church leadership and navigating the negative impactful

influence of the recession. One such study by Jackson (2019) thoroughly discussed financial

strategies; however, these strategies do not include membership management. Just as this study

focused on the financial aspect of management during crises, the studies conducted abroad

follow the same pattern. For example, authors such as Tagwirei (2022), do not discuss

membership management with respect to the required revenue stream diversity associated with

church sustainability. Another study by Williams (2018) indicates the value of change resistance

identification as it pertains to the church. The identification of change resistance was discussed

in a limited manner in direct relation to congregations as opposed to variables such as church

health (Williams, 2018). Conversely, the study by MacIlvaine III et al. (2016) reflects membership management and attendance they relate to the quality of church leadership. Thus, while the existing literature covers various aspects regarding the church, the scarcity of literature on adapting to socioecological influences, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects a gap in the research on leadership managing membership during the pandemic.

Church Leadership Theories and Frameworks for This Study

The organizational complexities related to leadership teams and churches have not been widely studied (Endacott et al., 2017). This gap may have led researchers exploring church leadership to develop and implement various perspectives or frameworks. One such study was presented by Jules (2021) "using theoretical frameworks revolving around Trait theory, Transformational, and Transactional Leadership Theories" to "shed light on how traits help leaders to be effective and successful in nonprofit organizations" (p. 21). On the other hand, the researcher De Neal (2020) stated "The theoretical framework this study focused on three primary theories: (a) L5LT, (b) pastoral leadership theory, and (c) church growth theory" (p. 3). Furthermore, Jackson (2019) approached leadership strategies within the framework of resource dependency theory.

These researchers applied different perspectives to address the indicated type of study. This is a perspective selection one may opt for in a qualitative phenomenological study. In doing so, one may review Patton's (2015) discussion on the difference between the type of study and the perspective: "A phenomenological study (as opposed to a phenomenological perspective) is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experienced" (Patton, 2015, p. 117). In this discussion, Patton (2015) pointed to an inquiry-based framework based on the years of development meant to provide an illuminating explanation of shared experiences. This is the perspective a researcher may use in a

phenomenological study (Patton, 2015). However, there is no indication of a researcher being bound to a phenomenological perspective in a phenomenological study; rather, borrowing from Peterson's review (2019), the application and flexibility of the selected qualitative framework are key to the researcher's ability to observe and articulate understandings and relationships.

The selection and application of a socioecological and its application to a phenomenological study may be achieved with an insight into the type of study and perspectives. The type of study of interest is the phenomenological, which is defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) as describing "the meaning of a lived experience"(p. 24). Perspective or framework selection varies from researcher to researcher depending on the study; however, their purpose is the same, and "the philosophical assumptions are often applied within interpretive frameworks that qualitative researchers use when conducting a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 22). The ability to apply the interpretive framework of a socioecological perspective can be observed in other studies.

Trait, Transformational, and Transactional Theories

The interpretive framework of one study weaves together aspects of multiple theories. The type of study selected was qualitative, and Jules (2021) included a list of six theoretical frameworks, stating "this study is informed by several theories to help express how leaders influence church and religious organizational effectiveness" (Jules, 2021, p. 5). The theories listed are "the great man theory," "trait theory," "transformational leadership theory," "servant leadership," "contingency theory," and "behavior theory" (pp. 6-7). Jules' primary frameworks of interpretation became trait theory with the aspects of transformational leadership theory, and transactional theory (Jules, 2021).

In this study, Jules discussed the evolution of trait theory, stating, "Newer research began to indicate that leaders display certain behaviors that either encourage or discourage others to

excel in the workplace" (p. 23). Jules (2021) also discussed transactional theory in relation to trait theory as an exchange between the leader and those who are following. The leadership traits in this study are considered for their role in transactional relationships. Jules indicates the value of selecting this framework, stating, "It is essential for our research to review each trait in order to better comprehend which personality trait promotes and which hinders nonprofit organizational success" (p. 38).

The comprehension of the assumptions regarding leadership traits was partly developed based on transactional perceptions. Jules discussed the transactional element in the study before stating, "The theory shares connections to Traits Theory" (Jules, 2021, p. 118). The researcher elected to combine multiple perceptions to build this interpretive framework (Jules, 2021). Following Creswell and Poth's (2018) statement, the assumptions and findings in the qualitative study are discussed by the researcher within the selected interpretive framework.

With regard to the data analysis of the study, Jules stated, "The underlying goal of the approach is to arrive at an appropriate description of the given phenomenon" (p. 68). The primary foundation for the selected approach and framework is the trait theory (Jules, 2021). In using this framework, Jules (2021) identified traits associated with successful leadership within the church setting, writing, "Specifically, the findings presented herein align with transactional theory's view that leaders show actions for follower to adhere to complete the task" (p. 118). The process of presenting the findings was the result of weaving together multiple theories. Jules (2021) selected a type of study and implemented a perspective designed to achieve the purpose of the study.

Resource Dependency Theory

The interpretive framework of the selected type of study is focused on one theory. This researcher's selected type of study is qualitative (Jackson, 2019). Jackson (2019) selected the

resource dependency theory as the interpretive framework for the study. The researcher stated, "This approach supports the idea that organizational performance depends on the level of resources from various external forces"(Jackson, 2019, p. 5). The researcher also indicated the role of leadership in securing resources for sustainability is based on the resource dependency theory (Jackson, 2019).

The comprehensive interpretation of findings in the study is based primarily on securing tangible resources within the selected framework (Jackson, 2019). Notably, Jules' (2021) discussion of various theories allows for the inclusion of intangible internal and external relationship-building aspects of RDT. Regardless of whether the discussion reflects tangible or intangible resources, RDT serves the purpose of providing the interpretive framework for Jackson's (2019) study.

Jackson supports the selection of the interpretive framework with the following statement:

> Resource dependence theory is a theory that is used to explain the functionality of power from leaders within the organization and from the external environment to ensure the availability of resources for sustainability. (Jackson, p. 12)

The application of the theory allows for the discussion of leadership strategies for securing resources for sustainability (Jackson, 2019). With the resource dependency theory, Jackson's (2019) "findings showed that church leaders must build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders to ensure financial sustainability during economic crises" (2019, p. 96). Jackson's (2019) direct approach with the selection of one theory achieved the purpose of the study.

Unsettled Times Framework

Like Jackson's (2019) study, the study by Johnston et al (2022) focused on one framework to accompany the selected type of study. These researchers selected a qualitative

study to capture the experiences of pastors and congregations beyond the information gathered from quantitative surveys (Johnston et al., 2022). (Johnston et al.) implemented the unsettled cultural period analytical framework to examine and interpret the qualitative data. They further supported the framework selection by stating, "Pastors experienced the early period of the pandemic as an unsettled time" (p. 379). They outlined the impact of disruptions from this unsettled period as the driving force to recontextualize existing strategies.

Gathering data from interviews and basing the interpretation of findings on this framework was meant to highlight the value of its application within the church setting. Johnston et al. (2022) highlighted the value of this framework as it pertains to holding a worship service, relationship building through pastoral care, and the perceived shepherding role of pastors. The framework provided the researchers and the pastors with an opportunity to examine the unsettling nature of the pandemic as it "allowed pastors to reimagine and creatively re-work different aspects of ministry" (p. 388). As a framework, the analytical approached provided the researchers with an interpretive perspective for the findings.

As regards the findings of the study, Johnston et al. (2022) stated, "Our findings suggest that this framework fits well with how pastors experienced the pandemic" (p. 392). The findings related to the worship service outlined the disruption to in-person gatherings and the strategic adaptations for the implementation of virtual worship, while the findings related to pastoral care reflected an irreparable breakdown in relationship building due to the restrictions placed on physical social interactions. The pastoral role as shepherd was found to be unchanged; however, the tasks underwent a strategic transition from preacher/teacher to informative source of stability and hope in the unsettling environment of the pandemic. The overall findings reflected the selection of this analytical framework achieved the purpose of the study.

Socioecological Theoretical Framework

The socioecological model (SEM) was developed in the 1970s as five enclosed spheres of influence impact individuals' growth and development (Kilanowski, 2017). The inner most sphere represents the individual and each subsequent sphere moves outward represents various levels of influence on the individual (Kilanowski, 2017). The model is used to assert "the impact of traditions, culture, research, technology, and policy all influence the interactions and relationships of the nesting circles of the SEM" (Kilanowski, 2017, p. 297). Kilanowski identified an opportunity for future research in this area of study by "exploring partnerships and collaborations that may be found in the levels of the SEM" (2017, p. 297). The identification of influential interactions between spheres—including terms such as relationships, partnerships, and collaborations—may allow for the adaptation of this model to the multifaceted dynamics of leadership.

Another study discussing the application of SEM to research is presented by Scarneo et al. (2019), who discussed the application of SEM and other "theories, frameworks, and models to facilitate the adoption of interventions for traditional public health concerns" (2019, p. 356). The

Figure 2: Adapted Spheres of Socioecological Influences
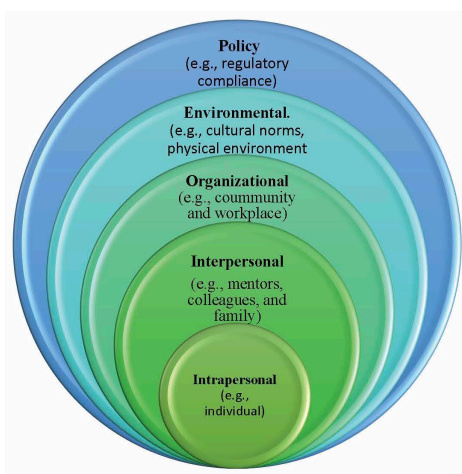
key element of the application of this framework to the research is the clearly outlined five levels or spheres of influence, which are "intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, environmental, and policy" (p. 356), as shown Figure 2. These researchers highlighted the value of influential interactions across the multiple levels of the spheres (Scarneo et al., 2019). The indication of impactful action across the levels, coupled with the identification of

each spherical level, may allow for the adaption of this model to the interpretation of leadership strategies.

A study discussing two of the five levels of the spherical domains was conducted by Davis et al. (2013), the focus of which was the correlation of humility with social bonds as it pertains to humility's influential role in the formation of relationships. The lack of consensus regarding the definition of humility led these researchers to define this term based on the intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities thereof. Davis et al. (2013) discussed the intrapersonal quality in relation to the individuals' self-awareness, while the interpersonal quality was discussed in relation to social interactions. The application of two of the five SEM levels may allow for the interpretation of church leadership strategies related to self-awareness and social interactions within the intrapersonal and interpersonal influential domains.

Overview of Scarneo et al.'s (2019) Framework in the Field of Spiritual Health

The application of this framework is found in biological social science studies addressing concerns in public health (Scarneo et al., 2019). However, the application of influence framework is yet to be applied in the field of spiritual health. While there are several lenses to investigate church leadership during a crisis, the levels of influence utilized by Scarneo et al. (2019) may prove to be a unique approach to investigating church leadership during a crisis.

The socioecological framework is a concept with five levels or spheres of influence, namely: "intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, environmental, and policy" (Scarneo et al., 2019, p. 356). To date, the existing literature has not revealed an application of the socioecological framework to church leadership or membership. The application of the framework may lead to a comprehensive understanding of the influences with an impact on church leadership and membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the researcher of the present study elected to focus on and implement the intrapersonal and interpersonal influences

on the church leaders as related membership. This study did not focus on and did not implement the structural dynamics related to the organizational, environmental, and policy influences.

Summary

Authors such as Senkbeil and Woodford (2021) discussed pastors developing leadership with an understanding of the overarching concept of pastoral ministry (Senkbeil & Woodford, 2021). This approach may also extend beyond pastors and pastoral ministries to any religious leaders and researchers who seek to examine leadership strategies with considerations for the varying types of faith-based organizations and churches. The variations in ideas and considerations may include the types of leadership in the church as outlined by MacIlvaine III et al. (2016), namely, "servants, shepherds, elders, and overseers" (p. 131). The literature review covered church leadership without separating the various types of pastoral ministries within the church's organizational structure. The literature review revealed various aspects of church leaderships management role, including traits, styles, resources, and unsettling societal circumstances.

The literature review revealed a gap regarding how church leadership managed membership during a crisis. The early studies focused on leadership traits and styles in the church setting adapted from the corporate setting. Moreover, the studies also focused on leadership in the church as an asset or resource needed for a church health or success. Later studies on leadership managing finances in times of crisis or overcoming policy issues during a crisis began to emerge. However, the literature review did not elicit any studies on church leadership's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic as they managed membership. The synthesis matrix contained the compilation of this study's research to identifying the gap. The synthesis matrix listed the variables, theoretical approaches, and research elements from each study applied to the organization and framework of this study (Appendix A). Notably, some

research was found regarding the variables of church leadership, managing membership, and COVID-19. The gap in research was revealed by the unavailability of studies about how each of these variables interacted in order to glean how church leadership managed membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the literature review did provide various frameworks to assist in the organization of this study.

The studies discussed in the literature review reflected the intentionality associated with the interpretive framework selection process. The selected framework should achieve the purpose of the study and, in this case, provide a perspective for interpreting the experiences of church leaders who managed membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, the selected framework is two of the five identified domains within the socioecological perspective.

Some of the studies in the literature review were found to contain elements associated with the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of influences of the socioecological framework. For example, Jules' (2021) study of successful leadership traits and styles encompasses the interactions between leaders and those they are leading or surrounded by. These elements can be viewed with respect to the influence of the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains, while Tagwirei (2022) is an example study of the church ability to navigate resource dependency and the successful navigation can be viewed based on the relationships built within the socioecological intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. The last selected example is the Johnston et. al (2022) study of leadership reestablishing disrupted routines during a crisis. The leadership strategies can be interpreted based upon the intrapersonal and interpersonal exchange required to overcome the disruption. Each of the studies has elements solely relative to the framework selected by each researcher. However, all these studies also have elements relatable to the socioecological framework, which allows for the application of a socioecological framework to interpret data they pertain to traits, styles, resources, and unsettling times, such as

COVID-19. The dynamic interactions between the individual or church leadership and the organization or church members reflects socioecological interactions. With the gap in research related to church leadership managing membership during a crisis, the universal aspect of the socioecological framework proves advantageous to this study, allowing researcher flexibility in the review of various church leadership aspects within two of the five socioecological domains, intrapersonal and interpersonal influences. The use of these two socioecological influences is beneficial to organizing and interpreting the interview data, providing practitioners with a holistic view of leadership strategies for managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategies practitioners may implement with or without the existence of a crisis.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The present chapter consists of the methodology, along with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, and sub-questions as stated in Chapter I. Other components presented in this chapter include research design, method, population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter follows a combination of the guidelines discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018), McMillan and Schumacher (2010), and Patten and Newhart (2018) to present a replicable, valid, and reliable study. The qualitative phenomenological study with the socioecological justification provided an opportunity to interpret the lived experiences of church leaders to attain a generalizable understanding of their shared experiences based on the two socioecological domains of intrapersonal and interpersonal influences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Research Question

What were the experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Sub-Questions

- What were the experiences of church leaders adapting intrapersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- What were the experiences of church leaders adapting interpersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Design

This study explored the lived experiences of church leaders who adapted two of the five socioecological influences in Scarneo et al.'s (2019) socioecological framework while managing church membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative approach selected for this study was a phenomenological focus with a socioecological justification. Qualitative research allows for open-ended interview questions, which allows the researcher to investigate deeply the lived experiences of the participants. As such, qualitative research was deemed appropriate for exploring a snapshot of leaders' lived experiences during the pandemic. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), in the discussion of this approach, stated "This can be thought of as capturing the essence of the experience as perceived by the participants" (p. 346).

Method

The various qualitative and quantitative approaches to studying the leaders and this phenomena were discussed by authors such as McMillan and Schumacher (2010), Patten and Newhart (2018), and Creswell and Poth (2018). The selection of an appropriate approach is based on the exploration of leaders' experiences and the specific phenomenon. While qualitative and quantitative approaches are procedurally comparative, the qualitative approach includes the added importance of the phenomena and its data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data for this study entailed words selected from interviews to highlight lived experiences of the participants during the phenomenon. This followed Patten and Newhart's (2018) discussion of qualitative study characteristics in which the data were obtained from interviews, providing a phenomenological focus on the common lived experiences of the participants, which, in this

case, were the experiences of church leaders during the COVID -19 phenomenon. This followed Peterson's (2019) statement that the "[o]ne distinguishing characteristic of qualitative methods is the emphasis on inductive strategies for theory development instead of logical deduction based on a priori assumptions" (p. 149). This qualitative study focused on the leaders' recounted lived experiences managing membership during the pandemic.

The leaders' recounted lived experiences included the socioecological influences on managing in the COVID-19 pandemic environment. For this study, the categorical generalizability of the leaders' recounted experiences was understood within a socioecological justification or framework. The socioecological framework, for this study, was presented by Scarneo et al. (2019) in the form of the following five levels of influence as (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, (c) organizational, (d) environmental, and (e) policy. The addition of the socioecological focus was deemed appropriate for categorizing interview data regarding the lived experiences of church leaders managing membership during the pandemic.

The selection and appropriateness of this approach were based on the exploration of the lived experiences, keeping certain factors and considerations in mind. These factors and considerations are presented by Creswell and Poth (2018) as follows: (a) the approach will use experiences regarding a phenomenon, (b) the approach is customary for experts in the field studying lived experiences regarding a phenomenon, (c) resources are available as is customary for dissertation students, (d) the approach will elicit phenomenological data for the field of study, and (e) the researcher is comfortable implementing this approach. Based on these factors and considerations, the qualitative research method that was suited for the needs of this study was the phenomenological approach with a socioecological framework.

Population

As per McMillan and Schumacker (2010), "A population is a group or elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also discussed the population as interchangeable with the terms "target population" and "universe." Further, they went on to state "the target population is often different from the list of elements from which the sample is actually selected, which is termed the survey population or sampling frame" (p. 129).

This study was interested in church leadership's lived experiences managing membership during the COVID -19 pandemic. The population comprised church leaders within Los Angeles County in Southern California. Based on the data obtained from the United States Census Bureau (2021), there are 3,244 self-reported religious entities with a combined 32,695 religious workers and affiliated church leaders in Los Angeles County, California. Therefore, the population for this study was the 32,695 religious workers and affiliated church leaders in Los Angeles County.

Target Population

The target population of a study refers to the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings of a survey are meant to be generalized. This definition determines the eligibility of the participants of the study (Cox, 2008).

For the present study, the target population was the church leaders in Los Angeles County, California and referrals, who are the individuals in the church having "a position of influence either paid or voluntary" (Sanders, 2020, p. 12) for the pursuit of the church's mission and vision. Thus, "Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence others for the voluntary

pursuit of organizational or institutional objectives" (Chauke, 2020, p. 10). Since the

participants were chosen using convenience sampling and snowball sampling, all members of the

overall population were eligible, meaning the population and target population were the same.

Sample

A sample refers to "the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are

collected" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The selected sample for this study was

church leaders or workers who managed membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. This

study aimed to gather data from a sample size 10 church leaders in Los Angeles County,

California, along with snowball-referred church leaders. The initial number of confirmed

participants was 11, although only nine participants completed the interview session for data

collection.

Convenience Sampling

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined convenience sampling as sampling "using

available subjects" (2010, p. 137). The convenience of participants who belonged to the

Christian churches in Los Angeles County provided the favorable factor of accessibility to

available participants and their affiliated church leaders for this study. However, subsequent

processes were implemented to achieve saturation of information-rich data. Therefore, as a

safeguard the researcher coupled convenience sampling and snowball sampling to identify and

select the participants needed for this study.

Snowball Sampling

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined snowball sampling as "a strategy in which

each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual" (p. 327). This

was the last step in the sampling processes implemented as needed to achieve saturation. The

researcher aimed to achieve saturation with the data gathered from 10 interviews. This saturation

guideline is supported by Patten and Newhart's (2018) statements that "qualitative research studies ranged from 10 to 26 participants with an average of 13" (2018, p. 115) and "researchers often rely on the concept of saturation" (p. 115).

Sampling Procedures

1) The researcher reached out to church leaders from churches in Los Angeles County to seek participation and referrals.

2) The informational letter and demographics survey were sent out to individuals identified as potential participants for this study.

3) Through the use of convenience sampling and snowball sampling from referrals, the researcher received participation confirmation from 11 church leaders who agreed to participate in this study.

Instrumentation

Qualitative researchers and data collection involve various tools such as semi-structured interviews with a list of questions, unstructured interviews, or direct unstructured observations" (Patten & Newhart, 2018). This qualitative study will rely on semi-structured interviews conducted by this researcher to gather information. The two selected instruments for this qualitative study are the researcher and interview questions.

Researcher as an Instrument

Authors such as Adu (2019) discuss the researcher with respect to their role as an instrument with the influence of "self" in qualitative studies. As such, the present qualitative study utilized the researcher as one of the instruments and required consideration for the influence of "self" throughout the research process. The researcher as an instrument was further discussed by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) concerning the "critical self-examination of the researcher's role throughout the entire research process" (p. 12). This researcher first completed

the basic certification process for human subject research (Appendix E). As this was a qualitative study, the researcher was an instrument and required the implementation of tools for continuous self-evaluation during this study. Adu (2019) provided a comprehensive reflective self-evaluation tool for this researcher to implement. This reflective self-evaluation tool was important for this qualitative researcher because it aided in limiting influence by adhering to the following:

> We also need to communicate our viewpoints and preconceptions to our audience (i.e., consumers of our research report) and demonstrate how we set them aside to prevent them from excessively affecting how we code the data, develop categories and themes, and report the findings. (Adu, 2019, p. 69)

Since the researcher was an instrument of this study, there was the potential for bias. Thus, it is important to note the researcher's experience in various church leadership roles including as a Sunday school teacher. In recognition of the fact that the researcher may have had potential biases, some safeguards were intentionally designed to limit these potential biases. Some examples of these safeguards are expert review and double coding for the reliability of the data.

Interview Questions as an Instrument

Authors such as Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) discussed interview questions with respect to the role as an instrument designed to gather a verbal recount of personal experiences. This qualitative study used the collected data from questions asked in a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview and the questions provided information on the lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The developed interview questions (Appendix B) for the semi-structured interview are considered with respect to Adu's (2019) discussion of the "self." With this consideration, the researcher could put certain safeguards in place to limit and prevent

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potential bias. The researcher was intentionally aligned the interview questions to the overall research question for this study.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) considered validity or validation "to be an attempt to assess the "accuracy" of the findings, as best described by the researcher, the participants, and the readers (or reviewers)"(p. 259). This researcher considered this perspective during the validation process to put in place the safeguards providing the trustworthiness of the research findings. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "*[V]alidity of qualitative designs* is the degree to which the interpretations have *mutual meanings* between the participants and the researcher" (p. 330). Further, they also outlined the various validity strategies that a researcher can select from during the design process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This researcher discusses the researcher in the section on instrumentation; the following section focuses on the participants and the readers or reviewers. The validation assessment strategy was (a) content alignment including participant language with (b) expert review and (c) pilot interviews.

Content Alignment and Participant Language

The interview questions were used as a data collection instrument in this study, and, as such, their validity was determined by content alignment and participant language. For this reason, the concepts applied to determine the trustworthiness of the resulting data were purpose, context, and participant language. The two points Patton (2015) made regarding interview questions were (a) "how qualitative interview questions are worded depends on a number of factors" (2015, p. 446), and (b) "general guidance on how to word questions must be adapted to purpose and context"(2015, p. 446). Conversely, McMillan and Schumacher 92010) pointed out, "Interviews are phrased in an informants language, not in abstract social science terms" (p. 331).

This study employed expert review and conducted a pilot interview to elicit valid data from the interview questions.

Expert Review

The expert reviewer had access to the process and the resulting interview questions. Moreover, the expert reviewer functioned as an external auditor with the expertise to review interview questions written in layman's terms with content alignment to the research question. According to Creswell (2018), "[T]his auditor should have no connection to the study" (p. 262). In this study, the expert reviewer was the auditor and was not connected to the study in any other capacity. This expert reviewer had to meet at least 3 of the following criteria:

1. A minimum of 5 years of experience in the field of church leadership

2. Employed as a church leader before and or during the COVID-19 pandemic

3. A master's degree in the field of religion or a leadership-related field

4. Experience with research in the field of religion.

The overall goal of enlisting an expert reviewer was to ensure content expert reviewed, vetted, and validated the language and subject matter of the interview questions.

Pilot Interview

One source of data for this study was captured through semi-structured interviews. To validate the interview skills of the researcher, the experienced expert reviewer provided the necessary feedback, which focused on the researcher's interview skills and the quality of the research questions. The qualifications for the expert reviewer were as follows:

- Degree holder in theology

- Experience with research within the parameters of Christian Doctrine

- Experience with carrying out data collection through semi-structured interviews

- Being a published author within the parameters of Christian spiritual counseling.

The overall goal of enlisting the expert reviewer was to validate the researcher's interview skills within the parameters of spiritual health within Christianity.

Reliability

Patten and Newhart 92018) stated, "A test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results" (2018, p. 136). In this study, reliability was the result of (a) an interviewee's self-reported narratives in alignment with the research question, (b) recording and transcribing the interview, and (c) subsequently coding the interview for the data analysis. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) pointed to six criteria of a reliable semi-structured interview in which the interviewees' self-reported narrative is interpreted and verified during the interview. The reliability of the self-reported narratives was cross-checked with external reliability and internal reliability.

External Reliability

The terms "reliable" and "valid" are not interchangeable. Patten and Newhart (2018) made a clear distinction by stating "reliability" refers to consistency of the results and "validity" refers to the content. In this study, the definition used for external validity was "generalizability of the results" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 116). As this study focused on the common lived experiences of a group of individuals during a segment of time, it was impossible to take these common lived experiences and generalize them to all people. As such, external reliability was not a factor in this study.

Internal Reliability

The ability to achieve internal reliability of consistent results is reliant on the triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to "obtaining convergent data using cross validation" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 331). In this study, the term "triangulation" was used for the convergence of data with various techniques. Patten and Newhart (2018) discussed triangulation in the categories of (a) data, (b) methods, (c) researcher/investigator, and (d) theory.

Furthermore, in this study, data reliability was reliant on the double coding process. As Patten and Newhart (2018) argued, this double coding process within the sample population may allow for a supplemental form of data reliability. For this study, the researcher implemented the double coding process to ensure the internal reliability of the data.

Intercoder/Intracoder Reliability

The ability to achieve coding consistency for analysis is reliant on intercoder reliability. "Intercoder reliability is assessed by having two coders from the coding team independently code a subset of overlapping studies" (Card, 2012, p. 74). After all the data had been coded by the researcher, a subsequent researcher with content knowledge, coding experience, and preferably post-graduate level qualitative study experience was expected to code 10% of the data. The goal of this was to achieve at least 80% agreeance in this double coding process, whereas the acceptable levels of agreeance on 10% of the overall data for reliability through the step-by-step process is presented by Lombard et al. (2010).

However, this study relied on intracoder reliability achieved with intracoding agreement procedures as the alternative to intercoder reliability. According to Card (2012), "Intracoder agreement is assessed by having the same person code a subset of studies twice" (p. 75) with "a random sample of studies selected for recoding after the initial coding is completed" (p. 75). The resulting codes were compared for discrepancy resolution, providing intracoder reliability. Cooper ª2017) stated, "This procedure can greatly reduce potential bias, make evident different interpretations of questions and responses, and catch mechanical errors" (p. 134). The process allowed the research to obtain an acceptable level of agreeance, as outlined in Chapter IV.

Data Collection

As per McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "In qualitative research there are five major methods for gathering data: observation, interviews, questionnaires, document review, and use of

audio-video materials" (p. 343). Additionally, there are three techniques qualitative researchers may choose from to establish reliability and trustworthiness: (a) data triangulation, (b) methods triangulation, and (c) researcher triangulation. This study employed interviews and double-coding procedures for data triangulation with convergence of cross categorical narratives of the collected data. Whereas, data triangulation refers to utilizing various techniques confirm the reliability and validity of the gathered information (Patten & Newhart, 2018). In this study, the cross categorical data from the interview narrative collection method was meant to identify and describe the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic under the five levels of socioecological influences (intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, environmental, and policy) as described by Scarneo et al (2019).

Interview Data Type

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), "Interviews are by far the most widely used type of measure of collecting data for qualitative research" (p. 161). This study implemented the widely used collection method under the format of the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B). Concerning the combined use of structured and unstructured interviews, Patten and Newhart (2018) stated, "In the semi-structured approach, an interview guide or protocol is formulated in advance (the "structured" part) but interviews may follow the flow of the conversation in each individual interview rather than follow the guide exactly" (p. 161).

Artifacts Data Type

As per McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "Artifacts are tangible manifestations that describe people's experience, knowledge, actions, and values" (p. 361). This study attempted to collect artifacts as a secondary collection method. McMillan and Schumacher further explain, "Artifacts in present-day groups and educational institutions may take three forms: personal document, official documents, and object" (p. 361). However, this study did not include the

collection of artifacts in the form of personal documents or letters and official documents or communications.

Participant Recruitment

The data from this study was meant to identify and describe the experiences of church leaders managing church membership during the COVID-19 pandemic under the Scarneo et al.'s (2019) five levels of socioecological influences. The participants in the sample population were church leaders from Los Angeles County, California in conjunction with a snowball-referred sampling. The initial number of confirmed participants was 11, although only nine participants completed the interview session for the data collection. The potential participants received the informational letter and the demographic survey (Appendix F), the informed consent form (Appendix C), and the participant bill of rights (Appendix D). The participant selected either telephonic, virtual, or in-person interviews according to the interview procedures section.

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell and Poth (2018) described data collection and the related procedural activities as "locating a site or an individual, gaining access and making rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information, exploring field issues, and storing data" (2018, p. 147). The sampling is discussed in the sampling section; the site, individuals, access, and rapport are discussed in the participant recruitment section; and the collection of data, recording, exploring issues, and storing are presented in the subsequent interview procedures.

Interview Procedures

This phenomenological study sought to identify and describe the lived experiences of church leaders managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed phenomenological procedures where participants might be from a single site, but all of them should have experienced the phenomena. Firstly, in this study, the sampling and

recruiting procedures ensured all participants experienced the phenomena. Secondly, the site was decided to be either telephonic, virtual platforms, or in-person based on space availability and comfort of the recruited participants. Thirdly, the interview procedures were conducted as follows:

1. The researcher welcomed the participants; discussed the interview, informed Consent (Appendix C), and the participant bill of rights (Appendix D); and informed participants of the recording and requested permission to record before starting.

2. The researcher started the recording, restated their name and the purpose of the study, and identified whether this was a pilot or an actual interview.

3. The researcher asked permission to record again before the interview.

4. The researcher Made the following statement: "I would like to let you know you can stop the interview or take breaks at any time – just let me know. Also, if I ask a question you do want to answer, please feel free to say, 'I am sorry. I don't wish to discuss that question.' After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and you will be contacted to review and sign off on the typed version of your interview. At this time, I would like to ask you, if you have any questions for me?"

5. The researcher conducted interviews with the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B).

6. All recordings and transcriptions were to remain confidential and secured.

7. A third party transcribed the interviews, while the researcher requested participant review feedback and coded the transcribed interviews.

Artifact Collection Procedures

The semi-structured interview questions included the question "Do you have artifacts that I can use to support your experiences of managing membership during COVID-19?"

The participants did not provide any supplemental artifacts types in the form of electronic communications or leadership activities implemented specifically for membership management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

The qualitative research data analysis process for this study consisted of two major steps. The first step involved a comprehensive thematic review of the data for potential themes and their coded frequency counts, while the subsequent step involved an analysis of the coded frequency counts as a means to answer the research questions.

Preparation for Coding

Adu (2019) discussed various qualitative data analysis approaches including interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The present study followed the guidelines for IPA, presented by Adu (2019) as follows:

1. Review the transcripts to learn more about participants' responses to the interview questions.

2. With the purpose of the study and research question(s) in mind, go through the data – identifying relevant information.

3. For the relevant information selected, write down your interpretations by addressing some of the following questions:

   a. What does this information mean?

   b. What is the participant trying to say or imply?

   c. What is the intent of the participant based on this information?

4. Develop themes based on interpretations.

5. Determine the relationship between the themes by comparing and contrasting them (Adu, 2019, p. 12).

This process included transcribing, preparing, and organizing interview transcriptions for the coding process with considerations for participant confidentiality.

Coding Procedures

The data collection involved interviews. The recorded interviews were transcribed by a third-party using Microsoft Word, and the transcribed interviews were scanned for anchor codes with an interpretation-focused coding strategy following the descriptive coding process discussed by Adu (2019). The transcribed documents were then uploaded to the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. The five steps of "emacD" (Adu, 2019, p. 98) were used to prepare an Excel spreadsheet for the coding process with columns for a(n) **e**mpirical indicator, indicator **m**eaning, research questions **a**nswer, answer-based **c**ode, and **d**escription of the code. Moreover, the interviews were individually reviewed and coded in the Dedoose software with the codes referred to as nodes. The five-step coding process and the Dedoose software were used to determine themes and patterns concerning frequency and source. After the completion of the first coding process, intracoder reliability was employed with a random selected sample of the interviews. Further, the five-step coding process and the Dedoose software were used to determine the themes and patterns with respect to the frequency and source, and the resulting codes were compared for discrepancy resolution.

Data Analysis

The researcher concluded the coding process, finalized the frequency counts, and proceeded with an analysis of the coded results as a means to answer this study's research questions. For example, the research sub-question "What are the experiences of church leaders adapting intrapersonal influences as described by Scarneo et al. (2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?" may elicit an intrapersonal adaption of church leaders during crises of "regularly journaling and reflecting on their leadership experiences." If

this theme was found to have a high-frequency count, then the researcher incorporated it in Chapter V as a component of the conclusions and implications for future action.

Limitations

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), "Limitations are particular features of your study that you know affect the results or your ability generalize the findings" (p. 154). This section outlines the limitations of the study or the characteristics affecting the generalizability of the findings. "Some typical limitations include population, sample size, regional and cultural differences, constraints associated with methods and design, and response rate" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 154). This study involved limitations of a population related to the sample, methods related to the researcher as an instrument, and response rate related to the sample and self-reported narratives. Thus, the limitations of this study are described as follows:

1. Population and sample
2. Researcher as an instrument
3. Responses of self-reported narratives

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore, identify, and describe the lived experiences of church leaders managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter presented information regarding the population, sampling procedures, sample, instrumentation, validity, reliability, data collection, coding and analysis procedures.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This study explored the lived experiences of church leaders managing membership during the COVID–19 pandemic through the lens of socioecological influences. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study and the background of the research. Chapter II discussed literature regarding church leadership, church membership, influences of 21st century crises on the church, socioecological influences, and the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter III discussed the selection and application of a socioecological framework to the methodology applied to the data collection process in this study. This chapter restates the purpose and research questions for this study, summarizes the research methods, participants, presentation of data, and provides an analysis of the findings.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Research Questions

What were the experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Sub-Questions

- What were the experiences of church leaders adapting intrapersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What were the experiences of church leaders adapting interpersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Participants

This study was interested in church leaders' lived experiences managing membership during COVID -19. The population were church leaders from Southern California. Based on data from the United States Census Bureau (Bureau, 2021), there are 3,244 self-reported religious entities with a combined 32,695 religious workers and affiliated church leaders in Los Angeles County, California. Therefore, the population for this study was the 32,695 religious workers and affiliated church leaders of Los Angeles County and referred church leaders.

Target Population

A target population for a study was the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings of a survey are meant to be generalized. This definition determines the eligibility of the participants of the study (Cox, 2008).

For this study, church leaders of Los Angeles County, California and referred church leaders of Southern California are the individuals in the church setting with the role or position of influence over others for the voluntary pursuit of the church's mission or vision. Leader in the church who "is in a position of influence either paid or voluntary" (Sanders, 2020, p. 12). "Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence others for the voluntary pursuit of organizational or institutional objectives" (Chauke, 2020, p. 10). Since participants will be chosen using Convenience Sampling and, possibly, Snowball Sampling, all members of the overall population are eligible meaning the population and target population are the same.

Sample

The sample was "the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The sample or group for this study was church leaders

or workers who managed membership through COVID-19. This study aimed to gather data from

sample size 10 church leaders in Los Angeles County, California plus a snowball sampling of

referred church leaders. The resulting sample from convenience sampling and snowball referrals

was 11 confirmed participants and 9 actual participants.

Demographic Data

Table 1: Demographic Data

Participant #	CL#	Denomination	Role/Position	Experienced Church Dynamics through COVID-19
Participant 1	CL007	Pentecostal	Senior Pastor	Y
Participant 2	CL019	Adventist	Music Ministry	Y
Participant 3	CL025	Baptist	Deacon	Y
Participant 4	CL015	Non-denominational	Assistant Teacher	Y
Participant 5	CL003	Non-denominational	Leader/Teacher	Y
Participant 6	CL009	Adventist	Children Ministry	Y
Participant 7	CL012	Adventist	Deacon	Y
Participant 8	CL022	Baptist	Senior Pastor	Y
Participant 9	CL004	Baptist	Pastor	Y

In the sample, nine participants met the criteria and completed the informed consent form

as well as the interview. The demographic data collected for this study included denomination,

role, and experienced church dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in Table 1.

Participants 1-9 were assigned CLIDs with the use of a random number generator for use during

the data collection process.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The presented findings were derived from the data collected during interviews the

conducted from December 20, 2023 to January 12, 2024. The interviews were recorded, and the

data were analyzed to answer the research question: *What were the experiences of church leaders*

adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while

managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic? The convergence of cross categorical

data was reviewed for intrapersonal and interpersonal themes and sub-themes with a double

coding process and had 89% agreeance of 10% of the data within the acceptable parameters

outlined in Chapter III. This process led to the overarching categories or parent reflecting sub-

theme items or child themes. As a result, the socioecological framework for this study and the

double coding process outlined in Chapter III elicited eight parent themes and 28 child themes

within the two socioecological categories of intrapersonal and interpersonal influences organized

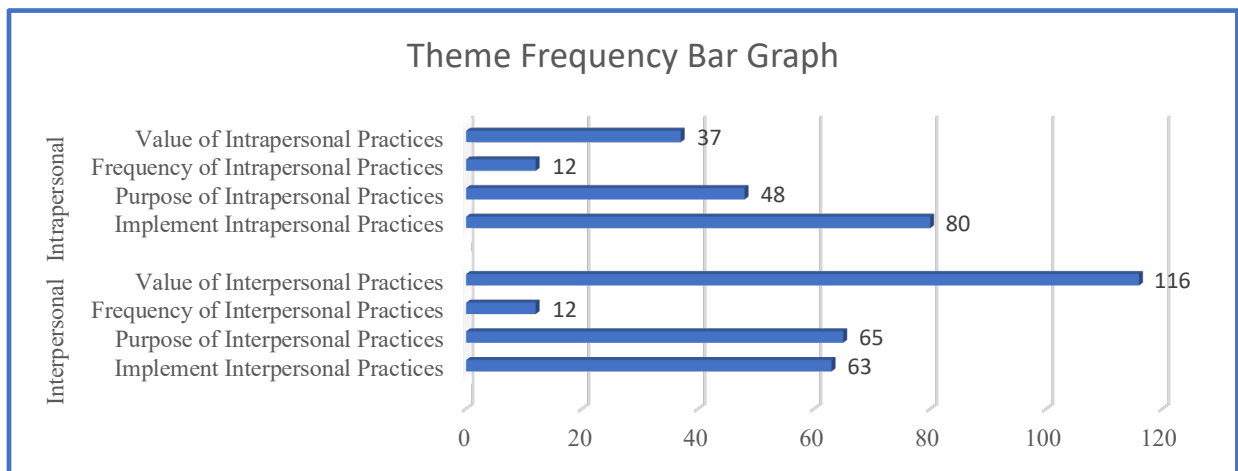accordingly, as presented in Table 2, followed by the frequencies depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Theme Frequency Bar Graph

Table 2: *Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Themes*

Parent Theme	Child Theme
Intrapersonal Influences	
Implemented an Intrapersonal Practice	Prayer Bible study/scriptures/journaling Meditation and prophetic revelation Faith Worship
Purpose of Intrapersonal Practices	Seek guidance and direction from God Seek homiletical approaches Gain revelation or knowledge
Frequency of Intrapersonal Practices	Daily intrapersonal practices
Value of the Intrapersonal Practices	Address personal health, grief, fears, or isolation Receive guidance from God Attend to personal trichotomy Adapt to rapid changes Improve through personal growth
Interpersonal Influences	
Implemented an Interpersonal Practice	Collaborative problem solving Collaborative encouragement Collaborative prayer
Purpose of Interpersonal Practices	Develop outreach to mitigate isolation, fear, and politics Develop or improve communication Develop and build relationships
Frequency of Interpersonal Practices	Daily interpersonal practices Weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual interpersonal practices
Value of the Interpersonal Practices	Technology in church Stay in contact with members and non-members Encouraging and developing trichotomy Develop new outreach Develop a plan for the future Develop collaborative groups

Intrapersonal Socioecological Influences

The data collected included a total of nine sets of responses to interview questions recorded by the researcher. Then, the recorded interviews were submitted to a third party for transcription. The transcribed interviews were retrieved using Microsoft Word and compared to the audio files for accuracy. Afterward, the transcribed interviews were scanned for anchor codes, and an interpretation-focused coding strategy, as discussed by Adu (2019), was used for the descriptive coding process. The transcribed documents were then uploaded to Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. The five steps of "emacD" (Adu, 2019, p. 98) were used to prepare an Excel spreadsheet for the coding process with columns for a(n) **e**mpirical indicator, indicator **m**eaning, research questions **a**nswer, answer-based **c**ode, and **d**escription of the code. The interviews were also individually reviewed and coded in the Dedoose software. This process elicited the frequency results for the intrapersonal socioecological Influences within the

legitimate four parent themes and 14 child themes as shown in the subsequent sections on each theme.

Theme 1: Influential Intrapersonal Practices

Under the first category of intrapersonal practices, the first parent theme was the implemented intrapersonal practices, which was related to the research question and could be divided into five subsequent child themes. This parent theme ranked the highest in this category, with a frequency of 80. The subsequent child themes were broken down from highest frequency to lowest. The child theme relating to prayer had a frequency of 33 from five sources; the child theme relating to bible study/scripture/journaling had a frequency of 26 from nine sources; the child theme relating to meditation and prophetic revelation had a frequency of 11 from five sources; the child theme relating to faith had a frequency of 8 from four sources; and the child theme of worship had a frequency of 2 from one source.

Table 3: Theme 1 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Implemented Intrapersonal Practices		80	
	Prayer	33	5
	Bible study/scriptures/journaling	26	9
	Meditation and prophetic revelation	11	5
	Faith	8	4
	Worship	2	1

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the influence of implementing intrapersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest-ranking influential intrapersonal practice was prayer. Participant 1 reported, "I prepared myself just through praying." On the other hand,

Participant 9 said, "Me as an individual, it was paramount that I learned to have a prayer life."

Moreover, Participants 2, 6, and 7 each discussed the implementation of the intrapersonal

practice of prayer. The second-ranking influential intrapersonal practice was Bible

study/scriptures/journaling, as all nine participants discussed various aspects of using the Bible,

bible scriptures, the Word of God, and journaling as an integral intrapersonal practice. This

influential practice was discussed by Participant 2 who expressed, "The same principles and

practices I leaned on for everything connecting with God through prayer and study." The use of

the Bible for study was also discussed, along with referencing to and using scriptures as an

influential practice. Participants 1 and 6 presented the influential nature of studying for oneself

along with reading scriptures in a private setting, while Participant 9 discussed the influential

nature of memorizing and quoting scriptures as the individual needs them. Further, Participant 3

summed up the overall sentiment for this intrapersonal practice by saying, "I lean on scriptures."

The subsequent child themes derived from the topics of meditation and prophetic revelation,

were discussed by participants 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The participants discussed spending time on their

own by meditating on the scriptures, receiving insight and revelations from God, or receiving

revelation in a dream. Participants 1,2,3, and 9 discussed the intrapersonal influence their own

faith; however, Participant 9 included the intrapersonal practice of worship as one element of

intrapersonal practices by stating, "I believe it is highly important. I believe, personally, that man

is a trichotomy. He is a soul. He has a sprit that lives within the body. I believe the word,

worship, prayer, and praise minister to the spirit." The implementation of intrapersonal practices

was discussed based on the purpose of the practices, as reviewed in the section on Theme 2.

Theme 2: Purpose of the Intrapersonal Practices

Under the first category of intrapersonal practices, the second parent theme was the

purpose of intrapersonal practice, which was related to the research question and divided into

three subsequent child themes and one grandchild theme. The parent theme elicited a frequency of 48 and ranked second in this category, with the subsequent child and grandchild themes being broken down from highest to lowest. The child theme related to seeking guidance and direction from God had a frequency of 26 from eight sources; the child theme related to seeking homiletical approaches had a frequency of 10 from three sources; and the child theme related to gaining revelation or knowledge had a frequency of 12 from five sources. A portion of the last child theme included a frequency of 4 from two sources related to the grandchild theme of gaining knowledge specifically of God.

Table 4: Theme 2 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Purpose of Intrapersonal Practices		48	
	Seek Guidance and Direction from God	26	8
	Seek Homiletical Approaches	10	3
	Gain Revelation or Knowledge	12	5
	Gain Knowledge of God	4	2

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the purpose of implementing intrapersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. As regards the purpose of influential intrapersonal practice, the highest-ranking child them was seeking guidance and direction from God. Participants 1 and 9 highlighted this purpose the most among the eight sources in this child theme. Participant 1 discussed the purpose of guidance from God as follows:

There were times I really didn't know what we were going to do, how we were going to deal with it. But every time I would pray the Lord would just drop an idea in my mind and my heart and we would go and do it.

Further, Participant 1 also emphasized the purpose of guidance from God for a homiletical approach and made thusly:

Every time I would pray, I looked at the facts. I had to look at what was going and then meditate on the scriptures. Then prayer helped me get the words I needed to share with people, to minister to people that needed to be ministered to and also prayer.

Similarly, Participant 9 emphasized the commitment related to guidance as follows:

It is a reflection of your true commitment to seek God's guidance and wisdom and counsel. At the expense of your own social preferences or social groups or peers. So, you have to forego that in order to have this intimate quality time with God.

This purpose was also discussed by Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8, and the overall consensus was summed up by Participant 6, who said, "You have to pray and ask for the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit." Although the interviews included guidance and direction, there additional reasons discussed concerning the purpose of intrapersonal practices had additional implications. The additional reason is revealed in the subsequent child themes of consisted of homiletical approaches and revelations. The sentiment regarding the homiletical approach has been discussed as intentionally preaching and teaching the Word of God. Participant 1 referred to the intentionality in this statement:

The sermons in the beginning, when they closed the church, those sermons for anybody were the most important sermons because they were putting a lot of information in our minds. A lot of prayer and a lot of thought was needed because we were leading people through something that we didn't know.

Along with Participant 1, Participants 3 and 9 discussed the use of the Word in preaching and teaching. Regarding leaders' preaching or homiletical approach for the Sunday services with adherence to the Word, Participant 3 said, "We follow the mandates we find in the scriptures. It

is the same for all of us. There are scriptures to tell us what we need to do and how we should do it, then have our services. We read our scriptures and go through the process of our services." Moreover, Participant 2 spoke about not leaning on one's own understanding. This purpose of the implemented intrapersonal practices was further discussed by Participant 9 concerning the help a leader may need, as seen in the following statement:

> We can see one second in front of us, but God already knows so it important to seek His guidance, there's a scripture that says 'trust in god with all thy heart and lean not to thine own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path.' That's the part of acknowledging God in all your ways seeking His guidance. Acknowledging is to have the conversation, this intimate conversation with Him. So, I find it is extremely helpful in preaching and church growth through teaching, preaching, planning, and strategizing for all aspects of church growth including the ministries of healing and prayer.

Furthermore, some of the interviewed participants also discussed frequency. The discussion regarding the frequency of the practice implementation is presented in the section on Theme 3.

Theme 3: Frequency of the Intrapersonal Practices

Under the first category of intrapersonal practices, the third parent theme was the frequency of intrapersonal practices, which was related to the research question and spawned one subsequent child theme. This parent theme ranked the lowest among the themes in this category, with a frequency of 12 from eight sources attributed to the child theme of daily intrapersonal practices.

Table 5: Theme 3 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Frequency of Intrapersonal Practices		12	8
	Daily Intrapersonal Practices	12	8

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the frequency of implementing intrapersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The daily implementation of intrapersonal practices was the preferred by Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 7, 8, and 9, whereas Participant 3 was the only interviewee who did not relay the implementation of daily intrapersonal practices. The participants who implemented the practices daily made statements similar to Participant 2, who said, "It's just the everyday way of life," and Participant 8, who said, "Those things are my daily regime." Some of the participants went into further detail regarding the frequency. One such interviewee was Participant 9, who said the following:

I developed what I call, for me personally, my hour of power. That occurred at three o'clock in the morning when I had personal prayer and devotion and worship for an hour. I sought to gain guidance by giving God prime time. The first of my time, the best of my time.

These interviews regarding the frequency of intrapersonal practices included discussions on the value of the intrapersonal practices, as mention in the section on Theme 4 below.

Theme 4: Value of the Intrapersonal Practices

Under, the first category of intrapersonal practices, the fourth parent theme was the value of intrapersonal practices, which was related to the research question and divided into five subsequent child themes. The parent theme, like the previous parent themes, elicited a frequency of 37 and ranked third in this category with the subsequent child themes broken down from

highest to lowest. The child theme of addressing personal health, grief, fears, or isolation had a frequency of 24 from six sources; the child theme of receiving guidance from God had a frequency of 5 from four sources; the child theme of attending to personal trichotomy had a frequency of 4 from four sources; the child theme of adapting to rapid change had a frequency of 3 from two sources; and the child theme of improving through personal growth had a frequency of 1 from one source.

Table 6: Theme 4 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Value of Intrapersonal Practices		37	
	Address Personal Health, Grief, Fears, or Isolation	24	5
	Receive Guidance from God	5	4
	Attend to Personal Trichotomy	4	4
	Adapt to Rapid Changes	3	2
	Improve through Personal Growth	1	1

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the value of the implemented intrapersonal practices during COVID-19. Although five child themes ranking from lowest to highest in terms of personal growth, adapting to change, personal trichotomy, guidance from God, and addressing personal challenges, one of the five child themes stood out with a frequency count of 24 out of 37. The child theme of intrapersonal practices addressing personal health, grief, fears, or isolation was discussed by Participants 1, 2, 6, 7, and 9, while Participants 3, 4, 5, and 8 discussed the other four child themes but not this one. As this child theme pertained to personal health, Participant 9 discussed the concerns of being a high-risk individual during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying, "I had cancer. There were others who felt I should have been more isolated.

My argument was the needs were too great and I would not operate from a place of fear." and went on to say, "I attribute the hour power to my own personal healing." This participant discussed the duties of performing a funeral and being exposed to COVID-19 while preparing for and undergoing cancer treatment with emergency surgery. A discussion on personal health accompanied by experiencing grief emerged in other interviews. For instance, Participant 1 discussed the need for the intrapersonal practice of prayer applied to grief in situations like the one disclosed in which a participant's family including wife, children, and mother, contracted COVID-19. Participant 1 disclosed the severity of his mother's illness, including coma, as well as her subsequent death. Although grief was the experience discussed by other interviewees, the lower-ranking child theme of finding ways to combat fear through guidance from God as stated by Participant 2 as follows:

> In my own personal belief, I cannot profess to be a Christian and profess to be a follower of Chris, but I'm giving in to fear and worry. As a Christian, I know what to do with those things. It doesn't mean I'm not going to feel fear or that I'm not going to worry. But it's that when I realize what's happening to me that I know what to do. I know to turn to God and take it to him and leave it there.

The experiences of these participants, during COVID-19, described the influential value of these intrapersonal practices as they related to implementation, purpose, and frequency. However, the intrapersonal socioecological influences were experienced in conjunction with interpersonal socioecological influences.

Interpersonal Socioecological Influences

The data collected included a total of nine sets of responses to the interview questions recorded by the researcher. Then, the recorded interviews were submitted to a third party for transcription, and the transcribed interviews were retrieved using Microsoft Word format and

compared to the audio files for accuracy. The transcribed interviews were then scanned for anchor codes, and an interpretation-focused coding strategy as discussed by Adu (2019), was used for the descriptive coding process. Afterward, the transcribed documents were uploaded to Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. The five steps of "emacD" (Adu, 2019, p. 98) were used to prepare an Excel spreadsheet for the coding process with columns for a(n) **e**mpirical indicator, indicator **m**eaning, research questions **a**nswer, answer-based **c**ode, and **d**escription of the code. Finally, the interviews were individually reviewed and coded in the Dedoose software. This process elicited the frequency results for the interpersonal socioecological influences with four parent themes and 14 child themes, as shown in the subsequent sections.

Theme 5: Influential Interpersonal Practices

Under the second category of interpersonal practices, the first parent theme was the implemented interpersonal practices, which was related to the research question and divided into three subsequent child themes. The parent theme elicited a frequency of 63, but ranked third in this category with the subsequent child themes being broken down from highest to lowest. The child theme of collaborative problem solving had a frequency of 31 from six sources; the child them of collaborative encouragement had a frequency of 19 from five sources; and the child theme of collaborative prayer had a frequency of 13 from five sources.

Table 7: Theme 5 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Implemented Interpersonal Practices		63	
	Collaborative Problem Solving	31	6
	Collaborative Encouragement	19	5
	Collaborative Prayer	13	5

Theme Narrative.

The interviewed participants discussed the influence of implementing interpersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic concerning the experiences in collaborative problem-solving, encouragement, and prayer. The highest-ranking influentially implemented interpersonal practice was collaborative problem-solving. The interpersonal practice of collaborative problem-solving experiences was discussed by Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9. The types of problem-solving collaboration experienced included discussing the use of technology. Participant 1 discussed how the uncertainty of church closure would impact membership by stating, "Then eventually we got together and decided we would all get online, and we would just go ahead and see where this goes." Along with outdoor church and social distancing, the implementation of technology was discussed as the new way church was conducted, which led to collaborative problem-solving in multiple areas, such as bridging the generational gap. The experience discussed by Participant 8 included delegation as described in the following statement: "We would take pieces of an assignment. So, if we wanted to learn an algorithm or if we wanted to learn how to get the sound more effective for Facebook and Instagram, then we would take a piece of that and work on it." With this process, Participant 8 experienced the implementation of generational collaboration to educate the senior members on the use of technology. On the other hand, Participant 9 discussed an experience of collaboration beyond the church by saying, "I established a partnership with Martin Luther King Hospital and the church. This allowed the doctors themselves and opportunity to come and speak to the members of the church, at the church, about the conditions and about sickness." The influence of interpersonal efforts of collaboration was not just used to implement technology and inform the church but was also used to encourage and pray. Participant 8 spoke about the extent of the support experienced related to the interpersonal collaboration as follows:

The conversation would start off with a problem we may be having as it relates to our

digital imprint. Then it moves into a conversation of death, grief, frustration. It moves

into those conversations that I think many pastors tend not to have with other pastors. But

it was those moments when we were trying to fix a problem of how to convey our

message to our members – we ended up getting very personal and very open and

vulnerable and became almost our own therapy session.

These responses are mere glimpses of the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic that are

related to the interpersonal practices of implementing collaboration. However, the purpose of the

implementation of interpersonal practices, as reviewed in the section on Theme 6, may provide

additional glimpses of these experiences.

Theme 6: Purpose of the Interpersonal Practices

Under the second category of interpersonal practices, the second parent theme was the

purpose of interpersonal practices, which was related to the research question and divided into

three subsequent child themes with nine grandchild themes. The parent theme elicited a

frequency of 65 and ranked second in this category, with the subsequent child and grandchild

themes being broken down from highest to lowest. The child theme of developing outreach to

mitigate isolation, fear, and politics had a frequency of 32, with the grandchild themes of

mitigating potential political division having a frequency of 27 from seven sources, mitigating

fear having a frequency of 3 from two sources, and mitigating isolation having a frequency of 2

from one source. The child theme of developing or improving communication had a frequency

of 26, with the grandchild themes of seeking transitional homiletics having a frequency of 12

from five sources, seeking ways to communicate or disseminate information having a frequency

of 7 from five sources, and seeking ways to communicate with others having a frequency of 7

from 4 sources. The child theme of developing and building relationships had a frequency of 7,

with the grandchild theme of seeking God's guidance with others having a frequency of 5 from three sources, church leaders attending to each other's needs having a frequency of 1 from one source, and seeking ways to build leadership relationships having a frequency of 1 from one source.

Table 8: Theme 6 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Purpose of Interpersonal Practices		65	
	Develop Outreach to Mitigate Isolation, Fear, and Politics	32	
	Seek ways to mitigate potential political division	27	7
	Seek approaches to mitigate fear	3	2
	Seek approaches to mitigate isolation	2	1
	Develop or Improve Communication	26	
	Seek transitional homiletics	12	5
	Seek ways to communicate/disseminate information	7	5
	Seek ways to communicate with others	7	4
	Develop and Build Relationships	7	
	Seek God's guidance with others	5	3
	Church Leaders Attend to each other needs	1	1
	Seek ways to build leadership relationships	1	1

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the purpose of implementing interpersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two highest-ranking child themes in this category were developing outreach to mitigate isolation, fear, and politics, along with developing or improving communication. The influential nature of collaboration was discussed by Participants 6 and 7 concerning the decision of whether or not to close the church in which each leader was required to make a decision. Whereas Participant 1 discussed the political division experienced

in the church based on decisions such as whether should be vaccinated or not, whereas Participants 4 and 5 reported having to consider whether it was appropriate for the church to submit to the government or not. However, the following experiences of Participant 9 included the influential transitional homiletics of the interpersonal collaboration relayed as follows:

> I had a group of ministers that I was fortunate to have in my circle. They would pray with me and we would talk about strategies moving forward. When navigating through this, unparalleled time, there was or there had not been a time in our lives that we could pull from as to how to proceed. We knew in order to keep the church active and vibrant we had to find creative ways to worship.

The purpose of the implemented interpersonal practices was ultimately discussed as the collaborative interpersonal practices of redefining how and why church is conducted on online platforms through political compromise to effective communication. The purposeful implementation of collaboration required exploring the frequency of interpersonal practices as reviewed in the section on Theme 7.

Theme 7: Frequency of the Interpersonal Practices

Under the second category of interpersonal practices, the third parent theme was the frequency of interpersonal practices, which was related to the research question and divided into two subsequent child themes. This parent theme ranked the lowest among the themes in this category, having a frequency of 12. The frequency breakdown included the child theme of daily interpersonal practices, with a frequency of 5 from three sources, whereas, the child theme of weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual practices had a frequency of 7 from three sources.

Table 9: Theme 7 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Frequency of Interpersonal Practices		12	
	Daily Interpersonal Practices	5	3
	Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, or Annual Interpersonal practices	7	3

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the frequency of implementing interpersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The frequency of collaborative practices was reported as daily phone calls or interactions by Participants 1, 2, and 8. While Participants 2, 3, and 8 also discussed the additional implementation of weekly, monthly, and quarterly meetings as the longevity of the COVID-19 pandemic surpassed expectations. The common experience discussed by these interviewees was the need to communicate. Participant 1 put it like this: "Every day, I was calling my mentors. I was calling my friends." This interviewee elaborated on the daily communication by stating, "I think calling was important because I was concerned about them and I needed to get information." Participant 1, along with other participants, discussed the importance and value of the collaborative interpersonal practices, as presented in the section on Theme 8.

Theme 8: Value of the Interpersonal Practices

Under the second category of interpersonal practices, the fourth parent theme was the value of interpersonal practices, which was related to the research question and divided into six subsequent child themes and twelve grandchild themes. This parent theme elicited the most frequency in the study of 116, and ranking first in this category. The subsequent child and grandchild themes were broken down from the highest to lowest. The child theme of technology in the church had a frequency of 49 within five grandchild themes. The subsequent grandchild

themes of implementing technology had a frequency of 33 from eight sources; implementing transitional homiletical approaches had a frequency of 6 from four sources; encouraging and teaching senior members the use of technology had a frequency of 5 from four sources; using technology to build generational relationships with a frequency of 4 from 2 sources; and incorporating technology for communication or dissemination of information with a frequency of 1 from one source. Moreover, the child theme of staying in contact with members and non-members had a frequency of 34 with two grandchild themes. The subsequent grandchild themes of seeking to reach members had a frequency of 21 from six sources, and seeking to reach non-members had a frequency of 13 from five sources. Additionally, the child theme of encouraging and developing trichotomy had a frequency of 13 with three grandchild themes. The subsequent grandchild themes of encouraging members and attendees had a frequency of 4 from three sources, encouraging through isolation and fear had a frequency of 6 from five sources; and encouraging through loss and grief had a frequency of 3 from two sources. Furthermore, the child theme of developing new outreach had a frequency of 14 with two grandchild themes, with the grandchild themes of developing alternative fellowship and worship having a frequency of 9 from three sources and the theme of developing means to meet a variety of needs having a frequency of 5 from one source. Additionally, the child themes of developing a plan for the future had a frequency of 4 from two sources and developing collaborative groups had a frequency of 2 from two sources.

Table 10: Theme 8 Frequency and Sources

		Frequency	Sources
Value of Interpersonal Practices		116	
	Technology in Church	49	
	Implement Technology	33	8

	Implementation of Transitional Homiletical Approaches	6	4
	Encourage and Teach Senior Members use of Technology	5	4
	Use Technology to Build Generational Relationships	4	2
	Incorporate Technology for Communication or Dissemination of Information	1	1
	Stay in Contact with Members and Non-Members	34	
	Seek ways to reach the members	21	6
	Seek ways to reach non-members	13	5
	Encouraging and Developing Trichotomy	13	
	Encouraging members and attendees	4	3
	Encouragement through isolation and fear	6	5
	Encouragement through loss and grief	3	2
	Develop New Outreach	14	
	Develop Alternative Fellowship and Worship Forums	9	3
	Develop means to meet a variety of needs	5	1
	Develop a Plan for the Future	4	2
	Develop Collaborative Groups	2	2

Theme Narrative

The interviewed participants discussed the value of the implemented interpersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, with technology in the church ranking the highest. The interviewees discussed the implementation of technology as an influential outcome of interpersonal practices. The collaboration led to new homiletical social media forms, new homiletical approaches, and generational relationships for multiple purposes. As regards the implementation of technology as a result of this influence of interpersonal collaboration, Participant 1 said, "When it first started, I really didn't know how we were going to go about conducting church. But eventually, because we had started getting online before COVID, it just pushed us to hurry up and get online." Participant 2 said the following about the use of

technology to communication: "I remember before we opened back up the church, we stayed in

constant communication with each other through phone calls, messaging, and virtual meetings."

On the other hand, Participants 8 and 9 discussed bridging the generational gap with the

interpersonal collaborative practice of the younger generations assisting the senior generations

with the implementation of technology. As for this generational bridging, Participant 8 spoke

about the younger generations assisting the older members "who never knew how to work or

never would have thought about working technology, like Facetime." Talking about the

integration of collaborative efforts by including the younger generation, Participant 9 said, "I

leaned on our young people, that means a lot of our youth were very much at the table."

Participant 9 went on to make the following statement:

> As it relates to how our church was going to shift, I leaned on a lot of young adults and
>
> college kids. As it relates to what we should or how we were going to post, how we were
>
> going to get information out, how we would even do ministry.
>
> The discussion, as reported by Participant 9, led to the child themes of staying in contact

with members and non-members, encouraging and developing trichotomy, developing outreach,

developing a plan for the future, and developing collaborative groups. Each of these child themes

was discussed based on the new implementation of technology in the church. Participant 4

expressed an optimistic view of the ability to reach members and non-members by saying, "I

heard stories, during COVID, a member who knew we had our church online would tell a friend.

They could tell someone in another country or even just out of state, and they were watching

because it went online." The experiences of Participant 4 and the other participants in this study

during COVID-19 described the influential value, purpose, and frequency of interpersonal

practices implemented with the aid of technology to learn a new way of conducting church.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences of church leaders adapting the intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological levels of influence from Scarneo et al.'s (2019) socioecological framework during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected from interviews with church leaders in Los Angeles County, California, along with a snowball sampling of referred church leaders, resulting in a total of nine participants. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and synthesized based on the socioecological framework. The process elicited eight parent themes and 28 child themes within the two socioecological categories of intrapersonal and interpersonal influences. The subsequent results included the identified lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic related to church membership based on the intrapersonal practices of prayer, Bible study, meditation, faith, and worship, along with the interpersonal practices of collaborative problem-solving, encouragement, and prayer.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences of church leaders adapting intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological levels of influence from Scarneo et al.'s (2019) socioecological framework during the COVID-19 pandemic. The socioecological framework identified the implementation, purpose, frequency, and value of intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences. Thus, the socioecological focused semi-structured interviews were designed to answer the following research question: What were the experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The anticipated participants were church leaders or workers who experienced membership concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to gather data from a sample size of 10 church leaders in Los Angeles County, California, along with a snowball sampling of referred church leaders. The resulting sample from convenience sampling and snowball referrals was 11 confirmed participants. However, only nine out of the 11 confirmed participants completed the study between December 20, 2023, and January 12, 2024.

Findings

After the interviews, the transcriptions were reviewed for data collection based on intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences. The researcher then coded the transcribed interviews into themes and identified eight major findings.

Finding 1: Influential Intrapersonal Practices

The implementation of intrapersonal practices, such as the implementation of prayer, Bible study, scriptures, journaling, meditation/prophetic revelation, faith, and worship, was influential during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants in the study expressed the importance of implementing a combination of the listed intrapersonal practices during the

pandemic. Additionally, the participants reflected on the intentional implementation of intrapersonal practices whether is experiencing the stressors of a crisis or an unsettled time such as the pandemic or not.

Finding 2: Purposeful Influential Intrapersonal Practices

The purpose of implementing intrapersonal practices was found to hold influential attributes. These influential attributes were described by eight of the participants, who identified a purpose based in seeking guidance and direction from God, seeking homiletical approaches, and gaining revelation or knowledge from God. This study found that the participants believed the only way to address the membership concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic was based on purposeful implementation derived from the list above.

Finding 3: Implementation Frequency of Intrapersonal Practices

The frequency of implementing with purposeful intrapersonal practices was described by eight of the participants. This finding was described as a daily requirement needed to achieve outcomes to address membership concerns. The ability to navigate the unsettled times of the COVID-19 pandemic was attributed to the successful establishment of daily implemented intrapersonal practices.

Finding 4: Beneficial Value of Intrapersonal Practices

The value of the intrapersonal practices was found to have beneficial value during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reflected the value of developing the individuals' abilities to address personal health, grief, fears, and isolation. The values found included the individuals' abilities to receive guidance from God and attend to one's personal trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit while adapting to rapid change to improve one's overall personal growth and adaptive leadership.

Finding 5: Implemented Interpersonal Practices

The implementation of interpersonal practices such as collaborative problem-solving, encouragement, and prayer was influential during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants in the study expressed the importance of implementing a combination of the listed interpersonal practices to navigate the unsettled times. The collaborative interpersonal practices allowed the participants opportunities to share and adapt the new way of conducting church as presented during the pandemic.

Finding 6: Purposeful Influential Interpersonal Practices

The purpose of interpersonal practices was found to hold a variety of influential attributes. The first influential attribute found was the use of interpersonal practices to seek approaches to mitigate church members' experiences of fear and isolation. The second purposeful attribute was the ability to seek transitional homiletics, and ways to communicate or disseminate information to church members. The third overarching purpose was the ability to collaboratively seek God's guidance while attending to one another's needs and building relationships.

Finding 7: Implementation Frequency of Interpersonal Practices

A component found within the purposeful interpersonal practices was the frequency with which it was implemented. For three of the participants, this study found a frequency of daily purposeful interpersonal collaborative practices to be an integral component during the unsettled times. These practices were held on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis as the unsettled times extended beyond expectations.

Finding 8: Beneficial Value of Intrapersonal Practices

This study found certain beneficial values of the interpersonal practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The beneficial value reflected in the findings included the collaborative

efforts in seeking ways to reach members and non-members during the crisis. Subsequent findings reflected the value of collaborative abilities to encourage members to develop their own trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit. This finding included the ability to encourage members through isolation, fear, loss, and grief while developing alternative methods for fellowship, worship and meeting a variety of needs presented by leaders and church members. The collaborative values of interpersonal practices were also found to aid in the ability to develop plans for the future of the church with the increased development of collaborative groups.

Summary of Findings

The researcher applied the intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences to identify the following eight key findings:

Intrapersonal socioecological influences:

- Intentionally implemented intrapersonal practices included prayer, Bible study, scripture review, journaling, meditation, prophetic revelation, faith, and worship.

- Purposefully implemented intrapersonal practices were meant to seek guidance and direction from God, homiletical approaches, and gaining revelation-based knowledge from God.

- Daily intentional and purposeful implementation of intrapersonal practice was considered essential.

- Benefits from the value of intrapersonal practice were based on developing one's personal trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit.

Interpersonal socioecological influences:

- Intentionally implemented interpersonal practices included collaborative problem-solving, collaborative encouragement, and collaborative prayer.

- Purposefully implemented collaborative practices were meant to navigate the plethora of needs presented to the church at any given time.

- Frequently intentionally implemented purposeful collaborative practices were essential and were held daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually.;

- Benefits from the value of interpersonal practices were based on efforts to develop collaborative groups focused on the relational development of one another's trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit.

Unexpected Findings

In addition to the findings in this study, within the child themes there were three unexpected influential interpersonal socioecological findings, which are as follows:

- The first unexpected finding relates to frequency of implementing the interpersonal collaborative efforts while seeking ways to mitigate potential political division within the church. The researcher found an unexpected need to purposefully seek ways to facilitate compromise while addressing the opposing political viewpoints within the church.

- Secondly, the researcher unexpectedly found the beneficial value of implementing technology to go beyond conducting church into the realms of communicating or disseminating information. Communicating and disseminating information appeared to aid in the mitigation of political viewpoints and opened the door to building generational relationships.

- The last unexpected finding relates to the second, as it revealed the bridging of a generational gap. The unexpected finding of generational relations based on younger members assisting senior members with technology was a welcomed outcome.

Conclusions

The researcher reviewed the findings and drew eight conclusions related to the lived intrapersonal and interpersonal influences on church membership during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher deduced from the findings a breakdown of four conclusions for the intrapersonal influences and four conclusions for the interpersonal influences.

Intrapersonal Conclusion 1: Implemented Practices Influenced Personal Growth

The participants who implemented intrapersonal practices also experienced the ability to development and growth in their personal trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit. All of the participants discussed the experience and benefits of relying on scripture or the Word of God to meet their personal needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. This personal growth through intrapersonal practices aided in their ability to navigate the unsettled times. The valuable practice of self-evaluation and reflection is discussed by Smith (2015) within the context the vulnerability needed to lead whether times are unsettled or not.

Intrapersonal Conclusion 2: Purposeful Practices Resulted in Guidance from God

The intentional and purposeful implementation of intrapersonal practices allowed the participants to experience growth. The participants who experienced personal growth through intrapersonal practices also reported an increased ability to seek guidance and direction from God based on scripture or Bible study and prayer. Their ability to gain knowledge and abilities necessary to navigate the unsettled times was related to the personal practices such as meditation, faith, and worship. The purposeful intrapersonal practices is similar to the intentional reflection component presented in the discussion about vulnerable pastors (Smith, 2015).

Intrapersonal Conclusion 3: Committed Daily Practices Were a Component of Personal Growth

The frequency of implementing intrapersonal practices was important to the participants' personal growth. The participants' ability to address concerns related to personal health conditions, grief, fears, and isolations concerns was related to the daily practices of seeking God through prayer and meditation on the Word of God.

Intrapersonal Conclusion 4: Implemented Practices Influenced Homiletical Approaches and Personal Well-being

Nearly half of the participants developed new homiletical approaches related to the revelations from the quality time spent in private prayer and meditation. The homiletical approaches related to conducting church in a new manner were developed by some participants based on the revelations acquired from the implemented intrapersonal practices, while some participants also attributed improved personal health to the time spent alone in Bible study, meditation, and prayer. This improved personal health was in part due to dedicating time to care that is necessary for their personal needs. Additionally, this personal time aided in their ability to adapt to the rapid changes associated with the fear and isolation of the unsettled times presented by the pandemic. The posture related to intrapersonal practices is connected to the vulnerability and reflection piece discussed by Smith (2015) as she answers the question, "So, how can any of us as emotional beings find a way to lead?" (p.63). A answer leading to personal well-being and vulnerability to be worked out by leaders in their private time.

Interpersonal Conclusion 5: Implemented Practices Influenced Collaborative Efforts

The participants who implemented interpersonal practices also experienced the shift from a one-leader structure to a collaborative model. All of the participants discussed the experience and benefits of collaborative problem-solving related to the implementation of the Word of God

for the development of a new way of conducting church during the COVID-19 pandemic. This personal collaborative problem-solving led to supportive roles of encouraging one another through new ways of conducting church. Although collaborative prayer was a lesser experience, it was nonetheless an experience related to the implantation of interpersonal practices. The transition from a one-leader model to the collaborative model would resemble the Blanchard and Broadwell (2018) inverted hierarchical pyramid of servant leadership.

Interpersonal Conclusion 6: Purposeful Practices Resulted in Relationship-building, Collaborative Development of Transitional Homiletics and Outreach

The intentional and purposeful implementation of interpersonal practices allowed the participants to experience relationship-building. The participants who experienced relationship building attested this to purpose-driven collaboration related to seeking ways to develop transitional homiletics, along with the outreach required to help members and non-members navigate the isolation of the unsettled time. This process of developing outreach led to increased opportunities to seek new ways of communicating, along with disseminating important information to members and non-members needed during the COVID-19 crisis. The implementation of purposeful strategic collaborative development is supported by the servant leadership practices presented by Blanchard and Broadwell (2018).

Interpersonal Conclusion 7: Committed Regular Collaboratory Conversations were a Component of Inter-Development

The frequency of implementing interpersonal practices was important to the implementation of a new manner of reaching members and non-members. The participants' ability to come together daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually allowed the collaborative groups to build relationships within the group.

Interpersonal Conclusion 8: Implemented Practices Influenced Generational Relationship-building in Conjunction with the New Ways of Conducting Church

All of the participants developed new homiletical approaches to reaching members and non-members through technology. The variations in homiletical approaches related to conducting church in a new way were developed by some participants based on different practices within their church. For some of the participants, the different practices and collaborative efforts led to the creation of small group settings in which members and non-members participated in relationship-building as well as collaboratively bridging the gap between the younger and older generations. Furthermore, the collaborative efforts of interpersonal practices led all the participants to use technology in new ways as a means to meet the needs of members and non-members through the alternative fellowship and worship forums. The collaborative efforts would meet the needs outlined by Sumpter (2019) in which the younger generations achieve feelings of inclusion and acceptance related to social connection and fellowship.

Implications for Action

In consideration of the socioecological influences in this phenomenological study and the need to manage membership during unsettled times, several implications for action are presented by the researcher. The implications for action are directed to church leaders of Christian ministries who are in the influential roles of a pastor, teacher, or any other designation in which church members are impacted. The following eight implications for actions should be embraced as essential tools needed to aid in the development of church leaders who are carving out the future of how the church is conducted:

Intrapersonal Implication for Action 1: Church Leaders Need to Implement Intrapersonal Practices to be Effective in their Roles as Leaders, Teachers, or Shepherds

Church leaders need to establish personal private time designed to develop their own abilities as effective leaders. These leaders should take an approach of implementing of intrapersonal practices as a means to address their trichotomy (i.e., an approach in which the body, soul, and spirit of the church leader are being ministered to through the implementation of these practices). These intrapersonal practices should include prayer, Bible study, scripture review, meditation, prophetic revelation, faith, and worship. The leaders should take time to implement any combination of these intrapersonal practices as a means to develop their effectiveness as leaders who are concerned about the future of how church will be conducted regardless of whether times are unsettled or not.

Intrapersonal Implication for Action 2: Church Leaders Need to be Purposeful with Regards to the Implementation of Intrapersonal Practices

The church leaders who elect to implement intrapersonal practices should do so purposefully. The development of personalized intrapersonal practices should include the outline of specific reasons, which should involve seeking guidance and direction from God. The guidance and direction from God should lead to the structuring of homiletical approaches necessary regardless of whether times are unsettled or not. This process of implementing purposeful intrapersonal practices will allow the leaders to gain the revolutionary knowledge needed to be an effective leader in the church and prepare for collaborative practices.

Intrapersonal Implication for Action 3: Church Leaders Should be Committed to a Daily Regimen Dedicated to the Implemented Intrapersonal Practices

The purposeful and intentional implementation of intrapersonal practices should include commitment on the part of the church leader. The level of commitment the church leader has to

the implementation would include setting aside a specific daily private time in a private location. The commitment to and effectiveness of the daily intrapersonal practice will allow the church leader the opportunity to address their personal trichotomy. Additionally, this daily implementation will, overtime, aid in the church leader's ability to facilitate the new way in which the church is conducted.

Intrapersonal Implication for Action 4: Church Leaders Should Implement the Practices Impacting their Personal Growth and their Interpersonal Efforts.

Church leaders should add the journaling to the combination of intrapersonal practices, and journaling should include the intention and purpose of the intrapersonal practices. Then, the church leader should identify the potential benefits of the intrapersonal practices. In the outline of the purpose and potential benefits, the church leaders' effective use of the private time will further allow them to gain personal growth by addressing personal needs, receiving guidance from God, and developing ways to adapt to the ever-changing world. As the future is unforeseen by man, the church leader can outline past, present, and potential changes facing the church. The process of taking a holistic approach to their role as a church leader can provide them with the personal growth needed to work with others in collaborative efforts to lead others, regardless of whether there is a crisis such as COVID-19 or not.

Interpersonal Implication for Action 5: Church Leaders Need One Another

Church leaders need to establish interpersonal practices designed to develop one another's abilities as effective leaders. These leaders should take an approach for the implementation of interpersonal practices as a means to address each other's trichotomy— an approach in which the body, soul, and spirit of each church leader are being ministered to through the implementation of these practices. These interpersonal practices should include collaborative problem-solving, encouragement, and prayer. The leaders should take time to

implement any combination of these interpersonal practices as a means to develop each other's effectiveness as leaders who are concerned about the future of how church will be conducted, regardless of whether times are unsettled or not.

Interpersonal Implication for Action 6: Church Leaders Should Spend Quality Time in Collaboration

The church leaders who elect to implement interpersonal practices should do so purposefully. The development of the interpersonal practices should include the outline of specific reasons for the practice, which should involve seeking ways to develop outreach ministering to the physical, emotional, and political concerns of each other and the church members. Furthermore, collaborative interpersonal practices should lead to the structuring of adaptive homiletical approaches, regardless of whether times are unsettled or not. This process of implementing purposeful interpersonal practices will allow the leaders to build leadership relationships while developing the homiletical approached needed for effective leadership and communication in the church.

Interpersonal Implication for Action 7: Commitment is a Requirement for Effective Collaborative

The purposeful and intentional implementation of interpersonal practices should involve a commitment on the part of the church leaders. The level of commitment the church leader has to the implementation would entail setting aside calendar time daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually based on the need identified by the church leader. The commitment to and effectiveness of the calendared interpersonal practice will allow church leaders the opportunity to address both their personal trichotomy and the needs of the congregation or church members. Additionally, the regular implementation will, overtime, aid in church leaders' ability to facilitate the new way in which the church is conducted.

Interpersonal Implication for Action 8: Church Leaders Collaboration Opens Unforeseen Doors of Opportunity

Church leaders should add the journaling and preparatory outlining to the combination of implemented collaborative interpersonal practices. The preparatory outline should include the intention and purpose of the interpersonal practices. Then the church leader should identify the potential benefits of the interpersonal practices. The outlined purpose and potential benefits should be aimed at attaining effective collaborative efforts of all participating church leaders, allowing them to grow by addressing each other's personal needs. Beyond personal growth, the collaborative benefits should include an outline of the implementation of technology in the new ways to conduct church. The technological implementation should include but not be limited to creating small groups to encouraging relationship building, staying in contact with members, reaching out to members and non-members, and bridging the generational gaps. The collaborative efforts can go beyond the previous boundaries of how the church was conducted by transforming the structure from an authoritative to a collaborative team leadership format. The team leadership can utilize the untapped potential found as senior members and young members are brought to the table through training in the implementation of technology, along with the development of technological homiletical approaches. The church leaders should approach these collaborative practices with the common goal of seeking ways to heal, grow, develop, and prepare the body of Christ, which is also known as the church, regardless of whether there is a crisis such as COVID-19 or not.

Recommendations for Future Study

The results of this study form the basis for recommendations for future studies to provide additive information to the existing body of knowledge and understanding related to church

leaders' practices of managing membership, regardless of whether or not society is experiencing

a crisis or not.

- Conduct a study to include the younger generation of progressive church leaders who participated in collaborative efforts to implement technology during the crisis. This is necessary as the present study elicited results on the senior members and, therefore, there is a gap in understanding the younger generations intrapersonal and interpersonal influences relating to how church is conducted.

- Extend the study to explore the lived experiences of members and non-members, as well as their perceptions of the impact intrapersonal and interpersonal practices had on themselves and the church leaders during the unsettled times.

- Undertake a supplemental study related to the organizational socioecological influences on church leaders. This study focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal influences, whereas additional knowledge may be gathered from a study focused on the organizational context.

- Undertake a supplemental study related to the environmental socioecological influences on church leaders. This study focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal influences, whereas additional knowledge may be gathered from a study focused on the environmental context.

- Undertake a supplemental study related to the policy-related or regulatory socioecological influences on church leaders. This study focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal influences, whereas additional knowledge may be gathered from a study focused on the context of policy-related or regulatory influences.

- Conduct a comparative study related to the lived experiences of church leaders based on all five socioecological levels of influence with different time frames of the churches' history. The time frames can include but may not be limited to before COVID-19 and after COVID-19.

- Undertake a supplemental study related to the impact of church politics and attendance within the context of socioecological influences.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Let me begin with a speech made by Woodrow Wilson in 1911 before he went on to lead the US through World War I:

I ask every man and woman in this audience that from this night on they will realize that part of the destiny of America lies in the daily perusal of this great book of revelations – that if they would see America free and pure, they will make their own spirits free and pure by this baptism of the Holy Scripture.(Arnebeck, 1986, p. Democracy Dies in Darkness section)

This quote, as my opening quote, is not in any way meant to present a political viewpoint, but rather to highlight the historical place of the Word of God or the Bible in this nation and in the lives of everyone, regardless whether they are American or not. My journey toward writing this dissertation has pushed me to seek God and God's purpose for my life. I have been given a divine opportunity to learn from the lived experiences of others during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequently share this information with others. Perhaps this information may reach at who is also seeking God's purpose for their life.

When I was at the beginning of this journey and selecting a topic for this dissertation, my search for God's purpose was ever-present. Over the two years I have spent on this journey, my perception of the church and church leaders was challenged by the truth of the experiences they

endured. The opportunity to frame these lived experiences based on the parameters set forth by preventive medicine in healthcare gave me an eye-opening understanding of the church, an understanding in which the church could be perceived and explored based on spiritual health while uncovering preventive measures similar to physical healthcare practices. The dynamic socioecological framework allows for the application of practices based on perception of the church as the body of Christ. This application opens up many more opportunities and conversations related to the holistic spiritual health of the body of Christ and its global existence.

The holistic approach to the body of Christ and its spiritual health reminded me of scriptures to the leaders, such as Acts 20:28, which says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (The Holy Bible, 2008). This scripture represents a directive to lead, teach, and educate the body of Christ. Thus, this research provides a glimpse into how the in-your-face analogy between physical and spiritual health issues can bring about dynamic change through the implementation of preventive educational measures. As I was writing this dissertation, I considered the possibility of some saying that they knew this already. If you are one of them, ask yourself: If you I knew this already, was your homiletical transitional smooth, and did you help another church with their transition? Why or why not?

This dissertation is not written just for church leaders but also for the body of Christ, in as much as we may learn to hope for ourselves and one another while always, in all things, trusting God. I envision the body of Christ as not attempting to return to what it once was but rather embracing the new found understanding of the interdependence between church leaders, community partners, members, and non-members. In this manner, the church will find ways to use the new found understanding as it's platform for foundational stability and growth. Stability occurring when the church facilitates the mitigation of political division in our country and

abroad while bridging generational gaps. Above all, remembering the ability to mitigate any circumstance hinges upon the accomplishable and spiritually healthy body of Christ— a spiritually healthy body of Christ prepared for the bridegroom.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting two of the five socioecological (Scarneo et al., 2019) influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Identified Variables: Church Leadership, Church Membership, Crisis & Socioecological Influences, Church Leadership & Sociecological Influences, Church Leadership Theories & Frameworks	Church Leadership	Church Membership	Crisis & Socioecological Influences	Church Leadership & Socioecological Influences	Church Leadership Theories & Frameworks
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Clarke, D. A. (2008). *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership* [Book]. T&T Clark.	X				
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Appendix B

Interview Questions

Purpose Statement
      The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
Research Questions
      What are the experiences of church leaders adapting the Scarneo (2019) intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
Sub-Questions
      What are the experiences of church leaders adapting intrapersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
      What are the experiences of church leaders adapting interpersonal influences(Scarneo et al., 2019) while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Script
Welcome the individual,

      My name is R'Betrice Phillips and I am the researcher in this study. The purpose of the study is to identify and describe experiences of church leaders' personal biblical interpretations, practices, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and abilities while managing church membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

      Thank you for your willingness to participant in the interview and sharing your experiences in church leadership. By sharing your story, you will help me understand the unique experiences resulting from managing membership during the pandemic. Please freely share your experience, as the details of your story will be helpful to my study.

      Prior to beginning this recorded interview, we discussed your participation. Only myself and a professional transcriptionist will have access to the recording. At this time, I would like to ask you:
1. Are you still interested in being a participant in this recorded interview session?
2. Did you receive the Participant Bill of Rights and the Informed Consent?
3. Did you have an opportunity to review the documents?
4. Do you have questions or concerns regarding the documents?
5. Did you have an opportunity to sign and return the Informed Consent?
   (Note: if this is done, then thank the participant for signing and returning it)

I would like to inform you of the interview process. You can stop the interview or take breaks at any time – just let me know. If I ask a question you do not want to answer, then please feel free to say I am sorry I do not wish to discuss that question. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and I will contact you to give you the option of reviewing and signing off on the typed version of the interview.
Great, let's begin with a few questions regarding your intrapersonal experiences during COVID-19.

The term intrapersonal is your personal biblical interpretations, practices, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and abilities managing membership during the pandemic. This may include practices such as self-reflection, meditation, individual study, praying, or journaling influencing you and your decision-making process as a leader during COVID-19.

1. What beliefs did you have to inform your decisions about managing membership during COVID-19?
2. What influential personal biblical interpretations, practices, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and abilities did you lean on to work through your beliefs and inform your decisions?
   a. Can you provide examples?
3. What personal biblical interpretations, practices, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and abilities activities did you implement?
   a. How often did you implement this activity
   b. Can you provide examples of how this activity influenced your decisions managing during COVID-19?
4. In self-reflection, did you change any background knowledge or ideas regarding the pandemic in order to manage membership?
   a. What self-reflective practice influenced the adaptation?
   b. How often were you required to implement the self-reflection and adaption?
   c. Why did you implement the self-reflection and adaption?
5. Are there any other personal biblical interpretations, practices, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and abilities changes you would like to share regarding your self-awareness as a leader during the pandemic?
6. Are there any other experiences related to your self-awareness process you would like to share?
7. Based on this topic, if you had to advise a pastor on the self-reflective aspect of managing during COVID-19, what would you want them to know? And why? Can you share examples?

The next set of questions are based on the interpersonal and personal biblical interpretations, practices, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and abilities as related to the people you may had direct contact or communication with during the pandemic. Based on the many possible interpersonal interactions,

1. Who did you lean on to help determine how you would manage membership during the pandemic?
   a. How often did you lean on them?
   b. Can you provide examples of how this person/these people influenced your management approach?
2. Why did you feel it was necessary to lean on this person/these people?
3. Can you provide examples of one or more problems related to the interactions and communication with others in the management process?
   a. Who did you lean on to work through these problems?
   b. How often were you required to work through such problems?
4. Can you discuss how your experience with this problem may have differed from other church leadership management approaches?
   a. Do you know why this difference did or did not occur?
5. If you had to advise a pastor on the contact and communication aspect of managing during COVID-19, what you want them to know? And why? Can you share examples?

Thank you for your time, I have two questions I would like to ask as we wrap up.

1. Do you have any items like emails, training materials, or recordings you would can provide to help understand your experiences managing during COVID-19?
2. Are there any church leaders you would recommend as a participant for this study? (Note: only ask this question if I do not believe I will have saturation)

Appendix C

Research Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Shepherds Leading the Flocks: A Qualitative Phenomenological study of Church Leaders Managing Church Membership During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: R'Betrice Phillips, MAEd/CI

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: You are being asked to participate in qualitative research study conducted by R'Betrice Phillips, MAEd/CI a doctoral student from the Doctoral of Education in Organizational Leadership at UMass Global.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe experiences of church leaders adapting the intrapersonal and interpersonal socioecological influences while managing membership during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study will glean an understanding from the lived experience and practices implemented by church leaders during the unsettled time of the pandemic.

The data from this study will fill the gap related to church leaders managing during COVIS-19 and provide incite for practicing church leaders managing membership in the post-pandemic environment. This study may also provide information to church leaders who are learning to manage membership or seeking proven methods for improving their membership management skills.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be conducted by R'Betrice Phillips either in-person or on the Zoom virtual platform. Completion of the interviews will take place in-person or virtually based on your preference.

I understand that:
a. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand the researcher will protect my confidentiality by using identifying codes and securing all digital research data with encrypted electronic access codes and physical data in a locked security box.
b. The possible benefits of are my narrative interview will allow to give practicing church leaders a lived experience to reference as they manage membership. The findings from all the narrative interviews will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and may provide me with insight from other church leaders managing membership.
c. I understand the interview will be recorded by either audio or virtual platform tools. The recordings will only be available to the researcher and the transcriptionist. I understand I have the right to pause or stop the interview at any time during the interview. I understand the interview will be recorded by either audio or virtual platform tools. The recordings will only be available to the researcher and the transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview narrative to maintain accuracy of data collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be

destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after the completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

d. I understand email communication is neither private nor secure. Though the researcher is taking precautions to protect your privacy, I am aware information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party. I understand my confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used. The researcher cannot guarantee protection against interception of data sent via the internet by third parties or data existing on backup and server logs beyond the timeframe of this research project.

e. My participation in the study is voluntary and I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

f. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call: The Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618; Telephone: (949)341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____ Date_____
Signature of Participant

_____ Date_____
Signature of Principal Investigator

<center>Appendix D</center>

<center>**ZA UMASS GLOBAL**</center>
<center>A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts</center>

<center>**UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Research**</center>

<center>**Participant's Bill of Rights**</center>

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

UMass Global IRB   Adopted   2021

<center>133</center>

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date	16-May-2022
Expiration Date	N/A
Record ID	48961333

This is to certify that:

RBetrice Phillips

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w0323b449-269d-4cd2-a04f-b73860c6d649-48961333

Date

Dear_____(TBD),

My name is R'Betrice Phillips and I am a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at University of Massachusetts Global (UMass Global). I have been an active member of the Christian Church for 25 years with roles in the Youth ministry, Homeless Ministry, Sunday School, and Choir. I am studying influences on church leaders during COVID-19. My particular interest is understanding the experiences of church leaders managing membership during the pandemic.

I am seeking the participation of Christian church leaders to participate in an interview for my study. The selected participants will be asked to participate in a 45-to-60-minute interview, either virtually or in-person based on individual preferences. The interview for this study will be part of a confidential process. The participants identifying information will not be attached to any recorded interviews or notes. The participant information will be securely stored in password protected computer and any hardcopies in a locked cabinet. The researcher will be the only individual with accessibility to the computer and cabinet.

Qualifying participants must meet the following criteria:
- Must have had a church leader role during COVID-19
- Must have at least five years of experience as a church leader
- Must identify as Christian church leader

Your time and consideration of the participation request would be greatly appreciated as your leadership experiences impact others in the church and the community.

If you elect to participate in this study, please complete and return the attached demographic questionnaire. For anonymity, please use your confidentiality code:_____

If you have any questions about participation expectations, then please contact me at rphilli7@mail.umassglobal.edu or by cellular at (760)791-5378.

Respectfully,

R'Betrice Phillips

<p style="text-align:center">Demographic Questionnaire</p>

Confidentiality Code: _____

1. What denomination is your church? _____

2. What is your educational background? _____

3. What is your role or position in the church? _____

4. How many years have you been in this role or position in the church? _____

5. How many church leaders are in your church with the same or similar role? _____

6. Did you pastor a church before and during COVID-19? _____

7. Do you count or classify membership and attendance separately? _ _____

8. If so, what was your membership before COVID-19? _____

9. If so, what was your membership during COVID-19? _____

10. What was your average number of weekly attendees before COVID-19? _____

11. What was your average number of weekly attendees during COVID-19? _____

RB Phillips <rphilli7@mail.umassglobal.edu>

IRB Application Approved: R'Betrice R Phillips
1 message

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>   Sat, Dec 2, 2023 at 2:31 PM
Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu
To: rphilli7@mail.umassglobal.edu
Cc: dlong@umassglobal.edu, pendley@umassglobal.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear R'Betrice R Phillips,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
irb@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.