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## Investigating and Increasing the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Children's Ministry at Victory Church of Melbourne, Florida

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INVESTIGATING AND INCREASING  
THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS  
OF THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY  
AT VICTORY CHURCH OF MELBOURNE, FLORIDA

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE  
IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY  
STANLEY RICHARD PATTON, JR.  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA  
MAY 2021



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to Christ and His Church, for His Glory. It is also dedicated to my dear wife, Dr. Melissa Patton: thank you for being the epitome of a loving, loyal, and lifelong partner on this roller coaster of ministry service. To my two sons, Micah and Mason, thank you for the privilege of making me the father I am today, where I can see adventure, budding purpose, and spiritual curiosity through your eyes. To my parents, Stanley and Pamela Patton, thank you for your emotional and financial support of my studies. Lastly, to Victory Church: thank you for trusting me to lead such a phenomenal community and for supporting my Doctor of Ministry work with prayers and words of encouragement.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the children's ministry at Victory Church of Melbourne, Florida, a growing multicultural and multigenerational church. Conversations with the children's ministry team, parents, child participants, and the senior pastor of Victory indicated that changes needed to be implemented in order to grow the ministry. This project used a case study methodology, focusing on a church with similar demographics as Victory, to discover the underlying factors needed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of Victory's children's ministry. To test the working theory that an increase in resources, team leadership, and parental involvement leads to increased effectiveness and efficiency, surveys were sent to three children's ministry leaders from the case study church. Interviews were then conducted to follow up on survey responses. The resulting quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed using the Qualtrics platform. The findings suggest that there are five components needed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the children's ministry at Victory Church: a vision/philosophy of children's ministry based on the great commission; adequate resources/funding for the children's ministry; key staff leadership; parental involvement; and strategic planning and the development of organizational systems.

## INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINS OF VICTORY CHURCH

In 2011, I began serving as the senior pastor of a church that required a complete turnaround and revival from its dormant state. When I first arrived, I was eager and honored to lead such a storied institution. I naïvely believed that because I was armed with biblical knowledge, previous pastoral experience, vision, and strong interpersonal skills, I could quickly transform the church's complacent culture. Five years later, some progress had been made, but apathy remained a defining characteristic of the church, and I was forced to acknowledge that it had gone as far as it could go under my leadership. After lengthy prayer and consideration, I knew it was time to leave this church and pursue the next step in my vocational ministry—planting a new church.

This new church (which was eventually named Victory) had four main goals: to reach the community; to positively impact children; to be relevant to congregants' lives; and to be intentionally multicultural. The overarching aim was to transform the community through holistic programming while being unashamedly mission focused. But though the vision, as well as a strategic plan for achieving that vision, was quickly established, locating sources of funding for this new startup church remained challenging. In order to raise the necessary capital while also conducting community outreach and improving the community's perception of the church, this researcher started a sports league—Victory Kid Sports, an offshoot of Victory Church.

The decision to prioritize activities for youths was partly due to the socioeconomic conditions of the community. In Brevard County, Florida, winter break is

one of the most difficult times for families and children; many under-resourced and impoverished families undergo transitions and endure major crises at this time of year, and they often cannot afford to buy the children gifts for the holidays. Though numerous individuals, programs, and church-based ministries have organized fundraisers and other initiatives to purchase gifts for these children, larger systematic issues remain. Thus, one of the priorities of Victory Church was to move beyond occasional gifts and donations and make a lasting impact by developing intentional relationships with children and their families.

As a first step towards realizing this goal, volunteers and launch team members from the newly minted Victory Church group created a camp that was promoted as an inexpensive twelve-day experience to foster fun during the holidays. The camp was designed to fill the gap during the holidays and provide children with a safe and secure sports experience. It was marketed via email, flyers, and conversations with administrators at local schools. Simultaneously, strategic partnerships were created with community agencies to help engage under-resourced families. A few of the agencies to whom the initial pitch was made even sponsored several participants. The response to this minimal marketing was incredible: less than \$700 was spent on marketing and equipment, yet the return on investment was both financially and spiritually rewarding.

Throughout the twelve days, children's lives were changed through sports and motivational messages from community leaders. The impact of this first camp experience became a major component in the church's future ministry paradigm. Sports united the youths and families and connected them to our newly forming faith community. Without

sports and the creation of a fun-filled environment, there would have been no opportunity to make a lasting imprint on the lives of these initial families.

The team quickly learned that the mutually reinforcing relationship between Victory Church and the sports camps created a natural pipeline for an elementary school-aged children's ministry. Seeing the fruit and potential of this initial camp experience caused the church leadership to formally adopt sports programming as an official ministry of Victory Church. As the sports ministry was launched, it became apparent that the church needed to create a separate business in order to reach more people beyond the church, conduct business in secular venues, and qualify for governmental grant funding. This new entity was called Victory Kid Sports.

Today, Victory Kid Sports touches the lives of thousands of children by providing competitively priced multi-sport leagues, educational programming for schools, sports camps, and church partnerships all around the nation. Youth sports are a thriving business and a dynamic way of reaching elementary-aged students and their families. In addition, Victory Church firmly believes that sports can be used for an even greater purpose. Since its humble beginnings, Victory Church has employed this youth sports model of ministry, expansion, and development to fuel its rapid growth and attractiveness to families with elementary-aged children in Melbourne, Florida and beyond.

This Paul-influenced tentmaking model for ministry has proven to be successful and sustainable in a variety of communities. However, it has also raised a number of questions for this researcher: why is Victory Church attracting more adult congregants than children, despite having a successful youth sports outreach model in its community? And how should the church respond if the children and families to whom sports

programming is provided are not as enthusiastic about the possibility of participating in the church's children's ministry programs? The aim of this thesis was to study these phenomena, identify problem areas, and seek solutions that will prove beneficial to both Victory Church and other children's ministries.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE CRISIS IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

### **Statement of the Problem**

How can the Church reach more children and youth? This is a question posed in many conference sessions, board meetings, and pastoral heart-to-hearts. A church's decision to focus on children (or not) and the strategies they deploy to attract more youth are often determined by their willingness to change the cultural and historical ethos of their church. Some churches have the capital to make shrewd hiring decisions, bringing in young, energetic individuals or teams to recalibrate the children's ministry. Some older churches and pastors acknowledge the low number of youth congregants but fail to take direct action to remedy the problem, instead falling back on familiar practices. Some seek new training, methods, or programs, hoping that through trial-and-error experimentation they can find the answer to their children's ministry problems. But these ad hoc processes are often inefficient and ineffective. In order to establish a more rigorous, systematic approach to the problem, it is first necessary to understand the fundamental issues undergirding the lack of youth engagement in ministry.

According to Michael McGarry,

there are three foundational problems facing youth ministry that youth workers have long discussed but must also be addressed with church leaders and parents. First, one must understand the "dropout rate," which is often cited as a description of how many students stop attending church after graduating from high school. Second, it is important to recognize that youth culture reflects a broader problem—it is not exclusively youth who are dropping out of church involvement. American culture as a whole is becoming increasingly non-Christian, and the problem of youth abandoning their faith reflects the same trend among adults. Third, in many churches there is a fragmentation between the

church, the youth ministry, and the family. These problems converge to create a situation whereby the second and third problems continue to fuel the first.<sup>1</sup>

McGarry argues that solving the ongoing problem of youth participation in the Church will require harmonization among the Church, the youth ministry, and the American family. He further writes that the Church must recommit herself to the gospel and to discipleship to strengthen an inner core whereby families may in turn be strengthened.<sup>2</sup> This is why the children's ministry of Victory Church has been chosen for investigative purposes. Victory Church adheres to McGarry's recommendations by prioritizing the gospel and discipleship as a means of strengthening families in the church and in the community. The aim of this thesis project was to determine the extent to which these strategies have a measurable effect on youth engagement with Victory Church.

The problem this project addresses is the lack of a proven model or principle for creating a more effective and efficient children's ministry. In response to this problem, this researcher adopted a systematic, multi-step process for analyzing and improving children's ministry. This process involved investigating a theology of children in the Bible; analyzing the appropriate literature relating to children's ministry development and practices; examining the children's ministry model of another church with similar demographics and practices to Victory Church; comparing what that church is doing to fuel growth in their children's ministry with the present children's ministry model at Victory Church; and identifying transferable principles that will help the children's ministry staff at Victory to develop faster numerical growth in their ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2019), 6.

<sup>2</sup> McGarry, 7.

### **Setting of the Project**

The setting of the project is Victory Church of Melbourne, Florida, a three-year-old church plant. Victory Church was founded by this researcher and a team of committed individuals with the aim of reaching people who are disconnected from God. From its inception, Victory Church has been intentionally multicultural, multigenerational, and multiethnic, with the understanding that diversity and inclusivity are important to oneness in Jesus Christ. Today Victory Church has over 550 active members.

Victory comprises 40 percent African American families, 30 percent Caucasian families, 20 percent biracial families, and 10 percent Latino families. The average age of Victory Church participants is approximately 40 years old, with 50 percent male and 50 percent female. Seventy-five percent of Victory Church's membership work in engineering jobs, 20 percent work in other corporate industries, and another 5 percent work in K-12 or collegiate education. Victory is a commuter church. Most of the people who attend Victory drive more than 15 minutes to the church location. Victory attendees come primarily from neighboring towns and cities such as Rockledge, Viera, Cocoa, Titusville, Palm Bay, Malabar, and even eastern parts of Orlando. This wide reach creates both social and economic diversity at Victory Church. However, it also makes it challenging to focus on a single neighborhood or census tract.

Victory Church is located in Melbourne, Florida, a beachside city 70 miles east of Orlando with a population of 83,029 residents. Melbourne is in Brevard County, known as Florida's Space Coast because it is home to Kennedy Space Center, Patrick Air Force Base, Northrup Grumman, Rockwell-Collins, L3Harris, and other military defense contractors. The high number of space, military, and defense employers has created

numerous opportunities for upward mobility and stable, long-term career tracks. Though Brevard County has a lot to offer young families, it is also a retirement haven. According to the most recent United States Census, 21 percent of Melbourne's population is age 65 and older. In short, Melbourne accommodates both an older and a younger population, combining career opportunities in military technology with a well-developed leisure industry for retirees.

Victory Church not only celebrates and embraces diversity but is a church with a heavy emphasis on reaching children through a variety of strategies. Victory Church has established a sister organization called Victory Kid Sports that supplies school-based sports programming, camps, and socio-emotional enrichment programs while also providing fun recreational opportunities to the community and several other states and school districts. Victory Kid Sports supplies a funding stream and organic outreach that has helped Victory Church grow quickly. Though Victory Kid Sports is integrated in some ways with the current children's ministry model, they are not identical; Victory Kid Sports remains a secular organization.

### **Purpose of the Project**

This project aims to add value both to the researcher's own ministry and to the Church at large. This researcher has spent his adult years in full-time ministry. While still a student at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, he was hired as a youth pastor at a large suburban church. It was during this ministry that he learned how to develop, cultivate, and disciple adolescents. Due to his passion for positively impacting the next generation, he desires to create a strong, effective, and enduring children's ministry.

In addition to this researcher's past as a youth pastor and children's discipleship professional, he leads Victory Church, a growing church plant in Melbourne. As the

primary visionary and architect of Victory Church, he is operationally responsible for the well-being and quality of all the ministries of the church. In the course of assessing the overall effectiveness of Victory Church, this researcher noted that the children's ministry was not growing as quickly as other ministries. He thus began to ponder what types of systems, structures, mechanisms, leadership pipelines, and paradigm shifts would be needed to make the children's ministry more effective and efficient in its growth patterns. This project was conceptualized in response to the researcher's desire to achieve a more robust children's program and contribute valuable observations and analyses to the larger field of youth ministry.

Moreover, this researcher assumes roles outside of the church. While he has served the body of Christ as a former youth pastor, worship leader, senior pastor, and now as a church plant lead pastor, his greatest servant leadership opportunity is his family. The spiritual development of his two young sons, ages eight and twelve, was one of the catalysts and driving forces behind this project. It is this researcher's utmost desire to see his two sons discipled to the highest level. As a concerned parent, he has repeatedly taken a deeper look at the effectiveness and potential of the children's ministry at Victory Church. His two sons often serve as a barometer of the quality, spiritual growth, health, and vitality of the ministry of which they are a part. Their observations give him valuable insight into what is needed to make the children's ministry better in both the present and future.

This project also has consequences for the Church at large. The Church benefits whenever a local church creates strategies and practices that aid in the development of that specific church. Furthermore, the Church in America is declining in millennial

attendance and engagement. Studies have shown that younger generations are trending towards a more secular worldview and away from sacred norms. Perhaps one of the reasons for the current crisis is the inadequacy of the children's ministry and the spiritual formation of children since the late twentieth century. The Barna Group suggests that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their savior (43%) do so before reaching the age of 13, and that two out of three born-again Christians (64%) made that commitment to Christ before their eighteenth birthday. One out of eight born-again people (13%) made their profession of faith while 18 to 21 years old. Fewer than one out of every four born-again Christians (23%) embraced Christ after their twenty-first birthday.<sup>3</sup> Engaging children ages 13 and under is therefore critical to the spiritual formation of generations to come. This researcher intends to add to the ongoing discussion and scholarship on what it takes to create a church that is primed and ready to assist in the faith journey of children.

### **Project Design**

The design of this project was informed by a number of key assumptions. First, that God desires to grow and expand the ministry capacity of Victory Church of Melbourne. Second, that there is a fundamental flaw (or flaws) in the children's ministry that is thwarting its effectiveness. Third, that the senior leadership of Victory Church has the adaptability and leadership skills to develop a process to create changes to the existing children's ministry paradigm. Fourth, that principles gleaned from other churches, sources, and best practices could prove effective within the context of Victory

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<sup>3</sup> "Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids," Barna Group, October 11, 2004, <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>.

Church. And finally, that incremental changes will directly impact the growth of the children's ministry.

Based on these assumptions, qualitative methodologies were selected for this project, namely action research and case studies. The first step was to investigate a theology of children as it pertains to spiritual formation as well as analyze the appropriate literature relating to children's ministry development and practices. The second step entailed surveys and video interviews with church leaders closely involved with the children's ministry of Crosspointe Church in Houston, Texas, a church with similar demographics and practices as Victory Church. The third step was to analyze the data from the surveys and interviews and compare what Crosspointe Church is currently doing to fuel growth in their children's ministry to the present children's ministry model at Victory Church. The fourth and final step concluded with identifying transferable principles that will help the children's ministry staff at Victory to develop a more effective and efficient ministry, which in turn will fuel a more rapid numerical growth in ministry participants.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

It is the layered and revelatory nature of the biblical text that defines and outlines God's plan of salvation for all who would receive Him. The underlying theme of salvation rises to the surface of the biblical narrative and becomes the interwoven thread between the Bible's books, chapters, verses, and two testaments. Furthermore, the emergence of salvation as the primary focus of both God and humanity results in the masterfully planned redemption of sinners through the birth and death of a promised savior, the incarnate Son of God.

According to Paul Kahn in his book *Out of Eden*, "If evil brought us to where we are, then the Western religious tradition tells us that our essential task as individuals and communities is to overcome the evil in our nature. We want to return to that 'image of God' that we were at creation. We must recover Eden."<sup>4</sup> Building upon this idea, Terence E. Fretheim writes,

In the language of Genesis 1:26-27, human beings are created in the image of God. We know from the larger context that human beings do not become an "image of God" only when they are adults; the image of God is not something that they "grow into." This point is made clear in Genesis 5:1-3, the beginning of the genealogy of Adam. After noting that male and female were created in the image of God, the genealogical structure of this chapter makes God the "father" of Adam.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul W. Kahn, *Out of Eden: Adam and Eve and the Problem of Evil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "'God Was the Boy' (Genesis 21:20): Children in the Book of Genesis," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia, J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 4.

The depiction of God as a father is a key theme throughout Scripture, including in some of the Bible's earliest writings, and it defines one of His chief characteristics. As a father, God is the progenitor of Adam, and each Adamic descendant is a living and breathing image bearer of the Father on earth. This concept suggests that each child that has been birthed since the time of Adam's creation provides a greater understanding of what it means to recover Eden through the lineage of Adam. Eden, which represents the idyllic relationship between God and his children, is finally restored through the offspring of Adam—more specifically, through the birth and death of the messianic child. This promised messiah is the beloved Son of God and represents the only hope humanity has at restoring the Father's purpose for all His children. It took 42 generations of God's children to produce an image bearer who not only represents the God of creation, but who is also of the same *homoousios* (substance) as God. The apostle Paul writes, "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15). With a genealogy that can be traced back to Genesis, He is the ultimate child, one who has the authority to bring about the rehabilitation and rebirth of creation.

Fretheim further writes that "when Adam had lived 130 years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. Human beings are now the ones who create further images of God...Everything that the image of God is, every child is, regardless of gender, race, social status, or age."<sup>6</sup> The concept of the likeness of God being perpetuated through the birth of children strengthens the

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<sup>6</sup> Fretheim, 4.

argument that children are necessary to the story of salvation. Fretheim's writings create a paradigm in which children are paramount to God's vision of recapturing His own image through the personhood of the messianic child.

Repairing the human relationship with God is essential to the redemptive story. However, humanity cannot redeem itself from the wrath of God apart from the mercy and grace of its creator. Ellen T. Charry writes that "grace is a gift imparted by God that enables godliness."<sup>7</sup> She further defines grace as an "attitude of divine benevolence. It speaks against conforming to religious practices that facilitate a holy life. This approach to grace as divine benevolence for individuals is less interested in articulating a religious way of life than it is in personal assurance against eternal divine wrath."<sup>8</sup> Though Adam and Eve trespassed the sanctity of God's law, they are not without hope. God provides a foreshadowing of His redemptive plan, which has the power to offset His divine wrath.

The Bible introduces readers to a "seed of the woman" concept that will become foundational to humanity's long journey back to itself: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). As theologian Walter C. Kaiser Jr. states, "Genesis 3:15 has commonly been called the protoevangelium (the 'first gospel') because it was the original proclamation of the promise of God's plan for the whole world."<sup>9</sup> The offspring referred to in Genesis 3 plays a pivotal role in crushing the enemy and dissipating the

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen T. Charry, "The Grace of God and the Law of Christ," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 57, no. 1 (2003): 36.

<sup>8</sup> Charry, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 38.

furious wrath of God. He is the promised descendant of Abraham through whom all families on Earth would be blessed. He is also the one that does not come to abandon the Mosaic law but to fulfill it. As humanity awaits this savior and messiah to be born, He appears intermittently as a theophany in the Old Testament. This messiah would come through the lineage of the Jewish nation and later become the hope of all nations.

### **The Promised Child of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament sets the tone and provides a starting place for the nature of this promised child who would one day become the risen savior. The prophet Isaiah declared,

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. (Isa. 9:6-7)

The promised child messiah of the Old Testament, though not yet incarnate, becomes a major focal point for several of the Old Testament prophets. The prophet Micah foresaw that a promised child and messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The prophet Isaiah foretold that He would be born of a virgin. Isaiah likewise prophesied that the messiah would be sacrificed and even described in detail how His execution would heal humanity's sins.

The prophet Isaiah believed and relayed that this promised child would be called Emmanuel, God with us and the Son of God, and Christians interpret these messianic prophecies as references to Jesus Christ. As Christopher J. H. Wright succinctly puts it,

“The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus completes.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, according to Iain Duguid,

the Scriptures are not just generally a message about Jesus. More specifically, Jesus told his disciples that the central focus of the entire Old Testament is his sufferings, his resurrection, and the proclamation of the gospel to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. The Old Testament is therefore a book whose every page is designed to unfold for us the gospel of Jesus Christ, accomplished by his sufferings and resurrection and applied through the outpouring of the Spirit on all nations.<sup>11</sup>

The centrality of the promised Son of God in the Old Testament lays the foundation for the broader theological importance of children elsewhere in the Bible.

### **A Theology of Children in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament consistently points believers towards a child messiah.

However, this does not mean that God does not have a plan or purpose for other children within the grand scope of His sovereignty. Throughout Old Testament scripture, children accomplish highly significant feats on behalf of God and Israel. David was a boy when he defeated Goliath. Samuel was trained as a priest from early adolescence. Joash became king at the age of seven. Though young biblical characters are often depicted with flaws, they are still conduits of God’s purpose and serve as youthful archetypes in service to Jesus.

Furthermore, the Old Testament tells the story of Jesus through the lineage of the nation of Israel, and children are central to that lineage. Abraham was promised a son, and his progeny Isaac was the fulfillment of that promise. Isaac’s wife becomes pregnant

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 8.

with twins, one of whom is Jacob, who is paramount to the continued tribal expansion of Israel. Ultimately, many of the children within this lineage become an extension of the original promise by building a bridge to a Jewish messiah. It took 42 generations of people to build a bridge that culminates with the birth of Jesus Christ.

Raising a faithful generation was also a central component of Jewish identity, and the Old Testament abounds with examples of Israel's commitment to her young.

According to Ariela Keysar, Barry A. Kosmin, and Jeffrey Scheckner, "the continuity of any religious or cultural group depends on the socialization of its members and their children."<sup>12</sup> Thus, Judaism foregrounds the importance of indoctrinating children into the cultural values of their community and educating them in their religious identity and history. The authors add that,

Socialization begins in infancy and ends only at death...Generally, religious socialization attempts to develop a basic sense of discipline so that one learns to postpone, modify, or even forego gratification in order to reach some religiously sanctioned future goal. This is particularly true of Judaism, which more than other religions tends to emphasize behavior and ritual (mizvot) rather than faith.<sup>13</sup>

The family and community's mandate to raise up the next generation in fear of and obedience to the Lord is a cornerstone of Jewish identity, which is both cultural and religious in nature. By prioritizing the teaching of the next generation, the communal cultural aspects of Judaism are preserved among the Jewish diaspora. Moreover, the Jewish tradition of spiritual apprenticeship lays the foundation for the early practice of monotheistic YHWH worship, service within the tabernacle, and the perpetuation of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ariela Keysar, Barry A. Kosmin, and Jeffrey Scheckner, *The Next Generation: Jewish Children and Adolescents* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner, 2.

Aaronic priestly duties. According to Michael McGarry, today’s biblical youth ministry is a modern application of the frequent directive to pass on the commands of God to the next generation.<sup>14</sup> The Bible, and especially the Old Testament, emphasizes that parents are given the responsibility of evangelizing and discipling their children.<sup>15</sup>

The Jewish pattern of passing down knowledge is made evident through the book of Proverbs. For example, in Proverbs 22, Solomon challenges readers to train up their children in the way of the Lord. Moreover, throughout Proverbs Solomon offers consistent reminders to his own son on how to live a virtuous life and shows a strong desire to teach principles to the next generation. In fact, in Proverbs 1, Solomon declares that the Proverbs were written to give “knowledge and discretion to the young”:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:  
for gaining wisdom and instruction;  
for understanding words of insight;  
for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,  
doing what is right and just and fair;  
for giving prudence to those who are simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the young. (Prov. 1:1–4)

In short, it was his mission to instill religious and moral insights into the youth of Israel.

In addition to Solomon’s writings, the Bible stories contain warnings about what happens when Israel does not invest in the spiritual development of the next generation.

For example, immediately preceding the death of Joshua, the Bible declares,

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD’s anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the

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<sup>14</sup> McGarry, 407.

<sup>15</sup> McGarry, 407.

Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. (Judges 2:10–15)

After the death of Joshua’s generation, a pattern of unspiritual behavior emerges in Israel. This pattern of unholy conduct culminates with Israel being repeatedly exiled from the promised land and praying for a messiah. Living outside of the land that God promised to Abraham gives Israel perspective and an increased thirst for God’s word. As the Old Testament concludes, Israel has been brought back to her ancestral homeland, now under foreign control, to await a messiah to save her.

### **The Promised Child of the New Testament**

After Malachi has written his last prophetic word, a series of historical events begin to pave the way not only for the New Testament but also a new covenant. During the intertestamental gap of time, or what is known in theological circles as the 400 years of silence, major historical events have taken place, and the timing is purposefully made right for the entrance of the promised child messiah. Randall Price writes that the “oppressive religious and political conditions” during this intertestamental period inspired a “messianic hope [that] expressed itself in late Second Temple Judaism through a development of the prophetic concept of messianic deliverance in the eschatological age.”<sup>16</sup> The belief that a messiah would come to deliver the nation of Israel becomes the backdrop of the New Testament and the predominant theme of the four Gospels. Tremper Longman III does note that expectation for the messiah “was all over the map. Some

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<sup>16</sup> Randall Price, “The Concept of the Messiah in the Old Testament,” accessed January 23, 2021, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.556.344&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

Jewish people did not expect a Messiah. Others thought that the Messiah would be a priestly figure, still others a royal deliverer.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the broad consensus was that the messiah would be both a priest and a king, born at a time in which the nation of Israel needed both.

Theologians convey that Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s Gospels are derived from the same source material, or “Quelle,” and thus their portraits of the messiah are similar in nature. Collectively, they constitute the Synoptic Gospels. However, Mark L. Strauss notes that “the reader approaching John’s Gospel immediately notices a picture strikingly different from the Synoptic Gospels”—about 90 percent of John is unique.<sup>18</sup> According to Strauss, “key features of Jesus’ ministry are absent. There are no exorcisms or parables, no table fellowship with sinners. The key Synoptic phrase ‘kingdom of God’ occurs only twice. Most of Jesus’ teaching is unique, and five of John’s eight miracles do not occur in the Synoptic Gospels.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, many key Synoptic events are absent from John, including Jesus’ baptism, his temptation, the transfiguration, and the institution of the Lord’s Supper, while John includes many stories not found in the Synoptic Gospels: the miracle of changing water to wine, Jesus’ conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman,

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<sup>17</sup> Tremper Longman III, “The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 28–29.

<sup>18</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 6741.

<sup>19</sup> Strauss, 6741.

the raising of Lazarus, Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus' high priestly prayer, the account of doubting Thomas, and many others.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) Study Bible, "the purpose statement in John 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel."<sup>21</sup> Many theologians theorize that the book of John was composed after 70 AD, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Thus, according to the editors of the HCSB, "it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God's people in replacement of the old sanctuary."<sup>22</sup> John also emphasizes Jesus' status as a deity from the beginning of his Gospel, affirming that He is the eternal word (from the Greek *logos*) who was with God and was God. The HCSB notes that "Jesus used the significant phrase *I am* seven times in John, claiming the personal name of God as his own. In John, Jesus is always in charge and knows what will happen in advance."<sup>23</sup> Finally, "knowing" and "believing" are key terms for John: "Both occur more than ninety times in this Gospel and are always used as verbs. Jesus's teaching in John reminds us that knowing God and believing in Jesus are expressed in action."<sup>24</sup>

Highly esteemed pastor and scholar John MacArthur argues that the primary purpose of John's Gospel is twofold, evangelistic and apologetic, and that the apologetic

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<sup>20</sup> Strauss, 6748.

<sup>21</sup> *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 1662.

<sup>22</sup> *HCSB Study Bible*, 1662.

<sup>23</sup> *HCSB Study Bible*, 1662.

<sup>24</sup> *HCSB Study Bible*, 1662.

purpose is closely related to the evangelistic one. In other words, “John wrote to convince his readers of Jesus’ true identity as the incarnate God-Man whose divine and human natures were united perfectly into one person who was the prophesied Christ (‘Messiah’) and Savior of the world.”<sup>25</sup> According to MacArthur, John also provides a “record of how men responded to Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offered.”<sup>26</sup> He highlights three main themes in the Gospel of John: “1) Jesus as the Word, the Messiah, and the Son of God; 2) who brings the gift of salvation to mankind; 3) who either accept or reject the offer.”<sup>27</sup> John’s Gospel also presents supplemental sub-themes that reinforce his main theme. Most notably, “he uses dualism (life and death, light and darkness, love and hate, from above and from below) to convey vital information about the person and work of Christ and the need to believe in Him.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, numerous biblical scholars agree that John was evangelistic in nature and painted Jesus as a miracle working figure who performed otherworldly feats to prove his God status and compel people to believe in Him.

John further expands his theological portrait of Jesus by defining Him as the word made flesh. This theological concept provides a framework for serious and weighty apologetic discourse. The central message of John rings true: namely, that the supernatural work performed by Jesus legitimizes His messianic claims and that we should believe in Him based upon the provided evidence. Though John’s chronicle of the

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<sup>25</sup> John MacArthur, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 1557.

<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, 1558.

<sup>27</sup> MacArthur, 1558.

<sup>28</sup> MacArthur, 1558.

messiah is disparate to the other Gospels, it still sets up the same storyline of first-century Jewish life under Roman rulership as the people await a savior.

During this period, the Roman authorities and establishment are now ruling in Israel. The temple has been rebuilt, and a socio-political storm is brewing on the horizon. Israel is looking towards a day when the messiah will come to vanquish all foreign oppression. It is also during this time that John the Baptist is born to awaken the spiritual consciousness of Israel and prepare the way for the messiah. According to Brian Dennert, “John shows continuity with the Scriptures and the practices of Israel. At the same time, John stands at the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promises and points to the ‘salvation’ that comes through Jesus.”<sup>29</sup> The familial and submissive relationship between John the Baptist and the messiah plays a major role in the decrease of John’s ministry and the concomitant increase in the public profile of the messiah.

The messiah is not the only important figure to appear in the form of a child; He is also entrusted to a young person. Mary is approached by an angel and given historic news: she has been chosen above all women and will serve as the vessel that God will use to bring the promised child to the Earth. King Herod, unwilling to relinquish his reign, attempts to thwart the birth of the messianic child by committing mass infanticide in Israel, but God sovereignly protects His child. The birth of Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament as “he continued to grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with both God and man” (Luke 2:52).

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<sup>29</sup> Brian C. Dennert, *John the Baptist and the Jewish Setting of Matthew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 48.

The birth of the Christ child signifies that God Himself has come to redeem all of humanity from the curse of the Mosaic law. Jesus develops in relative obscurity until the age of twelve, at which point Luke depicts Jesus as a student interacting with temple officials and teachers (Luke 2:41–52). The Scripture suggests that even at this young age Jesus has a quest for knowledge and believes that being in the temple is an example of proper worship and adherence to God’s will. He demonstrates that children have a place within the temple setting and should feel comfortable having conversations about faith and spiritual matters with spiritual authorities. The Gospels quickly move on from this adolescent period in Jesus’ life, but further depictions of the role of children within the Church appear elsewhere in the New Testament.

Christianity has continued to expand due to the discipleship model of passing down knowledge to its converts and followers. Jesus presented his teachings on the kingdom of God to his early adopters and commanded those disciples to dedicate their lives to the continuation of the gospel message for generations to come. As these youthful disciples were infused with child-like faith by the Holy Spirit, the world was forever transformed by the messiah and His apprenticeship model of ministry.

### **A Theology of Children in the New Testament**

The New Testament has much to offer on the role of children beyond Jesus’ statement, “Let the little children come to me” (Matt. 19:14).<sup>30</sup> Stemming from the life of Saul, who would later become known as Paul, a theology of children outside of the documented teachings of Jesus begins to emerge. As Udo Schnelle writes, “Paul develops

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<sup>30</sup> McGarry, 704.

his experience of the resurrected Jesus Christ on the Damascus road into a new interpretation of God, world, and human existence, one that leads to a radically changed life.”<sup>31</sup> For example, the apostle Paul picks up where Jesus left off and tells Timothy to not let anyone look down upon his youth: “Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). This passage of Scripture suggests that young people can play important roles in God’s Church and can provide an admirable example of what it means to follow Christ. In Titus 2, Paul further presents one of the only direct and explicit New Testament commands for the older generation to disciple the younger one.<sup>32</sup>

Vivienne Mountain, in her article “Four Links between Child Theology and Children’s Spirituality,” connects Jesus’ teachings on the kingdom of God to a theological construct that uses childlike behavior as a sign of true discipleship. She writes,

In the Matthew passage, the disciples were engaged in theological discussion as to who would be greatest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus takes a child and places the child “in the midst,” with the words “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 18:3). The prepubescent child is unremarkable, the gender is not an issue nor is the child shown in particular need or having special ability. The child “in the midst” confronts the disciples in their ambition and anxiety.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2003), 35.

<sup>32</sup> McGarry, 870.

<sup>33</sup> Vivienne Mountain, “Four Links between Child Theology and Children’s Spirituality,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 3 (2011): 262–63.

Mountain refers to the child as “a converting corrective in theology,” a means of warning the disciples “that they are in danger of not entering the kingdom.”<sup>34</sup>

The Old and New Testaments provide ample evidence that God has a crucial plan for children. God originally uses the promise of a coming messianic child as a clarion for the Old Testament prophets. He uses children to extend His promises to major biblical characters through the lineage of Abraham, culminating in a young girl being selected as the mother of Jesus. He moreover uses that promised child, His own son, as the substitutionary sacrifice to quench His wrath. It is clear that God has an important plan for the spiritual formation of children, one that is interwoven in the story of grace. Grace is extended as an olive branch to the Adamic race of people, repairing the seismic rift between the Father and His children. There is a clear biblical justification for strengthening children’s ministry today, and it is built on the belief that God desires to provide grace to all of His children. Children’s ministry is at the very heart of God’s plan, beginning with the Genesis narrative, and should be placed in the highest regard within ecclesiastical circles.

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<sup>34</sup> Mountain, 263.

### CHAPTER THREE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

As a first step towards realizing Victory Church's mission of developing a more successful children's ministry, this researcher completed a scholarly review of the literature surrounding two key questions: first, how do organizations improve their efficiency, and second, which children's ministry practices can be instituted to increase the ministry's overall effectiveness? Most of the relevant literature on organizational efficiency and effectiveness is gleaned from the fields of business, strategic management, and organizational strategy. According to Peter S. Davis and Timothy L. Pett, "although the criteria used to assess organizational performance have been quite diverse, virtually all of these criteria can be subsumed under the two distinct dimensions of effectiveness and efficiency."<sup>35</sup> Though effectiveness and efficiency work congruently to establish general organizational health, they can be studied and measured independently of one another to create a more robust organization.

#### **The Difference Between Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency**

In "Configurations of Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency," Cheri Ostroff and Neal Schmitt write that,

Efficiency and effectiveness are performance domains that have been clearly distinguished. Efficiency refers to an input-output ratio or comparison, whereas effectiveness refers to an absolute level of either input acquisition or outcome attainment. Although the best performing organizations are both effective and efficient, there may be trade-offs between the two. Progression along one

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<sup>35</sup> Peter S. Davis and Timothy L. Pett, "Measuring Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness," *Journal of Management Research* 2, no. 2 (August 2002): 87.

performance dimension could entail regression along another. Thus, an organization can be effective, efficient, both, or neither.<sup>36</sup>

Kevin Johnston uses the lens of strategic management to offer an even simpler delineation between efficiency and effectiveness: “efficiency aims to reduce the use of resources and thereby maximize returns, while effectiveness is measured in results.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Effectiveness Within a Church Setting*

Given that the aforementioned research stems from the domains of business and management, it is important to understand what effectiveness and efficiency look like within a church context. William Hoyt, in *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church*, suggests that some churches excuse their lack of effectiveness by citing their faithfulness. However, Hoyt argues that God has called us to be not only faithful and also fruitful.<sup>38</sup> As such, the Church should only measure its ministry effectiveness by one statistic: conversions.<sup>39</sup>

### *Pastoral Effectiveness*

Though the Church may measure its overall effectiveness by a metric known as conversion growth, leaders and ministries must still be evaluated for effectiveness. Robert McKenna and Katrina Eckard write in “Evaluating Pastoral Effectiveness: To Measure or Not to Measure” that pastoral effectiveness has been a topic of interest in the

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<sup>36</sup> Cheri Ostroff and Neal Schmitt, “Configurations of Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency,” *Academy of Management Journal* 36, no. 6 (1993): 1345, <https://doi.org/10.5465/256814>.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Johnston, “The Difference Between Efficiency and Effectiveness in Strategic Management,” *Houston Chronicle*, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/difference-between-efficiency-effectiveness-strategic-management-31117.html>.

<sup>38</sup> William R. Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 1100, Kindle.

<sup>39</sup> Hoyt, 1102.

literature since the 1950s, yet researchers have not been able to identify one trait or leadership style that accurately predicts the overall effectiveness of a pastoral leader. Researchers usually measure pastoral effectiveness according to in-role activities, tasks, and specific leadership skills.<sup>40</sup> Examples of these skills include “representing the congregation, cool under pressure, tolerant of uncertainty, persuasive, task-oriented, tolerant of freedom, controlling, relations-oriented, goal-oriented, accurate in predicting, and integrative.”<sup>41</sup> In McKenna and Eckard’s study, senior pastors were rated on several functions and skills by members of the congregation. Results revealed that the aforementioned leadership skills “were more predictive of leadership effectiveness than personality characteristics.”<sup>42</sup> McKenna and Eckard further argue that pastoral effectiveness can be described in terms of two criteria: primary and secondary characteristics. “Primary characteristics are associated with behaviors and tasks of the pastor, such as preaching, whereas secondary characteristics are associated with behaviors of the congregation, such as attendance.”<sup>43</sup> These primary and secondary characteristics can also be categorized according to the pastor’s impact on the congregation: primary characteristics “have an impact on the internal experience of the congregation,” whereas secondary characteristics are revealed in their external behavior.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Robert B. McKenna and Katrina Eckard, “Evaluating Pastoral Effectiveness: To Measure or Not to Measure,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 3 (2009): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-008-0191-5>.

<sup>41</sup> McKenna and Eckard, 304.

<sup>42</sup> McKenna and Eckard, 304.

<sup>43</sup> McKenna and Eckard, 304.

<sup>44</sup> McKenna and Eckard, 304.

However, standardized measures of pastoral effectiveness often do not consider “the real ways that pastors and those in authority over them measure pastoral effectiveness on a regular basis.”<sup>45</sup> For example, pastoral effectiveness is often evaluated by a board, council, or group of elders with limited experience in understanding the role of the pastorate and the numerous intangible factors that may impact performance. This is one of the glaring problems with the evaluation of pastoral effectiveness; a clear definition of pastoral effectiveness must be established before an assessment can be made. Moreover, McKenna and Eckard note that previous studies have failed to look at how church leaders describe their own methods for measuring the effectiveness of the role of senior pastor.<sup>46</sup>

This review of the literature suggests that the effectiveness of the senior pastor directly impacts the effectiveness of the overall church; thus, effective leadership change can ignite effective organizational change. In the context of this dissertation, this means that the effectiveness of the senior pastor is also tied to the effectiveness of the children’s ministry. As a result, measuring and developing strategies for improving pastoral effectiveness is essential to the study’s larger goal of improving and growing the children’s ministry.

#### *Children’s Ministry Effectiveness*

Given that the focus of this dissertation is the children’s ministry at Victory Church, it was important to review not only the literature on overall pastoral effectiveness but also the research on children’s ministries in particular. In her contribution to the

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<sup>45</sup> McKenna and Eckard, 304.

<sup>46</sup> McKenna and Eckard, 304.

edited volume *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, Marcia J. Bunge claims that “many churches do not adequately support programs for children and youth.”<sup>47</sup> She further writes that churches have a “mixed record” in their attitudes towards and treatment of children, citing the allegations of child abuse in the Church as evidence that church leaders’ behavior sometimes contradicts their self-professed ideology regarding children.<sup>48</sup> Bunge notes that even in churches that do not engage in outright abuse, children’s and family ministries are often underfunded, unsupervised, and even neglected by adults.<sup>49</sup> Her ultimate point is that the Church’s continued inattention to its children’s ministries can have far-ranging consequences. In order to achieve the aims of this thesis, it is essential to heed Bunge’s warnings and create a strong children’s ministry that does not perpetuate or tolerate negative attitudes towards or treatment of children in the church context. Churches should strive to cultivate a healthy spirituality for children that is both God honoring and excellent.

Rebecca Nye offers a straightforward definition of children’s spirituality as “God’s ways of being with children and children’s ways of being with God.”<sup>50</sup> This definition highlights the correlation between God’s desire to develop a relationship with a child and the child’s open curiosity towards the concept of God. The fact that God even

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<sup>47</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices for Faith Formation,” in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin E. Lawson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Bunge, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Bunge, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House, 2009), 5.

aspires to have a relationship with His creation is humbling, and children's ministries should create opportunities for children to cultivate their faith in a safe, educational, and fun way that builds Christian characteristics while sparking their interest to know God better. Children's ministries should also become adept at turning children into theologians. Friedhelm Kraft suggests that "the concept of children as theologians is derived from empirical research into questions concerning theodicy, the concept of God and the world, the symbolism of heaven, the development of a world view and the understanding of Creation, belief and children's Christology."<sup>51</sup> In short, children should be able to explore their religion in a productive and competent way that builds a theological framework that will continue to grow well into adulthood.<sup>52</sup> Thus, a children's ministry's efficiency and effectiveness can be gauged by its ability to turn children into mature Christians and theologians. However, many churches, whether intentionally or unintentionally, fail to help children connect to God by not focusing on the spiritual formation of their children.

In cases where a church is willing to improve its children's ministry but unsure of where to begin, Dan Reiland lists seven key factors that lead to an effective children's ministry: visionary leadership, team-based models, partnering with parents, managing change, intentional relationship building, good facilities, and evaluating systems and

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<sup>51</sup> Friedhelm Kraft, "Discovering Children's 'Christologies': An Introduction to the Practical Experience of Children's Theology," in *Hovering Over the Face of the Deep: Philosophy, Theology, and Children*, eds. Gertrud Yde Iversen, Gordon Mitchell, and Gaynor Pollard (Münster: Waxman Verlag, 2009), 218.

<sup>52</sup> Kraft, 218.

leadership training.<sup>53</sup> He begins by stating that visionary leadership is crucial for attracting new members, procuring funding, and moving a children's ministry beyond the status quo to the level of excellence. Vision entails a clear understanding of the children's ministry's purpose, direction, and plan of action. However, visionary leadership is not always limited to the children's ministry staff; it may also extend to the executive or associate pastor.<sup>54</sup>

In terms of team-based models, Reiland emphasizes that the concept of teamwork is not only task-related but should also reflect a true commitment on the part of team members to work together and grow together. The author writes that in the early days of children's ministry development (the late 1970s), the leader assumed responsibility for everything. Today, "team managing skills have to be learned and implemented to make ministry more effective."<sup>55</sup>

According to Reiland, well-designed children's ministry programs "encourage parents to provide input in the ministry and seek creative ways to provide support to these parents." The author insists that "building relationships with parents needs to be a primary initiative of today's children's ministry leaders."<sup>56</sup> Ivy Beckwith echoes that sentiment, stating that children's ministry leaders should "keep parents informed in a concrete and tangible way about what the kids are learning and talking about in their classes at Sunday school. This information gives parents a starting point for talking about

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<sup>53</sup> Dan Reiland, "Components of an Effective Children's Ministry," *Journeyonline*, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://journeyonline.org/components-of-an-effective-childrens-ministry/>.

<sup>54</sup> Reiland.

<sup>55</sup> Reiland.

<sup>56</sup> Reiland.

faith with their kids, which helps kids learn faith language and practice using it.”<sup>57</sup>

Reiland adds that change and flexibility are key elements of today’s children’s ministry landscape, arguing that the best programs “diagnose problems, initiate changes, and strategize ways to do their best to cope with this new dynamic environment.” By their nature, children’s leaders are change agents, and ministries should strive to support that impulse rather than fighting it.<sup>58</sup>

Reiland maintains that effective children’s ministries prioritize connecting with kids, and he discusses strategies for promoting intentional relationship building. He writes, for example, that setting aside time for small group activities within the regular schedule provides children with an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Likewise, planned activities during which kids can “hang out” with their peers and adults are an important means of building positive relationships. He notes that “relationship building strategies sometimes conflict with traditional educational methodologies,” but they are nonetheless “vital to the continual growth of the children’s ministry.”<sup>59</sup>

Reiland suggests that facilities also play a major role in developing an effective children’s ministry. He makes the case that a commitment to maintaining a vibrant physical space and quality learning environments for children increases the likelihood of engaging people who have children.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the author rates facilities as one of the most

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<sup>57</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Formational Children’s Ministry: Shaping Children Using Story, Ritual, and Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 63.

<sup>58</sup> Reiland.

<sup>59</sup> Reiland.

<sup>60</sup> Reiland.

important requirements for a successful children's ministry, second only to the teaching team. He writes that well-marked, clean, colorful, contemporary facilities speak of a church's commitment to its kids. Moreover, creating such spaces is not always prohibitively expensive; it merely requires pastors to "update the space to be current with the needs of today's child."<sup>61</sup>

The article concludes with a discussion of evaluation and training as a means of increasing children's ministry effectiveness. Reiland conveys that "churches must continue to use some evaluative device to insure their children's ministry is positioned to respond not only to present problems, but also to be prepared for future ministry changes."<sup>62</sup> The author also connects this evaluative system with the training systems of the church, arguing that a key component of a successful children's ministry program is a commitment to leadership training. Lastly, he insists that "a strong commitment to localized training is invaluable" because "training lay leadership insures the highest quality of week-to-week ministry."<sup>63</sup>

Based on this review of the pertinent literature on what effectiveness looks like in a church context, effectiveness can now be defined as measurable results, or the number of conversions. Other relevant conclusions for this dissertation are that the pastor is responsible for being effective as the chief visionary and architect of the ministry culture, but the other individuals working in a collective ministry also need to be effective in their roles. If the ministry or personnel are not effective, then an evaluative process needs to be

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<sup>61</sup> Reiland.

<sup>62</sup> Reiland.

<sup>63</sup> Reiland.

applied to determine what kinds of training and changes should be instituted. These conclusions are essential to building the framework of an effective children's ministry.

### *Efficiency Within A Church Setting*

If a church's effectiveness is measured by its conversion growth, then efficiency aims to reduce the church's expenditure of resources and maximize the return on investment. Simply adhering to the church budget does not always result in efficiency. Instead, it is the rate of return on ministry investment that signifies the efficiency of the church. Efficiency is also linked to effectiveness. As Hoyt writes, "the more efficient the system, the higher the visitor retention rate; it is efficiency that creates the window of opportunity to succeed and be effective."<sup>64</sup> The concept of efficiency does not have its origins in the Church. Instead, it can be traced to organizational developers who use efficiency to calibrate, change, or reframe an organization in a systematic way. Thus, in order to create systems that maximize efficiency, the Church will need to move beyond traditional models and consider nonbiblical and secular business practices. This does not negate the spiritual nature of the Church or tarnish its mission; rather, efficiency enhances these facets while providing the tools to continue promoting the best possible organizational outcomes.

### **Organizational Development**

In his book *Organizational Change and Culture*, Edgar Schein suggests that if "any part of the core cognitive structure [of an organization] is to change in more than minor, incremental ways, the system must first experience enough disequilibrium to force

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<sup>64</sup> Hoyt, 621.

a coping process that goes beyond just reinforcing the assumptions that are already in place.”<sup>65</sup> It is the aim of this researcher to create disequilibrium in the children’s ministry in order to move to a more efficient model that in turn leads to greater effectiveness.

Schein calls the creation of such disequilibrium “unfreezing,” or generating a motivation to change. Unfreezing requires three very different components, each of which must be present in order for the system to develop some incentive to change:

enough disconfirming data to cause serious discomfort and disequilibrium; the connection of the disconfirming data to important goals and ideals, causing anxiety and/or guilt; and enough psychological safety, in the sense of being able to see a possibility of solving the problem and learning something new without loss of identity or integrity. Transformative change implies that the person or group that is the target of change must unlearn something as well as learn something new.<sup>66</sup>

This research suggests that the children’s ministry of Victory Church is going to have to unfreeze some of the practices that are currently being deployed in order to pursue better systems. In beginning to solve the problem of how to improve the children’s ministry, Schein’s work is key to understanding how applying new methods and principles within the children’s ministry can lead to both efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Action Research**

Given the concrete, practical aims of this dissertation, it was important to review research methodologies that prioritize praxis over theory. The literature suggests that today’s organizational development is driven by action research. According to John Creswell,

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<sup>65</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985), 300.

<sup>66</sup> Schein, 301.

action research uses quantitative methods, qualitative methods, or both to investigate a specific, practical problem and arrive at actionable solutions. In short, action research designs are systematic procedures enacted in a variety of settings to gather information about and subsequently improve their particular setting. The researcher using this method seeks to empower, transform, and emancipate individuals from situations that constrain their self-development and self-determination.<sup>67</sup>

It is the goal of this researcher to use both quantitative and qualitative data to transform the children's ministry of Victory Church. Action research was therefore employed to aid in the development of actionable solutions to the problems the children's ministry is currently facing.

### *The Origins of Action Research*

The founding fathers of what is known as "action research" are John Dewey and Kurt Lewin. John Dewey is best known for creating the University Laboratory School (now the Dewey School) at the University of Chicago in 1896. The Laboratory School was a place for educational experiments, where theories and practices were developed, tested, criticized, refined, and tried again.<sup>68</sup> The social psychologist Kurt Lewin coined the term "action research" in the 1930s. Lewin believed that social conditions could be improved and enhanced through a process of group discussions. These group processes consisted of four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. By focusing on group processes and identifying phases of action, Lewin's approach introduced many of the modern ideas of action research. Spreading from the social sector to education, Lewin's ideas and philosophy were adopted by several leading institutions in America and

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<sup>67</sup> John W. Creswell, *Educational Research*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008), 597.

<sup>68</sup> Ronnie Lessem and Alexander Schieffer, *Integral Research: A Global Approach towards Social Science Research Leading to Social Innovation* (Geneva: TRANS4M, 2008), 408.

England.<sup>69</sup> Today, action research is used primarily as a tool to help teachers study their own classroom problems and issues. It also provides a structure to help transform schools and declining educational practices.<sup>70</sup>

### *Action Theory's Relevance for This Project*

The University of Chicago Laboratory School founded by John Dewey states that the principle of “learning by doing” has always guided the school’s efforts.<sup>71</sup> The ability to learn by doing is also critical to this project. This concept helps the people who have participated in the project to understand that the interviews conducted were part of an initial process of continued organizational evaluation. The overall aim is to see what does and does not work as this researcher looks to help Victory Church’s children’s ministry become more efficient and effective. According to Alice McIntyre, author of *Participatory Action Research*, participatory action research leads researchers into previously unfamiliar pathways; involvement in the process is likely to stimulate us to think in new ways about both old and new theoretical problems, thus generating provocative new ideas.<sup>72</sup>

### **Reframing the Organization**

Because the aim of this project was to reframe Victory Church’s children’s ministry, a review of the literature on what happens when an organization is reframed was undertaken. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, in their book *Reframing*

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<sup>69</sup> Creswell, 597–98.

<sup>70</sup> Creswell, 599.

<sup>71</sup> “About Lab,” University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, accessed September 24, 2020, <http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/about-lab/index.aspx>.

<sup>72</sup> Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 749–50, Kindle.

*Organizations*, articulate that “reframing requires an ability to think about situations from more than one angle.”<sup>73</sup> They introduce four distinct frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—that collectively provide a more comprehensive picture of the nature of organizational change and how to successfully enact it. Each of the frames has its own strengths and limitations; however, the structural and human resource frames are particularly useful to this research project.

### *Structural Frame*

As this researcher advanced through this project, certain structures within the current ministry context needed to be developed or demolished. According to Bolman and Deal, the structural frame explores the key role that social architecture plays in the functioning of organizations. Managers must understand the basic issues in order to design structural frameworks that fit the organization’s goals, tasks, and context, with the understanding that different organizations require different structures in order to be effective in their unique environments.<sup>74</sup> Structural frames concentrate on developing systems; setting measurable goals; delineating tasks; and creating benchmarks, processes, and deadlines.

Furthermore, “the structural frame looks beyond individuals to examine the social architecture of work. Though sometimes equated with red tape, mindless memos, and rigid bureaucrats, the approach is much broader and more subtle.”<sup>75</sup> Bolman and Deal

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<sup>73</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 6–7, Kindle.

<sup>74</sup> Bolman and Deal, 72–73.

<sup>75</sup> Bolman and Deal, 68.

emphasize that “if structure is overlooked, an organization often misdirects energy and resources. It may, for example, waste time and money on massive training programs in a vain effort to solve problems that have much more to do with social architecture than people’s skills or attitudes.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, structure is essential to organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Before implementing solutions to the problems within Victory’s children’s ministry, this researcher had to first ensure that he understood the precise nature of those problems in order to develop appropriate, successful solutions.

#### *Human Resource Frame*

This project also studied the impact of human capabilities on Victory Church. Bolman and Deal write that the human resource frame seeks to “explore the properties of both people and organizations, and what happens when the two intersect.”<sup>77</sup> Put another way, the human resource frame “focuses on the relationship between organizations and human nature.”<sup>78</sup> The human resource frame primarily emphasizes granting personnel the capacity and opportunity to execute their jobs well, while at the same time channeling their need for human interaction into personal development and job fulfillment.

The human resource frame also shows “how managers’ practices and assumptions about people can lead either to alienation and hostility or to commitment and high motivation.”<sup>79</sup> To that end, it contrasts two strategies for achieving effectiveness: “lean

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<sup>76</sup> Bolman and Deal, 68.

<sup>77</sup> Bolman and Deal, xii.

<sup>78</sup> Bolman and Deal, xii.

<sup>79</sup> Bolman and Deal, xii.

and mean' or investing in people."<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, "the human resource frame centers on what organizations and people do to and for one another," highlighting the reciprocal relationship between people and organizations.<sup>81</sup> Bolman and Deal write that,

organizations need people (for their energy, effort, and talent), and people need organizations (for the many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they offer), but their respective needs are not always well aligned. When the fit between people and organizations is poor, one or both suffer: individuals may feel neglected or oppressed, and organizations sputter because individuals withdraw their efforts or even work against organizational purposes. Conversely, good fit benefits both parties: individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed.<sup>82</sup>

As this researcher seeks to connect the research on efficiency back to a church context, understanding how organizations work and change is vital to the project. The effectiveness of the children's ministry is dependent on a system. The current system is not maximizing the return on resource investment, which is leading to lackluster results. As the literature has conveyed, Victory Church will need to develop the structure and human resource components of the children's ministry to enhance the overall quality of the ministry.

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<sup>80</sup> Bolman and Deal, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Bolman and Deal, 117.

<sup>82</sup> Bolman and Deal, 137.

## CHAPTER FOUR: JUSTIFICATION AND APPLICATION OF CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The intention of this project was to find and implement key principles that could impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the children's ministry at Victory Church. Case study research methodology was selected to provide a qualitative analysis for the project. Locating a case study church that modeled effective and efficient children's ministry qualities was therefore paramount. The case study church identified for this project, Crosspointe Church of Houston, Texas, matched the paradigm criteria of an effective and efficient children's ministry. Crosspointe was also chosen because of an existing friendship between their senior pastor and this researcher and because Victory and Crosspointe have several commonalities. Crosspointe Church is similar in age, size, culture, demographics, and style to Victory Church. Though similar in many areas, the children's ministry of Crosspointe Church is numerically larger and, from an outside perspective, seems more efficient and effective than Victory Church's children's ministry. Studying this phenomenon was crucial to understanding the underlying factors that can contribute to Victory Church developing a more efficient and effective children's ministry.

### **Justification for the Project**

As senior pastor of Victory Church, this researcher is operationally responsible for the overall direction of the ministry. His role as the chief ministry architect affords him leadership capital in all of the ministries of Victory Church. As a result of his own

pastoral insight and knowledge of the children's ministry, this pastor knew that changes to the children's ministry were needed to increase its efficiency and effectiveness.

Notably, this pastor observed that the children's director was not scheduling meetings with team members, children were not growing spiritually due to a lack of adherence to the educational materials, and there were not many planned activities to increase participation and parental involvement. This pastor had attempted to energize and incentivize the staff to create better programming, but to no avail.

Meetings with staff members of the children's ministry also provided input into what changes the team wanted to implement prior to this project. For example, the team had suggested creating a one-room mass gathering environment on Sundays to allow for the youth pastor to become the primary communicator to children ages twelve and younger. The impetus for the change was the belief that it would be easier for the youth pastor to assume sole responsibility for the children's spiritual education rather than train volunteers and keep them consistently engaged in teaching.

Finally, this researcher has two children who are children's ministry participants and who provided a unique perspective on the inner workings, philosophy, and practices of the children's ministry. This researcher specifically learned that the children wanted more planned recreational activities that they could invite their friends to. They also wanted an opportunity to have more conversations about and interactions with the curriculum at home after services were over. After conversations with the pastor's children, staff members, and Victory Church members at large, this researcher knew that the church would have to pursue new strategies and practices in order to achieve the

desired growth. Improvement through analysis and comparison was the purpose of this project.

### **Benefits and Costs**

The direct beneficiaries of the findings of this project are the senior pastor, the children's ministry staff, and Victory Church at large. Victory Church agreed to pay for any costs associated with this project. Initial projected costs included airfare, lodging, and meals during a site visit to Crosspointe Church, the case study church in Houston, Texas, as well as any necessary material resources. However, a global pandemic made it unsafe to travel to Houston. Thus, this researcher amended his travel plans and instead used virtual options to collect the data. As a result of the global pandemic, the budget and costs for this project were drastically reduced. An unforeseen benefit of the pandemic was that the case study church had greater availability to help this researcher with this project due to a state-mandated shutdown of all religious services.

### **Definition of Case Study Methodology**

G. David Garson describes case study research as “an umbrella term that means different things to different researchers. There are as many types of case studies as there are researchers. However, this has not stopped scholars from categorizing case studies into types, and these typologies throw light on the dimensions of case study research.”<sup>83</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia L. Leavy further complicate this definition in their book *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, stating, “Case study is a decision about what is to be studied, not a methodological decision, although it also guides how inquiry

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<sup>83</sup> G. David Garson, *Case Study Analysis and QCA*, Statistical Associates “Blue Book” Series 1 (Asheboro, NC: Statistical Associates, 2016), 6.

proceeds.”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, they note that researchers who conduct case study research often refer to their work by the particular methods employed within the case study, such as ethnography or oral history, rather than using the umbrella term of “case study.” As a result, a great deal of case study research is not defined as such.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, Hesse-Biber and Leavy ultimately define case study as an “in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program, or system in a ‘real life’ context.”<sup>86</sup>

In addition to highlighting the “real life” applications that can be deduced from case study methodology, Hesse-Biber and Leavy explain the purpose of case studies: “to arrive at an in-depth understanding of a particular case in order to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice, and civil or community action.”<sup>87</sup> Having developed an understanding of other methodologies in comparison to case studies, this researcher determined that the “real life” application capabilities and qualitative nature of case study were best suited to the intended outcomes of this project. As this researcher continued to study case study methodology, he hypothesized that analyzing, classifying, and implementing similar children’s ministry dynamics as those in the case study church would greatly impact the overall future of Victory Church. Using

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<sup>84</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia L. Leavy, *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), loc. 3794, Kindle.

<sup>85</sup> Hesse-Biber and Leavy, loc. 3801.

<sup>86</sup> Hesse-Biber and Leavy, loc. 3808–9.

<sup>87</sup> Hesse-Biber and Leavy, loc. 3809.

the case study church as a barometer and achievable model of success opened up possibilities for a more effective and efficient children's ministry.

### **Types of Case Studies**

According to Creswell, "case study research begins with the identification of a specific case that will be described and analyzed...Typically, case study researchers study current, real life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information not lost by time. The key to the case identification is that it is bounded, meaning that it can be defined or described within certain parameters."<sup>88</sup> He goes on to identify three main types of case study pathways that researchers use to develop and deliver measurable outcomes: intrinsic, instrumental, and multiple/collective case studies. Creswell defines these pathways as follows:

intrinsic case studies focus on a single unusual or unique situation, evaluating the case on its own terms. Instrumental case studies focus on an issue or concern and then select one bounded case to illustrate this issue. Finally, in a multiple/collective case study, the researcher elects to study several programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site in order to show different perspectives on the issue.<sup>89</sup>

This researcher studied each of the three types of case study pathways and determined that the instrumental form of case study was the best methodology for this project, as problems with children's ministries are not unusual or unique to Victory Church. Moreover, limiting the project to a singular case study church whose children's ministry contrasts the current phenomena found within the children's ministry at Victory Church

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<sup>88</sup> Creswell, 98, 96.

<sup>89</sup> Creswell, 99.

enabled this researcher to quickly collect, analyze, and interpret the data in a logical and systematic way.

### **Research Design Used for This Project**

For this case study project, the researcher based his research design on the template found in Winston Tellis's journal article, "Application of a Case Study Methodology."<sup>90</sup> Following Tellis's recommendations, the project consisted of four stages. The first stage was to design the case study protocol, which involved determining the skills required to successfully complete the project and developing and reviewing the protocol. The second stage was to conduct the case study—more specifically, prepare for data collection, distribute the survey, and conduct interviews. In the third stage, this researcher analyzed the case study evidence. Finally, conclusions, recommendations, and implications were developed based on the evidence.

#### *Stage One: Design the Case Study Protocol*

Tellis suggests that a successful case study researcher "must possess or acquire the following skills: the ability to ask good questions and to interpret the responses, be a good listener, be adaptive and flexible to react to various situations, have a firm grasp of issues being studied, and be unbiased by preconceived notions."<sup>91</sup> As this researcher was designing the case study protocol, he relied on his training as a researcher and his administrative skill set to prepare for the case study. Preparing a schedule was key to the

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<sup>90</sup> Winston Tellis, "Application of a Case Study Methodology," *The Qualitative Report* 3, no. 3 (1997): 3, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/1997.2015>.

<sup>91</sup> Tellis, 3.

creation of this project and was essential in staying organized and on target with timeframes, deadlines, and project goals.

The case study protocol consisted of four sections. First, a case study church was identified with a strong focus on children's ministry and similar demographics to Victory Church. Once selected, an official conversation with the senior pastor took place to see if the church would be willing to participate in the case study. After approval was granted, an overview of the case study project was developed, which included stating project objectives, identifying case study issues, and reviewing the literature on the topic under investigation. Second, field procedures were created, such as a consent form that would be given to the project participants. Next, case study questions were created. The survey in its final format consisted of eleven questions. These questions were both qualitative and quantitative in nature to target both the effectiveness and efficiency concepts that this researcher was looking for. The questions sought to identify the relationship between the children's ministry and the church as a whole, the practices that were helping or hindering the children's ministry from achieving its initiatives and objectives, explanations for why some initiatives work better than others, and the impact of staff and volunteer selection and training on the children's ministry, among other topics. A copy of the survey can be found in the appendix. Finally, an outline and format were determined for the case study report, with the understanding that the report would be essential to clearly communicating the project findings to Victory's children's ministry team, this researcher's thesis committee, and other interested parties.

#### *Stage Two: Conduct the Case Study*

Once the case study question instruments were developed in their final format, this researcher moved on to the second stage: conducting the case study. According to

Tellis, this stage entails preparing for data collection, distributing surveys, and conducting interviews.<sup>92</sup> Before the data could be collected, it was critical to first receive formal consent from all involved parties. The senior pastor of Crosspointe Church and this researcher had an agreement in principle for Crosspointe to participate in this study. However, consent forms needed to be signed to ratify the agreement and establish ground rules for participation in the study. The consent forms provided the title of the study along with this researcher's name. It included sections that clearly outlined what was expected from the participants and how the data would be collected and processed. The consent form also absolved participants from any risk while providing them with the ability to withdraw from the study for any reason. The consent form furthermore included a statement that promised to ensure each participant's anonymity. Though the participants would remain anonymous, the consent form stated that the data provided may be shared with the researcher's supervisor, thesis committee members, and Victory Church's leadership. Lastly, the consent form formalized the agreement through a digital signature.

Initially, this researcher wanted to conduct in-person interviews, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, flying to the case study church was viewed as a major health concern. Thus, this researcher had to amend the project design by sending out surveys via email and conducting virtual interviews via the Zoom web conference platform. The surveys were distributed to three key staff people: the senior pastor, the youth pastor, and the children's director of the case study church. After all the survey data was collected, three Zoom interviews were scheduled with each of the project participants to ask

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<sup>92</sup> Tellis, 7.

additional questions, discuss findings, and compare the case study children's ministry to the children's ministry at Victory Church. The interviews were open-ended in nature. According to Tellis, open-ended interviews are recommended "to expand the depth of data gathering, and to increase the number of sources of information."<sup>93</sup>

*Stage Three: Analyze the Case Study Evidence*

Once the second stage was completed, this researcher moved on to the third stage of the project: analyzing the case study evidence, locating patterns within the evidence, and comparing those patterns to the initial hypothesis. Tellis writes, "data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study."<sup>94</sup> This researcher examined the data found within the surveys and interviews using the Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics was used to find behavioral patterns, trends, and insights from the case study church. According to Tellis, "pattern-matching is one of the most desirable strategies for analysis. This technique compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. If the patterns match, the internal reliability of the study is enhanced."<sup>95</sup>

*Stage Four: Develop Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications Based on the Evidence*

Data analysis naturally leads into the fourth and final stage: developing conclusions, recommendations, and implications based on the evidence. This was essential to finding a mechanism to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the

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<sup>93</sup> Tellis, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Tellis, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Tellis, 13.

children's ministry of Victory Church. Tellis argues, "The reporting aspect of a case study is perhaps most important from the user perspective. It is the contact point between the user and the researcher."<sup>96</sup> Although the user and the researcher are one and the same in this project, the findings and recommendations will also be presented to the children's ministry team of Victory Church in the near future. Conclusions and recommendations will be discussed in more detail in chapter six.

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<sup>96</sup> Tellis, 16.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS FROM SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

### **The Primary Instrument of Data Collection: An Eleven-Question Survey**

The primary instrument for data collection for this project was an eleven-question survey sent out via email to three key leaders at Crosspointe Church. The surveys were distributed to the people deemed most responsible for fostering the effectiveness and efficiency of Crosspointe's children's ministry. The senior pastor, youth pastor, and children's director were selected due to their direct role in creating and overseeing the systems within the children's ministry at Crosspointe Church.

The survey was divided into two parts. The first six questions of the survey were written to discover more about the participants' viewpoints on the effectiveness of the children's ministry of Crosspointe Church. The last five questions were established to receive more information on what the participants believe makes Crosspointe's children's ministry efficient. By design, the questions about effectiveness were qualitative in nature and answers to those questions were collected in essay form. The questions revolving around efficiency were more quantitative in nature so that it would be easier to provide graphical data for the project findings. After all the survey data was collected, the secondary stage of data collection began. Three Zoom interviews were scheduled with each of the project participants to ask additional questions, discuss findings, and compare the case study children's ministry to the children's ministry at Victory Church. The interviews were open-ended in nature and questions were asked to gain more clarity regarding survey responses. After the interviews were conducted, the final stage of the

case study culminated with analysis of the data. The data from the surveys was organized through the Qualtrics platform system to quickly tabulate, compare, categorize, and evaluate the information.

### **Analysis of Data from the Children's Ministry Effectiveness and Efficiency Survey**

#### *Findings from Question #1*

**Q1: What are the demographic characteristics of the students involved in the children's ministry? Is the children's ministry equally effective for different types of students (for example, males and females, ethnic minorities, children from non-nuclear families)?**

Our children's ministry has a pretty even split between boys and girls. I believe we are close to 40 % girls and 60% Boys. Our children's ministry is effective in reaching all kinds and types of kids.

Are church is very diverse ethnically and the students represent the ethnic diversity of our church as well. We are close to 47% female and 53% male in terms of participants in the children's ministry which is considered children under 12 years old. The children's ministry is effective to differing students. However, the girls are better at paying attention during the teaching times.

The demographics of the students involved in the children's ministry are ages 12 and under. We currently are 47% female and 53% male. the children's ministry is equally effective for students of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and families.

The data from question #1 revealed that the participants in the children's ministry are within the targeted age range of twelve and under. The data also included the ratio of females to males that are attending the children's ministry: current demographic reports suggest that the children's ministry comprises 47% female and 53% male students. The survey participants believe that the children's ministry is effective for all students ages twelve and under, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and family of origin. Additional questions were asked in the second stage Zoom interviews to expound on what it means to be effective when working with children ages twelve and under. Highlights from those conversations are discussed in the second half of this chapter.

*Findings from Question #2*

**Q2: How is the strategy of the children’s ministry contributing to both the overall strength and spiritual formation of children in your church in the last three years?**

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The strategic plan of our church is to help people find, know, and grow in God. Our pastor preaches that message every week and it has become the culture of every ministry. The children's ministry is no different and that is a strength of the church. It is the reason why my family and I attend Crosspointe,

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The strategy of the children's ministry is a strength and is based on the vision of our church. We exist to help kids find, know, and grow in God. We have done that consistently over the last three years.

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The strategy of the children's ministry is centered around our Pastor's vision of helping people to find, know, and grow in God. The children's ministry strategy is centered around that concept. In the last three years we have seen tremendous growth and our children's ministry is one of our strongest ministries.

The data gathered from question #2 conveyed that the three participants’ children’s ministry work adheres to the pastoral/church vision: “helping people to find, know, and grow in God.” This vision statement is considered the overarching strategy upon which all of Crosspointe’s ministries are based. However, the answers from question #2 did not provide a concrete, definitive explanation of how the strategy of helping people find, know, and grow in God has contributed to the overall strength and spiritual formation of children in the last three years. Additional questions were asked in the secondary phase via Zoom interviews to provide greater clarity to this question.

*Findings from Question #3*

**Q3: To what extent have the methods employed in the children’s ministry produced unintended outcomes (positive and negative)?**

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We have several methods to help kids find, know, and grow in God.

1. A Great Children's Staff and Awesome Volunteers
2. Fun Kids Activities (pre Covid-19 days)
3. Sound Biblical Teaching Curriculum (we use custom material for our church)
4. Involved Parents

I have not seen any negatives at this time.

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I think one of the best things we could have done was hire Ashlyn as our new children's ministry director about three years ago. She has taken the children's ministry to another level!

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The methods we currently use are creative, engaging, activities driven, and educational. We always envisioned a children's ministry where kids could find, know, and grow in God on their level. This method of ministry has produced positive outcomes. At the present moment, we do not have any negative outcomes.

The data from question #3 revealed the methods currently being employed in the children's ministry. One of the participants provided a detailed summary of their methods, writing that the following four components had produced positive outcomes in the children's ministry: great children's staff and volunteers; fun kids' activities (pre-Covid-19); a sound biblical teaching curriculum; and involved parents. Another participant suggested that a creative, engaging, and activity-driven children's ministry coupled with education produces positive outcomes. Lastly, one participant suggested that the hire of a singular staff person was responsible for producing a positive outcome within the children's ministry in the last three years. No negative outcomes were recorded.

#### *Findings from Question #4*

**Q4: What is helping or hindering the children's ministry from achieving its initiatives and objectives? What explains why some initiatives work better than others?**

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Helping: We have a supportive Pastor who always challenges all the ministry to have kingdom excellence in everything we do. We also have a talented children's director who is creative and great with developing our team and volunteers. Sometimes if we do not hit an initiative it is because of a lack of planning or commitment to the project.

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Having a great team that aligns with the vision of our church helps to keep us achieving our objectives and initiatives. Some things work better than others because we put more energy behind it in support, communication, planning, and advertising.

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What helps the children's ministry to achieve its initiatives and objectives is the support of our Senior Pastor, the support of parents, and the support of our staff and volunteer team. We could not accomplish our goals without all of these people working together. Some initiatives work better than others because we have more planning time to pull the initiative together. Also, some initiatives work better when they are more popular with the children and their parents. We try to provide their input in objectives to create initiatives that they will support.

The responses to question #4 provided information on what is helping or hindering the children's ministry from achieving its initiatives and objectives. Having the support of the senior pastor was a recurring theme in two of the participants' answers. The senior pastor has been essential in pushing the children's ministry team to excel and

achieve their goals. In addition to a supportive pastor, the children's director was highlighted as critical to the development of team members and volunteers.

Understanding precisely how the team members align themselves with the vision of the church and the initiatives of the children's ministry was an item that required further clarification. In the secondary phase of the data collection portion of this project, additional questions were asked to better understand the dynamic relationship between the team's alignment with the vision of the church and the achievement of objectives.

Question #4 also asked why some initiatives work better than others. According to the survey answers, adequate planning, proper communication, and commitment to the project are instrumental to understanding why some initiatives work better than others. Other respondents claimed that the success of initiatives was partly determined by the popularity of the initiatives with parents and the level of support and input from parents, staff, and volunteers. Additional information on what types of activities or initiatives are considered more popular was gleaned from the secondary phase of Zoom interviews.

#### *Findings from Question #5*

##### **Q5: To what extent is the selection of the best staff and volunteers responsible for the quality of the children's ministry program?**

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Our pastor always talks about being part of the dream team and how that can make our church the Church God dreamed of. Selecting committed, spiritually gifted, and creative people is responsible for the quality of the children's ministry program.

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Once again, hiring Ashlyn was one of the best moves our church could make. She along with her team are responsible for developing a quality children's ministry.

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Having a great staff and volunteer force is one of the greatest ways to have a quality children's ministry program. We try to put people in positions of their giftedness and that also helps to keep the program quality.

Question #5 was introduced to explore a potential link between staff/volunteer selection and the quality of the children's ministry program. The data collected from this question suggests that selecting committed, spiritually gifted, and creative people to lead

the children's ministry program has had a positive effect on the quality of the children's ministry at Crosspointe Church. In particular, one participant noted that the strategic hire of Ashlyn, the children's ministry director, was one of the best moves the church had made. The respondent attributed the rising quality of the children's ministry to Ashlyn and her team. This evidence solidifies the link between the selection of key staff and the quality of the ministry program.

*Findings from Question #6*

**Q6: Over the last three-year period of children's ministry development, did any changes occur in the church's support for the ministry or the number and types of children who were willing to participate?**

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In the last three years there has been a major growth spurt in our church. Overall, I believe it is attributed to more people knowing about Crosspointe. Also, I think our children's ministry became more of a focus of Crosspointe with the addition of our new Children's Director.

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yes, we hired Ashlyn within the last three years and more children are participating in the children's ministry now than before.

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In the last 3 years our budget did double. After the budget doubled, we were able to add a staff member, plan more activities, and provide more resources to our volunteer staff through training.

Question #6 was designed to provide additional information about changes that the children's ministry underwent over the previous three-year period. This question was asked in order to pinpoint if there had been an increase in children's ministry participants, and if so, to determine the underlying causes of the three-year growth period. The data collected points to several factors that promoted the growth of the children's ministry. The first finding was that Crosspointe Church was experiencing an overall growth spurt, which one survey participant suggested was due to more people "knowing about" Crosspointe Church. Additional information was needed to ascertain how people were finding out about Crosspointe Church and how that was impacting participation in the children's ministry. The secondary stage of Zoom interviews was instrumental in helping this researcher understand these underlying factors.

In addition to more people attending Crosspointe Church, the budget for the children’s ministry was also raised: one study participant shared that the budget had doubled in size. This infusion of ministry capital allowed the church to add a staff member, plan more activities, and provide more resources to volunteer staff through training. The secondary stage of interviews was crucial to determining if there was a link between the numerical growth of Crosspointe and the growth of the children’s ministry budget.

#### *Findings from Question #7*

Question #7 asked: Does the cost (of salaries, facilities, materials, and activities) to run the children’s ministry positively benefit/negatively impact the quality of the children’s ministry program? It was the first quantitative and efficiency focused question in the survey. This question was used to determine whether the cost of running the children’s ministry positively or negatively impacts the quality of the program. The data (shown in graph form below) shows that 100 percent of the survey participants believe that the costs, including salaries, facilities, materials, and activities, are justifiable because they positively benefit the children’s ministry program.

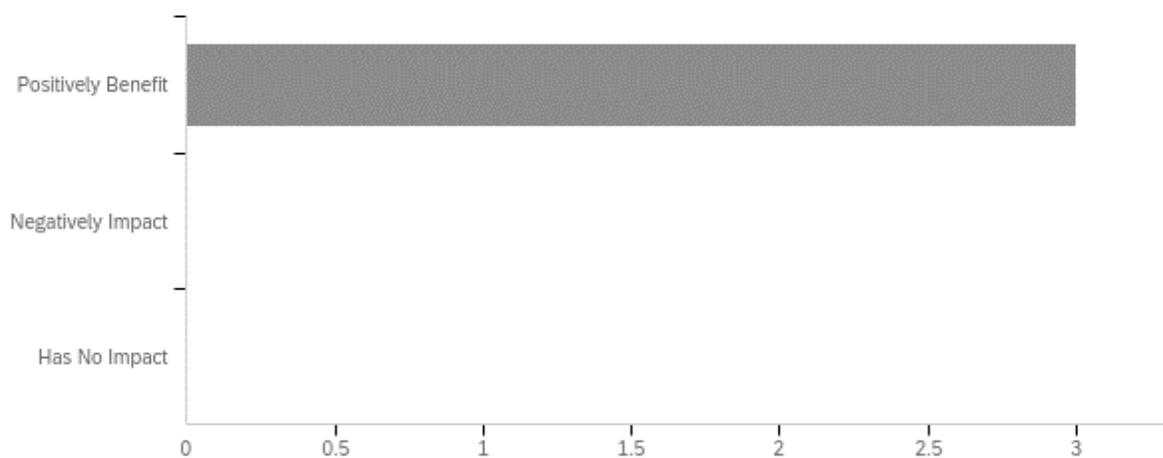


Figure 5.1. Responses to question #7 (raw numbers)

Table 5.1. Responses to question #7 (statistical analysis)

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
	Does the cost (of salaries, facilities, materials and activities) to run the children's ministry positively benefit/negatively impact the quality of the children's ministry program?	8.00	8.00	8.00	0.00	0.00	3

Table 5.2. Responses to question #7 (percentages)

#	Answer	%	Count
	Positively Benefit	100.00%	3
	Negatively Impact	0.00%	0
	Has No Impact	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	3

### *Findings from Question #8*

Question #8 asked: To what extent do the children's ministry expenditures impact the overall church budget? Does the percentage of financial resources allocated to the children's ministry impact the efficiency of developing the faith of children within your church? It was a follow-up to question #7, and its purpose was to determine how the benefit-cost ratio of financial resources allocated to the children's ministry affects the efficiency of developing the faith of children. According to 100 percent of the survey participants, while the children's ministry does impact the overall church budget, it also leads to efficient development of the faith of the children in the ministry. Secondary data

was sourced from the interviews to provide details on what constitutes efficiency in the faith development of children.

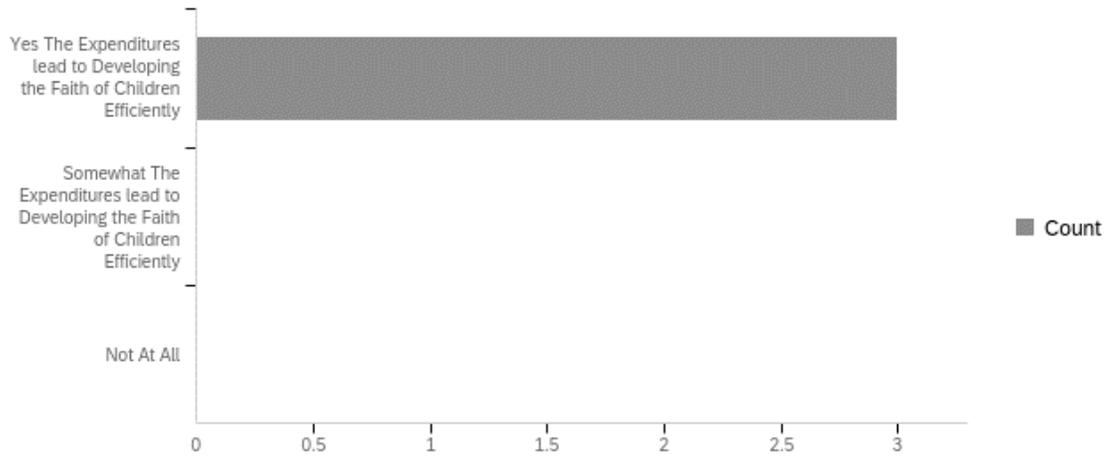


Figure 5.2. Responses to question #8 (raw numbers)

Table 5.3. Responses to question #8 (statistical analysis)

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
	The ratio of the overall church budget to the children's ministry is adequate in developing the faith of the children at your church efficiently	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	3

Table 5.4. Responses to question #8 (percentages)

#	Answer	%	Count
	Yes, the expenditures lead to developing the faith of children efficiently	100.00%	3
	Somewhat, the expenditures lead to developing the faith of children efficiently	0.00%	0
	Not at all	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	3

*Findings from Question #9*

Question #9 asked: How important are communication and organizational processes in developing an efficient children’s ministry? One hundred percent of the survey participants viewed communication and organizational processes as particularly important to developing an efficient children’s ministry. The data from the secondary phase interviews revealed the type of communication and organizational processes that are currently being used at Crosspointe Church.

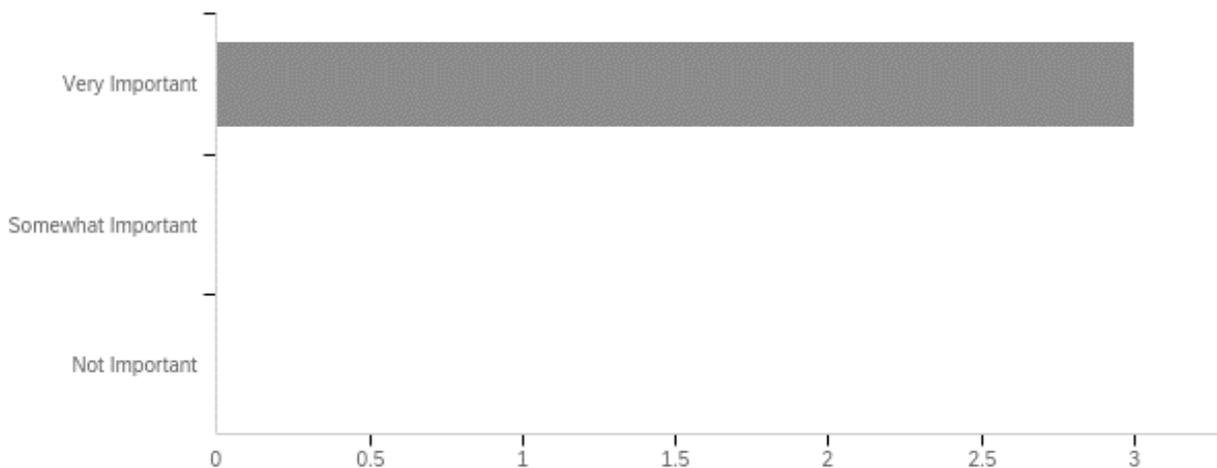


Figure 5.3. Responses to question #9 (raw numbers)

Table 5.5. Responses to question #9 (statistical analysis)

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
	How important are communication and organizational processes in developing an efficient children’s ministry?	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	3

Table 5.6. Responses to question #9 (percentages)

#	Answer	%	Count
	Very Important	100.00%	3
	Somewhat Important	0.00%	0
	Not Important	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	3

### *Findings from Question #10*

#### **Q10: What elements can be added to your children's ministry practices to achieve better outcomes?**

1. More training and staff development 2. Planning further ahead in our calendar

I think we could have more staff meetings to keep everyone on the same page.

We could add a quarterly evaluation instead of a yearly evaluation. Also, I think we could have a quarterly planning session instead of a six-month session. Things move quickly in our church and sometimes plans change. We could probably adjust and be more flexible when something is not working as good as another program.

Question #10 asked: What elements can be added to your children's ministry practices to achieve better outcomes? Training, staff meetings/development, evaluation, and planning were commonly cited as elements that lead to better outcomes. The ability to be flexible within the planning process was also highlighted and enhanced this study's emerging theory of what leads to better outcomes in a children's ministry.

### *Findings from Question #11*

Question #11, the final question on the survey, asked: Please provide a ranking order of the following items to achieve an effective and efficient children's ministry program. According to the resulting quantitative data, visionary leadership has the greatest impact on developing an effective and efficient children's ministry. The second most important factor was staff/volunteer training and evaluation. The third and fourth

priorities in developing an effective and efficient children's ministry were partnering with parents and managing/implementing changes, respectively. The fifth tier of developing an efficient and effective children's ministry was the creation of a team-based model of ministry. The sixth result was the creation of intentional relationship-building strategies. The least important factor in developing an effective and efficient children's ministry was the facility itself.

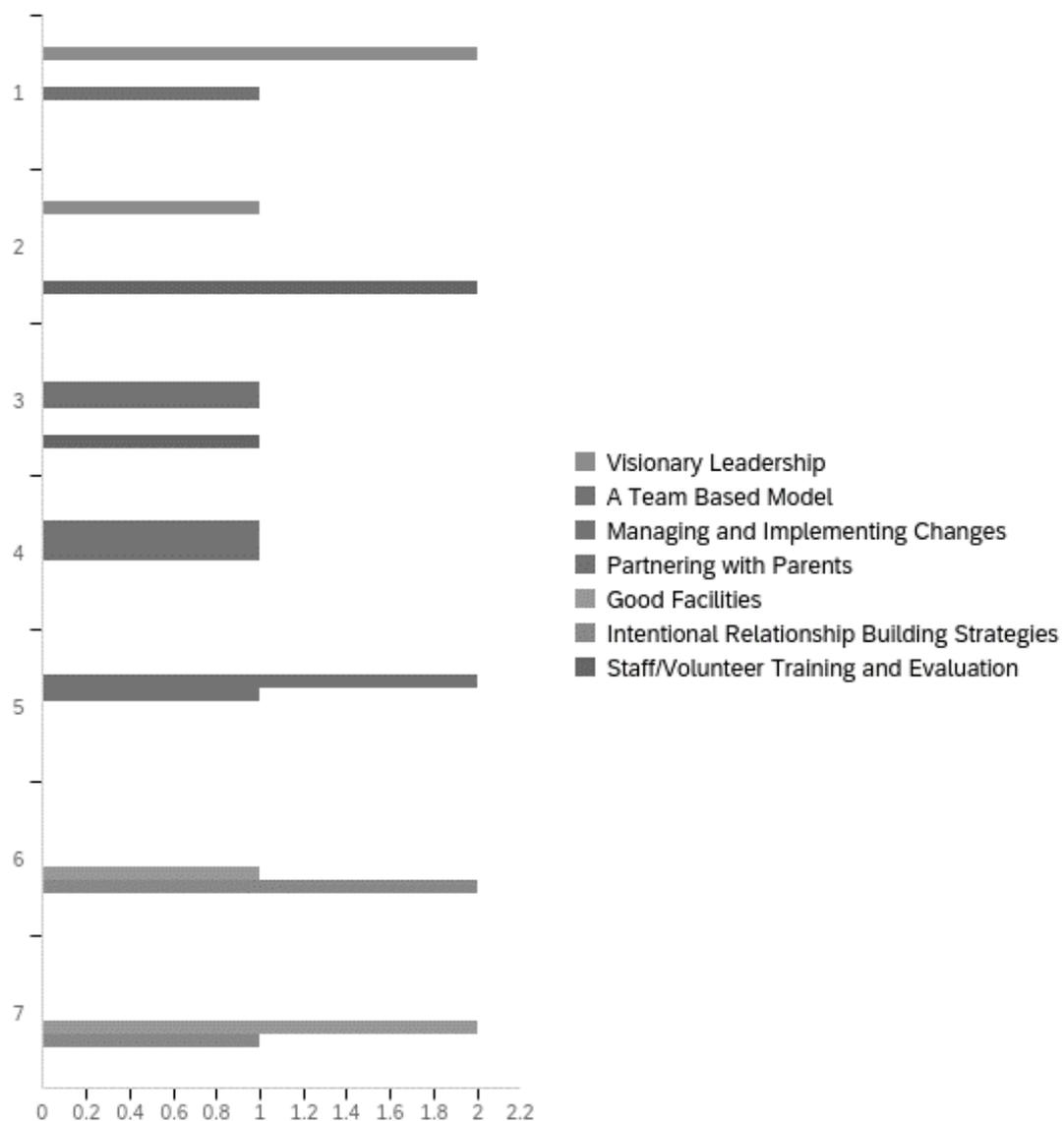


Figure 5.4. Responses to question #11 (raw numbers)

Table 5.7. Responses to question #11 (statistical analysis)

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Visionary Leadership	1.00	2.00	1.33	0.47	0.22	3
2	A Team Based Model	4.00	5.00	4.67	0.47	0.22	3
3	Managing and Implementing Changes	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.82	0.67	3
4	Partnering with Parents	1.00	4.00	2.67	1.25	1.56	3
5	Good Facilities	6.00	7.00	6.67	0.47	0.22	3
6	Intentional Relationship Building Strategies	6.00	7.00	6.33	0.47	0.22	3
7	Staff/Volunteer Training and Evaluation	2.00	3.00	2.33	0.47	0.22	3

Table 5.8. Responses to question #11 (percentages)

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total							
1	Visionary Leadership	66.6 7%	2	33.3 3%	1	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0	3	
2	A Team Based Model	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	33.3 3%	1	66.6 7%	2	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	3
3	Managing and Implementing Changes	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	33.3 3%	1	33.3 3%	1	33.3 3%	1	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	3
4	Partnering with Parents	33.3 3%	1	0.00 %	0	33.3 3%	1	33.3 3%	1	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	3
5	Good Facilities	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	33.3 3%	1	66.6 7%	2	3
6	Intentional Relationship Building Strategies	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	66.6 7%	2	33.3 3%	1	3
7	Staff/Volunteer Training and Evaluation	0.00 %	0	66.6 7%	2	33.3 3%	1	0.0 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	0.00 %	0	3

### **The Secondary Instrument of Data Collection: Zoom Call Interviews**

The secondary source of data collection for this project was three different virtual interviews with each of the project participants. There were five questions from the survey that required additional clarification. Questions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 needed more depth to build a working theory and structural framework on how to develop an effective and efficient children's ministry. Each interview was limited to a 30-minute window of time to be cognizant of the participants' availability and to reduce the amount of transcribable data that would be collected.

#### *Findings from Zoom Interviews: Question #1*

Survey question #1 asked: What are the demographic characteristics of the students involved in the children's ministry? Is the children's ministry equally effective for different types of students (for example, males and females, ethnic minorities, children from non-nuclear families)? The data collected in the surveys did not provide adequate details on the demographic makeup of the children's ministry. The surveys also did not collect enough source data on what it means to develop an effective children's ministry. Two additional questions were posed to each of the project participants during the Zoom interviews to provide more concrete data in support of the working theory on what makes a children's ministry effective for children ages twelve and under. The two questions were as follows:

1. What is the demographic makeup of your church? Is your church as a whole and children's ministry equally effective at developing ministry paradigms for people in diverse subgroups (ethnic minorities, genders, etc.)?
2. What makes a children's ministry effective?

These questions were posed in order to pinpoint a data stream that would easily transfer to the model of ministry at Victory Church. One of the participants provided demographic details about Crosspointe Church (shown in the graph below) that indicate that Crosspointe is a very multicultural church. This data aided the development of a transferable working theory because Victory Church is a multicultural church with a similar demographic profile.

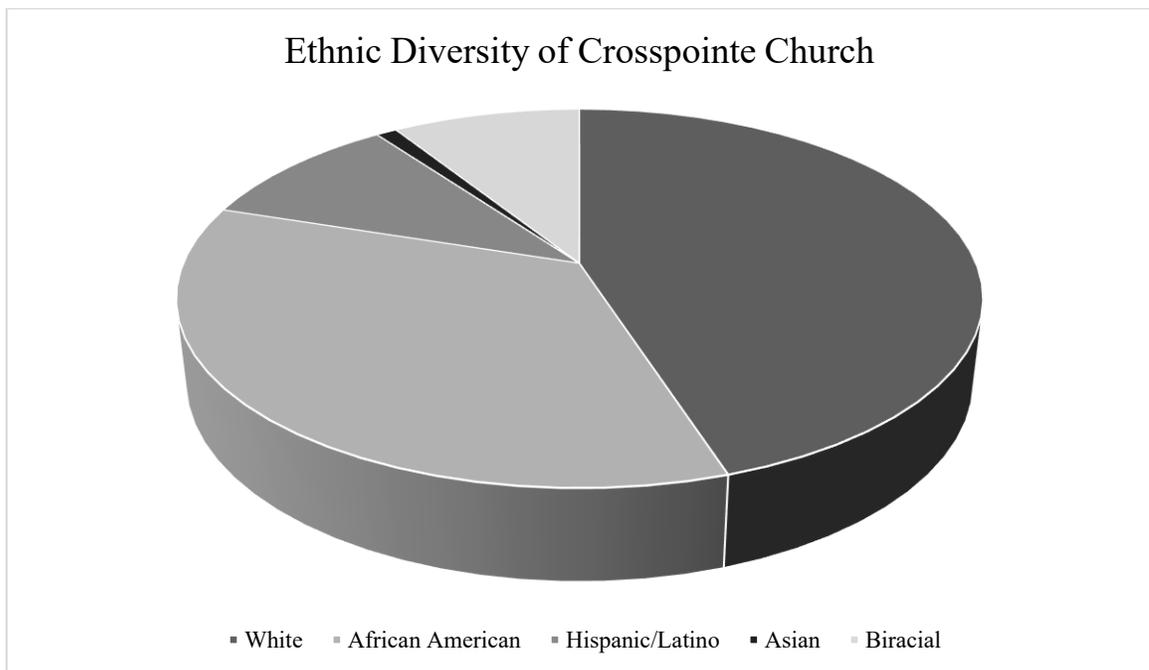


Figure 5.5. Ethnic diversity of Crosspointe Church

In addition to providing valuable demographic data, the interviews also offered insight into an emerging philosophy of children's ministry. One of the participants responded to the question of what makes a children's ministry effective with the following five-point answer:

1. Create opportunities for children to find, know, and grow in God
2. Develop systems for parental engagement with their own children

3. Market activities and programs to the twelve and under targeted community demographic
4. Train and develop staff, volunteers, and child leaders
5. Be open to new ideas

Another interview participant revealed that a children's ministry is effective when it helps the church to fulfill its mission and awakens the spirituality of children ages twelve and under through faith-integrated education, age-appropriate activities, and long-term models of spiritual engagement. These models are based on helping children develop through the various stages of adolescence and into adulthood.

*Findings from Zoom Interviews: Question #2*

Survey question #2 asked: How is the strategy of the children's ministry contributing to both the overall strength and spiritual formation of children in your church in the last three years? The initial information sourced from survey question #2 needed further explanation of how the strategy of helping people find, know, and grow in God has contributed to the overall strength and spiritual formation of children in the last three years. The interviews offered greater insight into this question and provided much-needed detail.

The senior pastor of Crosspointe was best equipped to answer this question in depth, though the other participants also provided insightful opinions. The senior pastor provided an overview of the strategy of Crosspointe Church by sharing the church's vision of helping people to find, know, and grow in God. He further explained that even though this is considered a vision statement, it is also a three-step process of developing people into discipleship pathways at Crosspointe. He believes that from the moment that Crosspointe Church was launched, the church had a mission to help people find God. At

Crosspointe, according to the pastor, congregants find Jesus in a variety of ways, from interaction with Crosspointe staff and fellow attendees to community outreach events hosted by the church.

The pastor mentioned that some of the people who are serving in ministries today started as ordinary congregants who wanted to find God. They were touched by people from the church, then brought into a knowledge of salvation that comes from Jesus. Next, they came to know God through a series of initial classes and small group studies. He lastly shared that after people come to find and know God, it is then time for them to grow in God by being placed in ministries where their spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, personality, and experiences can converge and make them a unique disciple for the kingdom of God. The pastor believes that this three-part strategy is the strength of Crosspointe and that he has been effective at underscoring the importance of helping people find, know, and grow in God. The vision statement permeates all ministries of the church—including the children’s ministry. The pastor admitted that the last three years have been some of the most productive due to attention to detail and making sure that the church understands the importance of Crosspointe’s vision.

Interviews with the other two staff members seconded the pastor’s responses. One participant described the focus of helping people to find, know, and grow in God as a constant barometer that measures the health of the entire church. The participant further shared, “Our pastor wants our entire focus, from our budget, activities, curriculum and even volunteer training, to be all about helping people find, know, and grow in God. It’s caused all of us to think differently in our approach to children’s ministry, which is a strength of our church.”

*Findings from Zoom Interviews: Question #4*

Survey question #4 asked: What is helping or hindering the children's ministry from achieving its initiatives and objectives? What explains why some initiatives work better than others? According to the survey answers, adequate planning, proper communication, and commitment to the project are instrumental in understanding why some initiatives work better than others. However, knowledge of what types of activities or initiatives are considered more popular had to be expanded during the secondary phase of Zoom interviews.

The Zoom interviews offered additional details as to why certain initiatives work better than others. The interviews conducted with the children's director of Crosspointe Church contained the largest quantity of source material. In her interview she not only presented the actual initiatives of the children's ministry but also provided a sample of six-month planning meeting notes to present how activities are brainstormed, budgeted, organized, communicated, and executed. The notes contained a litany of information that showed why certain activities were propelled to the forefront while others were relegated to the background. The notes also showed an effective and efficient way of communicating with and disseminating tasks to their teams using a project management software called Zoho Projects. In addition to the software, the notes revealed certain seasonal, pastoral, and church patterns/initiatives that the children's ministry was following. For example, in the month of February, the pastor was teaching a series called "Crazy in Love," and the children's ministry curriculum was developed from the pastor's preaching notes to provide family conversation starters amongst students and parents. According to the children's director, "Having great parental and student engagement is essential to having an effective and efficient children's ministry." The findings from the

interviews suggest that the most popular initiatives were those that were master planned, followed a curriculum that was customizable, and sparked interactions between parents and children. Furthermore, she stated that it was necessary for the team to be flexible enough to not only propel an initiative forward but also eliminate ideas that do not have the same amount of traction. Finally, the children's director shared the top three most popular community-driven activities:

1. The Crosspointe Kids Candy Corral: An alternative to Halloween where people can come to the church with their children, collect candy, play on bounce houses, visit a petting zoo, ride a trackless train, and walk through a makeshift labyrinth
2. The Crosspointe Kids Christmas Party: A children's Christmas party with music, free giveaways, food, and bounce houses
3. The Easter Eggtravaganza: An easter egg hunt with door prizes, music, and candy

*Findings from Zoom Interviews: Question #6*

Survey question #6 asked: Over the last three-year period of children's ministry development, did any changes occur in the church's support for the ministry or the number and types of children who were willing to participate? The secondary stage of interviews was crucial to find out if there was a link between the numerical growth of Crosspointe, the growth of the children's ministry budget, and the number of children participants in the last three years. All three interviewees were essential to understanding the catalyst for growth in the church, the children's ministry, and the budget. According to the senior pastor, the last three years of ministry have been some of the best he has experienced, notwithstanding the Covid-19 pandemic. As he recalled, three years ago the church had approximately 150 attendees and a staff of only three people: himself, the youth pastor, and the church secretary.

Three years ago, the church received a sizeable gift that was earmarked for children's ministry usage. The senior pastor stated that "it was a blessing that took our church to another level because we hired Ashlyn full-time who had previously been a 'rock star' volunteer." The youth pastor also stated in his interview that he previously had the responsibility of leading the children's ministry but felt more effective as a pastor over the middle and high school-aged children. Through this interview it became clearer that the removal of the youth pastor from the duties of working with the twelve and under demographic and the insertion of the newly hired children's director was a central change agent over the last three years. The pastor shared that, "Once the children's director had been hired, she immediately developed a team of volunteers, organized activities, changed the curriculum to a customizable format, and grew the children's ministry." The children's director was reluctant to name herself as the catalyst for church growth but did admit that the children's ministry started attracting more young families to the church through activities she had organized, and as a result, the church began to grow exponentially. As the children's ministry grew during that three-year period, the budget also grew. Thus, according to the data sourced from the interviews, the growth of the church, the children's ministry, and the budget of the children's ministry are all linked to one person.

*Findings from Zoom Interviews: Question #8*

Survey question #8 asked: To what extent do the children's ministry expenditures impact the overall church budget? Does the percentage of financial resources allocated to the children's ministry impact the efficiency of developing the faith of children within your church? The secondary data sourced from the interviews provided details on what constitutes efficiency in the faith development of children. Efficiency is a quantifiable

measurement used to determine if the program is worth the cost. According to the interviews, specifically those with the senior pastor, the cost of the children's ministry is justifiable, as the ministry is efficiently developing the faith of the children. He explained that most of the budget of the children's ministry is allocated towards the children's director's salary, but she is a major variable in the growth equation at Crosspointe Church. The pastor concluded that not only has the children's ministry become more effective at helping children find, know, and grow in God but now the entire church's efficiency has improved through the use of a cost-per-ministry formula. If the formula determines that a program is not worth the expense, it is cut or self-funded by its participants. The senior pastor shared that the current budget for the children's ministry is \$70,000, including salaries, activities, and program expenditures. There are approximately 200 students ages twelve and under in the youth ministry, which means that \$350 is spent per student annually. He believes that \$350 per student a year is a reasonable amount to pay for children to find, know, and grow in God. The cost analysis of the children's ministry was key to helping this researcher understand how much a church should spend to develop an effective and efficient children's ministry.

After all of the interviews had been conducted, this researcher began to create a working theory that will be shared in the next chapter. Throughout the process, this researcher has gleaned ministry insights from the data and looks forward to applying those insights in his current ministry context.

## CHAPTER SIX: A WORKING THEORY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project**

There are several strengths and weaknesses of the project that are worth noting. First and foremost, this researcher presented both strengths and weaknesses as the sole author of the study. He brought certain expertise from over 20 years of pastoral experience, which added a valuable knowledge base; however, he could have unintentionally tainted the data derived from the project with his personal opinions and insider knowledge about the project. This researcher attempted to remain as objective as possible and allow the findings of the project to be influenced solely by the data.

Another weakness that the researcher presented is that he had no previous experience conducting systematic data analysis at this level. In his pursuit of factors that can aid a children's ministry to become more efficient and effective, this researcher had to turn his natural weakness as an often-unorganized person into a strength. Moreover, the researcher's natural pattern of thinking skews towards the artistic and abstract rather than the scientific and academic. While creativity can be a useful tool in data analysis, especially in the location of patterns, scientific rigor must prevail in case study research.

The survey, which was the primary source of data collection, also contained flaws. For example, certain questions could have been phrased more precisely in order to collect greater detail and more concrete answers. There were also weaknesses in some of the written responses collected from the participants, as they did not provide as much source data as the researcher expected and needed. Though this presented challenges, the

Zoom call interviews supplied a significant amount of secondary data to supplement the initial data from the survey. In fact, the Zoom calls provided this researcher with some of the most valuable information on how to help the children's ministry at Victory Church become more effective and efficient.

Another weakness of the project was beyond the control of either the researcher or the project participants. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the project was impacted by travel warnings, financial issues, and health-related problems. For instance, this researcher was not able to travel to the case study church to conduct live observations. Thus, the project had to be modified and tailored to fit a virtual study of the case church, relying on distance communication. Using digital surveys and interviews, this researcher was able to gather adequate data, but directly observing the children's ministry at Crosspointe Church could have provided more nuanced data regarding the sources of the ministry's effectiveness and efficiency.

Though there were a few weaknesses in this project, this researcher believes that the overall findings are still valid and actionable. The project yielded critical information that will impact Victory Church and its children's ministry in the foreseeable future. In addition to the overall impact that the findings will have on Victory Church, this researcher believes that the findings will also lend themselves to the furtherance of the gospel and the larger field of children's ministry research.

### **Components of an Effective and Efficient Children's Ministry**

The aim of this project was to investigate a case study church and discover the underlying factors that make their children's ministry effective and efficient. Based on these findings, this researcher extrapolated a working theory of the principles that

might make any children's ministry effective and efficient, with the aim of incorporating those principles into Victory's children's ministry. As this researcher reflected on the outcomes of this project, five major components emerged from the research findings that can help a children's ministry become more effective and efficient. The main components derived from the research are as follows:

1. A vision/philosophy of children's ministry based on the Great Commission
2. Adequate resources/funding for the children's ministry
3. Key staff leadership
4. Parental involvement
5. Strategic planning and the development of organizational systems

Each of these five components and themes has a biblical foundation, support in the literature, and field research ramifications. As this researcher analyzed the five components, he realized that the reason Victory Church's children's ministry is not as effective and efficient as that of the case study church is that none of the aforementioned components have been implemented. It is humbling to find through research and discovery that the church that this pastor leads contains major deficiencies and is compromised in the children's ministry. The onus of rectifying the children's ministry will be on this researcher and a team of children's ministry leaders who can systematically implement the necessary changes.

This researcher was particularly struck by the third component: personnel have a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of a children's ministry. Both the surveys and interviews pointed to the addition of the children's ministry director at Crosspointe Church as the catalyst that ignited the effectiveness and efficiency of the

children's ministry. Her unique ability to galvanize a team, set initiatives, develop a curriculum, and produce community-driven activities may be difficult to reproduce in the Victory Church context. However, key qualities of her leadership can be imitated, and a number of her responsibilities can be delineated to team members at Victory. This researcher will need to think creatively in order to determine which aspects of Crosspointe's children's director's personality and actions can be successfully reproduced by the existing children's ministry staff at Victory.

Likewise, it became clear that the role of the pastor is vitally important in the development of an effective and efficient children's ministry. The pastor of the case study church was involved in not only crafting the vision for the whole church but also executing that vision in every area of ministry. The pastor clearly succeeded in developing a vision that the whole church could grasp and was excited to follow. The simplicity of the statement "helping people find, know, and grow in God" permeated all of the responses provided by the project participants. The staff members knew the vision and understood how to execute it. When considering how to apply the principles of this study to Victory Church's children's ministry, this researcher was forced to reflect on whether his staff and congregants fully understand the vision of Victory Church and how to concretely implement it. Likewise, questions emerged about the vision statement itself. For example, is the vision of Victory Church capable of creating a culture of effectiveness and efficiency? The current vision of Victory Church is: "We help people find victory in Christ which guarantees victory in life." On the surface, this statement alone does not have a great commission or discipleship

focus. Thus, this researcher may need to rethink certain aspects of the church's vision in order to produce a more biblically centered way of executing the vision.

### **Biblical Foundations of the Findings**

In chapter two of this thesis, the researcher provided an overview of the biblical/theological foundations of children's ministry, writing,

it is the layered and revelatory nature of the biblical text that defines and outlines God's plan of salvation for all who would receive Him. The underlying theme of salvation rises to the surface of the biblical narrative and becomes the interwoven thread between the Bible's books, chapters, verses, and two testaments. Furthermore, the emergence of salvation as the primary focus of both God and humanity results in the masterfully planned redemption of sinners through the birth and death of a promised savior, the incarnate Son of God.<sup>97</sup>

These words ring true as this researcher considers the findings of this project. The data from both the surveys and interviews revealed that the first component needed to produce an efficient and effective children's ministry is a vision/philosophy of children's ministry that is based on the great commission. Notably, the data derived from survey question #2 conveyed that the three participants understood, participated in, and executed the pastoral/church vision, which is "helping people to find, know, and grow in God." This vision statement is considered Crosspointe's philosophy of ministry and their corporate missional strategy.

A children's ministry built on the execution of the great commission fulfills the fundamental criterion for effectiveness. As Kevin Johnston states, "effectiveness is measured in results."<sup>98</sup> If the results of the children's ministry of Crosspointe Church are

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<sup>97</sup> See p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Johnston, "Difference."

measured by the number of children they have helped to find, know, and grow in God, it must be effective from a biblical perspective. Jesus is resolute in commanding His disciples to make new disciples. Thus, the measurement of effectiveness in ministry begins and ends with the fulfillment of the great commission.

Not only does the children's ministry of Crosspointe Church present a model of biblical effectiveness that should be replicated at Victory Church, but its model of efficiency should also be mimicked. In chapter three, this researcher defined the difference between efficiency and effectiveness as follows: "efficiency aims to reduce the use of resources and thereby maximize returns, while effectiveness is measured in results."<sup>99</sup> When considering how to apply this definition to the context of children's ministry, this researcher concluded that efficiency is tied to adequate resources/funding for the children's ministry. Staff from the case study church indicated that the last three years of ministry development were sparked by a sizeable charitable gift. This gift was used in part to hire a children's director. During the Zoom interviews, the pastor of the case study church shared, "Once the children's director had been hired, she immediately developed a team of volunteers, organized activities, changed the curriculum to a customizable format, and grew the children's ministry." It was the strategic use of the provided resources that resulted in a maximum return for both the children's ministry and the church.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 offers a biblical example of what efficiency should look like in a ministry context. In the parable, a man goes on a journey

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<sup>99</sup> Johnston, "Difference."

but leaves his assets entrusted to his servants. One servant receives five talents, another servant receives two, and the last servant receives one. The servants who receive five and two talents provide a 100 percent gain on their master's investment. The servant who receives one talent hides it and thus does not secure any return. The tension of the biblical parable reveals that Jesus expects His followers to maximize His resources. The two servants who provided a gain are met with the praise that every believer should desire to receive: "Well done, good and faithful servant." The man who did not improve upon his master's gift is referred to as slothful, lazy, and wicked. No person or ministry should follow the example of the slothful servant and fail to produce an optimal gain on the resources that God has entrusted to them.

As this researcher reflected on the data derived from the project, it became clear that the case study church maximized their return on investment. More specifically, the data from chapter five shows that the case study church is exploring ways to increase efficiency through a cost-per-ministry formula. This formula regulates the efficiency of a program by calculating if it is worth the expense. The study also revealed that the children's ministry budget of Crosspointe Church is currently \$70,000, including salaries, activities, and program expenditures. Though this may appear excessive, once a price-per-student ratio was presented, the allotted budget seemed more reasonable. Pre-Covid-19, Crosspointe had approximately 200 students ages twelve and under in the youth ministry. The current formula for ministry efficiency at the case study church is the total budget divided by the number of participants. In the case of the children's ministry, this amounts to \$350 per student annually. According to the case study pastor, \$350 per student is a reasonable investment for helping children to find, know, and grow in God.

As this researcher reflects on the children's ministry budget for Victory Church, it is clear that the current resources are not adequate enough to create an effective and efficient ministry. Victory currently allocates \$3,500 for the children's ministry, which serves approximately 40 student participants. Following the formula, this amounts to \$87.50 spent per student annually. To subdivide that even further and look at a monthly cost, Victory spends only \$7.29 per student per month in the children's ministry. Compared to the case study church, this is clearly not adequate nor a great return on the resources God has given to Victory Church. After the Covid-19 pandemic, this pastor will need to improve the benefit-cost ratio in order to increase the efficiency of the children's ministry and ensure its continued development.

The third component of developing an effective and efficient children's ministry is key staff leadership. The surveys and interviews both pointed to a strategic hire, Ashlyn, who provided oversight and brought a catalytic energy into the ministry that fueled the growth of the children's ministry and the church. Proverbs 22:29 conveys that a person who is skilled at their work will serve at the highest of levels. It was the skill set of the children's director at the case study church that produced dynamic growth over the last three years. Though the resources to hire the children's director created the opportunity for the children's ministry to become more efficient, it was the children's director herself who increased the ministry's effectiveness.

Through the survey and interview responses, it became clear that the children's director is highly competent, gifted, and has the appropriate disposition for children's ministry. When this researcher reflects on his current children's director in comparison to Crosspointe's, significant differences emerge. To begin, the children's director position at

Crosspointe is a full-time paid position, while at Victory it is a part-time position. Moreover, the children's director at Crosspointe is responsible for galvanizing the team, creating the curriculum, planning activities, and developing an atmosphere where children can find, know, and grow in God. The children's director of Victory Church is not responsible for creating the curriculum. She also does not hold team meetings or plan regular activities. Her main functions are related to Sunday service, where she makes sure that the materials and resources for teaching the children are distributed. She also does not send out communications to parents to encourage parental involvement. To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Victory's children's ministry, it is clear that the children's ministry director will need to take on additional responsibilities. However, the current children's director may not possess the necessary skill set or capacity to develop, organize, and ignite the children's ministry through much-needed leadership. The current children's director at Victory initially held a consultancy role—she was tasked with helping this pastor find a children's director—but she ultimately decided to apply for the role herself. Due to a lack of suitable applicants, the position was given to the current director. In hindsight this is one of the primary reasons why the children's ministry at Victory Church has not become more effective and efficient in the last three years. A change in personnel is imminent and will have to be addressed, just as it was in the case study church. At Crosspointe, the youth pastor moved to the middle school group in order to make room for the hire of a children's director who was better suited to increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of that ministry. Victory will have to make a change in the near future in order to see similar results.

The fourth component that is needed to increase efficiency and effectiveness in a children's ministry is parental involvement. Ephesians 6:4 teaches, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The apostle Paul's words suggest that parents, specifically fathers, are supposed to be involved in the spiritual formation of their children. Parents not only carry the weight of raising children but also the responsibility of training their children in the ways of God. The findings of this study echoed that sentiment. In fact, when participants were asked to rank the items needed to achieve an effective and efficient children's ministry program in question #11, parental involvement was ranked third in importance.

In chapter two this researcher provided a biblical justification for the role of parents in the development of children's faith, especially in the Old Testament. The Jewish pattern of passing down knowledge is made evident through the book of Proverbs, where Solomon challenges readers to train up their children in the way of the Lord, offers consistent reminders to his own son on how to live a virtuous life, and shows a strong desire to teach principles to the next generation. The research supports Solomon's words, suggesting that parental involvement is integral to an effective and efficient children's ministry.

Though it is clear that parents should be involved in the spiritual education of their children, the precise nature of how to do so is open to debate. The data from the survey and interviews shows that the case study church pursued several strategies for increasing parental involvement in the children's ministry. First and foremost, the children's ministry curriculum was developed from the pastor's preaching notes to provide family conversation starters amongst students and parents. The findings from the

interviews also suggest that the most popular initiatives are those that are master planned, follow a customizable curriculum, and spark interactions between parents and children. According to the children's director, "Having great parental and student engagement is essential to having an effective and efficient children's ministry."

As this researcher steps outside of his current researcher role and looks at this project through a parental lens, he can attest to the importance of parent-child interactions in the development of children's faith. This father had the privilege of baptizing both of his sons, and each of those major faith moments was the culmination of many spiritual conversations. It was one of the greatest moments in this father's life to share in the experience of his two sons deciding to find, know, follow, and grow in God as they gave their lives to Jesus for salvation. These two young boys in training are developing a healthy spirituality because of the conversations and interactions they have had with their parents and church. Thus, Scripture, the results of this research project, and this researcher's personal experiences as a parent all support the notion that parents should be engaged in their child's spiritual development.

As this pastor now looks at the state of the children's ministry of Victory Church, he acknowledges that there is little parental engagement, interaction, or involvement. This pastor has firsthand knowledge of this missing component not only because of his role as pastor but also because he has two children in the children's ministry. Based on his experiences as a parent, he can confirm that there is no communication of events, no customized curriculum to be used as a conversation starter, and often not even a takeaway sheet or project to show what the children learned at church. If there is going to be an increase in the effectiveness and efficiency of the children's ministry at Victory

Church, parental involvement and interaction will need to increase accordingly. One way of rectifying this current problem is to hold a meeting with the children's director, show her the findings of this project, and immediately implement the transferrable principles from the case study church.

The fifth and final component needed to create an effective and efficient children's ministry is strategic planning and organizational systems. Proverbs 24:26 states, "Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house." The implications of this verse are that there are organized ways and systems for building a house. Likewise, there is a systematic way to build a children's ministry. An effective and efficient ministry requires strategic planning and the introduction of appropriate organizational systems from the start. The results of this project show that there were several positive outcomes to strategically planning the activities, programs, and community outreach events of the case study church. Question #9 from the survey asked: How important are communication and organizational processes in developing an efficient children's ministry? One hundred percent of the survey participants viewed communication and organizational processes as particularly important to developing an efficient children's ministry. The data from the secondary phase Zoom interviews revealed the types of communication and organizational processes that are currently being used at Crosspointe Church, and each of these systems has a biblical foundation.

The first system is activity planning, which is used to develop family-focused, community-driven, and missional opportunities for people to find, know, and grow in God. Proverbs 16:3 tells us, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans." Success is predicated on God's involvement in the process. The research

does not clearly indicate whether God's presence in the planning process occurs through prayer or the leading of the Holy Spirit. However, the research does convey that the goal of Crosspointe's planned activities is always the same: to help people find, know, and grow in God.

The second system that is being deployed in the children's ministry of Crosspointe is clear, consistent communication. Survey question #4 asked: What is helping or hindering the children's ministry from achieving its initiatives and objectives? What explains why some initiatives work better than others? According to the survey answers, proper communication is instrumental to understanding why some initiatives work better than others. Notes taken from the Zoom interviews indicate that the case study church has an effective and efficient way of communicating with and disseminating tasks to their teams using a project management software called Zoho Projects.

There is a biblical precedent for the importance of proper communication. Proverbs 13:17 declares, "A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing." Before the advent of email and text message, humans were sent to deliver messages directly. Kings, for example, would send an envoy to relay their message via either a signet-ring-sealed document or a memorized declaration. The messenger was required to deliver the message exactly as it had been communicated to him, without any changes or errors. This proverb highlights the benefits of trustworthy communication as well as the risks of distorting messages. The research shows that clear communication between the team was a valuable asset to the children's ministry and aided in the development of projects and initiatives.

The third and final system in this discussion is an evaluation system. This system is as important as the aforementioned planning and communication systems and plays a major role in the children's ministry of the case study church. Question #10 from the survey asked: What elements can be added to your children's ministry practices to achieve better outcomes? The participants listed training, staff meetings/development, evaluation, and planning as elements that lead to better outcomes. The quantitative data also revealed that the second most important factor to building an effective and efficient children's ministry organizational structure was staff/volunteer training and evaluation.

Proverbs 27:23 commands readers to "Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds." This passage teaches Christians to closely monitor and evaluate the conditions of whatever they have charge over. The evaluation system that was utilized at the case study church not only evaluated programs and initiatives but also the people who were serving in that ministry. The evidence from the case study church showed that proper evaluation leads to better outcomes and higher staff and volunteer productivity.

As this pastor reflects on the current state of the children's ministry of Victory Church, he notes that there is no system for monitoring the organizational structures of the children's ministry. This may be one of the reasons why the children's ministry is not as effective and efficient as it needs to be in order help children develop a salvific relationship with Jesus. In the future this pastor will have to consistently monitor and evaluate the communication, evaluation, and activity planning systems of the children's ministry to increase its effectiveness and efficiency.

### Support for the Findings in Previous Literature

In the literature review for this project (chapter three), this researcher quoted Michael McGarry's claim that "solving the ongoing problem of youth participation in the Church will require harmonization among the Church, youth ministry, and the American family...the Church must recommit herself to the gospel and to discipleship to strengthen an inner core whereby families may in turn be strengthened."<sup>100</sup> The findings of this project support McGarry's argument; the evidence suggests that prioritizing the great commission—a call to further the gospel through the discipleship of others—is critical to the development of an effective and efficient children's ministry. William Hoyt adds to the conversation by suggesting that some churches excuse their lack of effectiveness by citing their faithfulness. He argues that God has called us to be not only faithful but fruitful.<sup>101</sup> As such, the Church should only measure its ministry effectiveness by one statistic: conversions.<sup>102</sup> The case study participants were resolute in their adherence to helping children find, know, and grow in God. The philosophy of ministry and vision for the church was founded on a commitment to conversion, which helps to explain the effectiveness of their ministry.

In addition to emphasizing a commitment to the gospel and to discipleship, McGarry also highlights the need for harmonization among the Church, the youth ministry, and the American family. This study supports that claim through the finding that parental involvement is a much-needed component in the development of an efficient

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<sup>100</sup> McGarry, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Hoyt, 1100.

<sup>102</sup> Hoyt, 1102.

and effective children's ministry. When parents, the church, and children's ministry staff work together harmoniously as a team, they can create well-rounded programs and family activities that spur spiritual interactions between parents and children and inspire much-needed parental support for church initiatives.

Finally, participants from the case study church indicated that visionary leadership is the top component in the development of an effective and efficient children's ministry. This echoes the arguments of McKenna and Eckard, who emphasize the importance of pastoral effectiveness. The Zoom interviews and surveys offered ample evidence of the pastor's impact on the children's ministry through his teaching of the church's vision, his support for the children's ministry, and his direct hire of the children's director. Each of these decisions played a role in the attendance growth of the church, the effectiveness of the children's ministry, and the efficient use of ministry funds.

### **Implementing the Findings**

In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the children's ministry at Victory Church, practices and principles from the case study church must be implemented. The children's ministry must first be grounded in a vision or philosophy of ministry based on the great commission. Both this project and the literature conclude that there is no other standard of effectiveness by which the church can be measured. It must become the primary goal of this pastor to effectively communicate a vision not only for the children's ministry but also for the entire church that is based on the one thing God calls us to.

Secondly, this pastor along with his leadership team will need to establish a budget for the children's ministry that supplies adequate resources and funding. The children's ministry cannot become effective without an efficient formula that dictates whether the ministry is worth the cost of expenditures. Currently the children's ministry of Victory Church is underfunded and is thus underperforming.

Key staff leadership is the third component needed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the children's ministry. However, Victory has yet to place a strategic, transformative leader in the role of the children's ministry director. This pastor will have to explore the possibility of giving the current children's director more responsibility or replacing her with someone who can exponentially increase the effectiveness of the children's ministry.

The fourth component that this researcher will need to address is the role of parental involvement in the children's ministry. As a parent and pastor, he is concerned that the children's ministry has not involved the parents in productive ways that foster and encourage the spiritual formation of their children. Once again, to rectify this situation, the pastor will have to relay insights from the project directly to the children's ministry team with the expectation that changes will be implemented immediately.

Lastly, based upon the evidence from this study, this researcher sees that strategic planning and the development of organizational and evaluation systems are critical to the success of the children's ministry. Through the exploration of this project, this pastor has located the problem areas and created a working theory on how to correct them, which should aid in the development of an effective and efficient children's ministry at Victory Church in the near future.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL REFLECTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Roughly twenty years ago, this researcher left home for the first time as a bright-eyed incoming college freshman. He was one of the fastest high school athletes in the nation and was awarded a full ride track and field scholarship to a college in Atlanta, Georgia. His goal at the time was to graduate with a degree in drama and the performing arts, move to Hollywood, and carve out a successful career in the entertainment industry. Instead, this researcher was expelled after his freshman year, squandered his scholarship, embarrassed himself, and disappointed his family. Though things did not go exactly as planned, it is clear now that God had to interrupt the researcher's first college experience in order to orchestrate his journey towards this moment, where he is pursuing very different personal, professional, educational, and faith goals. God had a purpose for this doctoral researcher and has been faithful and active in the ongoing fulfillment of His will in the researcher's life. This researcher knows that the grace of God is the sole reason he was ever in a position to start, much less finish, the highest level of formal education—a Doctor of Ministry degree. The process of arriving at this milestone involved accepting his true calling, persevering through several life transitions, overcoming challenges, and trusting the encouragement and faith of others.

Completing this thesis required reliance on both the grace and mercy of God and his family. This researcher was expelled from college his freshman year. What he did not know at the time is that soon after his greatest disappointment and failure he would meet his greatest supporter: his wife. This researcher's wife personally pushed him to finish his

doctorate. Having completed her own doctorate four years ago, she understood both the challenges and rewards of academic research and kept this researcher motivated. She challenged this pastor daily to pursue a greater relationship with God and to strive for kingdom excellence in all that he does. This support system enabled this researcher to advance further in his studies and overcome any self-doubt. This is the model every marriage should follow: a continued reliance on God and each other.

Even before he began a Doctor of Ministry program, this researcher's wife played a key role in his spiritual formation. She was there when this researcher was miraculously admitted to the Moody Bible Institute and was front row at his graduation just two years later. Earning a bachelor's degree in urban ministry helped this researcher relinquish his shame and disappointment over his previous collegiate failure. His wife was also by his side when he accepted his first full-time ministry position as a twenty-one-year-old youth pastor in a suburban Chicago church. The church—Jubilee Baptist Church, led by Pastor John Byrd—was this researcher's first job and enabled him to observe a godly example of pastoral discipleship. Pastor Byrd had previously served as a youth pastor and instilled many principles and paradigms of ministry during this researcher's formative years.

Though this church provided an effective training ground to grow personally, professionally, and spiritually, after a few years God challenged this pastor to further his education and prepare to plant a church. At seven months pregnant, this pastor's wife still had the energy to help him tackle this complex undertaking. This pastor was initially ill-prepared to plant a church and was angry at various ministry dynamics that had occurred in the past. Yet Michael and Twanna Henderson from New Beginnings Church adopted this pastor and his wife as their surrogate children, strategically instilling trust, faith, and

organizational skills into this researcher. This relationship facilitated much-needed personal growth while providing a clear pathway toward greater ministry potential. More recently, this researcher and his wife were excited to participate in their first exploratory meeting with Bethel University, asking questions to try and understand how a Doctor of Ministry degree would fit into his larger spiritual journey. Today this researcher understands what it takes to earn a Doctor of Ministry degree: it takes a lifetime of God-ordained events, people, and experiences to arrive at this moment. It also took prayers, words of encouragement, and an endless supply of peach-flavored tea to keep this researcher typing as he finalized this thesis project report.

The process of writing and conducting research for a doctoral thesis is an arduous undertaking. It requires acuity and focus and forces one to grow in unfamiliar and unexpected ways. First and foremost, this researcher had to learn how to become a better researcher. This entailed expanding his knowledge of previous scholarship in the field and different types of methodologies. This researcher also had to consider the advantages and risks of different research design pathways, analyze large quantities of qualitative and quantitative data, and formulate credible conclusions based on that data. Lastly, doctoral research requires one to add something of value to the ongoing scholarly discussion of a subject—none of which can be accomplished quickly. This researcher strived to achieve all of these goals by leveraging his passion as a former youth pastor, knowledge of children ministry dynamics, and adherence to a theology of children, yet he still feels that there is more to add to this important line of inquiry.

This project was born out of a passion to see Victory Church produce a more effective and efficient children's ministry. This pastor desired to see a greater spiritual

formation of not only his own children, who participate in the children's ministry, but of all the children who call Victory their church. In his previous ministry work, he saw firsthand how much of an impact a key hire could make on the effectiveness and efficiency of a church. During his youth pastor days, it was common to see as many as sixty children come to faith monthly. The church grew exponentially during that time, and many of those children have grown up to become godly parents, effective church leaders, and everyday ambassadors for Christ. This former youth pastor remembers how strategic conversations among church leaders, parental involvement, and well-planned activities came together to ignite a fervent passion for God in the children's ministry. This was the researcher's primary motivation for pursuing this project. He wanted to see the impact that he had had on a past children's ministry duplicated in the church he now leads. Comparing his past children's ministry experience to that at his current church has created higher expectations for Victory Church. While comparing churches is not always productive due to differences in culture, demographics, and needs, this researcher nonetheless wanted to determine if there was a systematic way to replicate his past successes in his current ministry.

By studying the scholarship on organizational efficiency and effectiveness, pinpointing biblical insights on children's ministry, conducting case study research, and developing a working theory from research data, this researcher sought to uncover the underlying variables that might spark greater efficiency and effectiveness in his children's ministry. Though the process was challenging and required several modifications from the original project proposal, he did find tangible principles from a

case study church that could be transferred to Victory Church. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, God's will was accomplished through this research project.

During this doctoral project, the world also went through several monumental changes. A global pandemic took the lives of over one million people worldwide. Churches and businesses closed or had to pivot to virtual means of operation. This researcher experienced the deaths of family members as well as financial and mental stress. There were social justice riots and protests all over the world calling for a greater understanding of the sanctity of all lives, but especially of underrepresented groups. There was a presidential election that divided the nation between two candidates, parties, and ideologies. These factors were certainly distracting and could have provided legitimate excuses for delaying the completion of this work. Yet, though often tired, frustrated, and disillusioned at the state of the world, this researcher nonetheless persevered and finished what he had started. Now more than ever, research is needed in order to help the Church become more effective and efficient at winning souls. Children deserve better, and God's glory commands us to respond to these unprecedented challenges with complete surrender and reverence.

This researcher learned that this is also how a dissertation must be undertaken: with complete surrender to and reverence for the process. A researcher must submerge himself in the project and respect the outcomes of the findings. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the outcomes of this dissertation were derived from email surveys and Zoom interviews with project participants, rather than live observations and conversations. In the future this researcher would relish the opportunity to undertake a live assessment of the case study church and see its children's ministry dynamics in action. The ability to

observe a live model would undoubtedly generate more questions and lead to more nuanced conclusions. Those conclusions would in turn facilitate the creation of a better set of transferrable principles that could be assimilated into Victory's children's ministry culture. Direct observation would also allow this researcher to subject his working theory to more rigorous testing in order to determine if the principles derived from the surveys and interviews are fully valid.

This project was not always a joy to write. It required an immense amount of time, energy, and effort to complete. Yet it is the crowning work of this pastor's ministerial career and calling. Prayerfully, it will positively influence the children's ministry of Victory Church and add to the scholarship of Christian academia. This researcher has accomplished his goal. Now, to echo the last words of Jesus Christ as He died for the sins of humanity: "It is finished."

## APPENDIX

**CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**Researcher's Name(s): Stanley Patton**

**Project Title: Increasing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of The Children's Ministry at Victory Church of Melbourne, FL**

**INTRODUCTION**

You are being asked to participate in a doctoral research study. This research is being conducted by Stanley Patton in partial fulfillment of his doctorate of ministry degree at Bethel University/Seminary. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this research is to find underlying factors that make a children's ministry effective and efficient.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THE STUDY?**

Three (3) people will take part in this study.

**WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?**

You will be asked to complete the questionnaire and then talk through additional questions via a secondary virtual call.

**HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?**

The questionnaire will take approximately 15-20 minutes to answer all of the questions and the virtual call will have a limit of 30 minutes for asking questions and discussion. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

#### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

Your participation will benefit Crosspointe Church, Victory Church, and future children's ministries at other churches.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

There are no risks associated with being a part of this study.

#### **WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

There is no cost to you.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information produced by this study will be stored in the researcher's project filing system and kept confidential. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

In addition, if photographs, audio or video were taken during the study that could identify you, then you must give special written permission for their use. In that case, you will be given the opportunity to view or listen, as applicable, to the photographs, audio or video files before you give your permission for their use if you so request.

#### **WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?**

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

#### **WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

#### **SIGNATURES**

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

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Subject

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Date

### Children's Ministry Effectiveness and Efficiency Survey

Q1. What are the demographic characteristics of the students involved in the children's ministry? Is the children's ministry equally effective for different types of students (for example, males and females, ethnic minorities, children from non-nuclear families)?

Q2. How is the strategy of the children's ministry contributing to both the overall strength and spiritual formation of children in your church in the last three years?

Q3. To what extent have the methods employed in the children's ministry produced unintended outcomes (positive and negative)?

Q4. What is helping or hindering the children's ministry from achieving its initiatives and objectives? What explains why some initiatives work better than others?

Q5. To what extent is the selection of the best staff and volunteers responsible for the quality of the children's ministry program?

Q6. Over the last three-year period of children's ministry development, did any changes occur in the church's support for the ministry or the number and types of children who were willing to participate?

Q7. Does the cost (salaries, facilities, materials, and activities) to run the children's ministry positively benefit/negatively impact the quality of the children's ministry program?

Positively Benefit

Negatively Impact

Has No Impact

Q8. To what extent do the children's ministry expenditures impact the overall church budget? Does the percentage of financial resources allocated to the children's ministry impact the efficiency of developing the faith of children within your church?

	Yes, the expenditures lead to developing the faith of children efficiently	Somewhat, the expenditures lead to developing the faith of children efficiently	Not at all
The ratio of the overall church budget to the children's ministry is adequate in developing the faith of the children at your church efficiently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9. How important are communication and organizational processes in developing an efficient children's ministry?

▼ Very Important (1) ... Not Important (3)

Q10. What elements can be added to your children's ministry practices to achieve better outcomes?

Q11. Please provide a ranking order of the following items to achieve an effective and efficient children's ministry program.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Visionary Leadership
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Team Based Model
- \_\_\_\_\_ Managing and Implementing Changes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Partnering with Parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good Facilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intentional Relationship Building Strategies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Staff/Volunteer Training and Evaluation

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