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Building Sustainable Faith Experience for Urban Youth

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BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FAITH EXPERIENCE FOR URBAN YOUTH

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BY

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I would like to Acknowledge my grandfather Hiram C. Crawford SR. for the light he was to lead our family to serve Christ. My father who showed God's love and sense of humor, my mother for her dedication and resilience which make me what I am what I am today. I would like to acknowledge my wife who makes me a better man and who along with my children demonstrated great patience throughout this process. I love you all.

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ABSTRACT

Every generation of believers face obstacles in figuring out how to pass on the

Christian faith to the next generation. The North American urban church is currently

experiencing attrition rates that are startling to the researcher. It is critical that urban

Christian believers not take for granted faith transmission will pass to their children

similar to how they experience it from their parents. This project is designed to ask

questions that will engage the urban Christian community in a productive dialogue to

reverse the trend of youth who are rejecting faith at alarming rates. From the

conversation, the researcher has created a model that will allow urban churches to support

families in a way that will stop the drift.

The American church has been wrestling with this issue for over two decades and

there have many books written about the challenges of youth attrition. This thesis focuses

on the urban North American church, which has a more significant challenge. Much

research has shown that youth who have a healthy relationship with devout Christian

parents are much more successful at sustaining faith than those with strained

relationships. Urban churches deal with extreme poverty, single parent households, and

many other negative indicators that create less than stable environments for children to

have healthy supportive relationships with their parents. These challenges increase the

difficulty of urban youth sustaining faith through their teenage years.

This project seeks to identify a workable model that will close the crisis of attrition rates urban churches are seeing with their young constituency.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

Statement of the Problem

This thesis project addresses the problem of teenagers' attrition from urban Christian faith communities. Teenagers who grow up in urban Christian faith communities are rejecting the faith at a high rate as they enter into adulthood. The researcher (a) examined the Scriptures to discover principles for successful faith sharing from one generation to the next, (b) explored literature relevant to this problem in sources that expose faith-hindering urban realities and sources that review stages of adolescent development, and (c) engaged with senior pastors of urban churches who are witnessing firsthand this exodus from the church to learn their perspective on its causes and potential solutions. With the data that emerged the researcher constructed a model from grounded theory that both explains the attrition and equips church leaders to reverse it.

An ever-increasing number of urban teenagers who grow up in Christian faith communities are rejecting the faith as they enter into adulthood. Something is causing young people to exit the doors of the church just when they reach an age when they can be trained for future service. Although children's ministries in churches appear to be thriving, participants' enthusiasm seems to wane as they mature. What can be done to avert this? If this trend continues the question of who will lead the next church generation becomes moot in the face of a more urgent question: who will be the church's members?

Research Overview

Assumptions

The researcher began with the Bible in the assumption that it is relevant for all generations. He further assumed that Scripture might offer a leadership model that addresses the subject of this project. The researcher combined this confidence in Scripture with the assumption that the Holy Spirit has prepared the church for the present global, pluralistic society of North America.

Delimitations and Research Steps

The researcher paid close attention to three important themes while investigating relevant literature for this project. First, he observed how the challenges of adolescent development affect the passing of faith to the next generation. Second, he identified cultural challenges found in the urban environment and their effects on young people of faith. Third, he investigated urban faith communities' approaches to youth ministry and resultant increased or decreased attrition among youth.

The researcher utilized direct interviews with senior pastors of urban churches who are seeing the challenge first hand. All of these pastors serve in Minneapolis or St. Paul, Minnesota where the researcher lives, works, and ministers.

The researcher analyzed the data create a viable model based on grounded theory to resolve the problem of urban youth attrition. The model merges Scripture with practical theory from the relevant literature and project data. If applied well, it has the potential to stop and perhaps reverse the trend of youth attrition. The model provides church leaders and youth workers with the necessary tools for effective evangelism and aggressive discipleship training among their youth.

Setting of the Project

The research took place in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, areas rich in cultural, religious, economic, and generational diversity. Ethnic groups from every corner of the globe have settled in the Twin Cities. The resulting cultural pluralism is distinct from religious pluralism because, although culture and religion are often interconnected, religious pluralism can exist without welcoming new ideologies as enriching the culture.[1] In other words, many ethnic groups live peaceably side-by-side, tolerating one another's cultural differences without embracing one another's beliefs. It is important to note this about the research setting in the Twin Cities of Minnesota because this kind of cultural pluralism can be a contributing factor in youth attrition in urban faith settings.

Minnesota's population continues to grow more culturally diverse. According to the 2010 census the number of Hispanics grew by 74.5 percent, blacks by 59.4 percent, and Asians by 51 percent.[2] Since the 2010 census the number of Asians has increased more rapidly than other population segments, growing six percent between 2010 and 2012.[3] The impact of growing up in a diverse community is that children from Christian faith communities do not experience their belief system as isolated to a mono-ethnic monocultural reality. Ethnicity is an easily identified marker allows cultures to define themselves by establishing a sense of safety and security. Changing demographics have forced a new way of anthropological, sociological, and historical thinking: that ethnicity is less an ancient and deep-seated force surviving from the historical past and more the

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[1] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 14.

[2] Dunbar, Elizabeth. http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/03/16/census-date-confirms-growth-outside-twin-cities (accessed October 2013).

[3] Dubar, Elizabether. http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2013/06/13/news/asians-minn-minority (accessed October 2013).

modernizing feature of a contrasting strategy that may be shared beyond the boundaries within which it is claimed.[4]

In their long history of religious, political, military, and cultural dominance Europeans referred to other groups as "savages," which was the genesis of Western postmodern moral outrage.[5] These philosophies of the European elite are often blamed for the ethnic cleansings from which most Western societies have long since distanced themselves.[6] The cynicism of other cultures, especially those from Islamic States and Eastern Asian religions, often creates tension for those who proclaim Christ as the only way to God. Many westerners resist this message to avoid being associated with an ideology that has become synonymous with the Western Christianity that perpetuated colonialism, committed genocide, and industrialized slavery. When a young person of faith attends school in a diverse setting, he or she must reconcile this historical view of Christian ideology with the message that Jesus Christ is God's unique revelation for salvation of the world, which suggests that their classmates are destined for eternal hell.[7]

The culturally diverse setting of the Twin Cities allows broad applicability for this project, as diversity has become evident in all major North American cities. The findings of this project are likely to parallel youth attrition in other urban faith settings. However, a close look at the demographic breakdown of all churches shows a marked decrease in

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[4] Walter Truett Anderson, ed., *The Truth about The Truth* (New York: Penguin Putman Inc., 1995), 63.

[5] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 58.

[6] Volf, 58.

[7] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publications, 1989), 155.

attendance among young adults under the age of 25. Although they make up six percent of the population, they account for only two percent of the church population.[8]

Figure 1 demonstrates how young adults are the farthest from God they have ever been in American church history. The unwillingness of nearly one third of an entire generation to identify themselves as people of faith is clearly uncharted territory. Those known as "the greatest generation" and "the silent generation" have been the most committed to faith. Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) have a slightly higher percentage; 13 percent are unaffiliated with religion, a consistent outcome since the 1970s. Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1980) follow the trend of the Boomers, with the number of religiously unaffiliated individuals increasing to 20 percent. It is no surprise that Millennials (born 1981 and later) comprise the highest number of religiously unaffiliated individuals at 26 percent. The trend continues to rise from generation to generation, and churches in the United States must begin to redirect their efforts to reverse this trend.

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[8] Christ Herlinger, "Membership Trends for U.S. Churches Reported to Be 'Stable'" (Ventura, CA: December 7, 2009).
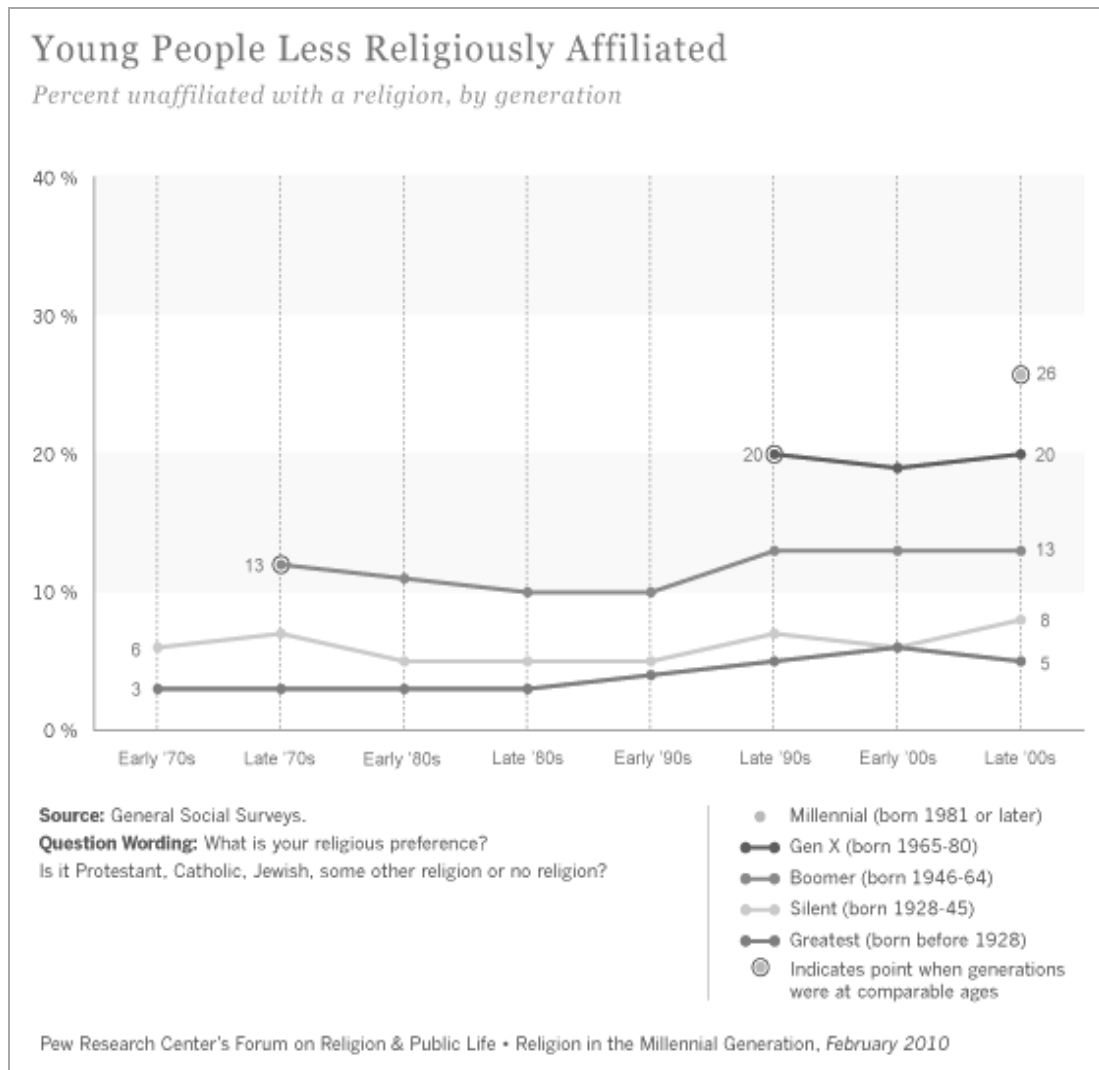
Figure 1. Young People Less Religiously Affiliated

Importance of the Project

Importance to the Researcher

The researcher experienced a strong sense of call to the ministry of preaching

God's Word at the age of four. He experienced God's presence and spirit and learned the

value of having a personal relationship with Him at a young age. As a teenager the

researcher observed that very few of his contemporaries retained their faith throughout

their high school years.

The researcher has served in various aspects of youth ministry for more than 20 years. He has seen firsthand how many post-adolescents abandon the faith of their parents. But he has also witnessed certain patterns among those who retain their faith. It was these disparate experiences that led him to investigate the causes of these differences. The researcher believes that this project can propose models of ministry that produce consistent faith among the targeted population. By identifying areas where consistency occurs, project results can equip church leaders to reverse the trend of attrition among urban youth.

The researcher feels a sacred obligation to clarify the causes of attrition among urban youth. He hopes to identify potential challenges to progress in this realm and influence a shift in ministry approach that may help the target population to retain its faith and active involvement in the church. After completion of this project the researcher hopes to better fulfill the mission of the local congregation he serves. The researcher anticipates creating an urban-focused curriculum that engages churches throughout the nation to take this urgent crisis seriously, and supporting them with action-oriented programs to improve their approach to family faith formation.

Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

The researcher serves as Family Life Pastor at Christ Church International in South Minneapolis where he formerly served as youth pastor. For 17 years he has observed a high rate of attrition from the faith that appears to invalidate much of his work with teen youth. By revisiting these trends the researcher hopes to gain insight that will help children and youth to retain their faith throughout their young adult years.

Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The problem of youth attrition in urban settings must be examined and addressed if the church of Jesus Christ is to continue evolving effectively. Christian faith is always one generation from extinction. This reality is more detrimental to North American society, where rapid urbanization means the most populous and influential centers are disproportionately affected.

Every church leader would benefit from better training in youth retention. This is true whether the leadership follows an apostolic authority model or a governing board model. It is true whether the leader is the local pastor, the youth leader, or parents of youth. Even surrounding communities stand to benefit, having historically drawn heavily from youth ministries in local churches.

This study is important to the future of the Christian church worldwide. Over the last 200 years the United States has been a seedbed for missions the world over. Its influence has been felt on every continent. Due to the United States' rich tradition of global outreach, many countries depend on us to provide training, resources, and candidates for the mission field. The effectiveness of molding and maintaining today's youth will affect how we as a nation impact global missions for the next generation.

Above all, Jesus Christ's claim to be the only way to God (John 14:6) creates an urgency not only to retain youth in Christian communities but also to expand God's family to include those who do not know Him as well. While some Christian churches are successful in expanding by boldly exploring new holistic models that can respond to changing cultural patterns, many American churches subscribe to older models of power that hold little appeal for contemporary young people. Some churches also ignore

leadership models that could influence the current generation. Jesus' claim forces every

church to re-evaluate its model in light of its effectiveness in youth retention.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter provides a framework for discerning the nature and depth of the plight facing urban youth in faith communities. It investigates issues foundational to the project: faith sharing and the western evangelical anti-urban position that demonstrates resistance to the growing urban reality. Both must be understood in order to comprehend why urban churches face such devastating youth attrition, and possible solutions to this problem.

Faith Sharing

The act of sharing faith begins with an understanding of how God views the process. In Scripture both narrative and propositional portions of the text express to parents how to impart faith to their children. Explicit direction and propositional teachings about sharing faith are rare and must be carefully elicited.

The researcher considered three passages of Scripture from which to draw insight: the creation narrative of Genesis, Moses' direction for sharing faith in Deuteronomy, and Paul's discussion of the topic in his letter to the Ephesians.

Genesis

One of the most obvious places to discover God's intent for humanity is the story of creation. It offers insight into the subject of faith sharing. Human creation tells of God's desire to have a relationship with people, which gives insight into the process of

faith formation. The researcher sought to discover God's intent and expectations for His most prized creation.

God first created the heavens and the earth, light, water, land, vegetation, and all living things (Gen. 1:1-25). He separated light from darkness (v. 4) and land from water (v. 6) to give humans a clear picture of His majesty as the creator and sustainer of all life. He then took counsel with Himself and said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created humans in His own image; in the image of God He created them" (vv. 26-27).

The first 25 verses of Genesis 1 capture the power of God as displayed in His ability to call things forth, creating something out of nothing. The author of Genesis appears to be making a contrast between the life of open transparency between God and humans and the coming separation when they are evicted based on their direct violation of the covenant He made with them.[1] Once in verse 26 and twice more in verse 27, Scripture makes it clear that humans were created in the image of God. Almost as an exclamation mark on His seal, God gave humans power to steward the earth as He rules the heavens (vv. 28-30).

Because humans reflect God, they provide a window into the nature of God. To scrutinize the bearers of His image is to attain a glimpse of God. This concept is pertinent to this study because His image is reflected in all humans. When God looks at humankind, He expects to see Himself. God commanded humans to reflect his authority

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[1] Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 118.

and creativity by ruling over the earth. "He uses an uncommon Hebrew word *radah*, which means having absolute or even fierce exercise of mastery."[2] Genesis 5 describes the genealogy of Adam, clearly indicating that Adam was made in God's likeness. This denotes a kinship between God and man that transcends His connection with the rest of creation.

The magnitude of what was lost in the fall of humankind can only be fully understood when the nature and purpose of humankind are understood.[3] God desired a harmonious relationship with humans in order that He might walk among them. Genesis shows God speaking directly to humans only, making them stewards of His creation with responsibility for animals that included naming them. Humans had direct access to God and could speak to Him without fear and without shame. The writer of Genesis contrasts the original openness between God and humans with the separation that followed their violation of His covenant with them.[4]

The rift in the relationship between God and humans set humankind on a journey of lost innocence, and they were given a future promise that would strike the serpent's head before restoration could be realized. The relationship changed from one in which they enjoyed fellowship (walking in the cool of the day) to one of Judge and judged, illustrating that the break would not be easily mended. God's clear design for ongoing human relationship is for all humans and appeals to each successive generation.

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[2] Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), 19.

[3] Ross, 117.

[4] Ross, 118.

Deuteronomy and the Command to Form Faith

From Genesis 12 to Moses' experience on Sinai, rebellion against God seems to have been the default for humankind. The role of family appears to have been instrumental in prompting the entire family of Israel to acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although it is possible that many families maintained oral traditions, after 400 years the Israelites were so committed to what they believed that they kept the bones of their ancestor. Throughout the Pentateuch and continuing through the rest of Scripture, Abraham's family was required to carry the promise from generation to generation. At Sinai the law was given in order to go a step beyond oral tradition and make the law of God so clear that it could not be misunderstood.

The second area examined by the researcher is in Deuteronomy. This narrative explicitly describes God's intent for sharing faith. God makes it abundantly clear that this book is for the children who will enter the Promised Land without their parents. From Deuteronomy 1:39 to 32:46, God pays close attention to how faith must be transmitted to these children.[5] Deuteronomy 6:6-9 provides the following summary:

> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy has served as an enduring constitution for raising generations of Israelite people. "The Deuteronomist stresses the causal link between loyalty to God and

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[5] Marcia Bunge, Terence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible*, 58

prospering in the land."[6] Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is often viewed as a catechism that became a daily ritual recited twice daily in Jewish worship.[7]

The church has retained this constitutional vision of Deuteronomy in teaching Christian parents to raise their children to fear the Lord and obey His commands. The early Christians were Jews who adopted the Hellenistic idea of *logos*, belief that the Word of God is eternal. And although there is no evidence to suggest that the Torah existed before its announcement at Sinai, Jews adopted the idea and applied it to the Law of Moses.[8] Paul's words in Ephesians 5:1-2 serve as a reasonable format for children to follow, and suggest a consistent worldview between Judaism and Christianity regarding faith development. In Jewish traditions three things are certain: the centrality of the law in curriculum, the duty of the home in education, and the involvement of the synagogue in community.[9]

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Paul and Ephesians

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Paul's letter to the Ephesians puts forth expectations for parents of faith and their role their children's faith development. He declares that in order to preserve unity in the body of Christ, Jews and Gentiles in the Kingdom share equal citizenship (Eph. 2:14-22). In chapters 3 and 4 Paul urges believers to maintain this unity to preserve the work of the Spirit by whom they were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). In discussing the roles experienced within a family in Ephesians 5, he first calls for mutual submission.

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[6] Alter, 911.

[7] Alter, 912.

[8] Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 35.

[9] J. Jullius Scott, Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 256.

John Eadie in his commentary on Ephesians suggests that this call to mutual submission may be foundational to Christian conduct in all domestic relationships.[10] Paul goes on to provide more details in his charge to husbands and wives, fathers and children, and finally slaves and masters.

The directness of the command to children in Ephesians 6:1 (τα τεκνα) suggests that Paul expects children to be present either to hear the reading or to do the reading themselves.[11] He gives the first directive to the subordinate group (τα τεκνα).[12] Although the age group addressed in this passage may not be clear, Paul is clearly speaking to children who are old enough to respond to the charge. He remains true to his first calling as a rabbi, commanding children to follow so that even in their simplicity of understanding they can know what it means to love and obey the Lord.[13] Paul's justification for obedience is that it is right (τουτο εστιν δικαινον), seemingly assuming that the children have already made a commitment to please Him.[14] Although this is not explicitly stated, it is unlikely that Paul would appeal to children with no stake in following Torah tradition.

In verse 2 Paul strengthens his argument by quoting the command from Exodus 20 to honor parents. Then he breaks with Jewish tradition by emphasizing the important role that fathers play in their children's faith development.

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[10] Eadie John, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1955), 407.

[11] John, 437.

[12] Hoenher W. Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 785.

[13] Foulkes Francis, *Ephesians: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 168.

[14] Harold, 787.

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; but bring them up in the training and ins Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— **3** "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."[a]**4** Fathers,[b] do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."[15]

Paul challenges fathers with two commands: first not to provoke their children, which stirs up wrath, and second to bring up children and nurture them in the instruction of the Lord.

Clinton Arnoild comments that,

Fathers have the primary responsibility in a way that they will be trained in understanding, the essence of the Christian faith, and that they will be instructed and admonished on how to live this out. In the marriage passage, Paul uses the same verb he uses here (εκτρεφετε) to refer to the tender and nourishing care that believing husbands are responsible for providing to their wives (5:29). Here he uses the verb in the extended, but commonly used, sense of "raising" or "bringing up" children, which includes the idea of nurturing care but goes beyond that to refer to all that goes into raising children to maturity.[16]

The command that fathers are to provide the leadership in the home without provoking children to anger is compelling. Paul acknowledges that discipline is essential and even beneficial for childrens' admonition, but warns against petty correction and capricious exercise of authority because it discourages children (Col. 3:21).[17]

Paul's stern command to fathers not to provoke their children to anger also points out the role parents play in discouraging faith. When an individual abandons the faith of his or her parents, a break in the relationship often occurs. Larry Crabb in his book *Connecting* describes his estranged relationship with his son. With a great deal of effort

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[15] Ephesians 6:4 NIV.

[16] Clinton Arnoild, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Ephesians,* vol. 10 of *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 418.

[17] Francis, 170.

and patience, Larry watched his son return to a relationship with God. After his son's

period of rebellion ended, Larry's son told him in a moment of honesty that the essential

element of returning to faith in Christ was returning to a relationship with his father. "I

did come back to the Lord during that time, but first I came back to you."[18] If Larry

Crabb had never mended their strained relationship, his son might never have returned to

Christ. This appears to be consistent with New Testament teaching that the primary

responsibility for children's faith development is the function of fathers. Paul was writing

for a patriarchal culture, and it is reasonable to believe that Paul's command is equally

directed toward mothers in a twenty-first century context.

Parents often provoke their children by being unreasonable, fault-finding, and

inconsistent.[19] If the church has failed in matters of faith, it is in the fact that adults have

been unable to stop the rapid attrition of children born to Christian parents. This has

occurred despite Jesus' emphasis on not hindering the children. At the heart of his

instruction was a directive to raise children in the ways of the Lord. This theme is dear to

God's heart, and obligates His church to discover what must be done to bring His

children back home.

Western Evangelical Resistance to Urbanism Is Not God's Call

Another theological component that must be addressed is the ideological battle

between the church and the urban city. According to Harvie Conn, "The history of the

Evangelical church in the American city has been liberally sprinkled with a cultural

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[18] Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Nashville: W Publishing, 1997), 5.

[19] Kent R. Hughes, *Ephesians* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 200.

pessimism toward things urban."[20] This pessimism has log-jammed the conversation about church involvement in social issues that plague cities.

Many pastors who have fought to stay in the city have found resistance not only by the city but also by the church culture. One example is Ray Bakke in 1966. After graduating from Moody Bible Institute he desired to be a pastor in Chicago. Bakke read an article published in Community Renewal and Society Journal by Stephen Rose entitled, "Why Evangelicals Can't Survive the City." This article suggests that the Bible is a rural book and that God prefers shepherds and farmers to urban dwellers.[21] It opened his eyes to the incapacity of evangelical churches to reach the city. Ray Bakke began to preach and write about this anti-urban bias.

If this perception had stayed in the realm of certain theological elites, it might not be so dangerous. However, it has permeated evangelicalism and fed into the self-serving nature that causes churches to feed off the financial benefits of cities' dense populations while ignoring the complex nature of the city and its challenges. Churches often flee to municipalities that escape the burden of the city's crime, taxes, and dysfunction while taking advantage of the benefits of its transit, jobs, and culture. This has been detrimental to children's faith development among lower income groups.

The church must identify a way to connect with families as a part of ministry if it is to retain parishioners into adulthood. Families often abdicate their responsibility as the place where faith begins, and churches often support this type of thinking by creating programming that exclusively presents faith-growing opportunities outside of the home.

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[20] Harvie Conn, *American City and the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 194.

[21] Ray Bakke, *Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 22.

Urban areas are far more lacking in parental, financial, and spiritual support. Mark

Holman writes:

> If we want our children to have a faith that influences the way they live their lives, then in our homes we need to be modeling faith through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We must empower families to do three things: (1) continuously talk about God, (2) teach children to live by the Word of God, and (3) develop a real understanding of God's Law.[22]

If the American church hopes to reach its urban youth then she must also deal

with the social ills that confront the city. In the American urban context the challenges of

single parents, income disparity, and social pressure that reflects and celebrates lifestyles

considered immoral by Scripture disrupt an environment conducive to healthy spiritual

development. It is imperative that urban churches develop surrogate family systems that

will support families in developing faith opportunities in their home.

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[22] Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home.*

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

If urban Christian churches in the Twin Cities are to be successful in transmitting faith to the next generation, a sincere effort to understand two major themes is required: the process of faith development in adolescents and the influence of urban culture on youth.

In order to frame the literature related to this research, it is necessary to differentiate among religion, belief, and faith. This document relies on several authors, among them James Fowler. Although he writes more broadly on the topic of faith development, the researcher felt confident about applying his findings to Christian faith development. Fowler suggests that religion entails the various customs passed on in certain communities of faith, while belief is the conviction of holding something to be true. In contrast, faith is the relation of trust and loyalty to the transcendent.[1]

Fowler further defines faith as "the making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning. It is a mode of knowing and being. In faith we shape our lives in relation to more or less comprehensive convictions or assumptions about reality."[2] Although these three concepts are related, the researcher was concerned with what distinguishes the experience of faith from religion and belief. The researcher sought to

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[1] James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 6.

[2] Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks, eds., *Faith Development and Fowler* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press), 15.

isolate the things that work against the formation of sustainable faith because, as David Kinnaman concluded in his research on the subject for the Barna Group, the dropout problem is at its core a faith development problem.[3]

Adolescent Development

No one can clearly identify when faith in the supernatural actually begins in a child. But it is known that it generally happens when a child is young.[4] In recent decades many social scientists have given increased attention to the connection between faith development and overall human development from early childhood through adolescence.[5]

Social Learning Theory

The researcher drew primarily upon "social learning theory," which suggests that children tend to repeat behaviors they see modeled. These patterns establish the framework within which they will operate throughout their lives.[6]

Phases One and Two

James Fowler refers to the first phase of faith as "undifferentiated faith" (birth to two years), in which the very young child's understanding of God is not clearly comprehended.[7] Although a two-year-old child's experiences cannot be positively interpreted, no major conceptual conflicts appear to exist as their perceptions of God

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[3] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

[4] Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, ed., *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 4.

[5] Roehlkepartain.

[6] Ganie B..DeHart, L. Alan Sroufe, and Robert G. Cooper, eds., *Child Development* (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2000), 19.

[7] James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 119-121.

evolve and become clearer by age three. Young children appear to create a mental image of God by the end of their third year. This primitive image of God develops to satisfy the psychological needs of self-formation, and most importantly also reflects a child's experience with caregivers.[8]

Young children begin to learn perceptions of God as their faith is shaped by the traditions of parents or primary caregivers. Regarding the connection between parenting and early childhood faith, Carl Ellis Nelson wrote "in truth, the most important influence in the formation of children's belief in God is their relation to parents and the practice of religion in the home."[9] According to the Search Institute, children who have a faith experience credit their parents more than two to one over any other outside influence. This includes the influence of pastors and church programs on a child's decision to follow Christ.[10]

Ellis goes on to explain that the social circle that influences the youngest children extends beyond the parents to include the faith community that influences the parents. He asserts that for children to experience to the benefits of faith sharing, the parents themselves must be fully involved in a local faith community and growing in their own faith. According to Ellis, "For this influence to be theologically mature, parents and other adults must participate in a congregation that is seeking to know the mind of Christ, an activity of study and practice that engages adults as well as children and youth."[11] An

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[8] Nelson Carl Ellis, "Reforming Childish Religion," *Journal of Family Ministry* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2005), 16.

[9] Ellis, 14.

[10] Mark Holmen, *Building Faith at Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal Publishers), 25.

[11] Ellis, 14.

entire web of concentric social circles must surround the child, who will then adopt the

parents' positive associations with faith. The caregivers are the critical strand in this web.

Caregivers play a dominant role in the way children interpret the world (and thus

faith) because of the early attachments that take place between parent and infant. The first

year is crucial to shaping a child's ability to form healthy attachments because it

establishes basic trust.[12] Fowler suggests that all humans may have inklings toward faith,

and that how this capacity develops is based on how one is welcomed into the world by

caregivers.

Faith is interactive and social. It requires community language, ritual, and nurture.

This leads naturally to concerns about what happens to children at this crucial stage when

large segments of urban populations lack the support needed to form healthy attachments.

Children in this pre-language stage are establishing separation and self-

differentiation, a process that depends on trustworthy and loving adult caregivers for

successful completion. As Fowler explains:

> In this pre-stage called undifferentiated faith, the seeds of trust, courage, hope and
> love are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of
> abandonment, inconsistencies, and deprivations in an infant's environments. The
> basic trust in this stage is the fund of basic trust and the relational experience of
> mutuality with the one providing the primary love and care. The danger of
> deficiency at this stage is a failure of mutuality in either of two directions. …
> excessive narcissism in which the experience of being central continues to
> dominate and distort mutuality or the experience of neglect … may lock in the
> infant patterns of isolation and failed mutuality.[13]

In other words, if a parent or primary caregiver is inconsistent in providing love

and care, the child can develop either narcissistic or isolating tendencies, both of which

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[12] Roehlkepartain, 37.

[13] Fowler, 121.

inhibit the growth of healthy mutuality in adult relationships. These tendencies can

likewise affect the child's spiritual relationship with God and with a faith community.

This early phase of life establishes patterns of security and threat that will in many ways

set the stage for how an adolescent interprets faith later in life. Fowler points out an

observation by Richard Niebuhr, that faith is an extension of the earliest human

relationships. It grows in accordance with experiences of trust or mistrust beginning in

infancy. Humans adopt and share the vision and values of those who are closest to

them.[14]

Perception Formation

These early events, though highly impactful, are not determinant. According to

Bruce Lipton, the most powerful determinant in behavior is perception.[15] In the interest

of survival, perception often takes on a life of its own. To predict to a large extent what

will come next, we learn how to "perceive" or filter incoming data on a subconscious

level, without the hard work of sustained cognitive reflection. We learn to forecast the

most likely turn of future events to better prepare for them. But this happens on an

emotional level that bypasses rational thought. It enables a person achieve a feeling of

safety in response to incoming data without activating any conscious filtering

mechanism. In this way, an individual's perceptions or pre-determined interpretations

hold sway over their ultimate faith interpretations that are more powerful than caregiver

attachments.

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[14] Fowler, 5.

[15] Bruce Lipton, *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and a Way to Get There from Here* (Australia: Hayhouse Inc.), 62.

Children are especially vulnerable to faith-reinforcing or faith-negating experiences that form perception, because their developing electrochemistry makes them more easily shaped than adults. This is evident in studies of electrical activity in infant brains. The electroencephalogram (EEG) measures infant electrical transmissions, which are predominately low-level electrochemical activity called delta waves.[16] In fact, the most dominant state for early childhood is between delta level and the next highest level of activity, theta level. During this low-level activity a child has the capacity to download significant amounts of information without a cognitive filter (alpha consciousness) to interrupt them.[17]

An adult's cognitive abilities operate on the next higher alpha level, and normally filter all incoming information. But alpha consciousness is not yet developed in the youngest children. EEG study shows that infants do experience occasional bursts of high voltage in which they tap into theta and alpha brain waves. This is normal but unfiltered input.

In practical terms, this means that children not only learn a new word as an adult would learn a word from another language, but they also learn all the emotional and relational nuances surrounding the word. This knowledge involuntarily activates within them an emotional or visual connection to that word that is almost imaginative, and will last as long as their memory retains it. In adult learning the newly acquired word is translated into the mother tongue's frame of reference before it can be used. An adult takes a word and first categorizes it, then filters it. Through a process of memory

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[16] Kazouya Watanabe, *The Neurophysiological Examination of the Newborn Infant*, ed. by J. A. Irye (New York: MacKeith Press), 11.

[17] Lipton.

techniques, the adult learner attaches the word's meaning to other words that are more familiar. This complicated process sometimes makes it difficult for adults to retain the meaning of new words. A child's imagination, not yet disciplined by consistent logical operations, responds better to a narrative that evokes emotion. In this way, according to Eugene Roehlkepartain, children come to see how they are connected to the mystery of everyday life.[18]

At these earliest stages children can learn six languages simultaneously while distinguishing between them, and at the same time master a musical instrument or athletic skill without feeling limited. This is because a child's perception of the world is downloaded into the subconscious without discrimination and without the filters of the conscious mind's analytical skills. Before a child becomes cognitively self-aware, his or her brain acquires a working awareness of the world by collecting observances and experiences that will inform behavior.[19] Thus, children often accept certain perceptions about life and their role in it without the capacity to reject false ones.[20]

Children's susceptibility to the shaping of their perceptions reinforces the importance of good early socialization by parents and caregivers. In spite of the fact that perception is more powerful than caregiver attachment, perception itself is still mainly shaped by caregivers. The two work closely in tandem in children's formation.

An understanding of socialization and perception development has implications for faith formation in children. In particular, it sheds light on how children come to behave later in relation to faith communities. In the same way they learn many skills like

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[18] Roehlkepartain, 38.

[19] Lipton, 64.

[20] Lipton, 63.

language, children are constantly downloading social rules that become highly influential, even determinant, in their futures. These perceptions shape how they understand themselves and how they understand the transcendent in relation to their ever-expanding world. For example, a child without prejudice may perceive that it is acceptable to be rude to a grocery store clerk but never to a police officer, simply by observing the behavior of parents and the emotional tone of such interactions. Both sets of behaviors become automatic and do not pose a contradiction in the child's mind, because they are not presented as a contradiction for the parents.

Likewise, children learn the value or importance of faith in their parents' lives through parental action and tone. Children come to perceive, even if precognitively, whether God is central in their parents' lives or simply part of a weekly ritual. If caregivers speak the language of faith with strongly negative emotional tones, they increase the risk that their children will come to associate that language negatively in their perceptions. So any lack of healthy socialization creates a challenge not only for how children understand faith but also for how they interpret future language used by Christians to persuade them to embrace faith. For example, phrases like "God is Father" may be loaded with negative connotations for children in urban settings who grow up with an abusive or absent father. The language does not prove persuasive despite its intended use as an endearment.

Consequences for Children's Faith

Social learning theory and perception formation research provide a backdrop for other researchers attempting to discover the root causes of attrition among youth in urban church settings. In their book *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist-

Denton coined the phrase "moralistic therapeutic deism" to articulate how today's teenagers consistently view God.[21] It illustrates their belief that the concept of God is a pragmatic solution for the social and physiological need for a deity. This means that God is understood as a pragmatic ideal rather than as a personal God with standards outside of an individual's personal and human expectations and experiences. With regard to behavior, this means that morality revolves around feeling good about oneself. Thus an individual becomes a law unto him or herself.[22] According to Smith and Lundquist-Denton, this idea is explicitly evident in the philosophy of today's youth. The authors argue that this belief sets youth up to leave their faith because their faith communities' other-centered moral standards fail to serve their pragmatic social and physiological needs.

Smith and Lundquist-Denton suspect that this phenomenon may be caused by what is communicated implicitly by parents' treatment of faith matters. Whether or not one agrees with this assessment, it is important to identify at what point or phase of childrearing that many of these youthful opinions are formed. Social learning theory and perception development theory point to very early formation of such opinions. For instance, a child would not have to formally learn the word "hypocrite" to delineate the value that a religious community places on living one's faith outside the context of church. Rather, the difference between a community's stated value versus its real value is obvious to very young children. The community says to live one way, but fails to do so in real practice. Hypocrisy becomes an understood concept whether or not it is formally

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[21] Christian Lundquist-Denton and Melinda Smith, *Soul Searching* (NewYorkOxford Press 2005),118

[22] Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion, eds., "Religion and Youth" (Christian Smith On 'Moral Therapeutic Deism') (UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 42.

taught. In summary, the foundation laid during the early years critically impacts many different facets of a child's social, emotional, and spiritual understanding of the world.

Phase Three

After infancy and early childhood the third phase of development known as childhood falls between ages seven and eleven. In an attempt to recreate Jean Piaget's position on childhood, Fowler describes this third phase as the beginning of a person's logical development. He writes:

> Around the age of seven, give or take a year, a typically rather rapid and pervasive transformation in the thought patterns of children occurs. The dominance of thought by egocentrism and perception gives way to what may be designated as the first truly logical operations of thought.[23]

Logic and rational thought begin to hold sway, in contrast to the egocentricity of early childhood due to lack of understanding of various perceptions. Therefore an older child may be able to reflect rationally on disappointment, like denial of a treat. But a young child may experience strong feelings of injustice when denied a treat, however irrational, because she or he mainly perceives the situation.

At the third stage children have access to a much more complex universe. They are able to internalize sensory-motor schemata and move beyond the egocentric and unpredictable preoperational phase. Their new world allows them to stabilize, organize, and integrate their schemata with their social context.[24] Jean Piaget labeled these years between seven and eleven as the "concrete operational stage."[25] This stage is definitive for children. According to Melvin Levine, this stage consists of twelve developmental

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[23] Fowler, 63.

[24] Fowler, 63-64.

[25] *Adolescence,* 13th ed. Santrock, John W, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 95.

missions for middle childhood. The first is to sustain self-esteem. The second is to find

social acceptance, primarily with peers. The third is to reconcile individuality with

conformity. The fourth is to identify and emulate role models. The fifth is to examine

values. The sixth is to feel successful in the family. The seventh is to explore the freedom

and limits of autonomy. The eighth is to grow in knowledge and skill. The ninth is to

become reconciled with the body. The tenth is to handle fears. The eleventh is to limit

and control drives, including desires for food, sex, material goods, and attention. The

twelfth and final task is to develop self-awareness.[26]

Successful accomplishment of these tasks depends heavily on a child's ability to

observe and imitate healthy behavior seen in consistent adults. Impulse control and

delayed gratification have been well documented as being much more apparent in

children who have seen these behaviors modeled.[27] This is echoed by Pearce and

Lundquist-Denton who write that "three key aspects of family life from birth to

adolescence shape religiosity; the socioeconomic resources or well-being of a family

household, the stability of the home environment, and the religious characteristics of the

parents."[28]

But even with positive role-modeling from caregivers and other significant adults,

and even with the growing cognitive ability to reflect logically, the third phase brings a

powerful twist. Peer social influences begin to dominate perceptions. After children reach

the age when cognition begins, they often become highly influenced by the idea of social

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[26] Roehlkepartain, 38.

[27] Kerry Patterson, *Influencer*.

[28] Lisa Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of Their Own* (New York: Oxford Press), 21.

acceptance versus rejection.[29] Thus protection of self begins to depend on other people's

perceptions. If early childhood conditions failed to produce healthy self-esteem in the

child, the need and hunger for acceptance from outside social groups will prove much

more important to controlling behavior. This understanding is highly relevant to the

discussion of urbanites who often grow up lacking healthy social conditioning during the

formative years.

As children move into adolescence the secondary group that impacts decision-

making after parents is their peers.[30] The reason is growing sensitivity to rejection. In the

third phase children gradually increase their engagement in a behavior known as social

comparison. When evaluating themselves, children take into account their social self only

as opposed to their isolated self, and then compare it with their peers.[31] Youth who reach

this stage with healthy self-esteem are likely to be less vulnerable to the negative

influence of peers.

Adolescence

The final stage before adulthood is known as adolescence. It is here that the

struggle for identity and autonomy in life takes center stage. This is also the last phase in

which the church has direct contact with most of the children who pass through their

ministries before many abandon their faith. According to Barna Group, of those who

switch to a different faith other than Christianity over the course of their life, 71 percent

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[29] Santrock, 6.

[30] Pearce and Denton, 24.

[31] DeHart et al., 425.

do so between the ages of 18 and 29.[32] Because this period follows an individual's most

impressionable years in identity formation, this should come as no surprise.

Kinnaman points out that all young adults who abandon their parents' faith are

not revolting against it. Those who fight consciously against the faith of their parents

Kinnaman labels "prodigals." But his research indicates that they are the smallest group

of what he refers to as the overall group of dropouts. According to Kinnaman, the largest

group are the "nomads." They associate themselves with the word "Christian" but show

no outward signs of faith commitment. The next largest group are the "exiles" who

participate in some church rituals but feel trapped between culture and church.[33]

Pearce and Lundquist-Denton categorize young people similarly, using labels they

call the "Five A's." The labels refer to five levels of proximity to local faith communities

and include "atheist," "avoider," "assenter," "adapter," and "abider,"[34] with the atheist

being farthest from and abider closest to a faith community. These categories are helpful

because they signify that although a majority of youth leave their faith during their

college years, not all are the same distance from a faith community. These distinctions

also help churches understand that the individuals in these various categories cannot all

be reached with one type of approach.

The causes of adolescent and post-adolescent attrition have been hotly debated. At

one end of the spectrum are those who claim that exiting from a faith tradition is solely a

western phenomenon. These sociologists cite classic studies such as the studies of

anthropologist Margaret Mead. Her observations of Samoan culture led her to believe

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[32] Kinnaman, 32.

[33] Kinnaman, 25.

[34] Pearce and Denton, 34.

that adolescence was sociocultural. Mead suggested that many children transition smoothly into adulthood without the need to "storm and stress" through an adolescent period, in contrast to the prevailing assumption in many western cultures. But at the other end of the spectrum are those who claim that biological chances account for dramatic departures from the faith of one's upbringing. For example, Mead's many critics argue that the Samoan culture is more stressful than she what first observed, suggesting that the delinquency of its minors renders proof of this.[35]

It is correct that purely biological and psychological aspects of this phase influence adolescent decision-making. The physical changes of puberty, hormonal increases, and higher cognitive awareness combined with normal adjustments in social identity indisputably result in a time of instability for young people. Any one of these factors alone is sufficient to alter a child's certainty about faith. But it is important to look beyond physical, mental, social and emotional factors because these alone are unlikely to be responsible for the recent significant uptick in young people abandoning their parents' faith.

The fact that every generation in every culture has experienced similar natural changes but without the attrition indicates that other factors are involved. Natural changes alone do not explain the massive shift in young people choosing not to embrace church and faith commitments. Therefore the researcher focused on what makes these most recent generations in the western urban world unique. The researcher investigated the ways in which these younger generations have been influenced to live out a script significantly different from that of their parents and grandparents.

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[35] Santrock, 6.

Adult appearances versus child-like development. The first unique factor faced by today's young people is the tension between having an adult body and a child's brain. Teens today have the biological strength and physical development of adults but the mental, emotional, and social development of children. The physical appearance of adulthood increases the likelihood that teenagers will be pressured to behave like adults and suffer the same consequences for bad choices. But their childlike mental-emotional development makes it less likely that teens will be able to handle adult pressures and consequences.

In one sense this tension has always existed. After all, it is the basis for legally and scholastically categorizing teenagers separately from both children and adults. But what is new for current teens and twenty-somethings is the severe degree of this tension. Many social scientists believe that the process of physical maturation has changed over time, so that it now takes longer than it did just thirty years ago to develop an identity or sense of self that drives decisions, morality, and life choices. It has even been suggested that a twenty-three-year-old today is the mental and emotional developmental equivalent of a seventeen-year-old in 1980.[36]

Present emotional and mental growth contrasts more sharply than ever with an earlier onset of puberty. The decline in growth rate drops off significantly for girls at age twelve and for boys at age 15, leaving them with the basic physical framework they will carry into adulthood.[37]

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[36] Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 52-53.

[37] DeHart et al., 461.

At the same time, perceptions of physical growth among youth has become a liability to their overall wellbeing because they lack the social, mental, and emotional development that would enable them to handle the adult pressures. The danger of assuming adulthood in accordance with physical appearance during adolescence is ironically rooted in biology. The prefrontal cortex of the brain, which equips humans to use good reasoning, and the corpus callosum, which enables information processing, are not fully thickened at adolescence. Nor has the amygdala, the seat of human emotions, been fully mastered by young people. The underdevelopment of these parts of the brain makes it hard for adolescents to process consequences and make rational decisions that will impact them for the rest of their lives.[38]

The sharper-than-ever difference between adult outward appearance and childlike internal development leaves adolescents with a steep disadvantage. Unfortunately, adults themselves struggle to categorize young people who are facing this difference. Legal battles are fought in court daily over special laws concerning the emancipation, incarceration, and ultimately the social identity of 16- to 18-year-olds.[39]

This disparity between appearance and actual development makes it challenging for young people to take on lifelong faith commitments. Many are not emotionally and mentally prepared to adopt their parents' traditions and beliefs, and also fail to see the long-term consequences of abandoning faith. The impulse controls necessary to make mature decisions about faith practices are not yet in place.

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[38] Santrock, 92.

[39] Santrock, 6.

Shifting family dynamics. A second major factor contributing to attrition is the culture-wide sociological shift in North American family dynamics. In 1960 five percent of children were born to unmarried couples. In 2010 that number has skyrocketed to 41 percent.[40] Today half of all mothers with children aged one to five and more than two-thirds of mothers with children aged six to seventeen are in the labor force.[41] Children of divorced parents show poor social adjustment, with emotional problems including impulsive, irresponsible, and antisocial behavior, and even depression.[42] The epidemic of single parenting combined with the circumstance of both parents working outside the home has accelerated the onset of the developmental phase in which children begin to build their identities around peers versus families.

Increasingly children are growing up in a world where self-concept is more strongly associated with a network of friends than with the biological family. Even in traditional two-parent households, healthy childhood behavior involves pulling away from parental control to establish an identity with a sense of emotional autonomy.[43] But when this process begins too early, it can lead to loneliness and marked dissociation from family. Other side effects may include outbursts of dysfunctional behavior. According to the National Youth Suicide Prevention Center, approximately 200 United States teens attempt to take their own lives every hour.[44] Other contributing factors notwithstanding,

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[40] Kinnaman, 32.

[41] Santrock, 293.

[42] Santrock, 294.

[43] Santrock, 283-283.

[44] Neil T. Anderson and Rich Miller, *Leading Teens to Freedom in Christ*. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 7.

this high rate suggests that many youth are isolated from deep meaningful relationships that could sustain them in times of sadness.

Technological Expectations

Finally, technology has a negative influence on the social concept of what it means to be young. Youth are affected not only by direct face-to-face relationships but also by the portrayal of young people in the media. As for generations of adults, technology now confronts youth with images of physically attractive young people as representing the norm. Teens are bombarded with images of teens who appear to be physically perfect.

This poses a serious problem for young people struggling to cling to their faith, because in the United States the number one contributing factor for high self-esteem in adolescents is physical appearance.[45] The opportunity to compare appearances is increased enormously by technology. Young people now have constant and unrestrained access to images against which they can compare their own, which unsurprisingly challenges their ability to feel good about themselves.[46] For a long time adolescents have willingly admitted engaging in social comparison, which in itself can be damaging to one's self-image. The situation is exacerbated when social comparison expands to include the ubiquitous images delivered by technology.[47]

Comparison via media is especially misleading because the images of physical attractiveness represent only a very small percentage of the population. Furthermore, the

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[45] Santrock, 283.

[46] Santrock, 141.

[47] Santrock, 135.

images are often altered to appear even more perfect. In this way, technology has

redefined what it means to look like and be a young person. It is difficult for a young

person to grow up with a healthy self-concept.

The redefinition of youth brings increasing pressure to either live up to social

standards of physical attractiveness or seek approval via other forms of social acceptance.

Either direction can have dire consequences for retaining young people in traditional

church communities. The obsession with physical attractiveness can lead to the

embracing of superficial values. Equally undesirable, pursuing alternate forms of

acceptance may include negative behaviors that violate family norms.

The combined impact of these three social factors on the current generation of

young people has made the struggle for a sustained faith experience more challenging

than in previous generations. Kinnaman's research confirms this, showing that although

teenagers are the most engaged group of church participants, early young adults through

their late twenties are the least engaged (43 percent). After attending regularly as teens,

59 percent simply stop going to church.[48] Kinnaman asserts that issues like relational

alienation, cynicism toward authority, and the high level of information access among

youth all contribute to attrition from faith communities. His conclusions are drawn from

more than 200 studies done by the Barna Group in which more than 27,000 individuals

were interviewed on the topic of church attrition.[49] It is important to note that much of

the abovementioned research took place across the nation, and did not focus on urban

areas in particular. Nevertheless, it provides important insight into a generation-wide

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[48] Kinnaman, 22-23.

[49] https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/635-5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church#.Ujx21xabBgI.

problem, the "epidemic of young people leaving the evangelical church."[50] When urban

realities are taken into account, the picture is even more grim.

Urban Reality

Looking at all the difficulties that confront the present generation of adolescents,

the picture of youth attrition becomes even more challenging when observed through yet

another lens, urban realities in the United States. This project focused specifically on the

urban reality of Minneapolis, Minnesota, but to better understand the problem in

Minneapolis, this chapter examines general challenges faced by all urban centers.

Assets for Success Are Missing

Understanding the challenges of urban settings begins with identifying what is

missing. Most urban settings lack several key assets demonstrated by researchers to be

necessary for children to grow into healthy, responsible adults.

The Search Institute discovered marked differences between students who

develop into well-adjusted citizens and those who exhibit more behaviors considered

risky by the general population. The presence or absence of 40 assets can to a large extent

predict how children will turn out. The Search Institute study divided these assets into

two categories: internal assets based on an adolescent's attitude and external assets based

on environmental factors. External assets were divided into four categories: strong

support system, empowerment by adults, clear boundaries and expectations, and

constructive opportunities. Internal assets included a child's commitment to learning,

positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.[51]

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[50] Powell and Clark, 15.

[51] Holmen, 67-68.

Merton Strommen, founder of the Search Institute, asserts that when 25 of the 40

assets are present in an adolescent's life, the likelihood that the child will grow up with

strong faith commitments increases significantly.[52] These 40 assets are significant

because the urban crisis America now faces is lack of many assets youth need to develop

in a healthy way. In urban centers where these assets are missing, so are the tools

necessary to build healthy functioning adults.

Experts suggest that the picture is bleak for many urban dwellers is bleak, and

without these assets many adolescents are more likely to engage in behaviors that

undermine the growth of vibrant faith. Craig Ellison and Edward Maynard describe this

bleak picture:

> Cities are contexts of brokenness. Urban dwellers live in a vortex of stress.
> Alcohol and drugs claim the allegiance and destroy the lives of millions. Physical
> and sexual assault shatter the well-being of countless children and women.
> Poverty deprives masses of people with the basic resources for healthy living.
> Violence in the streets creates a pervasive climate of fear and mistrust. Intense
> competitions and greed foster interpersonal isolation and distance.[53]

These conditions make it is hard for children in urban faith communities to grow

into young adults who maintain faith practices.

The Christian church has made little meaningful or consistent progress in the

discussion about how to handle challenges to faith development faced by urban children.

One contributing problem is the lack of historical research on urban areas. Much of the

previous research regarding church attrition focused on suburban areas. Kara Powell and

Chap Clark, coauthors of *Sticky Faith*, a guide for retaining church members, admit that

much of their research is based on children from intact families and on larger-than-

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[52] Holmen, 70.

[53] Craig W. Ellison and Edward S. Manyard, *Healing for the City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 13.

average churches that can afford fulltime youth pastors.[54] Mark Holmen, the author of

Faith at Home and founder of the faith at home movement, and John Roberto, editor of

the journal publication *Lifelong Faith,* both acknowledge that research in this area falls

short of an accurate depiction of families in urban centers, which often fare worse than

their suburban counterparts.[55]

In spite of the dearth of research on urban church attrition, the researcher

undertook three main areas of study. They included cynicism toward authority, the

church's blindness to diversity, and the church's neglect of urbanites. All three challenge

the Christian church's efforts to encourage youth to follow Christ after their high school

years.

Cynicism toward Authority

Urban environments tend to foster cynicism toward authority among young

people, an attitude that equally targets church authority. Social ills such as crime, divorce,

domestic violence, and substance abuse produce high levels of anxiety and negatively

impact children's development of a sense of certainty. Self-determination theory

confirms that such environments are detrimental to a child's ability to grow into healthy

adulthood. It suggests that each individual comprises a whole, and if life is out of balance

in one area they will lack a structural coherency in other areas.[56]

When individuals experience heightened levels of threat from the external

environment, the Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal axis (HPA) is activated to increase

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[54] Powell and Clark, 21.

[55] Private conversations.

[56] Roehlkepartain, 266.

awareness of surroundings and divert blood away from the forebrain to the heart and

lower extremities. This increases the likelihood of a fight or flight response. In this state

the vessels that send blood to the slower processing part of the brain known as the

prefrontal cortex are constricted. The net effect is diminished ability to reflect

intelligently on a situation and assurance of a more rapid response time.[57]

The HPA is highly effective at handling acute stress, but was not designed for

continuous activation.[58] For example, high levels of stress in urban areas can cause

pregnant mothers to produce high levels of adrenaline, alerting the fetus of danger. The

fetus senses that the world is a dangerous place, and learns to be hypervigilant. In other

words, difference can be perceived as a significant threat. A high level of constant

caution diverts blood to areas of the brain geared toward survival, and away from areas

used for cognitive rumination and decision-making.[59] Long-term drawbacks exist for

individuals who live with a constant perception of potential victimization or under threat

of immediate danger. Their immune systems weaken and their physical, mental, and

emotional health diminish over a lifetime. The long-term likelihood of adjusting well to

adulthood and becoming a healthy, productive citizen are reduced.[60]

Although long-term health is negatively impacted in such situations, the sense of

threat can increase a child's motor skills. Given the importance of motor skills for

preparing against perceived threats, this is not surprising. It has been suggested that

African Americans develop much stronger motor skills in early childhood than their

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[57] Lipton, 152-154.

[58] Lipton, 152-154.

[59] Patterson, 129-130.

[60] Lipton, 156-158.

counterparts of European descent.[61] Although studies are not conclusive, the potential

link is not entirely unfounded given that most African Americans grow up in poor

communities where a state of chronic crisis reigns.

Life patterns in poor urban areas appear to perpetuate heightened threat level

preparedness. Often it is due to lack of resources required for survival. In her book

Unequal Childhoods, Annette Lareau describes how an urban child's hypervigilance is

perpetuated by parental stresses:

> Formidable economic constraints make it a major life task for these parents to put
> food on the table, arrange for housing, negotiate safe neighborhoods, take children
> to the doctor (often waiting for city buses to come), clean children's clothes, and
> get children to bed and have them ready for school the next morning.[62]

Children whose daily lives are subject to these patterns understandably develop a

cynical attitude about life in general. And cynicism about life often focuses on those

perceived to be in charge of life.

Children are impacted negatively or positively by the speech patterns used by

parents and caregivers. All parents use language to give children directives, but those

below poverty level and on welfare tend to stop talking after the directive is given while

working and professional class parents go on to explain their decisions to their children.[63]

Children's cognitive development and eventually scholastic success are therefore

affected, because the number of words a child hears impacts how well he or she does in

school.

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[61] Roehlkepartain, 37.

[62] Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods* (Los Angeles: University of California Press Berkeley,
2003), 2.

[63] Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Experiences in the Everyday Life of Young
American Children* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co., 1995).

A study done by the Providence Talks Program demonstrates that a child who grows up in a welfare household hears an average of 600 words an hour, while a child who grows up in a blue collar family hears 1,200 words an hour. Children in professional households hear an average of 2,100 words per hour. This disparity means that by the age of three a poor child has heard 30 million fewer words than children who grow up in professional households.[64]

Another effect of parental speech patterns is the way they mold a child's overall worldview. The language of a parent in continuous crisis often becomes the language of victimization. This shapes the child's understanding of life and its conditions. Growing up with the self-image of victim increases the need for self-protection in a child who already began life prepared for threat. This belief follows the child into adulthood.[65]

Children who grow up with an exaggerated threat assessment and a victim mentality often feel wariness toward or distance from other people. The environment itself creates distance between children and authority figures who are perceived as able to do something about life's threats. Those in power are more likely to be viewed with cynicism, and seen as blameworthy with regard to the problems in poor urban neighborhoods. Authority figures may be seen as failing to use their power to prevent common urban problems.

Cynicism follows children into young adulthood, and behaviors resembling victimization are perpetuated during social interactions. The cynicism developed toward education system authorities transfers to broader social institutions. Thus the cultural

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[64] http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/the-power-of-talking-to-your-baby/?_r=1.

[65] Lipton, *Spontaneous Evolution*, 61.

logic of childrearing in poverty-stricken urban neighborhoods is out of sync with the standards that make for successful interaction with social institutions. Instead of fostering positive attitudes toward these institutions, urban childrearing fosters distance, distrust, and strain in institutional experiences.[66]

Church efforts to retain young people are hindered by this distance and distrust. It happens because many churches set themselves up as spiritual, moral, and sometimes even political authority figures in their communities. But doing so creates a relational discord with young people who already struggle with cynicism toward all kinds of authority, and cynicism encourages outright resistance to church authority.

Middle class adolescents are raised to question adults and relate to them as equals, and do not feel as threatened by them. But children who grow up in poverty often distrust those in authority, according to Lareau.[67] Barna's research indicates that western adolescents in general resist authority. But how much more, Kinnaman argues, do children raised in urban environments resist authority.[68] It seems natural that a community of faith trying to set itself up as the moral authority would face more challenges in urban settings.

The Church's Blindness toward Diversity

North American cities include a great diversity of minority populations. Unfortunately, churches have not always recognized this diversity, nor have they modeled their programs to reach out to diverse groups and encourage them to embrace

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[66] Lareau, 3.

[67] Lareau, 2.

[68] Kinnaman, 55.

Christian faith for the long term. In many ways, the church's blindness to diverse groups reflects the larger pattern of minority treatment throughout America's history.

African Americans have been the central minority group for most of this country's history since their arrival on the first slave ship in 1619.[69] They have also been the most visible group in urban America over the last 50 years. African Americans so dominate the urban landscape that the researcher encountered individuals for whom the terms "black" and "urban" are synonymous.

African Americans are by no means the only prominent minority in urban America. Asians are the fastest growing population in United States cities. But despite immigrating more than 150 years before many Europeans and despite being held up as the "model minority," Asians are viewed as perpetual foreigners.[70] Latinos comprise the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States, and have clashed with the Caucasian population as far back as conflicts over states that once belonged to Mexico. All ethnic minorities in America have been treated with hostility at some time during the country's history. This includes Caucasian groups such as the early Irish and Italian immigrants, even though these have gradually since assimilated.

The blindness of urban churches toward diversity has made them unwilling and unable to address the various forms of oppression faced by minorities. When churches have an opportunity to advocate on behalf of the oppressed, many instead turn a blind eye. To understand this phenomenon, it is helpful first to understand the kinds of oppression against which minority groups have struggled. Oppression can be categorized

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[69] Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror* (Bay Back Books, 1993), 7.

[70] Takaki, 7-8.

as ideological, institutional, interpersonal, or internalized.[71] The first three lead directly to

the fourth form. Unfortunately, urban churches have failed not only to address the first

three forms of oppression throughout American history. Even with their powerful

message of freedom in Christ, urban churches have also failed to counteract internalized

oppression, the most devastating of all forms of oppression.

Ideological Oppression

Ideological oppression uses a powerful worldview designed to allow one group to

feel superior to another. Much research validates the unequal distribution of social power

based in ideological oppression. One of the pioneers in this area is Jane Elliot, an

elementary school teacher who popularized an experiment known as the "blue-eyed/

brown-eyed exercise."[72] In an attempt to explain racism to grade school students in

Riceville, Iowa the day after Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, she divided

her classroom into two groups. When Elliot told one group they were inherently superior

to the other due to their eye color, she noticed an almost immediate shift in behavior

among both groups. The suggested superior group was more academically astute and

focused in class while the suggested inferior group performed worse. The so-called

superior students used their newfound superiority to mistreat their so-called inferior

counterparts. But the greatest shock of all came the next day when Elliot claimed to have

made a mistake, and reversed the roles. The newly-empowered group shifted roles

immediately and began to mistreat their "inferior" counterparts. Even their teacher was

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[71] John Bell, Youth Build USA, https://youthbuild.org/sites/youthbuild.org/files/Four%20Is.pdf.

[72] "Jane Elliot Meets Foucault: The Formation of Ethical Identities in the Classroom," *Journal of Moral Education* vol. 32 Issue 1 (2003).

not exempt, as her eye color suggested that she was also less intelligent and therefore not fit to teach them.[73]

Institutional Oppression

Institutional oppression emerges from ideological oppression. It allows individuals with power to ensure that those without power understand their inferior role. Institutional oppression creates a stratified world of insiders and outsiders as a means of maintaining power. According to Ellison and Maynard, institutional racism has far-reaching effects for its victims:

> Racism affects every aspect of a minority person's life. For this reason it has been called institutional racism. Both prejudice (the racist attitude) and discrimination (the racist acts) touch the minority in his school, job, neighborhood, and everywhere else he may find himself.[74]

Sadly, institutional oppression still exists in the United States, even decades after the elimination of Jim Crow laws and passage of legislation to guarantee equal access to constitutional rights. Often more subtle, institutional racism manifests itself in the way many aspects of society are structured. What many majority individuals fail to realize is the fact that a city is a conglomerate of systems, all of which can work together to prevent minority access to a better life. Police, schools, hospitals, banks, health and human services, landlords, judges, business owners, and employers are all power brokers who can determine quality of life for many city-dwellers. If social institutions are filled with individuals who have been influenced by the mentality of ideological oppression, these individuals often unconsciously use their power to oppress minorities. In this way, institutions meant to promote municipal health become instruments of oppression.

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[73] http://www.uua.org/documents/gardinerwilliam/whiteness/racial_identity_journey.pdf.

[74] Ellison and Manyard, 88.

Robert Linthicum tells of an experience he had while a young college student in Los Angeles. He as Christian mentor to a young lady and encouraged her to remain faithful to Christ while he went home for summer break. When he returned he found her offering herself as a prostitute for gang members. When she cried out, "They (the gang) got me," he asked why she didn't resist. The young woman claimed she did resist until the gang attacked first her father and then her brother, who ended up in the hospital. When they threatened to gang-rape her mother, she agreed to prostitute for them. Linthicum naively asked why she didn't go to the police, to which she replied, "Bob, you white honkey, who do you think they are?"[75] Instead of promoting justice, the police were a force that prevented the young woman's access to justice. This represents the epitome of institutional oppression in America, long after Jim Crow is gone.

Interpersonal Oppression

Interpersonal oppression occurs when members of the dominant group internalize the racial biases informed by ideological and institutional oppression. In this form of oppression an individual from a more dominant group controls, belittles, or in some way perpetrates against a minority.

The recent case of Trayvon Martin is an example of interpersonal oppression. It involved the death of an African American teenager who was approached and followed by George Zimmerman while walking home from the store. The larger issue often ignored is the habit of assuming guilt merely on the basis of race,[76] a prominent cause of

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[75] Robert Linthicum, *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[76] http://www.thecrimereport.org/news/articles/2012-03-in-a-colorblind-society-did-trayvon-martin-have-a-ri.

interpersonal oppression. This type of thinking may have caused Zimmerman to approach an unarmed teenager with a loaded gun and ultimately end his life.

In 2004 by Jennifer Eberhardt and colleagues from Stanford University published an article based on five studies of the assumption of guilt. They drew three alarming conclusions. First, "black faces influence participants' ability to spontaneously detect degraded images of crime-relevant objects." In other words, it is hard to distinguish the face of a black person from crime-related items. Second, "Activating abstract concepts (i.e., crime and basketball) induces attentional biases toward Black male faces." Finally, people make unconscious decisions based their perception of a subgroup.[77]

Internalized Oppression

The final and often most damaging form of oppression is internalized oppression. It happens when individuals victimized by other forms of oppression internalize these messages. All oppression carries with it a message of inferiority and incapacity, and the worst consequence is victims who perpetrate oppression against themselves. When an individual's self-identity has been so damaged that he or she accepts it without conscious resistance, one of the greatest dangers is that he or she may even learn to defend it.

One example of internalized oppression is the way in which it identifies the standard of the dominant culture as the standard for beauty and public acceptance. In a famous study from the 1950s two black psychologists placed black dolls and white dolls in a room and asked black girls to choose the prettiest doll. Most chose a white doll. The

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[77] Jennifer L. Eberhardt, Phillip Atiba Goff, Valerie J. Purdie, and Paul G. Davies, "Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87 no. 6 (December 2004), 876-893.

girls' low self-esteem was thought to demonstrate the detrimental effects of racism and the denigrating experiences many minorities experience early in life.[78]

Internalized oppression has negative consequences for faith retention. Charles Duhigg points out that individuals who are treated poorly and given less autonomy develop less willpower and are more susceptible to giving in to impulses even when they conflict with matters of faith.[79] Therefore, it should come as no surprise when urban minorities who face lifelong institutional oppression fail to maintain faith commitments into adulthood. Their repeated experiences of oppression tend to render them less able to control their impulses, which draws them into relationships and surrender to social pressure that encourages promiscuous behavior. The relationship teenagers have with God can often be hampered by their desire to follow their impulses. Many teens get caught in lifestyles that make it convenient to leave faith communities that make them feel guilty for their behavior.

In his book *Reconciliation* Curtis DeYoung states that "the reason [that faith] often acts as a dividing wall rather than a uniting force is that instead of modeling the inclusiveness of Jesus Christ, it has mirrored the exclusiveness of society."[80] He goes on to describe how America has had a racist, sexist, classist faith that demonstrates the hypocrisy of the United States and the church.[81] Though much of America is moving forward in the discussion of race relations, the institutional churches remain mired in the discussions of the past.

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[78] Ellison and Manyard, 88.

[79] Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2012), 151.

[80] Curtis DeYoung, *Paul: Reconciliation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 33.

[81] DeYoung, 34.

The Neglect of Urbanites

Perhaps more devastating than urban cynicism toward authority and worse than blindness to the challenges of diversity is the American church's hypocrisy when living out its mission to urbanites. This hypocrisy causes even the adolescents raised in the church to question the legitimacy of the church's claims. The outright neglect of urbanites reinforces dissent in young people and fuels their resistance.

When great cities first began to emerge in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s, Christians joined the anti-urban bias against the city.[82] They actually advocated that people flee cities as part of their devotion to Christ. However, during the Civil War American Protestantism experienced significant growth, much of it in the city.[83] Evangelist Dwight L. Moody was quoted as saying, "Waters run down hill,"[84] meaning that as inevitable as water heading downhill, so was the growth of the American city.

But all this soon changed as the evangelical salvation message became more heavily geared toward escaping the acts of sin rather than addressing the human condition of sin. The city quickly became a chief culprit and came to be viewed as perpetuating sinful activity, with many claiming that moral purity was impossible to maintain in such an environment. Moody reversed his earlier approval of cities and became disturbed to the point of exclaiming, "the city is no place for me … and if it were not for the work I am called to do, I would never show my head in this city [New York] or any other

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[82] Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 161.

[83] Conn, 59.

[84] Conn, 60.

again."[85] The evangelical church became infatuated with the "gospel of sin management," according to Dallas Willard. This religious ideology was organized around strategies to deal with the lingering negative effects of a guilt-ridden conscience.[86]

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the developing theology of many evangelicals only grew in its anti-urban bias. This created a chasm between the church and the city.[87] Ray Bakke faced this challenge directly when he realized that God had called him to urban ministry in the 1960s. During this time he came across an article entitled "Can Evangelicals Survive the City?" The article claimed that the Bible was a rural book and that God began things in a garden. God favors shepherds, who are inherently rural, and even good shepherds get into trouble when they go into Jerusalem.[88] What began as cultural resistance toward urbanism came to deeply permeate the white evangelical church, causing the church to shift from active social involvement to private prayer and personal evangelism as the primary means of coping with the problems of the city.[89] This shift was reinforced as the American church also bought heavily into the cultural narrative of segregation and individualism. The Wesleyan gospel of touching the sick, the orphan, the widow, the imprisoned, and the hungry was rejected.

Evangelical churches in general have adhered to this attitude from the 1920s, escaping the city whenever possible. When the automobile became a common mode of transportation, suburban populations began to explode. Residents of major United States

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[85] Conn, 60.

[86] Gary Black, Jr., *The Theology of Dallas Willard* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 148.

[87] Conn, 61.

[88] Bakke, *Theology*, 22.

[89] Conn, 89-90.

cities did have reason to fear because crime had become an entrepreneurial endeavor during the 1920s. But fear increased irrationally as many African Americans migrated north looking for work and education and settled mainly in more affordable inner city neighborhoods, even while whites fled further and further to city perimeters.

Southern cities also saw their share of African Americans swelling their ranks. But with the ubiquity of segregation in the South and antipathy toward blacks, southern cities became checkerboards of distinct neighborhoods sharply divided along racial lines. Residents of one segregated neighborhood declared, "There is nothing like the make-up of a Negro, physically or mentally, which should induce anyone to welcome him as a neighbor. … Niggers are undesirable neighbors and entirely irresponsible and vicious."[90] In both the North and the South, minorities were kept at arm's length. White Christian churches followed their white congregants in resettling as far as possible from minorities.

Many urban areas have been abandoned by the white evangelical church. In Minneapolis alone more than 70 white evangelical churches have relocated to the suburbs since the early 1970s.[91] Disdain for the city has essentially begun a culture war between the American church and urban areas. As in any war, many churches out of fear adopt the language of warfare in their battle against the city. They call the city "the world" and declare it to be the enemy, insisting that their parishioners and their children take sides and exercise care not to take on any cultural identities. To foster a sense of protection from "the world," religious walls must be erected to determine on which side people grant their loyalty.

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[90] Conn, 78.

[91] Art Erickson, Guest lecture for Introductions to Urban Studies Class (North Central University, March 2009).

The church's anti-urban bias has diminished its credibility as a witness for Christ in the city. This Christ-versus-culture ideology assumes that youth must choose either Christ or the culture with which they closely identify. Ray Bakke argues that this neglect stems from two main elements of urban culture misunderstood and mishandled by the American church: power and pluralism.[92]

Power

At the center of Christian theology is the God of the universe who humbled Himself and gave up power. He first became a servant and then made the ultimate sacrifice by sending His son to die for the sins of humanity that they might inherit eternal life. In his letter to the Philippians Paul urged believers to have the same Spirit within them that was also within Christ Jesus who refused to grasp power but chose to humble himself that others might be served (Phil. 2:5-11). In contrast, Jesus' enemies represented political, religious, and cultural power. Thus Jesus' humility represented an intolerable threat against the values, politics, and spirituality of the day, all of which revolved around power. For this reason the authorities killed him, even though he broke no civil or criminal laws.[93]

Cities are places of power. Their institutions wield power over the daily lives of their inhabitants. "Their centripetal magnetism draws social, cultural, economic, and political activities into their geographical orbit."[94] Just as power is drawn to cities, those

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[92] Ray Bakke, "The Global Urban Era" (lecture, Bakke Graduate University Seattle Washington, January 2005).

[93] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 109-110.

[94] Conn and Ortiz, 193.

in power tend to draw more of it to themselves, justifying all manner of questionable activity in its pursuit.

Urban churches also take part in power and its pursuit when they set themselves up as the final spiritual and moral authority. But most often it happens in a far more subtle way when they cultivate a community of legalism that creates an artificial sense of connectedness. Members' strict adherence to a code of rules sets them apart from nonmembers. This certainly brings them closer together,[95] but it is actually based on the same grab for power exhibited by the city's other institutions. The strict code is a way to differentiate who is "in" and who is "out." It is a way to clarify how a church group is more powerful than those around it, and who inside the group has the most power. Those in the group feel empowered and those outside feel powerless.

All this power grabbing comes at a great cost to the church that would retain its young adults. By playing with this form of urban power, churches often erect barriers against young people who can only be attracted by the same humble spirit Jesus displayed. An urban church that bases inclusion on overly strict standards leaves little room for the grace and forgiveness that young people often require. According to Bakke, "Nearly all barriers are created by church politics, policies, priorities, or personalities, and not by the big bad city itself."[96]

When confronted with a self-important church clinging to power just like any worldly institution might, the already disempowered urban youth feel impossibly shut out from power and its exercise. They see no hope of ever penetrating the church's labyrinth

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[95] Mark Baker, *Religious No More* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 20.

[96] Conn and Ortiz, 197.

of exclusionary barriers to become part of the "in" crowd. Most respond to this feeling by simply refusing to conduct themselves in a way that feels disloyal to their identity. An example might be refusing to give up street clothing for the strict and formal dress code of church insiders. This in turn leads to further ostracism from the church's favor.

Urban youth experience a continuous daily fight to know God because the shame with which they struggle creates a wall that comes to feel impenetrable. They have no hope of ever breaking into the powerful elite of the church. So what young urbanites need is a church that humbly includes them despite their struggles instead of a church that consolidates its own power through adherence to a strict code of behavior.

Pluralism

In the city there is no approved pattern of belief or conduct. Society is not controlled by a single dogma but a system that inspects each claim of control with a critical (and even skeptical) examination.[97] Harvie Conn says this pluralism creates a chaotic jumble, and humanity in urban areas "seems caught in an insecurity traceable to the arbitrariness of the gods."[98] This applies to the religious landscape of the city, which contrasts sharply with the religious simplicity of rural America. There, religion is caught in the singular narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. But in urban areas religion is now practiced in a timeless world with timeless truths and all people have different places of revelation and communication.[99]

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[97] Newbigin, 1.

[98] Conn and Ortiz, 182.

[99] Newbigin, 2.

In the face of this chaotic urban pluralism and despite the great diversity of beliefs around the globe, Christianity claims that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:5-6). This insistence on religious exclusivity has become a stumbling block for Christian adolescents who grow up surrounded by peers who worship in vastly different ways. This proves highly troublesome for churches seeking to retain their young people.

Understanding this problem must begin with a distinction between plurality and pluralism. Plurality is the understanding that many beliefs can coexist peacefully, despite their differences. On the other hand, pluralism is a systematic belief in the pluralistic ideology.[100] It goes beyond peaceful coexistence, claiming that all truth and practices are equally valid and seeking to celebrate this condition. In a plurality, Christianity's legitimate claim to the gospel's exclusive nature can exist side by side with other claims of truth. It can "earn its right to sit at the table" of ideas, so to speak, and be part of discussions alongside other belief systems without sacrificing its integrity.

But the western evangelical church has historically rejected the discussion of plurality. Rather than engaging with society alongside other belief systems, it has refused to even acknowledge their existence. Christians have joined secularists in accepting the stereotype that the city is a wasteland of concentrated chaos and disorder.[101]

The difficulty this creates for urban youth is that while the church resists conversations about religious diversity, ethnic diversity is accelerating. It is a daily reality for youth in their schools, sports, and social settings. The question that arises for the

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[100] Newbigin, 14.

[101] Conn and Ortiz, 168.

young Christian is how to maintain faith in an exclusive God when surrounded by a diversity that constantly negates this.

Young people's struggle to stay connected to Christian faith is compounded by the way in which American evangelicals have made their cultural identity synonymous with their religious identity. They embrace more than just a religious understanding of Christ but also a cultural understanding of Him. Evangelicals in America locate their identity not just in their faith but also in certain social, political, economic, and regional specifications. Thus it has become a movement that expands beyond belief in Christ and extends to cultural identity.[102]

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith refer to this belief system as "engaged orthodoxy."[103] People are considered to be orthodox in their faith if they are properly "engaged" in the evangelical subculture with all its characteristics. This acts as a barrier to young people who have difficulty relating to the evangelical subculture. They ask whether they must adopt this culture to be truly Christian. The many alternative cultures to which the Christian adolescent is exposed daily highlights the inadequacies of the Christian subculture. Adopting it appears even more foolish in light of the daily bombardment with examples of peers who change cultural practices and identities as easily as one might change clothes. If other young people can so nonchalantly switch cultural allegiances, why cannot the Christian?

The church's mishandling of power and pluralism have been major sources of its neglect of urbanites. The good news is that urban dwellers are hungry for high-quality

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[102] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

[103] Emerson and Smith.

relationships that are long-lasting. If the Christian church can overcome its historic patterns of pursuing power and its insecurity about plurality, it may be possible to have an impact on the youth who are leaving the church because of the blatant distortion of Christ's message of reconciliation.[104]

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[104] Bakke, 43.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to investigate the phenomenon of urban youth abandoning the faith traditions of their Christian parents. The researcher attempted to discover whether urban churches can reverse this trend and help parents to pass their faith on to the next generation. The intent was to identify ways parents and churches can work together. Qualitative research was used, in the form of semiformal interviews of church leaders in the urban setting of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The project examined how local church leaders' attitudes and feelings contribute to youth attrition from their faith communities. Interviews of urban pastors asked whether urban youth in faith communities have been culturally, socially, or spiritually prepared to sustain their faith in a contemporary urban setting.

Data was analyzed for themes to examine the different perspectives and their impact on the style of leadership used by church leaders and its subsequent impact on youth. The research sought to identify leadership models that might leave urban youth less vulnerable when assimilating into the larger culture and less likely to abandon their faith as they enter into adulthood.

Ultimately the researcher intends to develop an action plan that reflects a Bible-based model for transmitting Christian faith to all people, with particular focus on young adults living in pluralistic urban societies.

The Reason for Lead Pastors

The researcher engaged directly with pastors because of a firm belief that youth will be retained if pastors are open and willing to bring change to how faith is cultivated in the hearts of youth. The second group interviewed was youth workers, who tend to have more direct contact with youth. The high level of turnover among youth workers, urban churches' limited resources to employ youth workers, and the lack of support many youth workers suffer from require assistance from senior church leadership. The third group interviewed was other leaders most able to create supportive systems with a greater impact on the target group, even though they may not work directly with youth.

The Tools

The semiformal interview was designed to allow interviewees to explore the topic more openly and express their opinions in their own words.[1] The semi-structured interview enabled the researcher to elicit information in a consistent manner but with freedom to clarify, digress, and expand when the topic merited more time.[2] The goal was to build rapport with senior church leaders while gathering information in four distinct areas. Rapport allowed the interviewees to disclose detailed perspectives when responding to the process-oriented questions.[3] The topic of youth attrition or even adult attrition often produces a sense of shame among senior leaders. Leaders who lose followers often take it personally, as an indictment of poor leadership. This topic is sensitive because it has a tendency to appear accusatory, suggesting that someone is at

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[1] Kristin Estenberg, *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*, 87.

[2] Bruce Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon Publishing), 95.

[3] Crestwell, 117.

fault for this cultural phenomenon. Constructive dialogue was critical; therefore the researcher asked curiosity-based questions to extract the data necessary to create a productive model.

Of the sixteen strategies for purposeful sampling advanced by Miles and Hunerman the researcher chose three: extreme or deviant, criterion, and typical case.[4]

Criterion: First the researcher sought to ensure the data would have a consistent pattern to measure against. Therefore the researcher chose pastors who had been in ministry for more than five years, had previous experience as youth pastors, and had dealt with constituencies of primarily urban communities.

Typical Case: Second the researcher wanted to discover what was typical or normal in urban church settings in terms of attrition and approaches to dealing with the situation. For this purpose the questions were very open-ended and uniform in order to learn the interviewee's brief history, concerns, and steps taken to deal with the topic at hand.

Extreme Deviant: The researcher also looked for any deviant patterns that would point to a better way of handling the epidemic.

The initial phase of the interview often involved asking whether pastors had noticed a trend among their youth. Pastors were unanimously pleased to discuss their concerns about youth, and without exception, each had given previous thought to this dilemma. The researcher encouraged open discussion to evaluate leaders' awareness of the nationwide epidemic trend in youth attrition from Christian faith communities. The initial discussion also gauged leaders' insight into their perception of the gravity of the

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[4] Crestwell, 118-119.

problem. The conversation began with citation of the research done on the subject of

American youth attrition from the Christian faith. Church leaders were asked whether the

urban setting entailed a different set of issues than the research settings, and whether they

thought this would affect outcomes. The researcher left himself open to the possibility

that one of the communities of faith with which he intended to speak might be an

anomaly and not suffering the same level of youth attrition most churches in America are

facing.

The Questions

Before each interview the researcher discussed the nature of and aspirations for

the study to familiarize the pastor with the content being researched and studied.[5] A set of

questions had been sent in advance by email to each study participant; however, only two

actually took time to read it and only one answered the questions. The first group of

questions focused on the pastor's philosophy and how it helped define his values.[6] Using

the pastor's personal background, the researcher asked about the leader's process and

experience to detect common approaches to the problem. The researcher also looked for

variances based on the factual knowledge of the lead pastor. Then the researcher probed

into the leader's true feelings and asked about the results of their current program and

resource allocations for the youth program.[7]

The interviews included four areas of questioning. First, the philosophy questions

sought direct understanding of what leaders feel about the areas of faith development for

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[5] Creswell, 122-123.

[6] Estenberg, 95.

[7] Estenberg.

children. These questions enabled the researcher to discern senior leaders' philosophy and attitude toward the issue of youth attrition, and gave insight into their traditions, history, and personal experiences. Leaders were then able to open up about the factors that contribute to diminishing faith in the lives of youth. Philosophy questions told the researcher who lead pastors ultimately blame or hold responsible for faith commitment among youth beyond their high school years. The answers also provided insight into their level of concern about the issue. Finally the first set of questions helped the researcher identify each leader's willingness and ability to take action.

The second group of questions was designed to gain perspective on processes currently in place to introduce faith to children as well as how they are supported throughout their life experiences through graduation from high school. The researcher sought to understand the programs and processes in place to support faith development, the assessments or tools used to analyze these processes, and leaders' ideas for improving processes. These questions were designed to identify the level of intentionality in senior leaders' overall vision as well as the ministry to empower children to live as disciples of Christ throughout their lives. Information about monetary investments in efforts to train up children in Christian faith was also requested in this section.

The third group of questions asked for senior leaders' perspective on trend variances based on household makeup. The researcher wished to investigate distinctions in processes and programs in place to serve the diverse forms of families more often found in urban settings. These include fatherless families, grandparents raising children, and foster care, where family dynamics can challenge traditional assumptions about faith development in the family. The researcher sought to discover whether different

approaches to faith development exist for children not being raised by both biological parents. Further, the researcher wished to determine whether leaders noticed trends in faith sustainability among individuals from different socioeconomic classes.

With the final group of questions the researcher sought to understand whether church budget resource allocations align with stated priorities. It is common for churches to assert the importance of faith formation for children, yet fail to allocate resources accordingly. The researcher wished to examine whether leaders viewed resource allocation as a reflection of their priorities.

First the content was analyzed using interview audio, the interviewee's written responses to questions, and the researcher's written notes from the interview. The goal of this content analysis was to look for themes in the text, often by searching for word patterns.[8] However, the researcher looked more for the meaning behind the text than the content of the text. Many of the leaders interviewed had very clear thoughts and shared detailed information as well as stories to clarify their meaning.

The researcher contacted more than a dozen local urban pastors from different denominations, diverse ethnicities, and different socioeconomic backgrounds. Next the selection was narrowed down to a few that fit certain criteria. First the researcher chose urban church pastors in the Twin Cities area with a reputation for having had substantial youth attendance at some point in their history. The pastor must have been directly responsible for the youth at a previous ministry, which gives them a unique perspective on the issue and the nature of the challenges. The pastors were selected from different Christian denominations. Finally, congregations were selected for having very low youth

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[8] Estenberg, 171.

engagement and youth ministry attendance at present. The following section briefly describes the history of each church, personal context of the lead pastor, and current condition of the youth ministry.

City View Church/Converge Worldwide – Pastor Walt McFadden

Pastor Walt McFadden has served in ministry for more than 35 years in the Phillips and Powederhorn neighborhoods. For more than 20 years he served as Youth Associate Pastor at Christ Church. After completing his internship at Christ Church and graduating from North Central University he began his ministry in the urban community of South Minneapolis. Walt and his wife Lori worked faithfully to reach the children of Christ Church, but became discontent with the ministry's focus on in-reach. In 1989 Walt decided to reach out to the community, and his youth ministry began to take on new life.

By 1992 Christ Church had one of the largest youth ministries in South Minneapolis, averaging more than 200 youth on Sunday nights. The influx of community youth made some Christ Church parents uncomfortable. Many departed to other churches where they could associate with a more familiar demographic. This development not only emboldened Walt to become even more aggressive in community outreach, but also defined his calling to serve for the rest of his life. After almost two decades of youth pastoring, Walt accepted an associate pastor's role at Central Community Church with the understanding that he would be the next lead pastor. In 2008 Walt was selected as lead pastor of Central Community Church and the name was changed to City View Church. The congregation currently meets at 26th and Bloomington in the Blue Earth/ Phillips community in South Minneapolis. According to City Vision "the Phillips neighborhood is the most diverse neighborhood in America with 100+ languages

spoken."[9] City View Church has hired a youth pastor who currently sees 20 to 30 youth weekly, of which nine to twelve are from the congregation.

Christ Church International/Assembly of God - Pastor Darrell Geddes

Pastor Darrell Geddes is from Chicago, Illinois. After graduating from North Central University he moved back to Chicago to lead a youth ministry at South Side Worship Center Assembly of God. Two years later he planted a church in Little Rock, Arkansas where he served for three years. He then returned to Chicago to oversee the youth ministry and serve as senior associate pastor. After five years he was invited to launch the urban ministry degree program at North Central University. In 2001 Pastor Geddes was voted in as interim pastor of Christ Church International, and invited to stay on as lead pastor after a year.

Christ Church was a predominately white church from its inception in 1920 until 1999 when they merged with Northeast Assembly, a young and diverse congregation. During the merger process a cultural conflict arose which terminated most of the pastors' employment, and Pastor Geddes came in as a peacemaker to bring reconciliation to a divided body. Under the direction of this researcher the youth ministry grew to more than 300, with an average weekly attendance of 125 students. The congregation now includes about 20 youth, about half of whose parents attend worship on Sundays. (Disclosure: Christ Church has been the researcher's home church for more than 15 years and Pastor Geddes is his father-in-law.)

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[9] John Mayer. http://www.cityvisiontc.org/shtml/glocal.shtml. (accessed December 2014)

Living Word Church and World Outreach Ministries/
Pentecostal - Pastor Lesley Ford

Pastor Lesley Ford grew up in First Church of God in Christ in St. Paul, where he was in charge of many programs including the youth. After serving many years Lesley and his wife Rosella set out to plant a church, and during the first three years the congregation grew to more than 100 weekly attendees. Once Pastor Ford was meeting with denominational leaders from the Church of God in Christ, and had to handle matters in another office. He overheard a conversation (unintentionally using speakerphone) in which the leaders were discussing how they should demand more money from him because of his success. Pastor Ford was offended and subsequently left the Church of God in Christ to serve as independent pastor of a Pentecostal congregation.

The researcher served at Living Word Church in St. Paul during his college years and led the youth ministry for four years. For nearly two decades the youth ministry thrived under many different leaders and averaged between 100 and 400 youth per week. Over the last decade youth engagement has dropped significantly, with fewer than 20 now attending weekly. Current leaders include Pastors Lesley and Rosella Ford, Assistant Pastors Lesley Ford III and Lesley Ford IV, and youth leader LaVonne Gardner Guerra.

Refuge Christian Center/Church of God in Christ - Pastor Marcus Cage

Pastor Marcus Cage grew up in North Minneapolis and attended Trinity Tabernacle where he served as youth minister for several years. He attended college at St. Cloud State University, where he became interested in business administration. During his college years Marcus abandoned his faith and remained in St. Cloud after graduation. Several years later the conviction of the Spirit drew Marcus back to the Twin Cities and he renewed his faith commitment. With his life transformed he returned to the Twin

Cities and attended Free at Last Church of God in Christ where he met and married his wife. A few years he felt called to pastor a church, and returned to Trinity Tabernacle and served as youth minister for two years before he planted Refuge Christian Center.

Refuge Christian Center has a natural affinity for young ladies. The pastor tries to use his passion for basketball and football to establish relationships with young adult men in order to grow his church. The youth ministry included nearly 45 youth at one time and now has five who attend regularly.

Urban Jerusalem/Independent Evangelical - Pastor Stacey Jones

Pastor Stacey Jones is a transplant from New Jersey. He moved to Minnesota to attend Crown College where he met his wife Tryenyse. They served together for a few years as youth associates under Mark Jensen at Believers in Christ Ministries. The congregation quickly became an assemblage of musical, graffiti, and lyrical artists who were often shunned by traditional congregations. In the heart of North Minneapolis the Joneses serve the most abandoned individuals where incomes are lowest and crime rates are highest in the state of Minnesota. After about two years Pastor Mark accepted a teaching position at Northwestern College and gave the church over to Pastor Jones.

As Christian recording artists Pastors Stacey and Tryenyse have held Saturday night services that reflect music concerts over the last seven years. When they first took over the church, youth came from all over the city; currently fewer than five attend regularly. The congregation includes very few traditional two-parent biological families, so the pastors work hard to model family commitment and the hard work of living life in Christ together.

Finding Vital Behaviors

During the process of data collection the researcher looked for opportunities and key indicators to move toward transformation change. Everett Rogers describes this process as diffusion, and defines it as an innovation communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system.[10] Many social scientists have studied the process of bringing large-scale change to social systems, and often it centers on discovering and implementing the right behaviors. "The breakthrough discovery of most influence geniuses is that enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviors."[11] Although the interview questions were open-ended, the process often required further questions in order to look for solutions based on the pastors' unique experiences.

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[10] Everett Rogers, *Diffusions of Innovation,* 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2005), 11.

[11] Kerry Patterson, *Influencer*.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Chapter 5 is the reporting of the data of through the summation of the interviews. Themes that emerged are identified and analyzed at the conclusion.

Interview 1: Pastor Stacey Jones, Urban Jerusalem, North Minneapolis

Pastor Jones confessed that not until recently did they begin taking an intentional approach to ministering directly to children and youth. As an urban church with a hip hop culture, they believed that youth would naturally come and participate. Within the last couple years, Pastor Jones has become more convinced than ever of the need for a process that will engage children from birth. He said his epiphany came from reflecting on his own son. Pastor Jones and his wife began praying, singing songs, and speaking words of life over their son when he was in the womb, and it occurred to him that many of his parishioners did not have a lifelong vested interest in their children's faith development.

Pastor Jones reflected on his own life experience and stated that from the moment of his birth he experienced "hell and dysfunction." His resolve to introduce faith to his child grew out of his refusal to allow his son to repeat these experiences. During his son's upbringing Pastor Jones has discovered the powerful impact of association with other children on his child. He decided that to be successful in raising his son, he needed to establish a process that would impact the other boys and girls who attend his church.

Urban Jerusalem has completed the first step in this process, which was to determine how much could be done with limited resources and time. Parents of children from birth to age 18 often attend Urban Jerusalem once or twice a month. At present there is no adult willing to leave the worship service in order to watch over the children, nor resources to pay someone to do it. Because of limited resources and capacity they have instituted faith mentors in the congregation who will walk with students aged 13 to 18. This will ensure that every child has an adult who cares for and connects with them.

The next step was to establish relationships that support parents, especially single mothers. The Joneses spend a considerable amount of time cultivating relationships with other community organizations whose purpose is to support parents. They recommend places where parishioners can attend parenting skills classes, communication courses, and advocacy programs for the criminal justice system. These community relationships are invaluable in helping the congregation develop practical skills, due the fact that the church is limited in space, resources, and spiritually mature individuals.

One of the bright spots was that of all the congregations Urban Jerusalem had one of the highest rates of faith retention among youth after their high school years. According to Pastor Jones, 65 percent of the youth who attended their church are still living for Christ. Though displeased with the 35 percent currently abandoning their faith, he realizes this rate is better than average for the urban environment.

When asked why his retention rate was higher than that of the other urban pastors the researcher spoke with, Pastor Jones gave three reasons. First he believes many youth stick with their faith because Urban Jerusalem is in one of Minneapolis' poorest communities. His constituency's needs are so plentiful that it provides opportunities to

cultivate authentic relationships and creates a platform to speak life into them. The church's tutoring, literacy classes, and addiction support groups even for teens help youth become comfortable just spending time at the church.

Pastor Jones' second reason for the higher percentage of youth retention is philosophical. He asserted that many other churches are very rigid in their view of faith development. Once a young person engages in behavior perceived as a threat, the church often acts out of fear rather than love. Pastor Jones admits, "One reason my numbers are higher is because I don't count them out due to behavioral issues they may be experiencing at the time; I choose not to judge and cast them out when they fail." For Pastor Jones to be convinced that a young person has abandoned his or her faith, they must tell him so. Otherwise he considers them in the fold and will not walk away from them. Pastor Jones believes that when churches prematurely reject youth whose behavior does not reflect the church's general understanding of Christian values, the young person's faith is damaged further and in many cases the harm is irreparable.

The final reason Pastor Jones believes a higher percentage of Urban Jerusalem's youth maintain their faith is the way they contextualize hip hop to speak truth to a generation that craves blunt honesty in a word of political correctness. The worship service format is very open and inviting. One week the worship service may be a concert, the following week an interactive talk show panel, the following week a guest speaker. In these open talks with the congregation where no topic is prohibited many youth feel comfortable exploring their faith in the company of safe people as opposed to exploring it in settings where they may be pressured to abandon it.

Some of the church's proudest moments are when one of their students makes the honor roll. One of the most challenging is when that same honor roll student becomes pregnant. In the absence of a stable family structure they believe it is more difficult to attempt to make students avoid certain "sins" and much more effective to try to with the help of God make them whole. Urban Jerusalem hopes to acquire the necessary resources and space to expand the programs they offer to youth in the community, at the same time acknowledging that more needs to be done for the youth in the church.

Of all the challenges that impact the youth of Urban Jerusalem the use of familial language is the most difficult. Pastor Jones gave the example of a suburban college student in a youth Bible study who tried to communicate God as Father to girls who had no concept of a good father. Ultimately the challenge is to reframe ideas that are core to the Christian faith and translate them for a broken human race.

Pastor Walt McFadden from City View Church

Pastor McFadden believes that the overall philosophy of faith development for youth requires strong fathers in the home. He believes that if he can connect fathers' hearts with their children then faith becomes simple. He notes that although it does not make the faith journey easy (because there is nothing easy about faith), it does make it simple in that it gives youth a model for what faith looks like when it is lived out. Trying to live out faith and discover the goodness of your Heavenly Father is difficult for those who are lost and despondent over the lack of connection with their earthly father.

City View Church has an almost 50/50 gender split between men and women, which they believe to be a much higher male ratio than in other churches. Pastor McFadden believes his deliberate choice to preach to men and challenge them is one of

the core reasons for his success among men. Twice a year he preaches specifically on manhood, he puts on retreats for men, and he challenges them in their relationships with their children. "It's not just a man thing; I preach manhood to the entire congregation because women must also embrace the role of fathers in families in order to restore and bring healing to the family." According to Pastor McFadden, in urban areas the woman's role is typically more dominant, and the role of the father is not only rare but also becoming extinct. For this reason he puts strong emphasis on the restoration of manhood in his attempt to reach out to the youth.

The genesis of Pastor McFadden's belief is very personal; he grew up in a home with what he calls a "weak father" and "dominant mother." His mother was both physically and emotionally abusive toward him and his siblings, which made it difficult to live out life as a man. It was in his faith community that men began to speak into Pastor McFadden's life and help reshape the way he saw himself. This convinced him that if men were who they were supposed to be in the home it could have a lasting impact on the next generation.

When Pastor McFadden met and married his wife Lori, she already had a 14-year-old son. This proved to be a great challenge, because his wife's son wasn't looking for another father besides his abusive biological father. Pastor McFadden loved the young man as his own and watched how a father's love could win over a young man confused about life, parenting, and what it means to be a man. Although it wasn't easy, over time his wife's son came to call him "dad," and now that he's a grown man the two of them have a very tight bond.

In reflecting on the relationships that made a difference in his life, Pastor McFadden said it was frustrating that he had to seek them out. He believes that in a community of faith it should be the other way around—there should be a culture that helps young men find their way when their biological father is absent or seldom seen. Pastor McFadden's goal at City View is for every young man to have a mentor. He is so convinced of the importance of this that he attends their weekly young men's groups himself. He feels that he has created a culture where young men feel encouraged and validated as soon as they walk in the door. Many churches seem to be afraid to ask men to get involved, perhaps in fear they will leave. When they don't provide a platform for men to be useful, the men become bored and leave. Putting men to work early and often helps them gain a sense of identity within the church, which strengthens their commitment to the church.

This level of attrition among youth from the Christian faith was minimal 50 years ago. When asked why he thought this generation in particular are leaving in such large numbers, Pastor McFadden said it has a lot to do with society's failing to train young men to be accountable and responsible for themselves and their children. Young men live in their parents' home longer and marry later, which extends their adolescence. Our culture has no standard right of passage into manhood, and in urban settings the problem is compounded by beliefs that fathering children, taking lives, and having countless sexual encounters with women are trophies of manhood. This contrasts sharply with trying to figure out how to remain committed to one's faith.

Pastor McFadden said unequivocally that the greatest difference between youth who remain faithful and those who walk away is the presence of a strong godly father

figure. Although he acknowledged that there are exceptions, he believes a strong father figure provides the best fortification for youth attempting to navigate life's tricky waters while remaining faithful to their Christian faith. Pastor McFadden admitted that many children with strong father figures abandon their faith during their college years, but these often find their way back to Christ because of the impression made by their father while they were growing up.

According to Pastor McFadden one of the key elements missing in most churches and something he is trying to implement at City View Church is to see Christ modeled in everyday life. He believes that American culture is not truly Christian but simply retains a shadow of Christian memories. Pastor McFadden feels that the reason many immigrants are not attracted to Christianity is because the shallow watered-down versions of faith that Americans live out are discouraging to any seeker. The value that Christ lived out was to connect life to life and continue expanding until everyone is reached.

Pastor McFadden described being newly engaged in a process of more intentional focus on families' faith development. The church has always offered small groups in hopes of impacting families in a significant way. But unfortunately many single-parent families don't always feel comfortable with in groups led by two-parent households. Pastor McFadden finds that when single parents (especially mothers) connect with married families, they compare themselves and often feel ashamed. He has to walk a fine line between not shaming people for imperfect parenting before marriage and not being ashamed to hold up the ideal of married households. Although it has been challenging, Pastor McFadden is committed to ensuring that everyone who attends his church has

someone who can model Christlikeness for them. He is convinced that when this is achieved the programmatic aspects aren't really relevant.

Pastor Geddes from Christ Church International

Pastor Geddes has always been a proponent of faith development and discipleship and even small groups, but his exposure to the *faith at home* movement has taken his understanding about how to disciple families to an entirely new level. *Faith at home* is the idea that parents have the greatest influence on faith development for children between infancy and age 18. Therefore churches should be seen as equippers of families, providing them with the tools needed to pass the faith on to the next generation. This also means that families need to take ownership of their children's faith development rather than expecting the church to be responsible. Pastor Geddes finds the American church complicit in this misplaced accountability because it has failed to prepare parents to shoulder the responsibility.

Pastor Geddes is firmly convinced that the church must change its entire approach and begin to train and equip families to increase their children's exposure to faith in the home in order to make a difference. When he was asked how he was addressing the issue he said, "We are attempting with the help of our very competent but overly extended Family Life Pastor to challenge many of the misconceptions that parents have about the role of the church in faith transmission. We are also providing an opportunity for age-appropriate training for those who have children."

When asked to estimate in percentage the success rate for teens continuing in their faith journey, Pastor Geddes responded, "That is a very difficult number to determine seeing that we have been in some form of active ministry since 1981, and much of that

with young people. If I had to put a percentage on those who have remained faithful through their college years, it would be low; less than ten percent." However he indicated that Christ Church is now experiencing a shift in this area due to the active participation of its Family Life Pastor (the researcher). Pastor Geddes now hopes that under the new system introduced by the researcher, parents can be trained to implement a faith development program in their homes.

Pastor Geddes described the new program as a series of 13 mandatory classes for all parents, offering home tools to prepare children to live out their faith. It has expanded to encourage parents to discuss topics in a nonthreatening way that many churches assume parents understand. Many parents seem enlightened by the basic themes of discipleship and have embraced them in powerful ways. Pastor Geddes reported being consistently challenged by the Family Life Pastor to make better use of resources to support families instead of programs. "The biggest change however is at the philosophical level, where we have changed our approach from trying to be the primary source for the faith development of the children to a secondary, supplemental resource; and that has made all the difference in the world."

When asked about any observable impact seen so far with this new model of ministry, Pastor Geddes acknowledged that in the last two years he has seen a shift in parents' understanding that the congregation does not have primary responsibility for their children's walk of faith, but the family system has the greatest impact. However he was quick to acknowledge that understanding and executing are two very different things. Although Pastor Geddes believes the congregation is very clear about the change in direction, it has been hard to get them to put it into action. He said, "Some of our parents

have not shown up for classes and find excuses not to participate in groups geared toward their student's age group." He also mentioned a bit of shame and regret on the part of parents whose children are beyond their high school years which has caused him to tread lightly on the issue.

Pastor Geddes spoke of some resistance to practical implementation in the home of many of the faith rituals taught in the classes. He explained that many Christ Church International families are immigrants from Nigeria who have found themselves caught up in the rat race of the "American dream." They understand what needs to be done but lack the practical means to actually carry it out. As an example he described how both parents in many families work multiple jobs, often overnight, so the practice of sharing a blessing every night before they sleep is often forgotten or not possible. Some congregants have asked for a program to further assist them to carry out their responsibilities.

One trend Pastor Geddes has noticed is that parents of younger children from infancy to age six are taking their new responsibilities more seriously than parents of children ages seven to 18. They recognize that they have a ground-level opportunity to institute practices that will have a lifelong impact on their children, whereas parents of older children have already established family habits that will have to be unlearned in order to implement the new ones. One of Pastor Geddes' appeals to older parents who feel as if it may be too late is to assure them that it's never too late. He encourages them to "jump into this" with everything they have, because children look to their parents to set the guidelines and boundaries and give them approval well into their adult years. He fears they have given up hope, and fully aware of the statistics; are naïve to assume that the trends in attrition won't impact their kids.

Pastor Geddes admitted that Christ Church International does not currently have a means to measure what takes place in the lives of these teens after high school, but is eager to establish something that will have an impact. He mentioned a young man who recently returned from college full of zeal to reconnect with his former friends and launch a small group where they can all get together. Pastor Geddes hopes this initial step of establishing a small group for college-age students will provide the necessary incentive to begin a tracking system that will engage youth before they leave the church and remain with them through their college years.

Pastor Geddes does not believe social status affects whether children adhere to the faith of their families, but what matters most is how well parents present and live out their faith in the home. However, being raised in a single-parent family seems to have a detrimental impact compared to growing up with two parents in the home. According to Pastor Geddes the single parent has 50 percent or less opportunity to guide their children into lives of vibrant faith, and unless that parent is extremely committed it's difficult for one to do what both parents should be doing. At this time no systems are in place to support the church's single parents. But one of the benefits of having a large Nigerian population is that family care is built into the way they do community and many single Nigerian mothers receive family support from the larger West African community. As for the European American and African American members, Pastor Geddes acknowledged that distance is often preferred to close engagement and better support is needed.

When asked what he thought the impact would be if the entire congregation embraced and acted upon the vision of faith being lived out in the home, Pastor Geddes replied that if every household took seriously the courses in family prayer, the family

blessing, and service projects, the rate for young people remaining faithful to Christ through their high school and college years would double and even triple. He believes that if he continues to paint the picture, Christ Church International will fulfill the vision of every family living out faith at home. He acknowledged having fallen behind in casting vision on this very important issue, and renewed his commitment to ensure that every family is a faith-at-home family.

Pastor Marcus Cage from Refuge Christian Ministries

Pastor Cage believes that exposure to the gospel for urban youth is often shallow and does not reflect true discipleship. Most families in his congregation would drop everything if their children brought poor grades home from school, but are not nearly as concerned if they show no evidence of growing in Christ. He attributes the crisis in urban churches to the fact that the family's focus has ceased to be on God, and the church often reflects the social mobility of increasing wealth. Parents don't give their children a choice to go to school or not, but church attendance is optional. Pastor Cage emphasized that parents' responsibility to give their families everything they need for life must include faith, the most precious thing they can share. The reason most parents refuse to hold their children accountable to faith is that the parents themselves have been culturally influenced to avoid these issues in the home.

According to Pastor Cage the great challenge in this culture is that churches have changed their purpose for existing from one of drawing young people to Christ into an amusement park. Although he has nothing against entertainment, that cannot be the church's focus. At Refuge Christian Center lack of resources has prevented the establishment of successful children's or youth programs. While Pastor Cage initially

took this as a personal failure, he now realizes he can only do what he has the capacity and resources to do. Without the time and capacity he cannot accept sole responsibility for the future of the youth. After an incident in which Pastor Cage cried in despair that after eight years of ministry not one youth was still living a vibrant faith, he pleaded with the congregation to join him in support of the youth. Nine individuals responded and they are currently building a children's and youth ministry.

Pastor Cage feels that many urban churches including his often lack the "social capital" to deal with today's youth and speak to them in a relevant manner. By social capital he means a type of individual who has the will but not the skill to work with youth. This person may be present but can't connect or relate to the mind of the today's youth. Such individuals are often resistant to training because they feel that showing up has been good enough in the past and should be good enough now. A second type of individual may have the skill to connect with youth but not the will. Although talented and able to connect well with youth, such a person is not interested in a long-term investment because their lifestyle is often too demanding to give of themselves to the next generation. A third type is one who has both the skill and the will to have an impact on a child or teen's life. This person has the most social capital to reach young people. Pastor Cage says he will use the first and third types, but prefers working with the latter.

Pastor Cage provided a unique perspective on the plight of urban youth perhaps because he has yet to see a youth living out their faith after high school years. He suggests that each individual goes through their own spiritual maturation process and will experience hills and valleys that either bring them closer to God or pull them farther away. But he went on to say that in urban communities it is improbable if not impossible

for youth to maintain a faith commitment given the way society has fallen. Pastor Cage feels that as an urban pastor he should be prepared for his youth to stray, while remaining hopeful that the seeds that were sown will eventually draw them back to Christ. He asserted that experience has taught him the goal of the church is to make an impact during their window of opportunity with young people and then pray that as they go, so will they come back.

Pastor Cage is concerned that his systems are not ready to embrace the concerns of youth today and asked the researcher to meet with the nine volunteers who recently agreed to serve in this area. He assured the researcher that at least four of the nine were in the third and most valuable category of social capital, and provided examples and details. One new initiative for Refuge Christian Center is a Saturday night youth service. When the leader asked to have a parents' meeting before meeting with the youth, Pastor Cage was confused and was somewhat hesitant. However during the course of this interview he came to believe in the absolute necessity of involving parents in their children's faith development if they want the fruit to endure. He is now both encouraged and confident that he has the right team in place to move their children's and youth ministry forward into the future.

Pastor Ford and Team from Living Word Church and World Outreach Ministry

When Pastor Ford heard about the topic for this interview he invited his wife and co-pastor Rosella, his son and assistant pastor Lesley Ford III, his grandson Lesley Ford IV, and his chief youth worker LaVonne Gardner Guerra. At age 70 Pastor Ford was clearly interested in the fate of youth leaving his church and confessed that, "If I claimed that five percent of the youth over my three decades in ministry had remained faithful to

Christ through their college years, I'm afraid I might be exaggerating." He said almost all have fallen away and abandoned their faith, most before completing high school. Pastor Ford opened up and was quite honest about his desire to do something to help the current generation of youth participating at his church. He admitted to having made mistakes and knows he cannot go back in time, but said that doesn't mean he cannot change what happens moving forward.

After his father opened up with such honesty Assistant Pastor Les said, almost in retaliation, that he did not feel it was the church's fault so many teens are abandoning their faith. He said that although he was raised by godly parents, he walked away mostly because he found so many opportunities to get into trouble. He was excited by risky behaviors and didn't much care what his parents or members of the congregation said; he was determined to go his own way. According to Assistant Pastor Les the temptation for youth is the "draw of the world, girls, and the desire to do what he wanted to do,"— pitfalls that could not have been foreseen or avoided.

When asked about his philosophy of faith development for the next generation, Pastor Ford responded that he was raised in the Church of God in Christ, which has a high view of the work of the Holy Spirit. He described how originally this philosophy led people to preach to individuals who spoke a different language in "other tongues," with full confidence they would be understood. During a worship service the Holy Spirit is expected to be at work, so there is no need to minister to children at a different level. Belief that the preaching of the Word comes by revelation removes the need to preach differently to children. Children were punished for not understanding when parents asked what the pastor preached about and punished if they fell asleep during the service, and

misunderstanding was thought to have more to do with the condition of the heart than with intellectual ability or cultural familiarity. Pastor Ford described it as an extreme form of legalism, and feels he's been doing all he can compared to the old philosophy.

Pastor Ford described his new approach as geared toward getting children involved enable them to learn God's Word. His church has been blessed with individuals offering many different approaches to youth ministry that didn't require him to be hands-on with the program. During the thirty years of his ministry he has seen dance troops, praise dance teams, human video teams, drama teams, Bible quiz teams, and countless Sunday programs all designed to save the youth. In a moment of reflection Pastor Ford said it seemed as though everything related to youth ministry was driven by programs and activities that attempt to teach children to learn about Jesus.

LaVonne Guerra asserted her belief that exposure to the things of God such as prayer, music, and reading of Scripture will sow seeds in children and teach them who God is even if they may be too young to respond. She compared it to children in daycare learning the alphabet song; although they don't understand its purpose, the song will remain with them until they have use for it. LaVonne believes that by the age of six children enter a developmental stage when the engrafting of the Word has to be consistent because by age twelve the enemy's warfare begins, and if children six to twelve have not been prepared they will remain vulnerable to the devil's plan for their life. At age twelve, she believes, children become accountable for their decisions and make the ultimate choice whether or not to serve God for the rest of their lives.

LaVonne described how they structure the children's program by allowing them to sit in the main sanctuary during worship until the offering and then releasing them.

This ensures that even children as young as three years old will absorb the songs and Scriptures. The second part of their programming takes place on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights when they teach children songs, the books of the Bible, and Scripture memory verses. Each class moves forward in succession, so it is important that each child learns what comes before to be ready for what comes next.

Pastor Ford explained that they try to educate children at the level they are at. He invited his son and grandson to the interview to demonstrate his commitment to the generational sharing of faith that begins with the child and moves through adulthood. According to Pastor Ford being black affects their children in that some find it difficult to believe they have what it takes to make it in this world. Having observed that the topic may have touched a nerve not directly related to faith development but highly relevant to the context and experience of the young people in question, the researcher inquired further about how cultural experience impacts faith development.

Pastor Ford described an incident he viewed as racially motivated that involved his grandson at a young age. When young Les was answering a white schoolteacher's in class he was called "dumb" in front of an almost entirely white class. The rebuke caused damaged him severely in unexpected ways. First, he was too ashamed to tell his parents what his teacher said and remained silent about the issue for years. Secondly he began disengaging almost completely from any setting in which he would be forced to read or speak publicly. The children's program at church was one such setting. Les learned the best way to avoid being called on or expected to read or say anything was to misbehave, and when confronted about his behavior he simply disengaged completely. At first forced

to sit with his parents, he began doing so by choice to avoid the weekly embarrassment of repeating and quoting scriptures in front of others.

Misbehavior in church is unexpected and labeled as rebellion; punishment is often verbal, sometimes physical, but always environmental. In most African American churches an environmental shaming takes place; it is designed to help children see the error of their ways, but in fact it often pushes them further away. The only way to acceptance for those who have been labeled as bad is to spend time with others given the same label. This impacts the home and the school because as a child assumes an identity it is only natural that he will act in a manner consistent with his newly found self-image.[1] When children reach age twelve or thirteen they make it very difficult for their parents in learning to assert their independence by refusing to go to church. Ultimately this was where Les found himself. He said, "Even at 23 years old it still impacts me and I feel intimidated even now in college when I have to try and compete intellectually against white students."

Real or imagined, the researcher discerned that in this context, all interview participants perceived this as a primary reason their children have trouble behaving in church. When the researcher asked the group how racism impacts the faith experience, Pastor Ford said it's almost a disease when a black student gets the words "I can't" in his mind. He believes the perception that black people are inferior and learn more slowly than their white counterparts impacts black students not only in white schools but in all schools. The culture teaches that it is harder for blacks to learn and teaches them through racially biased systems that they can't. Then they come to church, and according to

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[1] Maltz.

Pastor Ford, "They can't read the Bible, they can't memorize Scripture, they are infected with 'I can't'."

LaVonne described her son Zion's experience in one Lutheran daycare and school all the way through fifth grade. When his teacher began to disparage his ability to learn and tackle challenging problems he told his parents. After several meetings with the teacher Zion's parents decided to change schools. The new teacher asked to meet with them after Zion's first few weeks and asked why Zion had so many negative things to say about himself. She concluded that just a short time with a negative teacher had undone years of affirmation by parents and good teachers.

The new teacher is also a pastor, working in a public school, and is helping Zion change his negative beliefs. According to LaVonne, even though Zion is radiant and expressive at home, "He still will not speak fifteen words at church," even when he knows the answer. Unfortunately, Zion has concluded that all white people are racist, and often makes accusations not based in reality but in pent up feelings of hurt. In spite of having had white teachers all his life, most very kind, one experience has made him jaded toward white people in general, including some at the church. LaVonne insisted this perspective makes it difficult for him to function in today's world.

Assistant Pastor Les attended an all white school and an all black church of which his father was the pastor. He felt that his strong roots in the church empowered him with evidence to refute much of the racial bias he experienced at school. While he was growing up the presumption of racism forced parents to affirm their children and reassure them that any unfair treatment they experienced had nothing to do with them personally, but rather with a broken world. Furthermore, the church affirmed what parents said.

When asked about existing processes to support parents' efforts to transmit faith to the next generation, Pastor Ford admitted they have none. But he was thrilled by the new desire to implement some form of support for parents, sparked by the interview. Assistant Pastor Les asked, "But isn't the preaching on Sunday morning the teaching needed to help parents get involved in doing this?" Pastor Ford responded that preaching is one method, but the church needs an environment where faith is demonstrated and where opportunity exists for questions and answers so parents can master the necessary details to encourage faith development in their children. Pastor Rosella added that although some may learn through what is preached, parents need to be held accountable to what is being learned.

The researcher asked what the common elements were among the five percent of youth who have maintained their faith through their high school years. Without hesitation Pastor Ford responded, "It is their families." He said families who have taken time to disciple their children have a much better track record. Pastor Rose described how one of her grandchildren not only hears the Word of God at church but is also quizzed on it at home. The Fords are convinced that if they can develop and strengthen their families they have a far greater chance of setting kids up for success. According to Pastor Ford, if families took faith as seriously as they take education, they might see an immediate change in the youth culture. Parents don't see school as optional even though most kids hate to go, but they do allow them freedom to choose when it comes to church attendance.

LaVonne voiced support for parents' predicament of lacking the patience for a constant state of conflict with their children. For many people Sunday is a day off, and

attending church is a means of refreshing the spirit. It can be stressful when a teen refuses to come, and or when one parent gives in and allows the teen to stay home. LaVonne feels the church to could help facilitate dialog between parents and their children. She said, "Most parents have old school expectations of children with a new school reality." In our society parents are at a disadvantage because use of tactics such as shame, yelling, and corporal punishment for persuasion are culturally unacceptable; children interpret them as acts of hate and parents feel stuck.

When Pastor Rosella defended the church's use of engaging programs with activities and events to attract children, Pastor Ford asked when do you integrate them into the main church. Pastor Rosella directed the question to the researcher, who responded that although both are important, research evidence fails to show programming as significant in sustaining faith among youth. Rather, nonjudgmental relationships with adults in the church community can facilitate authentic living and seem to have the greatest impact. The researcher advised the interviewees that most adults haven't been trained to listen to young people long enough to foster the relationship, without correcting them. Correction is viewed as rejection, and may cause the child to shut off communication. It will take a bold church community to rally around these issues and wrestle with solutions.

Finally, the researcher asked whether the church was monitoring faith trends among youth and whether tracking systems had been created. LaVonne responded that the team had been in charge for less than a year but the subject had been discussed in meetings with volunteers. She said they are now more encouraged than ever to create a tracking system and means of support for their parents.

Analysis of Interviews

This section presents important themes that emerged from the interviews, and contrasts them with research data as well as with each other.

Philosophy

The importance of understanding the interviewee's philosophy was to gain a clear understanding of their values and worldview.[2] Initially Pastor Jones identified no discernable philosophy at Urban Jerusalem. However as the interview progressed it became evident that his entire ministry is based on creating a place where individuals who are drawn to the hip hop culture can feel welcome and accepted. Pastor Jones and his wife both have a passion for music and the arts, and have often felt stigmatized by traditional church culture for expressing themselves in this way. The Joneses use hip hop music, visual art, dance, poetry, and the ambience of a Saturday night concert service to attract young people's participation.

For Pastor Jones and his wife the arts are not only an attraction but also part of what they use to assist people in the healing process. Individuals who have felt rejected and discriminated against rarely feel they have a voice or a platform for validation. At Urban Jerusalem open microphone services and other activities help the congregation open up to feel the warmth of a loving community. One step they are careful to not to overlook is the healing process that needs to take place during an individual's journey toward Christ. Pastor Jones feels many churches often overlook this, and admits that although he may overemphasize healing, he prefers to err on the side of giving too much grace than not enough, because of the undeserved grace Christ has given him.

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[2] Estenberg, 95.

It appears the philosophy at Urban Jerusalem to sustain the faith experience among youth is more a matter of connecting with them in a relevant way, establishing authentic relationships, and walking with them in nonjudgmental ways.

City View Church's overall philosophy of faith development for youth can be summed up in one word: "dad." Pastor McFadden made it abundantly clear that if he can capture the hearts of men he can capture the hearts of their children. The origins of this belief are steeped in his personal history and experiences as a child. Pastor McFadden's frustration over his own father's weakness and his admiration for the strength of the men who invested in his life have shaped his life so powerfully that it informs every aspect of his approach to ministry. The importance of the father is what he preaches about, programs around, and emphasizes every chance he gets.

This philosophy of Pastor McFadden's did not begin when he accepted the lead pastor position at City View Church; it was present in his youth ministry and every leadership position he has held since college. Although Pastor McFadden believes with all his heart that fatherhood is the only hope for faith sustained among youth, he continues to struggle with the problem of how to get men who may not attend his church involved in the lives of their children. He requires every man on his board of elders to take responsibility for a small group of young men to invest in. In a way these men become surrogate fathers for many young men in the community.

One program that demonstrates Pastor McFadden's philosophy is summer camping retreats for fathers and sons that invest heavily in the participants. It is hoped that these trips will become fishing nets for fathers who have lost their way. However the

primary purpose is for young men to see Christ modeled in the lives of godly men sowing seeds that will bear fruit.

Pastor Geddes was very clear about his present philosophy: to train parents to connect with and lead their kids to faith. He's convinced his previous philosophy allowed parents to neglect one of the core responsibilities of parenting, the biblical mandate to "raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord."[3] As part of his strong commitment Pastor Geddes allows a monthly get-together during the sermon where parents of a designated age group of children gather to discuss how to implement faith rituals into their family practices.

Now that Pastor Geddes has embraced this philosophy the hard work has begun. He has had difficulty encouraging his parishioners to respond with the same level of enthusiasm. Although he is confident he will able to change the culture, he admits feeling he's competing with the ever-elusive chase of the "American dream." Pastor Geddes believes many congregants' priorities are aligned more with American culture than with the Kingdom of God. He hopes that as he continues to create the new platform his people will continue to buy in to the vision. One cause for optimism is that the parents of younger children seem to be buying into the new philosophy with much more vigor.

Pastor Cage seemed to have the most unique philosophy, one that suggests there is very little his church can do about the world's attraction for the teens who attend his church. He believes in an ideal world each child would grow up with Christian friends, receive guidance from their pastors, and remain faithful to God. But according to Pastor Cage this belief is "impractical," and therefore he is not focused on providing

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[3] Ephesians 6:4.

programming for youth. Instead he emphasizes good preaching, worship, and Wednesday night teaching. Pastor Cage feels blessed to have nine volunteers who have stepped forward to serve the children's and youth ministry, and believes it is their job to sow the seeds of life in the children. If a child goes astray, these seeds will lead them back.

When pressed about his belief that most youth will inevitability walk away from faith, Pastor Cage referred to his own life and the lives of many youth who have attended his church. He feels that today's world holds too many temptations for youth to resist, and although we as Christians are required to give everything we have to save them it is not practical to believe they will sustain their faith throughout their college age years.

Pastor Ford believes that every child should be discipled in an age-appropriate curriculum, that the church should create elements of expression for children to participate in adult services, and that a point person should oversee the faith development journey of the children's and youth programs. He expects the individuals he appointed in to engage, entertain, and teach the kids to love Jesus. Pastor Ford's vision is highly activity-driven. Children are expected to participate in some form of creative expression I which they learn dance, singing, drama, or spoken word. He believes children from a very young age should memorize Scripture to become familiar with the Word of God.

Pastor Ford's programs have served him for more than 30 years but with less than five percent success. Due at least partly to the interview he appears to be ready to rethink his entire approach to faith development. He expressed an interest in enlisting parents to assume the bulk of the responsibility for engaging their children in matters of faith.

Summary

The church's philosophy informs the beliefs from which programs are created and thus determines the results. It was clear that only two of the pastors had thoroughly thought through their philosophy of faith development for its successful transmission. Pastor Geddes and Pastor McFadden articulated clear visions about the steps necessary to make the changes that would enable their families to prosper, yet they lack the support needed to keep families engaged. Pastor Jones, though unclear about how, achieved better results than the rest by creating an environment where youth feel accepted as themselves. Pastor Ford appears to rely on programming but is concerned about the results and feels that their problem may simply be not having the correct program in place.

Process

We looked for common patterns to identify the processes each leader used to deal with the challenge of youth attrition.[4] Pastor Jones' process for more than seven years bore no clear intentions. He has been busy creating an environment to draw youth in without giving much attention to sustaining them. At present he is putting together a process in which a volunteer will minister to the youth and provide a place where they can talk freely without fear of disclosure to their parents.

Pastor McFadden's process has been simply to create an environment where men can grow into fatherhood and you will win their children. The process features preaching, weekend father/son retreats, small groups for young men led by himself and by church elders, a Wednesday night youth program, and a healthy dose of love and reprimand.

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[4] Estenberg, 95.

These elements constitute Pastor McFadden's approach to saving youth by saving their fathers or providing surrogate fathers for them.

Pastor Cage's process has been based on his belief that children learning and worshiping in the main service would help them develop spiritually. However, feeling that this is not enough, he is now depending on nine volunteers who recently agreed to establish a process where faith development for children and youth will be handled effectively.

Pastor Geddes has stretched his congregation significantly and been stretched himself by allowing his family life pastor to utilize different organizational behaviors in the hope they become habits over the next few years. The process is centered on education for parents, intergenerational relationships, and age-appropriate programming.

Education for Parents

As a first step parents are encouraged to attend a formal baby dedication experience to confirm their devotion to their child's faith life. The service is preceded by a mandatory course for parents of infants and young children to be dedicated to the Lord. This course sets the stage for explaining the epidemic of youth abandoning their faith. The parents are advised that they will have primary responsibility for transmitting faith to their children, and that the church will walk alongside them in support.

Over the next few years the parents attend 13 classes that focus on everything from rituals such as the family blessing, family worship, and family prayer to pitfalls such as computer use, dating, and sex. The goal is to develop an internal community and accountability with parents sometime in the future.

Intergenerational Relationships

Christ Church holds three annual events they call "Village Days." The purpose of Village Days is to connect individuals and families who are often segregated into different age groups on a typical Sunday morning. The first event takes place in the spring; families gather on a Friday night to eat together, play board games, and enjoy a relaxed environment. For the second event in the summer streets are blocked off for sports, inflatable games, and eating. The third event is held the Sunday before Thanksgiving; families sit together and learn to interact, converse, and expand relationships with individuals from all generations.

Age-Appropriate Programming

This aspect of Christ Church's process is like many other ministries. Children ages 0 to 18 have two pastors in charge of four departments led by four different program leaders: nursery, preschool, children, and youth. All have weekly services and programs for children and youth also include camps and weekend events. These programs are designed to expand each child's experience of fulfilling the church's mission to worship, grow, connect, serve, and go.

The process at Living Word Church is twofold: to educate children and to provide opportunities for their involvement in the larger congregation. Nursery and preschool age children go to a classroom where they receive loving care, learn songs, and do crafts that promote biblical teachings. After the worship service children ages six to eleven go to Sunday School class to learn lessons from Scripture with practical application for everyday living. Youth ages twelve to 18 attend worship with the adults and listen to preaching as part of their transition into adulthood. They have their own service on

Wednesday nights and are expected to learn and share in small groups that focus on how Christ fits into their everyday lives.

In addition Living Word involves children right away in demonstrative presentations of what they are learning. Nursery and preschool groups often learn songs twice a year at Christmas and Easter. Children's services include memorizing Scripture and learning songs that are often presented every fifth Sunday during the family service. Children also perform with the youth in drama productions and human videos during Easter and Christmas services. Youth are integrated into adult teams for worship, dance, ushering, and greeting. These activities are meant to help youth to feel like part of the adult congregation and experience God with them.

Summary

The process question exposed the fact that many churches have simply built upon what was already in place. Every church desires better results, but often assume better involves merely doing more of what has already been shown not to work. Only when confronted with these hard truths are church leaders willing to look at things in a new way that might allow them to reconstruct their model completely and achieve better results.

Resources

Use of resources was examined to determine the structure of the ministry's intent for dealing with the epidemic. Urban Jerusalem has very limited financial resources and what little they have is dedicated to support the congregation's social needs. Pastor Jones and Tryenyse are both bivocational pastors and see themselves and their leaders as the only true resource for the youth. Their ministry is geared toward young people who are

attracted to hip hop culture and the arts. The resources they provide are authentic listening, care and compassion, and willingness to walk with young people through every life circumstance. Pastor Jones estimates that 50 percent of available resources go toward faith development among those under 18.

City View Church also has limited financial resources but because their youth are one of their highest priorities they have hired a half-time youth pastor, Jacob Valtierra. He and his wife Maria lead small groups for both girls and boys once a week. Pastor McFadden also invests himself by hosting and leading two of the young men's small groups, and requires men on the board of elders to host one small group each. The church sponsors father and son camping, skiing, fishing, and sledding trips every year. Pastor McFadden estimates that 25 percent of available resources go toward faith development among those under 18.

At Refuge Christian Center Pastor Cage invests in youth by supporting nine volunteers who are in the process of creating a Saturday night youth service. His best people are hard at work in deciding how this program will look over the next year. Pastor Cage estimates that faith development among those under 18 receives less than ten percent of available resources.

At Christ Church International Pastor Geddes has established a part-time family life pastor position, a full-time youth pastor position, and a programming budget for every age from 0 to 18 years old. He estimates these positions, events, and programs to cost nearly $60,000 a year. These departments involve about 30 percent of the church's volunteers. The church invests in camps, mission trips, Village Days, overnight retreats, and many more events with the aim of inspiring children and youth to serve Christ. Pastor

Darrel estimates that faith development among those under 18 receives 40 percent of available resources.

The Living Word Church pays about $450 a month in stipends for youth, nursery, and children's workers and has a $10,000 annual budget for family ministries. The volunteers who serve in these departments make up about 15 percent of the church's total volunteer staff. Children and youth are encouraged to display their talents during worship services, and youth services and events promote connection and foster relationships with other young believers. Pastor Ford estimates that faith development among those under 18 receives ten percent of available resources.

Summary

Senior leaders do not often see resource allocation for faith development among youth as an investment. It is often viewed as a necessary part of doing church business while attending to the needs of adults. However when the subject was raised in the context of this research, the leaders interviewed were able to see it as a significant priority. The one exception was Urban Jerusalem, whose target audience is the generation in question. With regard to resource allocation, the researcher concludes that the percentage is less important than how the resources are being spent, and relational capital is more important than financial capital.

No two churches exhibited the same philosophy, process, or commitment to resources. While each is unique, the attention devoted to the problem of youth attrition appears to directly impact the church's success. Urban Jerusalem had the highest success rate, perhaps because their entire approach to ministry involves reaching out to young urbanites and because they compensate for their limited physical resources by offering

dedicated emotional support. Refuge Christian Ministries' leadership team had little or no energy for its youth and children's ministries, and no success stories after ten years in ministry. The other three churches appeared to see results for their efforts, but Living Word has discovered that consistency and clarity are required if they are to leave a lasting impression on their youth. All five churches acknowledged that to be successful their effort must be intelligent and based on clear and fixed goals.

The strength of this research is threefold: the diverse ages, geographic origins and backgrounds, and experience and approaches to faith sharing among the interviewed church leaders. Despite significant differences in these areas, common experiences were reported.

Pastor Jones is originally from Brooklyn, New York and also lived for a time in New Jersey. He is the pastor of a multicultural church in North Minneapolis of about 75 people. Pastor Jones was raised in the church and although he struggled for many years with abuse and other adversities, he never abandoned his faith but remained faithful to the church. An African American aged 41, he has been the lead pastor for seven years and also performed with a hip hop artist group that travelled all over the country. Pastor Jones tries to reach those who are part of the hip hop culture. He and his wife Tryenyse are both musicians, produces, and songwriters. They believe strongly in the arts as a means of helping youth express themselves.

Pastor Walt McFadden is a 49-year-old white pastor who leads a mostly white congregation of about 150 people. He grew up in Zion, Illinois, a suburban town outside of Chicago. Pastor McFadden received Christ into his life as a child, was called to ministry during high school, and enrolled in a Bible college that brought him to

Minnesota. As a 19-year-old sophomore at North Central University he was called to urban ministry and has been committed every since. Pastor McFadden believes his father was weak and allowed his mother to get away with both verbal and physical abuse. Although he has forgiven his mother, he feels particularly obligated to help strengthen fathers. His passion is to reunite fathers with their sons whenever possible or to find surrogates to help young men grow up in the Christian faith. Pastor McFadden has an all-hands-on-deck philosophy that keeps his staff and board of elders occupied. He believes that if you are committed to City View ministry then you have it in your heart to help young boys become men.

Pastor Geddes is originally from one of the tougher areas of Chicago, Illinois. He is a 57-year-old African American pastor of a multicultural congregation of about 200 people. Pastor Geddes grew up with a distant father who was great at providing in spite of functional alcoholism; his father refused to attend church because as an altar boy he was smacked across the face by a Catholic priest during mass. All he learned about God came from religion classes at the Catholic high school he attended. Pastor Geddes received Christ during a campus Bible study his first year in college and within a few months he felt called to the ministry. He attended North Central University and received a degree in pastoral ministry. After two years as youth a pastor in Chicago, Pastor Geddes moved to Little Rock, Arkansas to plant a church. Three years later he returned to Chicago and served for six more years as the youth and associate pastor. He then left for Minnesota to pioneer the Urban Studies program at North Central University. In 2001 Pastor Geddes took over Christ Church as the lead pastor and has since led a

multicultural, multigenerational ministry seeking to connect with the city and all the complexities it represents.

Pastor Marcus Cage spent most of his youth in Natchez, Mississippi and relocated to Minnesota as a teenager. He is a 43-year-old African American pastor who has led his church of about 200 for ten years. Pastor Cage's years in youth ministry have led him to believe that solid preaching will touch adults and youth alike. He came out of the African American Christian tradition and turned his back on his faith for five years during college. Pastor Cage returned to faith with a zeal to serve and later felt called to the ministry. His congregation is predominantly single African American mothers, which presents a challenge for young teenage boys growing up without a role model for what it means to be a Christian man and father in the home. The chief influences in these boys' lives are young men who engage in violence, illegal drug sales, and delinquent activity.

Pastor Ford is a 71-year-old African American pastor who has been leading the same congregation of about 350 people for more than 30 years. Coming out of the Church of God in Christ (the largest Pentecostal denomination led by African Americans) he was not exposed to different approaches to family ministry. Pastor Ford has invested a great deal of time and energy in listening to many of his congregants with experience in education and youth work. Having witnessed the last three generations, his perspective captures the frustration of many pastors who are watching their congregation dwindle as youth leave much younger than age 18. Pastor Ford's frustration and desperation for a solution are not only typical but amplified among congregations smaller than his.

Weakness of Research

Besides its strength, the weakness of the research is also its diversity of ethnicities and denominations. One group the researcher sought diligently to engage was the Twin Cities' Latino population. Three Latino pastors who were identified as excellent candidates were initially excited about the prospect of engaging in the discussion, but were unavailable for interviews due to scheduling conflicts. The researcher also reached out to a Native American Ministry, but the pastor admitted that he hasn't had a youth since his own children attended more than 20 years ago. After reviewing the interview questions he felt he had very little to contribute. Leaders of several Hmong congregations also proved difficult to schedule. The researcher believes that these churches not represented in the research may have very good input to offer, having done extensive work in these congregations as a speaker and trainer feels many of the challenges are similar to those already presented.

Other denominations were contacted but do not appear in the research: several Lutheran churches, one Reformed Church of America, and one Presbyterian church. Numerous scheduling conflicts arose during the year data was being collected. It the researcher's sincere hope that the completed project will inspire an ongoing process and open the conversation for many churches, denominations, and ethnicities not represented in this project.

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The lack of faith communication from one generation to the next among Christians in the United States has become an epidemic. In urban areas the erosion of faith is even more evident and leaders in communities of faith are struggling to create a model that makes faith more sustainable for the youth they serve. This research demonstrates that a new model with a more lasting impact is required for students during their formative years. Until now the urban church has relied on programs and activities to do the job of discipleship, which can only occur in the context of relationships. Brokenness among urban families has weakened the urban church's ability to introduce and sustain faith-related conversations with urban children and youth. Urban church leaders must take the first step of inviting families and creating surrogate families to engage in a process that will have a holistic spiritual impact on their children.

Scripture presents a family model for ensuring that faith is communicated from one generation to the next in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Joshua 4:21-24, and Ephesians 6:4. The family unit is the training ground for spiritual development. The Bible both represents through narratives and commands explicitly for fathers to ensure that God's lessons be taught and repeated so that their children may remember the ways of God.

In the Twin Cities urban churches where interviews were conducted programming has replaced paternal responsibility to the point where the effectiveness of programming

is often the determining factor when parents choose a church. If churches are to succeed in winning the hearts of their young parishioners they must return to the examples laid out in Scripture and support parents as they help their children navigate through the ever-changing urban culture. This is a significant paradigm shift for both parents and churches, but one that is clearly put forth in Scripture as the model to follow.

Unless churches return to offering a structure for family support it is hard to believe they will stem the epidemic tide of urban youth attrition from the Christian faith. This speaks to a much larger problem—a greater divide between the American Christian church and the growing population of the unchurched.

Many parents are not alarmed by youth attrition and do not view it as a significant problem. They often cite anecdotal evidence that in the 1960s and 1970s many of them left their Christian faith and tested the boundaries of human experience with un-Christ like behavior. These parents feel that because they left their faith and returned, their children are merely repeating the pattern. However, three important distinctions separate modern parents from the current generation of youth who are rejecting faith. First is the emergence of a an accepting culture that rejects the notion of exclusion on the basis of lifestyle, second is lack of social pressure challenging youth to embrace faith, and third is patterns of urban migration that limit children's opportunities to be received and accepted by a church family as part of a dedicated growth process.

Present social expectations that people are actually Christians are much lower than formerly. When a faith tradition like Christianity dominates social consciousness as it did in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century, its adherents naturally have their faith as a self-referencing marker. However Christianity has been redefined for

many of today's urban youth as an intolerant, bigoted, and out-of-touch religion. These opinions often emerge under the guise of tolerance in the context of diversity and acceptance training, visible at almost every grade level of education.

Children's programming in the churches represented in this study teaches through lessons and activities but with very little emphasis on modeling Christlikeness. The teacher's role is often limited to instructing, singing songs, and doing crafts. For the most part youth programming follows a similar pattern while also modeling faith in the context of camps, mission trips, and retreats. Besides Christ Church no special programming focuses on the role of the parent in faith development, although City View Church does emphasize it in Sunday morning sermons. Although the biblical standard suggests that parents and not the faith community are the center of faith formation, this does not diminish the crucial role of the community in adding value. The community is must reflect publicly the lessons that parents live privately.

If Christian faith is to be passed on to the next generation of urban Christians the church must shift its paradigm from church-led programs to home-led faith facilitation. Christian parents must begin to take seriously their role in raising their children to have faith in Christ. In a world of overwhelming busy-ness Christ Church finds that parents have trouble carving out time to implement new rituals and put them into practice all at once. What makes it easier is to first identify current routines for morning rising, meal times, sleep, travel time, and weekends. Most families discover they have much more time available to them than they realized. Families are challenged to introduce one new spiritual habit every six to twelve months, depending on how old their children are and how many courses they will attend during the calendar year. If church communities can

begin to introduce new spiritual habits to their families in this way, the development of a community that connects effectively with its children will be profound.

Literature Review

Social researchers suggest that developing an understanding of God is consistent with who children are and what they grow to believe. Yet knowing about God has not been enough to prevent an epidemic of attrition among urban youth raised in faith communities. Inconsistent parenting and lack of supportive communities have created unstable environments not conducive to cultivating faith. Challenges for single parents, strong systems of discrimination, and physically dangerous environments in urban neighborhoods all have detrimental effects on urban children of color. Children who grow up under these conditions are more likely to develop attitudes and behaviors that display self-preservation as opposed to self-sacrifice as reflected in Christ.

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist-Denton suggest that the broader American culture has adopted a form of "moral therapeutic deism" that satisfies the psychological need for a deity and concludes that morality ends with a clear conscience and a healthy self-image. The danger in this belief is that it sets youth up to leave their faith because their faith community's other-centered moral standards fail to serve the young person's pragmatic social and physiological needs. Furthermore, the affirmed values of urban culture are not based on the values of its rural or suburban counterparts. The limited amount of power experienced by urban youth forces them to try to achieve a sense of dignity and self-affirmation at the cost of their neighbor. Thus urban culture can justify burglary, sexual promiscuity, violence, and murder under a moral code in which

individuals seek respect and validation not available in a traditional supportive environment.

If urban youth feel ideologically and institutionally oppressed, they also feel morally justified in pursuing destructive values to preserve their own sense of worth. However the resulting moral disrepute is consistent with stereotypes about urban youth of color in media outlets and other cultural institutions. This proves an even greater barrier to embracing faith than that experienced by their suburban and rural counterparts.

According to the research cited in chapter three and the data presented in chapter four, the earlier a different faith development model is introduced, the more significant the impact on urban youth. If urban faith communities fail to implement systems of parental support, affirm positive value systems, and create programming that helps increase young people's self-worth, retaining youth is likely to prove an uphill battle. Furthermore, urban churches cannot neglect the young adults, youth, and adolescents who have already begun leaving their faith. Abandoning these important groups in the assumption that it is too late for them would not be prudent.

To reach strayed or straying youth it is important to acknowledge as David Kinnaman suggests that not all have gone the same distance, and although this is an epidemic each individual story needs to be heard. If youth are to return to faith in Christ, the process must begin and end with the family. Delayed adolescent development has decreased the natural consequential thinking that would empower urban youth to make better choices. The increasing number of households headed by a single parent is crippling the family's ability to raise children in supportive homes filled with faith. Furthermore, access to technology that increases expectations of immediacy makes the

patience required for faith appear out of touch. These challenges and many more complex issues make it difficult for urban churches to discourage youth from leaving the faith.

All leaders of urban churches interviewed for this project agreed that they have been plagued with the problem of youth attrition. All reported lack of resources to do everything they believe would have a greater impact on youth before their college years. Two of the five had a clear sense of what they wanted to accomplish in order to prevent continued youth attrition but only one had established a systematic approach toward the goal. None possessed hard data about the long-term impact of what they are doing. All pastors reported lack of time as their number one concern with regard to reaching their youth.

Conclusion of the Project

An exodus of youth from the Christian faith is taking place, most intensely so among urban youth in North America. Churches often cling to antiquated models that use entertainment to engage students with activities yet neglect the biblical model, which requires parents to assume the primary role of spiritual leadership in the home. It is imperative that urban churches respond by reallocating their human and financial resources away from programs and event-driven ministries toward ministries that support existing families and design surrogate relationships for those lacking a solid family structure. The family is God's first institution and carries with it responsibility for transmitting faith and values to the next generation.

The model:

Based on the research in scripture and the literature used it is critical that the church refocus her efforts on a family model based on Deuteronomy 6:6-9 which

commands families to teach their children the testimonies and laws of God. It becomes

the responsibility of the urban church to assess what is necessary for their unique

community while supplying the following four things.

A.   The church to provide each family with a clear support system that helps them establish clear goals to introduce their children to the knowledge and experience of God from birth until their children's high school graduation.

B.   The church must create accountability systems through surrogate families that use the strength of age and wisdom from older congregants that encourage families to live out faith at home.

C.   The church must resource their people over their programs. This means engaging in realistic measure that seek process goals of achieving community connections over program participation.

D.   The church must see the brokenness of the city and embrace with love the city for all its imperfections. With the social ills of the city the church must preach a gospel of empowerment while creating a high esteem in people that are often disenfranchised.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTION

When the researcher enrolled in the Global and Contextual Leadership Doctor of Ministry Program at Bethel Seminary he had already been offered a position overseeing the Urban Studies program at North Central University. He felt this degree would provide him with a much deeper understanding of the urban crisis outside of North and South America where he already had a great deal of experience. However, due to a hiring freeze the position at North Central University was eliminated and the researcher saw no immediate need to continue in the degree program. Nevertheless he decided to continue his studies in the knowledge that his calling from God could only be enhanced by further examination of this field of study.

After his first international trip to Jordan and Israel the researcher felt he needed a deeper awareness for the sake of the body of Christ at large regardless of his academic pursuits or lack thereof. The first major paradigm shift came from encountering Palestinian Christians at Bethlehem Bible College. The researcher realized that the complexity of Middle East issues, of which most Americans are unaware, cannot be handled with simple peace talks and band-aid solutions. Through no fault of their own the Jewish settlers were placed in an area turned over to them by the United Nations resolution to evict the Palestinians.

The researcher was forced to examine his own bias. Growing up in an extremely conservative political environment he had never been aware of the unfortunate conditions in which many Palestinian Christians continue to live after almost 70 years. Political support for Jewish return to Jerusalem was the only position he knew. After spending days in Bethlehem where many Palestinian Christians are fighting political, economic, and geographic oppression, it is now unlikely that the researcher will continue to blindly support Jewish inhabitants without empathy for the Palestinians as well.

Palestinian professor Dr. Salim Munayer speculated that at the time they were displaced from their homes in Jerusalem the Palestinian people were the largest Arab Christian nation at about 45 percent. After the invasion and eviction it became difficult for parents to convince their children to follow Christ when the political perpetrators were Christians from the west. He estimated that Christians now make up less than four percent of the Palestinian population. The impressionable young were attracted to a radical Muslim message that encourages them to respond to injustice with violence.

The researcher left with a sense of hopelessness concerning the resolution regarding of these issues and a deeper awareness of the need for godly leadership to emerge in every part of the world. Undoubtedly the end of the struggle between Jews and Palestinians is nowhere in sight and to assist with the challenge the delicate nature of both sides must be appreciated. The researcher felt that even if given the power to do so, he would not know what to do. Leadership must emerge from beyond the limited talking points most Americans are spoon-fed through media outlets, and which carry distinct agendas. Leadership must be promoted for justice for all people that all may come to know Christ.

A second experience that reshaped the researcher's thinking was a trip to India where the level of urban poverty is profound, the diversity of religious beliefs is evident, and the syncretistic nature of religion seems to expose the nature of American religion. India's caste system makes poverty an acceptable condition that requires good karma to end the cycle. Although frustrated by poverty, Indian people have a religious view that accepts their woes. However the American urbanite has no such means for accepting this same fate. From childhood they are taught that their creator has given them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and the assurance that all people are created equal. These patriotic slogans create hope but also have the power to create rage in urban citizens who consistently witness injustice in the form of rules and penalties that apply more harshly to those who don't have the power to defend themselves.

Most powerful of all was observing how the Christian church flourishes in a land where Christians cannot purchase property, convert native people, or speak publicly against Islam. In the country of Malaysia the researcher witnessed one of the most fascinating forms of Christianity being lived out in an area where Christians are persecuted. The week the Bethel team arrived, many Christian churches were set on fire to protest a federal judge's ruling that Christians could use the name "Allah" to refer to the God of the Christian faith. Despite the fact that this had not been an issue for more than two centuries, the ruling sparked outrage in Muslim communities. In every location the Bethel team visited, Christian leaders had but one response: "these are exciting times."

The persecuted Malaysian churches were more unified across denomination than anywhere else in the world the researcher observed. They professed a very distinct gospel

message that challenged people to come to Christ, and they served in many areas of social improvement that gave them a platform to proclaim God's love. Churches serve to earn to the right to preach Christ. It is the researcher's contention that the gospel is preached on no better platform than when the Christian demonstrates God's love in both word and deed.

These courses sent the researcher on a quest to discover the things that are most important for the current generation to hear and experience in urban areas across the United States, issues that will impact urban areas around the world.

Recommendations for Further Study

Urban centers in the United States are expanding with refugees, immigrants, and second-generation immigrants who are not rooted in American religious traditions. The researcher has witnessed many failed attempts to reach immigrants and refugees as if they were in their home countries and not in a foreign land. An entirely different model is needed due to the unique nature of their status.

For urban centers to be impacted by the truth of the good news churches will not only have to reverse youth attrition from their faith but also take an active role in reaching young people with little or no Christian background. This means taking a new missiological approach to the United States itself.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your overall philosophy of the faith development of children from infancy to 18?

2. What approach (if any) do you take to prepare parents for the faith development of their children?

3. Over your time in ministry please approximate the percentage of youth who you have observed to remain faithful to Christ through their college years?

4. In your estimation, what is the number one factor that has enabled youth to remain faithful into adulthood?

5. What do you believe are the factors that have contributed to the straying from the faith experienced by other youth?

6. How have you monitored the faith trends of students once they have graduated from high school? Please identify any system you use to track these trends.

7. What is currently in place in your ministry to ensure that students who graduate high school have ongoing support in their faith journey?

8. What impact does social status have on the faith journey of youth?

9. What correlation do you see between one- and two-parent households and how faith is developed in a child?

10. Does your faith community approach the faith development journey differently for one- versus two-parent households?

11. What is your process for intentional faith development for parishioners from the ages of 16-18?

12. What is the process for intentional faith development for parishioners from the ages of 14-16?

13. What is the process for intentional faith development for parishioners from the ages of 12-14?

14. What is the process for intentional faith development for parishioners from the ages of 10-14?

15. What is the process for intentional faith development for parishioners from the ages of 6-10?

16. What is the process for intentional faith development for parishioners from the ages of 0-6?

17. What resources are dedicated to ensuring a successful faith journey for your children?

18. What role does culture play in the resistance of youth to matters of faith?

19. How do you address issues of culture and faith?

20. What is one thing your leadership team can do to reduce the amount of attrition from faith in Christ that may have occurred among your youth?

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