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BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BETHEL UNIVERSITY

A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF ONLINE AND HYBRID MINISTRY ON
SMALL TRADITIONAL CHURCHES

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN FAMILY AND
CONGREGATIONAL CARE

BY
PATREZA D. NEWTON
ORLANDO, FLORIDA
MAY 2023

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ABSTRACT

The present study addressed the lack of insight regarding the impact of technology on the small church. The mixed method research for this project took a case study approach that also included the analysis of the biblical and theological foundation and the pertinent literary material regarding technologies' impact on the small church. Online and in-person surveys were conducted as part of the study, and relevant information about independent church structures was gathered from church sources; personal interviews were conducted; observations were made; a denominational document review was conducted; and online surveys were administered to those who were not members of a church. It was followed by field research, analysis, and data evaluation.

The research includes the voices of the leader, congregants, and non-church members' views of technology's impact on the small church. The impact of the technology study provides the groundwork to establish insight into strategies for the small church in this regard. This project identified the definite impact technology has had on the preference for worship styles in the church. It also reveals where the church has suffered during and after the pandemic. Lastly, it reveals what non-church members are looking for in regard to a church home.

CHAPTER ONE: THE TECHNOLOGY TOOLS AND MINISTRY METHODS A SMALL TRADITIONAL CHURCH NEEDS TO ESTABLISH A DIGITAL PRESENCE

Introduction

Technology has had a tremendous impact on society throughout the years. However, small traditional churches remained the one entity where technology had no significant effect on worship style until the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of the millennial age group preparing to surpass the previous baby boomer generation by 2035, church attendance statistics report that 59 percent of millennials feel disconnected from the church they grew up in and 35 percent feel that church is more harmful than beneficial to society. Moreover, church attendance statistics show that attendance in traditional churches has declined by 45 percent.

The religious landscape of the United States continues to change rapidly. In the “Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65 percent of American adults described themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade.”¹ Many small conventional churches have not explored other methods to connect with those who may not have been interested in traditionally attending church. This is one of the issues that churches are concerned

¹ Justin Nortey, “More Houses of Worship Are Returning to Normal Operations, But In-Person Attendance Is Unchanged Since Fall,” Pew Research, accessed October 12, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/22/more-houses-of-worship-are-returning-to-normal-operations-but-in-person-attendance-is-unchanged-since-fall.

about, and they are evaluating ways to better engage the community from a religious perspective. Several small churches do not have any technology as an alternative way of worship because most believe that it is counterproductive to the traditional life and method of churches. Others do not think that the use of technology in worship has any biblical justification.

Corresponding to this controversy, many pastors have wrestled with the idea of whether to use technology as an alternative method of worship to reach others. Earlier, most small churches preferred traditional worship without technology usage in their services or agreed to use it on a minimal basis with no acknowledgment of its presence as an alternative to congregants or guests. However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed and challenged the mindset of pastors and congregants of small traditional churches due to the closures of churches because of health concerns and COVID-19 restrictions. The pandemic was a tough time for many small churches because they did not have a method of outreach or digital presence to assist them in congregating as a church family to continue to worship safely. With this lack of spiritual access, small church pastors across the country realized a digital presence was crucial to reach and engage with other church members.

Technology is one area in which considerable growth has contributed to the progress of churches. It was not until the pandemic that churches investigated the significance and use of technology across the world. The Hartford Institute survey showed an 88 percent increase in online worship during the pandemic. Before this time, an online presence was not an aspect that many churches embraced or wanted in a significant capacity in their work.

Across the globe, people are innovating their religious practice. In the United Kingdom, BBC One has returned to broadcasting Sunday morning services. In Iran, Muslims attend drive-in religious ceremonies during Ramadan, something described by one participant as ‘creative and beautiful’ (AFP TV, 2020). In the United States, 40 percent of churchgoers prefer online worship instead of traditional worship.²

Unfortunately, the churches that decided not to adopt or make space for technology usage did not understand or receive the benefits of finding alternative solutions to their problems.

The Statement of the Problem and Subproblems

The problem that this project aimed to address was understanding what technology tools and ministry methods a small traditional church needs to establish a digital presence. In response to this problem, this research (a) examined Paul's unconventional ministry methods, used in the book of Acts to spread the gospel; (b) reviewed relevant literature regarding digital methods of ministry and how churches adapted an online presence during the COVID-19 pandemic; (c) conducted a mixed method case study on the use of technology in small traditional churches; and (d) identified strategies that could help a small traditional church establish a digital presence.

The researcher began her research by studying the book of Acts to discover the method used to worship and reach others for Jesus Christ.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was examining the book of Acts to discover Paul's unconventional strategies for sharing the gospel. This information was valuable because

² Hazel O'Brien, "What Does the Rise of Digital Religion During Covid-19 Tell Us About Religion's Capacity to Adapt?" *Irish Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 2 (2020): 244.

it gave insight into how Paul used different techniques uncommon during his time but effective in reaching others for God's kingdom.

The second subproblem was reviewing relevant literature regarding digital ministry methods and how churches adopted an online presence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information showed the impact of using different methods to reach others. It also showed the diverse kinds of strategies used to enhance the ministry during the pandemic. The researcher looked at the hybrid church model of ministry success and its impact on small church ministry.

The third subproblem was conducting mixed method research: using a survey and interviews to determine the use of technology in small churches. This information was valuable because it provided the required information from those directly impacted by technology usage during the pandemic. The researcher thought information regarding different activities impacted by technology was needed to provide a more detail-oriented report.

The fourth subproblem was identifying strategies to help a small traditional church establish a digital presence. The researcher focused on different methods that churches have used to integrate technology into worship and assist them in becoming relevant to the current societal needs.

The researcher limited the scope of the research to local, small traditional churches within the researcher's denomination along with some non-denominational churches.

Delimitation of the Research

The research included three small traditional disciples of Christ Churches and three small non-denominational conventional churches. These churches served as

examples of what small traditional churches faced during the pandemic. The said churches were able to provide insight into the concerns of church leaders regarding technological methods and the transition that took place to keep the congregation together.

The research was limited to methods used by Paul to spread the gospel in the book of Acts. Only the literature regarding the strategy of online and hybrid models of ministries was reviewed. The researcher discovered the different methods Paul used to spread the gospel to those of his time. In addition, it gave insight into how the Holy Spirit uses various methods to reach others in the kingdom.

The research focused on a strategy in using technology to enhance the growth of small traditional churches.

Assumptions

The researcher understood the necessity of demarcation and the importance of identifying the assumptions regarding this research. The first assumption was that the Bible is the theological guide for Christ-oriented discipleship. The researcher believed that the New Testament gave theological guidance to Paul's different methods and principles to bring others to Christ.

The second assumption was that the Bible demonstrated different gospel-spreading methods. The researcher focused on the book of Acts to show Paul's various techniques for sharing the gospel with others. The theological questions helped the researcher focus on areas relevant to the study.

The third assumption was that online and hybrid ministry models impacted traditional small churches. Through studying scholarly literature and surveys, as well as researching answers to some research questions about online and hybrid ministry, the

researcher gained insight into technology's impact on small traditional churches. Furthermore, the researcher discovered the different ways those who embraced online and hybrid ministries achieved ministry. Almost all the activities originally carried out on-site within the church building had shifted into the virtual world.

The fourth assumption was that churches had discovered new and unconventional methods of reaching others. Through questions and scholarly literature on the diverse biblical methods used to spread the gospel in the book of Acts, the researcher showed the different methods Paul employed to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ during some of his mission trips.

The fifth assumption was that Jesus Christ functioned in many ways and through different methods. The Church of Jesus Christ sent forth people worldwide to share God's word and compel others to come to know Christ. The researcher clarified the mission and the diverse ways small churches would have functioned in society.

The Main Case Description

The researcher's primary setting was the Orlando area, with a population numbering over 300,000 people. Orlando is considered the fourth largest city in the state of Florida. It is the 73rd largest city in the United States and is also the largest inland city in Florida. According to the census data, 48.6 percent of the population in Orlando is male, and 51.4 percent is female. The different races of Orlando comprise 57.4 percent Caucasian, 25.1 percent African American, 32.7 percent Hispanic, and 4.7 percent Asian. Orlando is one of the capitals of theme parks.

A portion of the churches in the research was in the researcher's denomination. The founders of The Disciples of Christ were "Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell,

Barton Stone, and others in the nineteenth century.”³ Established in Thomas Campbell's publication of the Declaration, the Disciples of Christ was addressed in 1809, marking a significant intellectual beginning for the disciples. The Disciples of Christ understood this date as their starting point, celebrating their centennial in 1909 and bicentennial in 2009. The Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ were one unified Church until 1906, when the split occurred between the two ministries.⁴

The demographics of the Disciples of Christ were older Caucasians. However, the movement worked hard to include people of all races and cultures. This was a challenging task in some parts of the Disciples of Christ due to old mindsets and beliefs regarding race, culture, and sexual orientation. The Disciples of Christ's membership declined over the years due to old traditions and a lack of forward-thinking regarding the health and wellness of the local church in each region.

Due to the significant decline in membership, the Disciples of Christ worked hard to rebuild local churches with a new perspective and opportunities for clergy and potential and current members of all races and social classes to grow and be a part of local churches. The Disciples of Christ's leadership structure involved a General Minister, Assistant General Minister, Regional Ministers, Assistant Regional Ministers, District Ministers, Moderators, Pastors, and Ministers. The congregation voted for the appointment of pastors within local churches.

Working on this project with church organizations such as the Disciples of Christ assisted the researcher in helping to rebuild and prepare small churches in new and

³ Mark G Toulouse, Gary Holloway, and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing Christian Unity: A Concise History of the Christian Church* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press), 5., Kindle.

⁴ Toulouse, Holloway, and Foster, 45.

diverse ways for the future. This project was an asset, and the Disciples of Christ was the perfect place to obtain data on technology's impact on small churches. The Disciples of Christ worked on strategies to strengthen the church's life for the future while maintaining the present needs of the older population within the church.

The researcher selected three small Disciples of Christ churches to collect and research data from participants through a survey. Each church had different dynamics involving the age and culture of the members. One was full of youth and young adults, one was full of middle-aged adults and families, and the last was full of senior citizens. The Disciple of Christ's age range varied based on the church and region. Many of the small churches had an elderly population. The researcher desired to touch each demographic to learn the impact of technology on churches. The age ranges that the research covered were 18–35, 36–55, and 56–90. These age groups helped determine the differences and commonalities in the mindset concerning the impact of technology on local churches.

Lastly, the second setting of the research was done with three non-denominational small traditional churches. The researcher examined these churches to determine if the findings obtained with them were the same as that obtained from the Disciple of Christ regarding the impact of technology. The researcher chose two African American churches and one multicultural church. One of the churches was a part of an independent Pentecostal organization named Cathedral of Praise, founded by Bishop Michael and Cynthia Roberts in 1995. The church was established in 1995 and had to transition to a hybrid type of ministry due to the impact of the pandemic. The congregants ranged from being infants to 85 years of age. The church used technology to reach out to those who

did not traditionally desire to attend church. The church experienced an increase in growth in attendance and expansion of how it reaches others, and it had an average age of 35–55.

The second church was called Triumphant Living; its Founding Pastor is Bishop Wiley Wright. Triumphant Living is an African American church that has existed for 25 years and is located in Orlando, Florida. The church is a small independent church organization that is non-denominational. This church has a fellowship of churches that are also small but have connection and structure. The membership is multigenerational, with an age range from 1–90. Triumphant Living has transitioned from a traditional church to an online church.

The last church, Victory Church, is a multicultural church located in Norcross, Georgia. It was founded in 1990 by Pastors Dennis and Colleen Rouse. Victory Church-Norcross GA is a hybrid church within the Victory Church movement, with an age range from infancy to 95 years of age. The researcher incorporated the impact of technology in the data findings gathered and the strategy suggested and implemented.

Importance of the Problem to the Researcher

Being a pulpit supply pastor in the Disciple of Christ allowed the researcher to witness the effects of technology on the church firsthand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Serving in a setting that had to adjust from a traditional format to an online one and completely hybrid worship was a learning experience. Understanding this phenomenon and the need for adjustment in dealing with this problem was also vital to the researcher, because of the transition in several small churches due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, church attendance had been in decline for years.

The impact of the pandemic on churches accelerated the decline of traditional worship further, which caused many to rethink how church was being done. Amid the decline and the pandemic, some small churches still refused and were unprepared for technology. “Empirical facts showed that many churches were not ready to implement life in the new normal. The activities originally carried out on site in the church building almost all shifted to a technology-based virtual world.”⁵

The researcher believed that small traditional churches had to think differently, train, and adjust to reach people through different technical means, such as social media, other technological methods, and platforms. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic began to be felt in numerous small churches and forced them to begin thinking of how to change their method of worship.

Many small churches started examining the usage of technology for congregants’ worship experience. Some of the discussions centered around the following:

(1) the potential contribution of enforced distancing to deeper spirituality, (2) new worship practices, (3) effects on financial structures, (4) exposure of unequal access to resources and appropriate responses, and (5) lessons learned about leadership and institutional structures.⁶

Some had a complete technological upgrade, others began to use technology on a small scale, and some did not undergo any changes. Small churches feared the unknown when changing the worship experience from in-person to virtual worship.

“In the early period, pastors scrambled to create and implement new forms of practice and strategies for connecting with congregants. This required considerable time

⁵ K.R. Gernaida et al., “Pandemic Ecclesiology: Church Re-Actualization During the Pandemic,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): 7201.

⁶ Dale L Lemke and Sharon Short, “Technology and Ministry During a Time of Pandemic: An Annotated Bibliography,” *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 3 (2021): 520.

and energy but also allowed for creativity and innovation.”⁷ Several churches reflected on the biblical history of the church during tough times and discovered different methods of worship to handle the period of transition.

In looking to transition to another method of engagement, pastors and church leaders discovered that “the transition of character building and discipleship from church buildings to home is also a manifestation of obedience to the Great Commission by studying the Acts of Paul and the Early Church, who used homes as their place of worship and mission.”⁸ Helping small churches through the transitional period of using technology was important to the researcher. The researcher sought to help small churches implement technological models to assist them with long-term stability and relevance in an ever-changing society. The researcher believed that the impact of technology was here to stay and that churches had to adapt to this new normal.

Importance of the Problem to the Ministry

The researcher discovered that the impact of technology was a critical concern for small ministries, primarily because many small churches were at a crossroads regarding the new normal and the thought of embracing technology during the pandemic. “A large number of churches turned to electronic platforms to reach their members, and this gave a faster and more inevitable rise to the digital Church. Churches had to adjust to digital worship, digital sacraments, digital sermons, digital tithes, and digital missions.”⁹ Many

⁷ F Erin Johnston et al., “Pastoral Ministry in Unsettled Times: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Clergy During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Review of Religious Research* 64, no. 2 (2022): 376.

⁸ Putu I Darmawan et al., “Covid-19 Impact on Church Society Ministry,” *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)* 4, no. 3 (2021): 94.

⁹ Jerry Pillay, “COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible,” *Transformation* 37, no. 4 (2020): 267.

small churches lost finances from those who once attended service weekly. Many small traditional churches financially suffered, and pastors became bi-vocational to reduce the financial burden on churches. “The adverse effects of the pandemic on the standard of living of religious leaders may be far-reaching considering that religious leaders cater to the needs of their church members, who call on them for financial support.”¹⁰ Most churches could not gather at the previous level due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not being able to gather put a strain on many churches’ finances and congregants’ ability to worship and fellowship as they were accustomed to doing regularly.

Beyond the experience of worship itself, the ability to mobilize and recruit volunteers for the practical needs of religiously motivated ministries, as well as generating financial contributions, are also challenged when members are deprived of the opportunity to interact face-to-face.¹¹

Several small church leaders passed away due to the pressure of being unable to handle the financial hardship when the doors remained closed.

The researcher was consulted by church leaders regarding the impact of technology and whether it was the new normal for church attendance and fellowship. The researcher believed that technology was a new partner in massively reaching others, with new initiatives to strengthen small churches. The researcher’s data indicated that technology was now a part of a new normal.

¹⁰ A Osei-Tutu et al., “Ban of Religious Gatherings During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on Christian Church Leaders’ Well-Being in Ghana,” *Pastoral Psychology* 70, 342 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-021-00954-5>.

¹¹ Joseph O Baker et al., “Religion in the Age of Social Distancing: How COVID-19 Presents New Directions for Research,” *Sociology of Religion*, 81, no. 4 (Winter 2020), 364.

Importance of the Problem to Academia

Academically, this project was a new initiative for small independent churches that worshipped traditionally. As with anything new, a period of trial and error ensued. However, within The Disciples of Christ, the process of reimagining what the church would look like had already begun.

The researcher hoped that the contributions made through these findings would aid The Disciples of Christ in fine-tuning the model under development to make it more effective in reaching all generations that were a part of the church. The researcher also gathered findings from the three non-denominational churches to see if the impact of technology was widespread in other Christian forms of faith. The researcher recognized through these findings that numerous non-denominational churches do not have any assistance available to them because of their independent status from a mainstream denomination. The researcher hoped that the information in these findings would help the churches find new methods and upgrade their ministry without financial burden. Another hope was that the results and models developed regarding the impact of technology on local churches would assist them in utilizing the technology data with their future results.

The Value of The Research in the Immediate Context

The researcher believes that this research will help small congregations be better prepared in case another pandemic arises in the future and that churches will be able to assist better their congregant's current and future struggles during and after the pandemic. With the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches found it difficult to find solutions for issues (such as spiritual and mental health counseling for congregants) and the community based on their traditional way of thinking, both inside and outside the churches.

During the pandemic, the spiritual and mental health of many of the congregants and families within the community was of significant concern because many were unable to cope with being consistently cooped up inside their homes and not being able to worship traditionally. Small churches were having problems with the mental health needs of children and their parents. Neither churches nor schools knew how to

offer mental health or coping skills services to students who depend on them to address their trauma-related needs. Without such services, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to cumulative trauma for many children across this country; it increased the chances of developing mood and anxiety disorders and elevated hyperarousal symptoms.¹²

Finding a way to stay connected and relevant in the lives of the congregants and families outside of attending church while everything was on lockdown was essential. Leaders needed new ways of reaching parishioners during the most challenging period of their lives.

In the immediate context, the researcher could assist churches by empowering them with different strategies to connect with congregants and the community using technology, regardless of the situation. Moreover, the researcher sought to empower churches with the necessary information and tools needed to help them explore the technology used to keep the congregation and visitors engaged in different areas of ministry in churches.

The Importance of the Project to the Broader Community

Many small churches suffered during the pandemic because of a lack of access to technology and methods of reaching their congregants and matching the needs within

¹² Chavez Phelps and Linda L. Sperry. "Children and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, no. S1 (2020): S73.

their communities. Due to the church closures, pastors and church leaders felt it necessary to find a way to connect to their congregants and those who needed assistance within their municipality. The researcher believed that the information would help small churches develop tailor-made methods and strategies for their ministry. In addition, the research data would help small churches connect and remain relevant in meeting the needs of the congregants and all those who may not attend church.

Summary

Many needs that arose during the pandemic were difficult for small traditional churches to handle. Pastors and church leaders dealt with an overwhelming amount of discouragement and death within their congregations. Not being able to interact with the members proved to be a significant problem that they had to address. Senior members in the congregations were having a challenging time because they were not technologically savvy and could not socialize with other church members, as they were accustomed to doing on an ongoing basis. In addition, many families could not socialize with their loved ones, with whom they had become accustomed to connecting weekly or daily, which caused spiritual and mental health issues.

Several members had friends and families in the hospital who they were unable to visit because of the COVID-19 restrictions on visitations. Pastors were struggling to give hope to parishioners because they also were experiencing difficulties in their faith and understanding what the Holy Spirit wanted them to do in such a situation. The researcher believes that having technology as one of the resources in small churches' ministry would assist pastors and church leaders in reaching parishioners and the community at large. The researcher also believes that this will allow churches to become more relevant and meet the needs of those who need them the most in times of crisis.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

The study sought to obtain and share insight as to whether online ministry is biblical. Moreover, the researcher wanted to investigate and share information regarding the different and unconventional methods used to further the message of Jesus Christ worldwide, to help small churches understand that the Bible patriarchs used different and unconventional methods to share the gospel. The researcher believes that an unconventional method is a new and strategic way of achieving a goal beyond the normal methods of achieving success. Whether it be in communication or strategic planning, an unconventional method moves away from traditional thinking to complete one's task. The Bible contains unconventional methods to get the message God wanted to deliver to his people. The researcher sought to answer several questions small church leadership had regarding changing or adding on an unconventional method due to being unable to worship traditionally. Some of the major questions that were addressed were the following:

- What unconventional methods did Jesus, and Paul use?
- Is online ministry/church a method that could be used for those who need an alternative way of hearing the message of Jesus Christ?
- Was the non-Jewish audience impacted by Paul's unconventional methods?
- Was the church's growth due to Paul's methods of evangelism?
- What was the impact of using different methods?

Christ's Unconventional Method in the New Testament

Introduction

Throughout the New Testament, one will find the unconventional love of God through Jesus Christ and Apostle Paul's love, passion, and mission. According to John 3:16, 1 Peter 2:21-25, and 1 Corinthians 5:7, God's love and unconventional method of redeeming humankind were to send his only begotten son Jesus to die for the world's sins as a sacrificial lamb to save the lost from the penalty of sin that separated them from God. In addition, Acts 9:15 shows that Jesus demonstrates his unconventional love for humanity by choosing Paul, who was a destroyer of those who were witnessing to others that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus used an unconventional method to reach Paul and show him that he was the Messiah he was persecuting. Jesus chose Paul, a persecutor of Christians, to bear his name. No one would have chosen Paul as the standard bearer for Christ because of Paul's hatred of Christ, but God saw him as the right person to share his name with a gentile nation. Jesus also used an unconventional method to convey his message to others who did not believe him to be the Messiah.

Different Kinds of Worship

The researcher felt it essential to explore Jesus' use of unconventional methods to compel others to follow him as Lord and Savior. Throughout the New Testament, one will find several scriptures in which Jesus used an unconventional approach to reach others with a message pertaining to the kingdom of God. The New Testament gives the researcher a glimpse of the different methods that Christ employed to share his kingdom

message. Some of Jesus' methods cause the disciple to be trained and grow in knowing who Jesus is as the Christ.

Jesus' methods were new and effective in sharing the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus used the attraction method to introduce himself and his ministry to those who had never heard of him. In the gospel, according to John chapter one, John presents Jesus as the Messiah; he reveals how Andrew and Simon's disciples began to follow Jesus, by asking Him where he was staying. Jesus invited the disciples to come and see where he was living. Jesus understood the importance of relationship building, allowing Andrew and Simon to get to know and see who he was as the Messiah they had been waiting to see manifested on earth. Jesus also uses an unconventional method of personal evangelism according to gospel of John chapter four with the Samaritan woman at the well. He introduces the conversation by exposing his human and divine nature to the Samaritan woman. Jesus' human nature was exposed when he asked the woman for something to drink to quench his thirst. Jesus revealed his divine nature by telling her everything he knew about her at their first encounter. She became a believer based on the revelation of Jesus' divine nature and his acknowledgment of being the Messiah. Jesus used an unconventional method to restore the man possessed with demons by speaking to the demons destroying the man's life. Jesus restored the man to normal life and living, and the man told others about what Jesus had done, and they were amazed at what God had done for him in the gospel according to Mark chapter five. Jesus used an unconventional method of sharing with Peter how to fish another way than he had previously done in the gospel of Luke Chapter five. Jesus' use of unconventional methods

shows the church how to proactively share the message of Jesus Christ in new and innovative ways.

Many church leaders wrestled with one of the questions regarding the use of technology in worship: whether an online church is biblical. Can the online church be an option for those who need and want an alternative way of hearing the message of Jesus Christ? The truth is that all methods of worship, evangelism, and Bible study had to have a start somewhere. Throughout the Bible, one can find times when worship was done differently. The Old Testament worship focused on a physical place with a physical structure (tabernacle), special clothing items the priesthood had to dress in, lampstands, burning incense, musical instruments, altars, and different animal sacrifices. When one looks at the New Testament, one can find different methods of worship being instituted. In the New Testament, the focus was on the true worshiper that worships in spirit and truth, “John 4:19-24, the Priesthood of all believers 1 Peter 2:5,9.”¹³ Jesus paying the price for our sins brought a new covenant and a new way of approaching worship to God.

God of the Cosmos

God is the God of the Cosmos; “the gospel of John 1:14, which proclaimed that the Word who is God became flesh and pitched his tent within the cosmos.”¹⁴ Some scholars believe that God can be both, the God of the Cosmos and a personal god.

Representing God as a spiritual or cosmic force does not necessarily preclude belief in a personal God nor deny divine intentionality or agency. For example, Christians may view the disembodied Holy Spirit as a dove or divine Counselor

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984).

¹⁴ Gloria L. Schaab, “Incarnation as Emergence: A Transformative Vision of God and the Cosmos,” *Heythrop Journal* 54, no. 4 (2013): 638, <https://DOI.org/10.1111/heyj.12016>.

and Comforter. Muslims have 99 names for a merciful God, including the Absolute.¹⁵

Another point of consideration is that the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit is within each person who believes in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the Church is the Body of Christ, so it is also the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The Church came into being when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Christ at Pentecost (Acts 2), empowering them so that they might become his bold witnesses (Acts 1:8).¹⁶

The understanding that people of the faith are the true heart of churches rather than the physical buildings being the heart empowers one to understand that online church is not unbiblical.

As a community, the Church is the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Church is a community of God's people called from the world (and) into communion with Christ. Therefore, the Church has a unique identity, namely God's beloved people (cf. Pt 2:9). The Church understands the visible and invisible Church.¹⁷

Additionally, it is important to understand that the "relationship between Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology is brought out in 1 Peter 2:5, where we find the image of Christ as the cornerstone of the temple and where believers are described as a spiritual house."¹⁸ The Holy Spirit, who causes the Church to manifest, now dwells in each of us. Thus, we can connect in fellowship and acts as its principle of animation. The different unconventional methods used throughout the Bible were someone's idea of how

¹⁵ Kathryn A. Johnson et al., "Science, God, and the Cosmos: Science Both Erodes (via Logic) and Promotes (via Awe) Belief in God," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 84 (2019): 11.

¹⁶ Mark J. Cartledge, "Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation." *Practical Theology* 14, no. 1-2 (March 2021): 22, <https://DOI:10.1080/1756073x.2021.1878194>.

¹⁷ Gernaida et al., 3.

¹⁸ Cartledge, 22.

to move the gospel's message forward, as Jesus did in using various methods to reach others in the name of Christ.

The New Testament gives insight into God's unconventional method of bringing forth the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, into the world. It explains Jesus's ministry with disciples. Jesus did not have any formal training on how to reach others with his message. "Discipleship to Jesus and the rabbis had some areas of similarities and differences —Jesus was widely recognized as a teacher of considerable repute even though he lacked the rigorous formal training customary for the Jewish rabbis"¹⁹ (Mark 6:2-3). Jesus was known as a teacher and had developed his unconventional methods during that time.

Jesus's Teaching Methods

As a teacher, Jesus used several teaching methods to reach his followers, and in the process, he developed the guiding principles of discipleship. He employed what most see today as small groups through tools, mentorship, or apprenticeship. Jesus's uncommon method was evident in the gospels.

Jesus instituted a different way of training disciples, instead of relying on formal education, he called his disciples to live and learn with him as they went through life. For Jesus the act of mentoring was a lifestyle, a relationship where [the] mentor would impart wisdom to the mentee as they encountered everyday challenges.²⁰

Through the Gospels, readers can discover the commission the resurrected Jesus gave to the disciples, to go forth and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). Jesus

¹⁹ Paul Muhati, "An Exploration of Jesus' Model of Discipleship and Insights for the Contemporary Church," *ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies* 1, no. 2 (2021): 63.

²⁰ Orlando Rivera, "Mentoring Stages in The Relationship Between Barnabas and Paul," *Biblical Perspectives*, May 2007 (2007): 2–3.

used different methods because “the Church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”²¹ Jesus's mission was to get the disciples ready for the next chapter of his mission on the earth without his physical presence.

Jesus's Method of Mentoring

Jesus used apprenticeship to help disciples understand how to walk a new way of life as his followers. David Csinos says the following:

when seen through the lens of legitimate peripheral participation, Jesus, in calling these followers, began to form his community of practice. This community was to follow him as he demonstrated, through situated learning, how they were to behave and as he allowed them to partake in actions that characterized the Jesus community.²²

Jesus’s mentoring style was a style of mentoring, teaching, and hands-on experience. Jesus ensured that those he mentored had hands-on experience as they became disciples. “As a teacher, he used several teaching methods to disciple his followers and, in the process, developed the whole principle of discipleship. He employed what most of us see today as small groups and other tools of mentorship or apprenticeship.”²³ Jesus used his unique method and established a plan for expansion by teaching his disciples to do what he had done for the period he was with them on the earth. Jesus’s uncommon methods were seen in not only the gospel but also the book of

²¹ Bryant W. Ball and Robert K. McIver, “Jesus and the Great Commission,” in *Grounds for Assurance and Hope: Selected Biblical and Historical Writings of Bryan W. Ball*, ed. Bryan W. Ball and Robert K. McIver (Cooranbong, Australia: Avondale Academic Press, 2015), 296.

²² David M. Csinos, “‘Come Follow Me’: Apprenticeship in Jesus’ Approach to Education,” *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (2010): 53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080903472725>.

²³ Muhati, 63.

Acts. Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and he began to teach the disciples about the kingdom of God in the book of Acts.

Brief History of The Book of Acts

Introduction

Scholars believe that book of Acts continued the Gospel of St. Luke. It is thought that the author of Acts is Luke, the physician. Luke's writings in the book of Acts mention some of the unconventional methods used to spread the gospel. "The book of Acts tells the story of how Jesus's small, ethnically homogenous group of disciples grew to become a fledgling multi-ethnic movement sweeping across the Mediterranean world, all within the span of a single generation."²⁴ The book of Acts gives a person the opportunity to see examples of how the church grew in the time of the early church. Unsurprisingly, many church leaders and scholars examine the book of Acts when they look for a model of the growth of the biblical church. Yiner Cotrado explains that "the book of Acts works as a link between the gospels and the epistles, according to the order of the New Testament dating back to the second century CE."²⁵

The book of Acts shares with the researcher the resurrected Jesus's ministry to the disciples and his methods of teaching them about the kingdom of God. It also speaks to the teaching method of Jesus post-resurrection. Additionally, the book of Acts introduces the expansion of the message of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to people of different nations and backgrounds. "The book of Acts

²⁴ Benjamin R. Wilson, "The Depiction of Church Growth in Acts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2 (June 2017): 317.

²⁵ Yiner Josue Huaycani Cotrado, "Principles of Discipleship and Church Growth from Acts 2:46-47," *International Review of Mission* 109, no. 2 (2020): 329.

emphasizes the Spirit's role in disciples' witness for Christ. It may be seen throughout the book that the Spirit of God pushes people far across cultural missions²⁶ (Acts 8:29, 10:19, 11:12, and 15:28).

The book of Acts includes the purpose and unconventional methods used by both Jesus Christ and the ministry of Paul. Christopher Stenschke indicates the purpose of Jesus's ministry in the book of Acts: "This aspect of the ministry of Jesus is assumed to also be known to Peter's Gentile audience in Caesarea ('you yourselves know'). It is in this setting [Act 10:37-39] that there appears the only fairly detailed description of the ministry of Jesus."²⁷ Stenschke's statement speaks to why Jesus felt it necessary to teach and train others to carry on the ministry he established. The book of Acts also introduces the reader to the uncommon ministry and methods of Paul.

Paul's Different Methods of Sharing the Gospel

Sharing an Uncommon Testimony

Paul's conversion is an example of an unconventional method. "He was known first as Saul 'the persecutor of the people of the Way. However, after his encounter with Christ, he became known as Paul the preacher of the gospel of Jesus."²⁸

Jesus and Paul were not in contact with each other in the physical sense, yet Paul had an encounter with the spirit of Jesus Christ, which changed his life forever. "The story of Saul's transformation in Acts 9 is one of dramatic reversal. This rageful enemy

²⁶ Yan Chai, "Spirit-Empowered Discipleship in Acts," (D.Min. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological University, 2016), 35, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/1239>.

²⁷ Christopher W. Stenschke, "The Presentation of Jesus in the Missionary Speeches of Acts and the Mission of the Church," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35, no. 1 (2014): 4.

²⁸ Mike Megrove Reddy, "The Pauline Methodology of Communicating the Word to a Gentile Audience," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 102, (2021): 3.

of the movement (8:1-3; 9:1-2) is recruited from the ranks of the opposition and soon becomes a vigorous proponent.²⁹ Paul sharing his witness regarding the encounter with Christ was an unconventional story, to say the least, because Christ in the physical form was no longer present among the people. It was an unconventional method of storytelling to those who knew him as a persecutor of Christ. The Holy Spirit had begun to deal with Paul from the moment he had accepted Christ as his lord and savior.

The Holy Spirit could not be seen, but his presence still spoke to Paul and guided him. In the natural sense, man-made technology similarly guides one on how to perform a task. The Holy Spirit provided Paul with different ways of sharing the message of Christ.

From a biblical standpoint, technology offers one the opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in places that one cannot physically reach. The Holy Spirit moves through different people and airways, using different mechanisms to draw people to listen to the message. This technological method is employed through interactions with different electronics, which share information through greater systems and among people on an ongoing basis. For example, technology gets a command from the entity in charge of looking up the scripture, whether through a computer or a phone; it has no idea of who is giving the command because it cannot see who is talking to it, but it knows that the scripture can be used as a way to share the Gospel.

Paul used various unconventional strategies to reach the loss of Jesus Christ as a disciple. Scholars debate over whether Paul had an actual strategy or method during his

²⁹ John T. Carroll, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), 59.

early stages of ministry. The Holy Spirit called them to his plan and developed a strategy; he downloaded in their spirit a hunger and desire to see others enter God's kingdom.

According to Acts 13:2, the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work unto which I have called them.' In Acts 14:26, we are told that the apostles sailed to Antioch, where they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.³⁰

Roland felt that the usage of the phrase "the work" here gave evidence of the work Paul and Barnabus did on the earth. These scriptures suggest that a planned work was in place to fulfill what they were called to achieve. Paul understood the importance of having a plan to implement the developed methods.

Paul's Method of Listening to the Holy Spirit as His Guide

Paul used several kinds of methods, most of which were uncommon during his time of ministry, to reach others with the message of Jesus Christ. One of the uncommon methods that Paul understood early on was that to be effective in his mission, he had to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit to advise him on where he should go to share the gospel. Paul did not rely on his strength or intellect; he relied on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as seen in Acts 15:41 with Paul and Silas.

Roland Allen wrote,

Acts 15:41 tells us that Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the congregations. It is expressly stated that he tried to preach in Asia but was forbidden by the Holy Spirit; he then attempted to go into Bithynia and again was forbidden by the Spirit. So, he found himself at Troas where he was directed by a vision to Macedonia³¹ (Acts 16:6-10).

³⁰ Roland Allen. *Missionary Methods: God's Plan for Missions According to Paul* (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2017), 3.

³¹ Allen, 4.

Paul relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide him on his destinations and what method to use in different cultural settings. “While at Ephesus, Paul was propelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, After I have been there, it behooves me to see Rome also”³² (Acts 19:21).

Paul had a dream that motivated him to go to Macedonia. He took heed to the vision, believing that the Holy Spirit was guiding him to go to Macedonia to minister to the people within that area. Paul was insistent about relying on the Holy Spirit to guide him in the method of sharing his gospel messages in letters.

Paul’s Reliance on the Holy Spirit in Cultural Communication Writing Method

The New Testament (Ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη) has a compilation of the letters written by the Apostle Paul. It should also be noted that although he was a prolific writer and teacher of the word, Paul encountered many barriers when it came to sharing the gospel. He was nonetheless very able to connect with people in the Graeco-Roman world outside of his culture and could easily communicate with the intellectual élites he encountered in the Empire.³³

Paul was an excellent speaker, engaging and effective in reaching non-believers. Paul enjoyed both give and take. He was always excited to answer questions from those inquisitive about faith. Many people in different cultures loved Paul’s preaching and consequently became followers of Christ.

Teaching Methods to Other Cultures

One of the things Paul did was exercise the power of the Holy Spirit on himself with his gospel method of teaching with the gentile cultures: V. K. McCarty scripts that

Luke shows God working through the new faith of Lydia by interacting with the faith of Paul, challenging him to accept hospitality from a new believer who was

³² Allen, 5.

³³ Reddy, 1.

in all likelihood radically different from him: a non-Jewish woman, from a different culture, operating without the guardianship of a man.³⁴

Del Mueller records that,

The prayer service was led by an elderly Jewish man, a close friend of Lydia. When he learned that Paul, a Pharisee, had joined the group, he immediately requested that Paul share a message. His sermon's central teaching was simple: Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah. His suffering and death paid the penalty for all sin for all people.³⁵

Paul's interactive teaching with Lydia had such a great impact that "both host and guest show generosity in engaging with one another in this exchange, and from this acceptance of hospitality, the church in Philippi began to grow."³⁶ Paul was an in-depth teacher of the word of God; he wanted to make sure his converts knew how to successfully live for Christ.

Paul's methodology in presenting the gospel (Acts 17:2-3) involved 'reasoning, explaining, proving, proclaiming, and persuading his hearers to accept Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. This attitude demonstrates the ability of one who intermingles apologetics in the proclamation of the gospel.³⁷

Paul was a scholar of the word, and he provided his converts with in-depth insight into the Bible. In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went to worship in the Jews temple. At the temple, they spoke to several Jews and Greeks. Many of the Jews and Greeks understood, believed, and received the message that Paul and Barnabas shared with them. Paul presented the gospel differently from his approach to the Jews. Homer A. Kent observed,

³⁴ V. K. McCarty, "Lydia in Acts 16: 'The Lord Opened Her Heart,'" *International Congregational Journal* 13, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 23.

³⁵ Del Mueller, *Narratives of St. Paul's Missionary Journeys and Rome: Book Five* (Authorhouse Publishing, 2013), Kindle.

³⁶ McCarty, 23.

³⁷ Ikechukwu Ugo, "St. Paul's Church Planting Strategies as Revealed in Selected Passages in the Book of Acts," *Global Missiology English* 3, no. 9 (2012): 8.

“Paul’s speech to the pagans was appropriate to his audience. He made no special appeal to Scripture but built upon the knowledge they had from the natural world. He stressed the evidence in nature of a supernatural Creator and showed the folly of idolatry.”³⁸

Paul’s Working of Miracle Method to Win the Lost for Christ

Another method Paul used was the working of miracles; for example, Roland Allen shares regarding Luke’s narrative that

At Paphos, a miracle led to the conversion of an important man; at Iconium signs and wonders were a witness to the truth of the Gospel; at Lystra a miracle introduced a great opportunity for expounding the doctrine; at Ephesus miracles were the means by which a great spiritual victory was won.³⁹

Paul and Barnabas had shared the gospel in the Synagogue Iconium. Their teachings were so effective that Jews and Greeks gave their lives to Christ. The Jewish leaders who rejected the gospel began to poison Jews and Gentiles. Despite the hostility Paul and Barnabas received from the Jewish leaders, they decided to spend considerable time in the town, rising up and speaking boldly about their dependency on God. Their testimony was confirmed by the miracle signs and wondered God enabled them to achieve, just as the apostle accomplished in Jerusalem.⁴⁰

At Lystra, Paul could share the good news because of the miracle. Howard Marshall also indicates, the miracles performed by Paul and Barnabas caused the bystanders to respond positively. The miracles were a significant occurrence; the crowds that witnessed the miracles were local people who believed that Paul and Barnabas must

³⁸ Homer A. Kent Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 116-7.

³⁹ Allen, 36.

⁴⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 247.

be some gods that had come to visit with them and should be honored and respected as gods.⁴¹

The book of Acts shows Paul's method of sharing the gospel with those who were not converts of Christ and that Paul's method of sharing the gospel was different based on the various settings he found himself in at that time.

Paul Confrontational Method

Paul's method in Acts 13:6-17 was more aggressive toward the Jewish false prophet, Bar-Jesus. "From Luke's perspective, Bar Jesus is a prophet whose interpretation of free will of God is false, and therefore whose authority is foreign to that of the legitimate prophetic circle as represented by Barnabas and Saul."⁴²

According to Luke, Bar-Jesus sought to discredit Paul's witness to Sergius Paulus, a Roman Proconsul. Paul accused Bar-Jesus of being a son of the devil.

John MacArthur shares that

Bar-Jesus fancied himself a righteous prophet, but Paul denounced him as the enemy of all righteousness. He constantly twisted and perverted God's truth, leading to Paul's withering question, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?⁴³

Paul continued his confrontational method to with Bar-Jesus. Kathy Ehrensperger writes that Paul

addresses him as υἱὲ διαβόλου, a potentially highly problematic term when translated as son of the devil. A translation as [a] son of a disturber or twister

⁴¹ Marshall, 250.

⁴² Rick Strelan, "Who Was Bar Jesus (Acts 13,6-12)?" *Biblica* 85, no. 1(2004): 66 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42614491>.

⁴³ John MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (New York: Moody Publishers, 1996), Kindle.

would be perfectly legitimate and indicate a different dimension to what is associated with the term devil in [the] Christian tradition.⁴⁴

Paul allowed the Holy Spirit to use him to speak a prophetic word to Bar-Jesus, concerning his fate due to his deceitfulness.

Paul's prophetic word to Bar-Jesus was instantaneous and happened as Paul prophesied to him. Consequently, the Roman Proconsul accepted Christ as his savior. Paul's uncommon method of evangelism caused salvation to occur in this Roman official's life.

Michael D. Schultz writes that

The actual making of what we know as evangelism calls was a method employed throughout the book of Acts. Paul's call to the Philippian jailer's household would certainly apply. They didn't just believe it because their father came home and told them to, but through the same sin and grace presentation which the jailer himself had heard.⁴⁵

Paul and Silas used an unconventional method of prayer and praise while in a prison cell, to convey the message of Jesus.

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Silas began singing and praying to commune with God and share their faith with all who were listening in the different jail cells. As a result of their unconventional method of sharing the gospel through singing and praying, the power of the Holy Spirit entered the jail cells and allowed Paul and Silas to break free. However, due to their integrity, they remained inside the cells, and the head jailer received Christ as his savior.

⁴⁴ Kathy Ehrensperger, "Meeting the Romans: The Encounter of Paul and Sergius Paulus According to Acts," In *Cyprus within the Biblical World: Are Borders Barriers?* ed. J. H. Charlesworth and J. G. R. Pruszinski, (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 103, <https://DOI.org/10.5040/9780567694928.ch-007>.

⁴⁵ Michael D. Schultz, "Evangelism in the Acts of the Apostles," (1988): 3.

Paul proclaims the gospel in a place where gentiles once had power. Del Muller shared that Paul

visits a region known as Cappadocia. It included a community that lived in caves cut out of a soft tuff mountain rock. This former center of Hittite power housed a synagogue. When we left after a two-week stay, we thanked God for establishing a Christian congregation among these mountain-carved homes.⁴⁶

Paul empowered the people who were present at the location and established a church in a place that was once a powerful synagogue of another deity.

Paul's Engagement Method

Paul's method of engagement in Acts 14:8-20 shows how he shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with the lame man who did not know Christ as his savior. Paul enjoyed engaging with people who were not from his culture or religious background. Apostle Paul used different methods to be effective with people culturally different from him in their way of life.

The effect of the preaching was now seen in the way in which a lame man, presumably a beggar, whose malady had been lifelong, responded to the message by believing that he could be healed; this suggests that the message included some reference to the healing ministry of Jesus. It can be assumed that the man, like most of the other inhabitants, could understand the Greek language in which Paul spoke.⁴⁷

Paul's Mentorship Method

Paul also provided mentorship.

Paul discovered that Timothy was the son of a believing Jewess and a Greek father, and that people spoke highly of him. A good reputation was a characteristic that Paul valued immensely. In fact, after revealing Timothy's

⁴⁶ Mueller, 483.

⁴⁷ Marshall, 250.

excellent reputation, Acts 16:3 clearly states that Paul wanted to take him along on the journey.⁴⁸

Paul's mentorship of Timothy began at that moment, and his love for Timothy grew by leaps and bounds. Paul understood the importance of investing what he had learned into Timothy and others to expand the kingdom. So he invested a great deal of time in making sure that Timothy was trained, could handle the position of a leader, and could manage the pressures and persecution in the ministry. Paul mentored not just Timothy but also Silas, John Mark, Titus, and others throughout his career. He did a great deal of church planting during his career.

Paul's Church Planting Method

Another of Paul's methods was church planting. "The Apostle Paul had a strategy. For instance, Acts 17:2 states that on the Sabbath Paul went into the Synagogue, as was his custom. So, his strategy involved attending the synagogue and preaching Jesus Christ to the people each time he visited the city."⁴⁹ Paul's strategy was to ensure that his converts could maintain their newfound conversion.

Paul focused intentionally on urban church planting. His strategy to make disciples began with evangelizing the cities and planting local churches in them. In each of Paul's missionary journeys, he crossed the Mediterranean world, going from city to city with his message and establishing churches.⁵⁰

Paul understood the power of discipleship and the expansion of the message of Jesus Christ through church planting. He understood that he could not accomplish the

⁴⁸ Stacy E. Hoehl, "The Mentor Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as Loving Mentor to Timothy and the Application of this Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Challenges," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 2 (2011): 33.

⁴⁹ Ugo, 3.

⁵⁰ Ugo, 3.

work of expanding the gospel alone; he needed others, especially those from the gentile culture. Church planting was essential to fulfilling the great commission.

Paul's strategy for church planting was to go where the Holy Spirit would send him and speak and teach those receptive to his message.

This attitude adopted by Paul was given to the disciples by Christ in Matthew 10:11–16 and Luke 10:5–16. Jesus [emphasized] to the disciples to go to people who were receptive to their message but should not overlook the non-receptive; moreover, they were to focus on those ready to hear (Payne 2016:3).⁵¹

Although Paul faced great opposition in some of the areas that the Holy Spirit led him to, he had great opportunities among those receptive to the message of Christ. Paul utilized his strategy to share the good news with both Jews and non-Jews. His strategy included reaching out to families to establish house churches.

One of the methods Paul emphasized was his strategy of developing house churches; this was very useful in connecting with families. Homes were a crucial instrument in the development and life of a Christian. "In Paul's approach, sharing the gospel in a house setting allowed him the additional opportunity to evangelize those who were slaves, friends, and even neighbors."⁵²

This method helped Paul to grow churches in a comfortable environment and allow people to fellowship with one another.

Paul used house churches to also teach and disciple others so that the message of Jesus Christ could be expanded. People experience spiritual growth through the apostle's teaching and discipleship. As a result, they began to spread the gospel and complete

⁵¹ Akinyemi O. Alawode, "Paul's Biblical Patterns of Church Planting: An Effective Method to Achieve the Great Commission," *HTS Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020): 2.

⁵² Alawode, 2.

different Christian services. Acts 4:31 says, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken.”⁵³

Paul understood that in establishing the churches, individual parts of the church would have a great impact on different areas of the location. “[Focusing] on large cities and towns for planting churches will have a great impact on the communities. The cities are made up of people who come from all parts of the world for business, education, trade or tourism, and thus, provide a great audience.”⁵⁴

Church Growth As a result of Paul's Methods of Evangelism?

The Church was able to birth churches with gentiles in the audience because of the work that Paul did to ensure the enactment of command Jesus had left for the disciples. “The Book of Acts faithfully records the spiritual growth of the early Church. Acts 2:42-47 is a beautiful cameo of the inner life of the Church. The spiritual growth of the fellowship is reflected in the boldness of the believers’ prayer in a time of crisis”⁵⁵ (Acts 4:23-31). Also, it speaks to the love demonstrated in Acts 4:32-37 regarding the disciples’ willingness to share their possessions. This act of kindness that the disciples displayed showed how much Christ had affected their lives, fellowship, and love for one another.

Paul’s method of sharing the gospel yielded fruit based on the gathered biblical information. The scripture indicated that an increase was observed in the places where the gospel was preached. “The passages which most directly convey the growth of the

⁵³ Alawode, 3.

⁵⁴ Alawode, 2.

⁵⁵ Allison A. Trites, “Church Growth in the Book of Acts,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145, no. 578 (April 1988): 166.

Christian movement in Acts are the numerous statements that refer in general terms to the ongoing numerical growth of the church”⁵⁶(Acts 2:47; 5:13–14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). Throughout the book of Acts, the researcher discovered that church growth was evident in the expansion of the ministry by the method that Paul, the Apostle, and others employed to share the message of Jesus Christ throughout the marketplace. People from different cultures and races heard the gospel and became followers of Jesus Christ.

The Impact of Paul's Unconventional and Different Methods

Paul understood that the different areas within the marketplace could be impacted and changed through the witness of those local to and residing in the surrounding cities and towns. He understood the importance of having a method relevant to the time, place, and people he was called to influence. Thus, the researcher grasped that using technology as a tool could help church leaders become relevant in the current time by giving them the power to expand the kingdom of God into another area across the world; technology is not a hindrance to churches but a tool that they can employ to complete great commissions that Jesus shared with the disciples at his ultimate command.

Paul’s methods were uncommon yet relevant to the people he was called to reach because many of them, particularly gentiles, had never had an encounter with anyone sharing the message of Jesus Christ. Paul understood the importance of meeting people where there are in life and cultural differences.

David Hessel Grave holds that if the gospel is to be understood, contextualization must be relevant to the complete authority and unadulterated message of the

⁵⁶ Wilson, 319.

Bible, on the one hand, and it must be related to the cultural, linguistic and religious background of the respondent, on the other hand.⁵⁷

Paul showed the importance of not limiting how the Holy Spirit wanted to work, to share his message with a public that may be unbelieving of Christ and with those who have never heard the gospel before. His methods were relevant to the times and culture of that day and age.

His strategies yielded fruit, and consequently, the gospel spread to different places. This information regarding Paul's trust in the Holy Spirit's direction can empower the pastors and leaders of traditional churches to know that using technology in worship is okay. Technology can be a blessing to churches. It can develop and provide new ways to reach people not interested in coming to the church building to worship.

Conclusion

Many Jews and gentiles came to know Jesus as their Christ because of the unique style of ministry of Jesus and Paul. Jesus and Paul shared their message beyond the traditional worship in the temple/synagogue. Most of their ministry messages reached those outside the confines of traditional worship. Both Jesus and Paul set the stage for unconventional discipleship and nontraditional worship methods for the future.

⁵⁷ Alawode, 4.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Many small churches can develop new opportunities by examining the uncommon strategies of how Jesus and Paul communicated their message beyond traditional thinking. Having an understanding of the impact of Jesus' and Paul's approach during their time of ministry helped the researcher gather the information that was necessary to aid small churches and church leaders. Also, understanding the impact of Jesus and Paul's ministry on others assisted in putting the leaders' minds at ease about using technology in churches and marketplace ministry. After gaining some critical insight, the researcher believed that as churches seek to utilize new and innovative ways of sharing the gospel, the churches would be following in the footsteps of Jesus and Paul. Further, the researcher believed that by small churches ensuring that those who do not prefer traditional methods of hearing the message of Jesus can do so in different spaces the small churches would be expanding the message and example of Jesus and Paul.

Gaining an understanding of the impact of Jesus and Paul's strategy during their time of ministry helped the researcher gather the information that would aid small churches and church leaders and put their minds at ease about using technology for church worship and various ministry related setting.

The Internet has brought different communities and groups together on the Web, overcoming time, space, and cultural barriers. Internet technologies have shaped how we live; we borrow books in electronic format from a library physically

situated on the opposite side of the earth and obtain degrees from universities located in other countries.⁵⁸

Even with all that technology has done for society, many churches were slow to embrace it, and others did not embrace the full potential of the internet until the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a study, churches have a long history of reinventing themselves.

Of course, this is far from the first time that social and information-sharing networks have sat at the heart of the transformation of the traditional structures of organized religion. Christianity has been reinventing itself and redefining its relationship with its faithful for two millennia. This particular use of social media in 2020 may be novel, but the assumptions that underpin it are firmly anchored in the past.⁵⁹

Churches have long used different forms of communication to get their message out, from using printing technology to print the bible to utilizing mass communication media, such as television and radio, to get their Sunday morning sermon and Bible studies to the masses. However, for many churches, religious organizations, and synagogues, changing how they traditionally worshipped in a building was a bridge too far to cross.

The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 reshaped all aspects of life, including religious practices and rituals. As more religious activities shifted to digital space during the lockdown periods, the need to examine the link between religion and digital media grew stronger.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lee Suk Dae, "An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy For Church Evangelism Through a Case Study of The Sarang Community Church," (D.Min. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological University, 2011), 1.

⁵⁹ Helen Parish, "The Absence of Presence and the Presence of Absence: Social Distancing, Sacraments, and The Virtual Religious Community During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Religions* 11, no. 6 (2020): 276.

⁶⁰ Parish, 276.

The researcher wanted to understand the full impact and adjustments to be made for ministries during the pandemic, especially since many churches were struggling with what to do with the impact of the pandemic on the congregation.

Jerry Pilar penned that

The closure of churches during the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown has forced Christian churches to do Church differently and to re-imagine the Church. For a long time, many small traditional churches have resisted change and spoke against considering or even implementing different ideas of “being” [the] Church [of] today.⁶¹

Some churches wanted to maintain the traditional belief systems and ways of in-person worship. The researcher looked to find answers to some plauging questions in this regard. The researcher investigated the questions to understand the depth of the impact of technology during the pandemic. Moreover, understanding the value of technology is an integral part of the church experience and has future relevance. The researcher sought to find answers to small church pastor questions.

The COVID-19 Pandemic’s Impact on Small Church Pastors and Leaders

Small church pastors and leaders struggled with the use of technology to transition their churches to reach a broader audience. Many small church pastors are not tech-savvy and prefer a traditional kind of worship. Many of them are uncomfortable with using technology. Some pastors felt the same as scholar Postman, who “contends that absent physical place, religious practice cannot possibly replicate the original context of religion.”⁶² He, along with many others, felt that in digital worship, a person could not

⁶¹ Pillay, 266.

⁶² Wyl McCully, “Gleaning the Fields of Change: Adoption of Information and Communication Technologies in Religious Organizations,” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 84.

feel the same way they would if they met in person to worship God in a traditional church. This was a struggle, but the pandemic made them rethink how they worship and feel about technology to keep the congregants connected.

Despite being unable to worship in a physical building, “twenty-eight percent of Americans reported that the pandemic had strengthened their religious faith, which exceeds the second-ranked country at 16 percent, and the fourteen-country median score of 10 percent. Sixty-eight percent of U.S. adults indicated that their faith had not changed much.”⁶³ The researcher’s goal was to put weary hearts to rest and share some insight gained about the impact of technology. The questions the researcher looked to answer are listed below:

- What effect did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the traditional churches that caused the exploration of digital ministry?
- Did the usage of technology have a financial impact on small churches during the pandemic?
- How did small churches adjust to the impact of the digital ministry method?
- How did the digital method affect the different departments within the ministry?
- Was there a new preference in worship style as a result of employing digital ministry?
- What was the impact of forming a digital ministry outreach?
- Should the Church produce a hybrid model of church for the new normal?

The COVID-19 Pandemic’s Impact on Church Attendance

When COVID-19 hit the world, it shocked everyone; the entire country went through a lockdown. This COVID lockdown created the ending of an era and the beginning of a new one called the new normal. Businesses and churches were asked to close their doors. They had to find new ways to exist. For businesses, it was the usage of technology to make online sales. For churches, it was discovering the benefits of

⁶³ Lemke and Short, 521.

technology, which already existed to aid in new ways. Research companies such as Lifeway indicate that over 4,500 traditional churches permanently closed during the pandemic. However, some churches remained open and followed the CDC recommendation. Some did not follow any of the COVID-19 restrictions, and people became ill, with some dying. Consequently, many people believed that churches were one of the main spreaders of the disease and had caused many lives to be infected.

Wesley J. Wildman et al. wrote

the Church had insisted on in-person meetings, banning health masks, praying while touching others, and refusing to turn over its membership list to health officials. Routinely accused by mainline Protestant Christian denominations of being a secretive sect, now it is being blamed for contributing to the local epidemic of COVID-19.⁶⁴

This is one example of the mindset of many who believe that the churches that remained open during the shutdown should have found a different way to reach the needs of the congregation when the pandemic was at its peak.

Though many churches suffered loss and persecution by continuing their routine, some closed their doors completely. These small churches sought ways to make changes for the health of their congregants and to maintain connection and fellowship. Countless churches decided to embark upon using technology to connect with congregants and wanted to know what kind of impact the changes would have on churches as a whole, such as in finances, auxiliaries, and attendance. Darmawan et al. observed that Covid-19 pandemic disrupted many ministry patterns of worship. Numerous studies indicated that during the pandemic, the importance of worship services being held

⁶⁴ Dale L. Wildman et al., "Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 10, no. 2 (2020): 115.

virtually. Studies also indicated that economically strong churches could handle this type of transition in the style of worship.⁶⁵

These authors also indicated that the Covid -19 “pandemic brought up different theological interpretations and perspectives, which either strengthen the faith or cause confusion to the faithful.”⁶⁶ These various theological dynamics were viewed by many as the negative results of the pandemic. Authors also viewed that the different theological perspectives caused the Church to adjust how ministries’ worship services were biblically interpreted and conducted.

The researcher wanted to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on many small churches and the adjustments churches had to make because of having a digital presence in the ministry. Moreover, the researcher wanted to understand the different areas in small churches where a digital presence was developed and operated on, which kept the churches connected to their congregants even during the pandemic. “The Church has responded to the situations caused by the pandemic by holding worship services at home, handing out liturgical rubrics for guidelines, and preaching the Word of God through live streaming or video recording services.”⁶⁷ Teaching ministry faces difficulty in sharing the worship and bible study presentations with congregants.

⁶⁵ I Putu Ayub Darmawan et al., “Covid-19 Impact on Church Society Ministry,” *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)* 4, no. 3 (2021): 94.

⁶⁶ Darmawan et al., 93.

⁶⁷ Darmawan et al., 93.

Several churches faced similar challenges due to the ages of their members; their members were not tech-savvy or wished to have socialization through in-person worship despite the pandemic. The challenges in holding church worship services were not just among the pastors who were interviewed for this study but were also widespread across the world.

The Orthodox Church revealed that “The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed how society lives. For Orthodox Christians around the world, this meant that the holiest days of 2020 (i.e., Great Lent, Holy Week, and Pascha) were celebrated online—a virtual reality of Holy Resurrection.”⁶⁸ Churches in Africa disclosed that “scholars and religious practitioners concur that the pandemic has negatively affected the church in various ways such as in church worship, fellowship, finance, interrelationships, and various other ministries and programmes.”⁶⁹ Lovoria et al. concluded “that the churches that they surveyed showed that (88.8 percent) reported that their Church had provided an alternative form of worship. If the respondent's Church provided online worship opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁷⁰

The survey showed that 55.7 percent had not resumed in-person worship. Having this information, the researcher better understood that the COVID-19 pandemic had a worldwide effect on churches, and all churches had to determine the best way to achieve success during this difficult season. According to CBS news, the COVID-19 pandemic

⁶⁸ Danny A. Schieffler and Joshua Genig, “The Orthodox Church and the Mental Health Burden of a Pandemic: A Narrative Mini-Review,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 5 (2021): 3209.

⁶⁹ Vhumani Magezi, “Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on Church Ministries in Africa: A Literature Analysis Focusing on South Africa,” *HTS Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): 1.

⁷⁰ Lovoria B. Williams et al., “COVID-19 and the Impact on Rural and Black Church Congregants: Results of the C-M-C Project,” *Research in Nursing & Health* 44, no. 5 (October 2021): 771.

hit churches across America, which were already struggling with church attendance. Half of nearly 15,300 congregations across America reported that their church attendance has dropped to around a little less than 65 people on a given Sunday.

The researcher realized that what the pandemic affected was not just worship but also the auxiliaries, bible study, children, youth, young adult ministry, women and men's ministry, and communion. Churches were affected in every area of her existence. One of the main areas, which was broadly agreed upon, was the area of finances.

The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Church Finances

The United Methodist Church conducted a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial wellness of congregations, both large and small. They interviewed roughly a hundred pastors of large and small congregations.

The study found that “(76 percent) were doing well financially, financially steady, or had only experienced marginal declines in overall financial position because of COVID-19. This group of congregations experienced some [fluctuations] in member donations and organizational expenses, but not significantly [affect] their organizational functioning.”⁷¹ However, 24 percent congregations experienced a decline in income and had to make cutbacks. The pandemic worsened the situation in many small traditional churches and exacerbated an already bare bottom budget to the point of laying off and reducing the pastor's employment and salary to part-time. Some of the churches closed because they could not continue to operate with a lack of funds and, in some cases, without any funds to handle the upkeep of a building.

⁷¹ David E. Eagle et al., “The Financial Impacts of COVID-19 on United Methodist Churches in North Carolina: A Qualitative Study of Pastors’ Perspectives and Strategies,” *Review of Religious Research* 64, no. 2 (2022): 404.

The churches that survived were able to get aid from the PPP loan, which was available to those affected by the pandemic. Having the PPP loans helped churches that took advantage of the funding stop from descending into a catastrophic situation

The churches that did not receive aid found that their desire to remain in existence was a financial strain. News organizations, such as CBS, reported that churches that were already under financial strain even before the pandemic had forced them to permanently close their doors due to lack of funding. Members scattered from the churches that closed during the pandemic had to go to those that remained open during that time.

Based on the gathered information, the researcher realized the impact of the pandemic on churches was worse than previously thought. Countless churches had to close. Those that survived found themselves having to drastically change from the traditional mode of worship to using technology in different areas of the worship experience and setting up online programs so that the congregants could remain connected.

Small Church Adjustment to Online Worship

The researcher discovered that although numerous churches permanently closed during the pandemic, many also began to establish worship services online to stay connected to their church members and guests. For many churches, making that transition from traditional services to online services was difficult. However, pastors had to make the transition to connect and comfort their congregations. Bryson, Lauren, and Davies wrote about what many parishioners in the congregation were feeling because of the COVID-19 restrictions:

For the congregations, lockdown prevented them from engaging in shared worship, pastoral care and other congregational activities through being co-

present in the same place of worship. Pastoral care continued building on established practices, including regular telephone calls.⁷²

Jesus and Paul had to find different ways of communicating and offering Pastoral care with their disciples and potential audience. Some pastors found that they had to discover additional ways to connect with church members, which were live streaming and recording different church services and programs. This was an unfamiliar practice for many small churches across the country. Nonetheless, it presented them with an opportunity to learn new things and establish new ways of reaching others in what is considered to be a new normal, still in development. Churches used phones, the Zoom application, websites, and social media for morning worship, bible study, and Sunday school while trying to navigate through the difficult periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beck and Picardo noted that “even within a congregation, different categories of people handle returning to the church differently, creating different layers of hybridity in church communities (Picardo & Beck, 2021).”⁷³ Fellowship for many people looked different, as many re-engaged with the churches in different ways.

Adjusting to Doing Eucharist, Baptism, and Funerals Online

One of the difficult things for churches was being unable to bond, form a fellowship, and celebrate each other’s accomplishments. The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on many people who enjoyed that aspect of worship. However, the new norm caused those activities to be conducted online. Most churches serve communion in

⁷² John R. Bryson, Lauren Andres, and Andrew Davies, “COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 111, no. 3 (2020): 36, <https://DOI.org/10.1111/tesg.12436>.

⁷³ Stephen Garner, “From Distanced Church to Returning Church to Hybrid Church,” *Revisiting the Distanced Church* (2021): 101.

the researcher's denomination in closed, small communion containers to ensure that no one would get ill if the person were in the sanctuary during the communion. Moreover, most of the church denominational members would take their element at home with the items they have available for communion. However, this is not a standard practice in all church denominations.

Although church leaders have come to terms with the authorities for the sake of public health, there have been conflicts scaling up during major religious celebrations (Grigoriadis, 2020). Yet, some rituals and devotion practices that might represent a risk of transmission are still common.⁷⁴

Churches across the nation made a decision that was the best for the congregation's health. Some churches provided disposable communion kits, while others decided that each person should get their own items.

Surprising statistics shows that,

Anglo-Catholic clergy give more support for clergy celebrating communion alone in their own homes without broadcast-ing the service to others (50 percent compared with 12 percent). Anglo-Catholic clergy gave more support for clergy celebrating communion at home if they are broadcasting the service to others (70 percent compared with 39 percent). Anglo-Catholic clergy gives less support for people at home receiving communion from their bread and wine as part of an online communion service (18 percent compared with 41 percent).⁷⁵

Most Baptisms were done creatively. The Catholic Church had discussed baptism and felt that the fundamental for baptism was all that a person would need.

⁷⁴ Andreas S. Papazoglou et al., "Spiritual Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts on Orthodox Christianity Devotion Practices, Rituals, and Religious Pilgrimages," *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 5 (2021): 3219.

⁷⁵ Leslie J. Francis and Andrew Village, "This Blessed Sacrament of Unity? Holy Communion, the Pandemic, and the Church of England," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 34, no. 1 (2021): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15709256-12341420>.

Funerals were another thing churches had to adjust to being online. Many people died during the pandemic shutdown. Churches around the globe had to decide how to navigate the mental stress created by this situation.

Funeral directors report immense pressure from grieving families to ignore the 10-mourner limit. Many funeral providers were trying to preserve the ability to hold funerals with the understanding that the absence of such a ritual could hold 'frightening' mental health consequences for those left behind.⁷⁶

Having to adjust to an online funeral with little to no immediate family was stressful for everyone who lost loved ones and the funeral homes. Some family members did not even get a chance to give their loved ones a proper goodbye. Funeral homes had to provide online services with nothing but a few people in churches and that was only if the deceased did not have COVID-19. If they had, the funeral home would strongly suggest that the person be cremated for the safety of the staff.

Pastors were concerned that they did not have a way to reach those struggling to get the help they needed to cope with all the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technology Helping Solve Problems with Children Ministry

Children's Ministry and Mental Health

For many churches, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a mental health crisis among children and their families. Sunday school teachers had to be creative in their approach to teaching children who were watching them from a screen at home. "Within children's ministry also there was great creativity and adaptiveness in order to facilitate online

⁷⁶ Jennifer Lowe, Bruce Rumbold, and Samar M. Aoun, "Memorialisation During COVID-19: Implications for the Bereaved, Service Providers and Policy Makers," *Palliative Care and Social Practice* 14 (2020): 4.

delivery of Sunday school-type activities.”⁷⁷ Barna indicated that 32 percent of faithful Christians no longer had communication with their church during the pandemic.

In addition, the families did not access the online services for children. Some churches did not do anything for children during the pandemic; others tried different approaches and felt these approaches were short-lived. Nonetheless, some churches did have volunteers willing to be a part of children’s ministry as long as they did not have to go to the brick and mortar.

Many initially produced pre-recorded material but then utilized interactive modes of delivery, including Zoom sessions, Facebook Live and YouTube Live. In most cases, the online content was generic and provided no possibility of adaptation for children with additional needs.⁷⁸

The volunteers eventually found a rhythm that worked with the children and were able to assist the children’s church as much as they could.

Youth and Young Adults Ministries / Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many problems for not only children but also entire families, especially youth and young adults. Depression was at an all-time high in many youth and young adults. “Studies carried out during the pandemic suggest that although some families are coping well, others are facing financial adversity, struggling to home school, and risk experiencing vicious cycles of increasing distress.”⁷⁹ Pew Research also interviewed several thousand children and young people regarding their mental health. Their article showed that “Probable mental health conditions increased

⁷⁷ Sarah E. Holmes, “The Changing Nature of Ministry Amongst Children and Families in the UK During the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *Christian Education Journal* 19, no. 1 (2022): 136.

⁷⁸ Holmes, 138.

⁷⁹ Tasmin Ford, Ann John, and David Gunnell, “Mental Health of Children and Young People During Pandemic,” 2021; 372: 6614.

from 10.8 percent in 2017 to 16 percent in July 2020 across all age, sex, and ethnic groups according to England's Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey.⁸⁰ Youth ministries found themselves dealing with suicide, anger, and grief management for many teenagers and young adults. Many teenagers lost confidence and hope in life; they had a hard time grieving the death of the people they knew.

Although children and young people are far less likely to suffer serious illness or death as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many have been bereaved of a close family member as a direct consequence of the virus, including 16,800 children bereaved of primary or secondary resident caregivers.⁸¹

Some of these children did not know how to cope with so much death.

Having the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the mental health of entire families, one can understand how this can cause some underlying issues to surface among youth, young adults, and families. "Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has already been linked to negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress in populations across the world."⁸² Boden indicate that moreover, it is important to know that more people will experience these outcomes as the pandemic and its negative consequences, such as economic hardship, continue. These outcomes will be long-lasting and quite substantial among some people and populations, as evidenced by research on the severe acute respiratory syndrome.⁸³

⁸⁰ Ford, John, and Gunnell, 614.

⁸¹ Matt Boden et al., "Addressing the Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 through Population Health," *Clinical Psychology Review* 85, (2021): 1, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272735821000490>.

⁸² Boden et al., 1.

⁸³ Boden et al., 1.

Many children and families have been affected by COVID-19 and ministering them could be of great benefit to their long term mental and physical health. Having technology as an alternative could be a way to help mothers and fathers and husbands and wives process the pain and frustration of the pandemic.

Adult and Couples Ministries / Mental Health

Husbands and wives had a difficult time due to not knowing if their marriages would survive; neither knew if their job would be available once the pandemic ended. If one person in the relationship got laid off, then both felt the impact at its worst. Having the ability to aid the entire family was crucial to many individuals because they could use the assistance with how to cope with all that occurred during the pandemic. Churches sought to find a way to assist with counseling to help the congregants and community cope.

The Impact of Technology on Churches' Counseling Members and Community

Technology played an important part in helping pastors offer counseling services to their congregations and the community at large. Strengthening those relationship bonds with congregations and the community was more important during the pandemic than at any other time. During the pandemic, members of many churches and surrounding communities were experiencing a mental health crisis. Many of the congregants were dealing with pandemic trauma from losing loved ones and not being able to socialize with friends, as they were accustomed to. A great deal of suicide and abuse ensued because of people being cooped up in homes. Anger surged at God and everyone who did not solve the problem immediately. Churches have always been the psychiatrist for the health of many in the community, no matter the culture.

Churches have been the unofficial therapist for many who do not understand what is going on emotionally with themselves and are unable to afford to get professional treatment.

As Karl Menninger has observed, without the stabilizing, undergirding, nurturing, value-supporting ministries of the churches, millions of persons of every age would have diminished in their abilities to handle life situations constructively. Further, they would have been much more vulnerable to mental, emotional, and spiritual illnesses.⁸⁴

Churches offering counseling services online to assist their members and the community was essential to the health and wellness of the members and the community at large. “The local Church is in a strategic position on the front lines of mental health, in both its preventive and therapeutic aspects. Year in, year out, most churches are contributing significantly to the growth of persons and the healing of their inner wounds.”⁸⁵ Some pastors and church leaders had to implement new ways to aid their flock during the lockdown; one of the things they did was create telepresence for counseling appointments with parishioners. This seemed to be an alternative way through which some pastors connected with church members during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

In the arena of pastoral care, telepresence provides an obvious alternative to traditional face-to-face interactions between provider and client. Broadly speaking, telepresence might mean telephony, texting, email, or more recently, videoconferencing.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Howard John Clinebell, *The Mental Health Ministry of the Local Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965), 1.

⁸⁵ Clinebell, 1.

⁸⁶ William Young, “Virtual Pastor: Virtualization, AI, and Pastoral Care,” *Theology and Science* 20, (2022): 8, <https://DOI/10.1080/14746700.2021.2012915>.

Some individuals believe that remote counseling has some advantages over face-to-face meetings. The former provides more flexibility in time and has less risk of getting sick or making someone sick. Some pastors believed that this was a good way to meet the needs of the congregation and the community during the pandemic. “Studies have shown that clients interacting with their care provider remotely are often more forthcoming and disclose sensitive issues sooner than they might in face-to-face scenarios.”⁸⁷ This mechanism to reach others is still under development, and some of the experiments include artificial intelligence.

This mechanism for counseling others is not currently being used for pastoral care; however, in the future, a robot or some other machine might offer advice to those in need. As one examines the advancement of technology, one can see that there are individuals who are already receiving counseling using technology. Some of these mechanisms which are being used are toll-free lines in which a person receives counseling from a stranger over the phone or through a computer. Having an Avatar as a replacement for a live person for counseling may seem uncomfortable to the person receiving the counseling in the beginning however, as VR developer Bruce Wooden shared: “After a while, the brain accepts the virtual space as real space, and you start thinking that the avatars you encounter are real people. They evoke real emotions.”⁸⁸

Moreover, despite many feeling their thoughts are kept confidential in receiving counseling from a pastor, some do not trust pastors or want to come to a church building to receive counseling. Young indicated that over the last few decades, there has been a

⁸⁷ Young, 8.

⁸⁸ Young, 9.

diminishing amount of trust in clergy and church leaders. A Gallup survey in 2018 showed that fewer than 42 percent felt clergy had high moral standards of honesty and ethics.⁸⁹

These percentages fuel individuals to devise innovative ways to meet the needs of those who may not want to attend church to receive spiritual counseling or help with their immediate concerns. “Thinking beyond considerations of church attendance, there are a plethora of other challenges and opportunities which an increased shift to online Church or Church online will create.”⁹⁰ Churches discovering ways to create an online presence that resembles some form of the traditional service and activities for those who gather on and offline has the propensity to cause an enormous increase in church accessibility and engagement.

Having services online would assist those who may have trouble getting to a church or may not want to attend church but still desire help from the church. It can meet their needs without them having to commit to becoming a member of the Church. Services such as counseling that are free to those who need them without requiring them to offer something to the community and are relevant to them at the time without instilling in them the fear of being judged may also build some trust back among people who have lost faith in the clergy and the trust. Some pastors used technology such as Zoom in place of meeting congregants in person. They assisted the congregants via

⁸⁹ Young, 7.

⁹⁰ Buhle Mpofo, “Transversal Modes of Being a Missional Church in the Digital Context of COVID-19,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 7.

virtual counseling until the time they would be able to meet the congregants in person. Others used a more traditional method of the phone.

Technology also helped large, medium, and small churches see the need to develop programs that meet the needs of those in dire situations. Many churches, whether great or small, found themselves with new missions and visions for the ministry. They understood the importance of churches being the hands and feet of Jesus by reaching people in ways they had not done before.

The researcher explored areas where small traditional churches could enhance their ministry and also keep the traditional flavor for those who preferred traditional worship. The researcher examined the usage of technology to create new types of outreach while strengthening the old outreach patterns, which were good but needed an upgrade. The researcher investigated different ways of using technology that could expand outreach and further the mission and message of Jesus Christ and the Church.

Expanding Outreach in New Areas Using Technology

The study explored the different kinds of outreach a small church could implement to expand the reach of the church while maintaining some of the traditional flavors of the church. One of the ways was developing a social media platform. Some of the social media platforms present a church with a great opportunity to connect and highlight the benefits of worship with the church. “The evolution in technology does not make traditional media obsolete, but offers a new means of evangelization.”⁹¹ According to a study, “Overall, the findings suggest that Christian congregations' adoption of social

⁹¹ Emmanuel-Lugard Nduka and John McGuire, “The Effective Use of New Media in Disseminating Evangelical Messages Among Catholic College Students,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 16, no. 3 (July 2017): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2017.1361707>.

media platforms is closely related with their community outreach and social marketing activities as well as their resources.”⁹² Social media gives a congregation the ability to reach people they have never met around the world, who could benefit from the message of Jesus Christ. “The impact of social media on church life is generally seen as a positive one. People who are actively practicing their religious faith have the opportunity to interact with people they may not have otherwise had the chance to meet.”⁹³

A church engaging in social media has the opportunity to be creative in finding new ways to share its message regarding Jesus Christ and reach a new generation of believers. In addition, this connects the church to a disciple who may never come to church but will participate in an online service. Social media is one of the main platforms that many churches use to share their message.

Surveys of Christian congregations in the United States show that the majority of churches view social media as a more effective outreach and proselytization method than such traditional ways as knocking on doors, radio, television, or newspaper advertisements (BuzzPlant, 2012; LifeWay, 2011).⁹⁴

With all the things that social media can do for churches, according to the researcher’s study, setting up outreach on different social media platforms can be costly. Studies also suggest that “social media create challenges for small organizations in terms of the costs associated with monitoring for appropriate use of the common space and analyzing the usage data.”⁹⁵

⁹² Young-Joo Lee, “Is Your Church ‘Liked’ on Facebook? Social Media Use of Christian Congregations in the United States,” *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 28, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21291>.

⁹³ K. Badmos, “Effect of Social Media on the Church,” In *2014 Annual Conference of theological friends and fellows* (Lagos: The Redeemed Christian Bible College, 2014), 4.

⁹⁴ Lee, 384.

⁹⁵ Lee, 384.

Many small churches could not afford expensive equipment to compete with larger venues on social media. However, they could have a presence on social media, which would allow them to be exposed to billions of people just through their I-phones or android phones. Now, a church can do so much because of the impact of technology on the world and churches. Churches can explore new ways that may be budget conscious and meet their current needs in evangelism. The researcher also discovered that small churches could utilize several different platforms to get their message out into new avenues.

Social media has many different venues where a church can establish its presence and do outreach in different ways, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Del.icio.us, Google+, Digg, Clubhouse, and Snapchat. Each of these venues allows a church the opportunity to reach an audience they have never reached by the thousands. Technology outreach can also be used in other areas such as video email and text messaging. These methods that are being used are tools that are developed to reach this generation and cultural audience like the tools and strategies Jesus and Paul developed for their generation and culture.

Text and Video Email Outreach

Text messages are a good way to reach out to someone with the message of God's love. It will allow the person to receive a quick message and be about their day. "Text messages are an effective form of communication because they are prevalent, have a high likelihood of being read, and their content can be easily tailored."⁹⁶ Text messaging is a

⁹⁶ Elizabeth E. Park, "Utilizing Text Messages for Effective Outreach," *The Reference Librarian* 61, no. 2 (2020): 87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2020.1755766>.

non-threatening way to share a message about Christ. Also, another outreach used by the researcher's denomination was video email. Churches began to think of ways they could stay in contact with their congregations on a weekly basis. Video emails was something they used to stay in contact with the congregants to give them an encouraging word. Countless small churches and churches in general did all they could to adjust to all the twists and turns created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many small churches decided not to pivot but instead remain open for worship. Others pivoted and began using technology to assist them with keeping their congregations together and finding new ways to reach new people.

However, they also faced difficult times during the adjustment period. "Many pastors stated that the shift online just created more duties, tasks, and frustrations for them as many had to learn to navigate this shift by themselves without help."⁹⁷ Numerous pastors felt that they were out of their comfort zone and did not know what they were doing; they were just trying to make the best of the situation. "One pastor from Plainville explained that if he could hire anyone right now, it would be an online campus pastor since having to both pastor the in-person and the online congregation has created significant difficulties."⁹⁸ As time has gone on, pastors and churches can now see the fruit of their labor. They are grateful that they moved out of their comfort zone and saw the benefit of learning new ways of meeting people. Now, more people tune in to worship than expected. Some of the previous members have begun reconnecting with churches,

⁹⁷ Heidi A. Campbell and Sophia Osteen, *When Pastors Put on the "Tech Hat": How Churches Digitized during Covid-19* (Report, Network for New Media, Religion & Digital Culture Studies, 2021), 7.

⁹⁸ Campbell and Osteen, 16.

and new people have emerged all over the world who just want to hear the gospel and be among people who worship God.

One pastor described the reality that an online live stream could reach multitudes of people in other counties, states, and even countries was unthinkable for many individuals pre-pandemic. However, with technology, small churches have begun realizing the impact that the internet has for reaching all over the world.⁹⁹

Questions and Answers

Was There a New Preference in Worship Style Due to Employing Digital Ministry?

For some, yes, there was a new preference for ministry. A study was done by Life Research regarding whether people like online ministry. To the examiner's surprise, most felt there was no real difference between the two, and some preferred online church to in-person church. People may have a myriad of reasons for preferring online worship. The study showed that some online worshippers felt that doing so online was more convenient than having to get dressed to attend service for an hour when they have small children.

What Was the Impact of Forming a Digital Ministry Outreach?

Technology significantly influenced those who embrace digital worship. For many pastors, it may have moved them out of their comfort zone and made them learn and experience something new. Churches were able to grow in new ways and expand their reach across the world. It did not matter if a church was small or large, it could be innovative and explore different ways of sharing the gospel across the world.

⁹⁹ Campbell and Osteen, 16.

Should Churches Produce a Hybrid Model of Church for the New Normal?

Hybrid ministry is something that allows a congregant of a church or a visitor to attend worship either online or in person. Hybrid also encompasses the best of both worlds. It's a bridge to the future. Hybrid also can be done in different ways because it is a bridge builder. Hybrid model is also used for those who want to do phone church instead of the traditional church. Hybrid may be a consideration worth examining. Post-pandemic, many churches are doing hybrid ministry to keep the connection that they established online during the pandemic.

Summary

There were different pandemics during Paul and Jesus' time of existence, and they had to find new and innovative ways of getting their message to a broader audience. Jesus and Paul had to adjust their method when difficulty arose to ensure they could still reach others. The churches follow Christ and must adapt to a new approach during a difficult time. Churches have been through a lot during this pandemic. Nonetheless, they are being born into a new norm that will expand their existence. For many, this change will not be something they desire to embrace. However, those who do will be able to be relevant and expand into new areas. The impact of technology on churches has already been observed. When churches did not know what to do and were afraid to embrace technology as one solution, technology rose to the occasion and helped all kinds of church staff and churches themselves expand in the ears and eyes of all those who desired to hear from a church. Technology is here to stay, and as the months continue to come and go, technology will continue to evolve, and hopefully, with the help of those who can see the impact, small churches will too. The researcher believes that by having this

information as the foundation, the answers that plague small churches can be effectively addressed by the small church.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

Data and Methodology

Nature of the Research

The research method that was used in this project was mixed method. The researcher chose mixed method research because it is a method which include both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Mix-Method allows for collecting data from different perspectives and analyzing the information using percentages and numbers. The mixed method interaction allows the participants to respond in areas such as in-person interviews, video interviews, surveys, and related documents. The methodology used was a case study approach. The researcher felt that this approach was the best among the methods because it allowed the researcher to focus on the issue of technology's impact on the small church and the different complexities of the problem. Leedy and Ormrod explain that a case study approach is a type of qualitative research in which in-depth data is gathered relative to a single individual, program, or event to learn more about an unknown or poorly understood situation.¹⁰⁰ The information included in the qualitative research is obtained from different theological, biblical, literary, and other documents related to the impact of technology on the small church.

¹⁰⁰ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (Boston: Pearson, 2020), 92, Kindle.

To gain better insight, answer questions, and provide strategies and solutions, the researcher used personal observations, in-person and online surveys, as well as interviews, which were synthesized and categorized. The researcher identified concerns and strategies that could help a small, traditional church establish a digital presence.

This project was completed using a sequence of explicit and planned steps. Some of the steps overlap and intersect with one another. Nonetheless, all efforts were essential to the overall success of the project.

Series of Steps

First Step: Biblical and Theological Research

The first step the researcher took was to look at the biblical and theological writings on the different methods Paul used to convey the message of Christ. Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson disclose that the biblical foundation “focuses on the biblical text and [involves] a systematic process using standard reference tools.”¹⁰¹

The Bible, commentaries, word studies, and peer-reviewed articles regarding Paul’s methods in the book of Acts were used as relevant material to perform this study.

The research began by examining God’s and Jesus’ unconventional methods. The biblical work of the Holy Spirit in communicating a message with a person was reviewed, as well as how online ministry relates to sharing the message of Christ. Secondly, the researcher examined the biblical writings in the book of Acts regarding Paul’s unconventional methods. The researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding of how Paul used different methods to spread the gospel. The researcher sought a correlation

¹⁰¹ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 27, Kindle.

between the unconventional method Paul used and the unconventional method of technology used in current times. The research shows how different biblical passages and concepts give credence to technology being a biblical method for spreading the gospel.

The researcher focused on the book of Acts, concentrating on the Apostle Paul. The research performed sought to understand the unique methods used to convey the message of Jesus Christ throughout Paul's ministry. This was accomplished by examining different methodologies used by Paul to relate the message of Jesus Christ during his time of existence.

The various methods Paul used were thoroughly examined in order to understand how he used each technique to reach the culture. Some of the areas that were reviewed were Paul's method of listening and relying on the Holy Spirit, his writing method, his teaching method, and his confrontational method in Acts 13:6–17. The researcher examined Paul's method of engagement in Acts 14:8–20, Paul's mentorship in Acts 16:3, and his planting method in Acts 17:2. The researcher studied some of the different processes Paul utilized to communicate the message of Christ in unconventional ways. Relevant research was performed, showing how Paul used a different approach to spread the message of Jesus Christ and the method's effectiveness. Some scenarios discussed were in Acts chapter 16, which included Paul and Silas in the synagogue; Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Iconium; and Lydia in Philippi. The researcher also explored Paul's method of discipleship and gathered and reviewed literary information to gain insight into technology's impact on the small church's ability to express God's message.

Second Step: Literary Review

The second step the researcher took was to gather and review relevant literature regarding the impact of technology on the church during the pandemic. Also, the

researcher examined how churches adopted an online presence during COVID-19. The second step was to engage the relevant literature on leadership. The researcher's objective was to understand the different areas in which small churches struggled during the pandemic. The researcher analyzed how technology impacts the small church's ability to get through the pandemic. It was helpful to complete a comparison between the virtual church and the traditional church. The researcher gained insight into the mindsets of those who do and do not attend church virtually and those who do and do not want a traditional worship experience.

Correspondingly, the researcher gained greater insight into the hybrid ministry and how it gives a practical option to the church. The researcher sought to understand the unique realities of hybrid and online ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of the literature regarding probable difficulties and strategy for digital ministries. Additionally, the researcher examined ways to assist small churches in expanding their method of delivering their gospel message digitally. The researcher gained a deeper understanding of the difficulties that pastors faced in keeping their congregations connected and adjusting to technology, as well as the blessing that technology was to the congregation's ability to stay connected. It also assisted the researcher in understanding mental health and financial issues before technology was implemented during COVID-19.

Fulfilling these first two steps was the focus for this project's first three and a half months. Being able to complete the theological and literary research was intended to establish the foundation for the qualitative research that was foundational to unearthing the impact technology has had on the small church.

Third Step: Access to Participants

The third step was to identify five small churches in the United States that would be willing to participate in the survey to provide the latitude and goals of the research. The researcher included Disciples of Christ churches, small independent churches, pastors, and church members. The researcher found it difficult to schedule interviews with some of the previous churches mentioned in the proposal. The researcher contacted some small new churches that fit the profile and consented to participate in the surveys impacted by technology during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Access was granted to these leaders and church congregants to conduct the interviews in different formats. The independent churches preferred in-person surveys and interviews. The Disciples of Christ chose the printed and electronic survey options online, via phone, and in person.

First, the researcher conducted an in-person survey with four of the church pastors, leaders, and congregants of small churches within the United States. The twenty-question survey was performed in person by thirty-two church pastors and leaders and thirty-one congregants of four churches. Following the surveys, the researcher conducted an interview with the pastors and church leaders.

The second was the twenty-one-question online survey of the sixteen participants of the drive-in church and the twenty-five-question survey of fifty-three participants without a church affiliation. Additionally, the researcher sought to hear from those not affiliated with a church and those who attend church sporadically about what they are looking for in a church in terms of aid and practices. The researcher conducted these interviews via email, in-person, online, and phone. Each participant met the profile the researcher was looking for and agreed to participate in the survey.

The Fourth Step: Instrumentation

The fourth step was to capture all the information gathered from the biblical-theological data, literature review, and related documents to formulate an interview model and conduct surveys for data compilation. The information gathered from the different sources was reviewed and questions were formed for the surveys. The researcher formed a sampling of questions to develop a preliminary survey instrument. The researcher obtained the assistance of two individuals who helped edit the final questions used for the survey.

Once the questions had been determined and edited, the researcher prepared several categories from which the surveys would be used to gather data. The categories of questions were designed for discussions with pastors and leaders of churches (Appendix A), additional questions for congregational members (Appendix B), and questions for non-members, non-churchgoers, or limited attendees (Appendix C). The surveys were developed with questions for each category based on age, demographics, and religious worship preference. The questionnaire included demographic questions for church leaders, congregations, and non-members/non-attendees regarding traditional church culture, online church, social media, and hybrid church topics regarding technologies' impact on the church.

An informed consent form was attached to all forms of the surveys and accompanied by Appendices A, B, and C. The participants were notified of the purpose of the study, the time frame, volunteer participation, the choice to omit a question if desired, and the confidential nature of the study. The online and in-person forms included an option to participate or decline.

Fifth Step: Collection of Data

The fifth step was to conduct phone interviews for those who could not attend in-person or via zoom. Also, the researcher provided the phone interview as an option for Pastor and church leaders for follow up questions that the researcher needed additional information. Researcher also provided the option of online survey for those who are not affiliated with a church or do not participate in traditional worship services. The researcher provided the email option based on the availability of the churches and individuals that met the profile of the researcher's study.

The researcher's target audience for the surveys was small churches that had to adjust their traditional worship through technology and individuals not affiliated with or attending traditional churches. Two Disciples of Christ churches three independent, and fifty- four individuals unaffiliated or non-churchgoers met the profile requirements The researcher conducted the interviews and surveys with the churches mentioned via phone, in-person, online, and email, which was the easier way for the pastor to conduct the interviews and surveys. During the interview and survey process, the researcher learned about the leadership and congregants' opinions and adaptation to digital methods. Also, the researcher performed an online survey for those who were not members of churches. The researcher learned why the group did not attend traditional Sunday church and their opinion regarding online ministry.

The preferred study methods were an electronic survey issued through an email link and printed surveys administered in person on Sunday after church and during bible study or group fellowship. Interviews were conducted in person and via phone due to the churches being located within the vicinity of the researcher. The researcher took notes from interview questions based on the questionnaire and from notes taken during the in-

person interviews. Any additional information needed from pastors and leadership was gathered via email. All participants were asked permission to participate in the discussion and were glad to do so.

Three of the participants in the survey pastored independent churches. Two pastors were with the Disciples of Christ organization; two were relatively new as senior pastors. Three were more experienced in the role of pastor and had been pastoring for several years. One of the churches has a drive-in and online service. This church preferred to do electronic surveys due to the structure of the church's worship and the use of the building for outreach and group discussions. The two other pastors have pastored for over ten years. The researcher found that allowing the churches to have options for how the interviews and surveys were conducted was much easier for many church leaders and congregants. In cases where the pastors could not answer specific questions, the church leaders or elders could respond and give greater insight regarding the impact of technology during the pandemic.

In-person surveys.

The researcher conducted four in-person surveys with three Pastors of independent churches and one with a Disciples of Christ church. The in-person interviews were conducted after contacting the senior pastors via phone to explain the study and ask a few questions. The three independent churches and the one Disciple of Christ took an hour.

The participants in the survey understood that they could end the survey or not answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. During the in-person survey, a small number of participants exercised the option not to answer questions that

they were not comfortable with, but most of the questions were answered. The researcher could hear the participating pastors', some leaders', and congregants' thoughts during the sessions. During the survey, the researcher answered many questions and provided clarity. After the survey was completed, the researcher followed up via interview regarding some open-ended questions with participants.

In-person interviews.

A personal interview with the pastors and leaders took an additional thirty minutes to review some of the questions and hear the pastors' and leaders' hearts through their answers. The follow-up interview has printed records of notes and questions answered during the survey session. In addition, the researcher was able to observe the participants' reactions and keep a record of the information gathered from the study's sampling. As Leedy and Jeanne Indicated The researcher believes that the objective for meaningful sampling is to understand a particular occurrence, not to represent a large group of people, by the selecting of data that are rich in information.¹⁰²

Sixth Step: Analysis of the Data

The sixth step was to analyze, collect, and organize the data to help broaden the understanding and insight gained from these distinctive case studies. The information obtained helps the researcher be able to articulate the study in a format that will assist future and current struggling small churches as to the strategy needed for the use of technology.

Transcription and analysis of the information were done after the interviews took place. The researcher made sure that the questions were written so there would be no

¹⁰² Leedy and Jeanne, 277.

mistakes in what was answered regarding the survey and interview questions. The researcher oversaw coding the information received from the interview questions and looking for similarities within the answers. The constant comparative method was used to discover themes and similarities in the data responses.

Chapter Five of this report includes the interview and survey findings. The report contains similarities and contrasts in themes along with the surveys. In addition, the report also included information from documents obtained and analyzed regarding the church's denomination and historical beginning. Significant attention was given to the factual information regarding identifiable concerns described in this study while investigating any recent or inconsistent data throughout the examination of the research. The researcher thought it was essential to ensure the validity of the research interviews and in-person and online surveys. All pertinent documents were evaluated to provide credibility in answering the researchers' questions.

Seventh Step: Strategies

The seventh step was identifying strategies to help the small, traditional church establish a digital presence. The researcher obtained raw data on the viewpoint of the impact of technology being used for worship purposes from individuals who often frequent church as well as from others who do not go to church. The information will help churches understand what potential congregants are looking for to become members of a church in a post-pandemic society. Also, the information provided insight to the researcher into areas the churches can target in their outreach strategies.

Summary

As the researcher identified in Chapter One, this study aimed to provide insight and clarity regarding the impact of technology on the small church. Furthermore, the

researcher sought to provide an understanding of biblical accounts in the book of Acts regarding Paul's ministry, in which he used different methods to share the gospel. The goal was to show how technology is a tool that could further advance the message of Jesus Christ. The researcher also conducted a literary review of peer-reviewed articles that were relevant to the study on the impact of technology on the small church during the pandemic and beyond. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study to understand the use of technology in the small church. The researcher collected and analyzed data and pertinent information regarding this problem. The researcher identified a strategy to help the small church establish a lasting digital presence.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The research strategy for these findings used a mixed method methodology to provide insight, strategy, and plans regarding the impact technology has had on the small church. The research procedures included the collection of relevant qualitative data, in-person and online surveys, and interviews via phone and email.

The research process involved collecting qualitative data, including in-person and online surveys, interviews via telephone and email, observation, and relevant documents in a comfortable and familiar setting to the participants. The mixed method was used to analyze the participants' natural environment and obtain their views on the impact of technology on the small church. Creswell and Poth shared that the qualitative approach allows one to “as a distinct methodology from qualitative inquiry and one that bridges qualitative and quantitative research.”¹⁰³ The authors also shared that mixed method encompasses research offers a sampling of a narrative of beliefs and thoughts within a population.

The information gathered in this chapter shows the results of five small churches impacted by technology during the pandemic. The members of the churches were interviewed, surveyed, and observed while gathering information. Four churches chose in-person interviews and surveys with follow-up via email and phone. One church

¹⁰³ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (California: Sage Publications), chapter. 4, Kindle Edition.

decided to do the online study with follow-up via email and telephone. The researcher also included those who are not members of churches and non-churchgoers. The surveys were constructed separately for pastors, leaders, and congregants among the five churches. The five churches received two surveys, one for pastors and leaders and one for members; each survey had personalized questions geared to their role in the church.

The online church survey was also personalized for those who were church members and those who were leaders in the church. The survey questions for those not members of any church were geared toward gaining insight, and strategy building for small churches. The respondents agreed to take the survey by electronic signature and an in-person signed agreement. The researcher wanted to get the viewpoints of the pastors, leaders, members, and none members regarding the impact of technology on the church. Therefore, the questions were designed to hear the voice of the respondents for the study.

Questions

This survey and interview guide were adapted for the online participants, who were pastors, leaders, congregants, and those with no church affiliation. As mentioned above, the survey questions were divided into different categories. The process included the survey and follow-up questions when participants were interviewed. The questions were a combination of open-ended and straightforward questions that allowed a person to agree or disagree. The questions were written in such a way as to stimulate discussion during and after the survey so the researcher could observe the different reactions and thoughts of the pastor, leaders, and congregants. Also, the researcher planned to ask additional follow-up questions after the survey of the participants.

Presentation of Results

The researcher examined the information gathered from the three categories that were part of the study. The categories explored were in-person and online surveys, interviews, and pertinent documents. The steps for completing these categories happen interchangeably during similar frames of time. The first was surveying four church pastors, leaders, and congregants of small churches within the United States. The second was the online survey conducted by a drive-in church and individuals who were not affiliated with any church. The third was gathering, reviewing, and analyzing relevant documents about the five churches that participated in the survey. This chapter summarizes the findings of the in-person and online surveys of church pastors, leaders, congregants, and those not affiliated with any church.

Demographics

The demographic information collected provided a profile of the churches and individuals who participated in the survey. The collection of the data lends credibility to the research design. The report also speaks to the diversity of individuals involved in the study. It is essential to describe the churches that participated in the in-person and online surveys and interviews. These churches are a sampling of the impact technology has had on the small church. It also represents individuals who are diverse in race and culture but are similar in service and standing in the community.

The first church, Church A, is a small church in the urban community and has been a pillar and stable for many years, meeting the needs of the poor and neglected. The congregation has been in existence for over twenty-four years. The senior pastor is a female, and the co-pastor is her husband, their son is the assistant pastor. The congregation is a mixture of children and adults of all ages. The congregation was

impacted by technology through their giving. The congregational size is around 50 members.

The second church, Church B, is in a rural community and has been a staple for the community for over twenty-two years. The church is multicultural and is an example to many regarding race relations. A husband-and-wife team pastors the church. Their ministry is helping people all over the community and the country; they oversee another small church as the mentoring congregation. The church underwent various changes during and after the pandemic; the congregational size is 20 members.

The third church, Church C, is a congregation that has been around for more than fifty years. The church is a part of an independent organization that oversees and gives insight to the pastors. The church has an outreach ministry in the community and helps the less fortunate. The leaders and congregants are of various ages. The church experienced a shift in congregants coming to traditional worship during and after the pandemic. The congregational size is 120 members.

The fourth church, Church D, is a Caucasian church that has been established for over seventy years. The church has been a staple in the community and has an older population of congregants. Unfortunately, the church went through a decline in membership during the pandemic. The congregational size is 100 members.

The second group consisted of individuals who took the online survey. One of the groups was made up of those who were not affiliated with any churches. These individuals may attend church but are not members of the church. Secondly, other individuals did not go to church at any time.

In addition, the third group consisted of a multicultural congregation that has been around for 70 years and attracts people from all over the world through its drive-in service. The church offers two forms of worship on Sunday: one is drive-in services, and the other is online services.

The drive-in church consisted of the following online survey participants:

Church: Senior Associate Pastor: 1

Church: Group Leader: 6

Church: Church Congregants: 11

Table 1 shows the ethnicity, average age, and size of the leadership and congregants who participated in the study. The researcher intentionally performed the analysis in a multicultural environment with respondents from different churches. One of the objectives was to understand how far the impact of technology had spread throughout the small church community. The study's ability to be conducted in a variety of cultural settings provided a sampling and insight into the effects of technology from different cultural perspectives. The researcher discovered that there were similarities regardless of the culture of the other churches.

During the in-person surveys, one of the observations was the participants' ages. The researcher had the opportunity to obtain data from different churches regarding this issue. One area of similarity was the age of the participants who attended church in a traditional setting. The researcher observed that none of the churches could take the survey and share their perspective in the study as a church member or leader in the church. The researcher visited four churches: two during midweek Bible study and two on a Sunday morning. In each church, about 70 percent of the church leaders and

congregants in attendance during the study were in the age range of 55–90 years old. The other 30 percent were individuals aged 36–54; none were 18–35. The researcher felt it was essential to investigate the average age of the congregants further.

In speaking to the leaders during a follow-up interview regarding the age group among leaders and congregants of the church, the researcher was given the breakdown of the average age of the congregants of the church. The researcher discovered that of the four churches, one had no children, youth, or young adult members, and the average congregation age was 65. In addition, Church A had children but no youth and a small number of young adults. The average age of the congregation was 35–55.

The third church, known as Church B, had a mixture of children, youth, and young adults, but admitted families were no longer a part of the church. The fourth church, Church C, had a combination of a small number of children and youth. The researcher was given an age range of 3 years to 89 years, and the leader shared that not many youths frequent church every Sunday. Some prefer watching the service online due to health or work challenges. Finally, the drive-in church had youth and young adult groups.

Among the five churches, two churches admitted that their congregation's age and demographic changed due to the pandemic. One church shared that they had a 50 percent loss. The other church reported the same. The other two churches were not affected by the pandemic.

Table 1 gives a breakdown of the different demographics among the survey participants from the various churches.

Table 1: Demographics

Topic	In-Person Survey of Church Leaders	In-Person Survey of Church Congregants	Church Online Responses
Ethnicity Language	African American Caucasian/Hispanic English	African American/ Caucasian English	Caucasian/African American/Hispanic English
Approximate Age: Leaders, Congregants	18–35=0 36–55=14 56–90=18	18–35=0 36–55=5 56–90=26	18–35=0 36–55=5 56–90=11
Male and Female Groups	Males=10 Females =21	Males=8 Females=23	Males=1 Females=15
Participants from Each Church	A. Church=6 B. Church=3 C. Church=13 D. Church=9	A. Church=3 B. Church=3 C. Church=9 D. Church=16	Church Online=16

Research Results

The mixed method research findings include the responses to the in-person and online survey and interviews of pastors, leaders, and congregants, which are shown in the table below. The questions were categorized according to the following themes: pre-pandemic, post-pandemic, and future regarding the church. The research also added additional information regarding the findings of the online surveys of those not affiliated with any church.

The researcher needed to ensure the participants' voices were heard by sharing the words they wrote in the open-ended questions, agree or disagree statements, and the follow-up interview. For the online survey, the researcher included selected comments in the findings for the respondents' questions. The theme categories are not organized in a specific order but rather according to the researcher's interests. The voices of small

church leaders and congregants were the focus of the research survey. The researcher wanted to gain insight into their feelings about church attendance before and after the pandemic. The researcher sought to investigate the attendance level of congregants for traditional worship before and after the pandemic. Table 2 shares online and in-person congregants' responses to questions 1–4.

Table 2: Questions 1–4 Comparison Table

Topic	In-Person Survey of Church Congregants	Church Online Responses
How often did you attend church before the pandemic?	Often=26 Sometimes=3 Rarely=1 Never=1	Often=14 Sometimes=2 Rarely=0 Never=0
How often do you attend church after the pandemic?	Often=28 Sometimes=3 Rarely=0 Never=0	Often=14 Sometimes=2 Rarely=0 Never=0
Have you ever participated in a worship service online?	Yes=25 No=6	Yes=16 No=0
What is your preference: traditional, digital, or hybrid?	Traditional=7 Digital=2 Hybrid=22	Traditional= 2 Digital=0 Hybrid=14
What are the digital platforms your church currently uses for outreach?	a. Website=15 b. Online streaming=16 c. YouTube channel=25 d. Facebook=28 e. WhatsApp group=0 Other (Please mention)	a. Website=0 b. Online streaming=3 c. YouTube channel=5 d. Facebook=9 e. WhatsApp group=0 Other (Please mention)

From the above results, the researcher observed no significant change in how the participating congregants in this study felt about attending traditional church since the pandemic. However, the researcher did notice that many are using social media platforms

for church and leisure. In addition, most of them use social media platforms for their social and church engagement. The researcher thought this information was important because it showed their concentration and frequency at these venues. The researcher also thought it was important to see how the survey participants felt about technology being used for church services for a variety of reasons.

The question was asked: What is your overall opinion of digital churches? About 88 percent had a positive view and felt it was an option for people who have to work, are sick, care for someone, or prefer that option for church time. Some of the comments directly from the participants were, “I like going to church online. I lost my mother during COVID-19; she was a cancer patient.” “Great for people who can’t physically attend or prefer not to attend church.” Another respondent stated, “When done well, I like virtual worship, in some situations when I’m feeling ill or I’m on a trip. Also, I frequently “attend” additional church services with friends in another town.” Around 9 percent had a negative view of digital church and only replied that they did not like it.

The researcher also reviewed and analyzed the responses to the online surveys regarding their overall opinion of the digital church. About 60 percent of the online participants surveyed shared that they felt very positive about digital churches and felt it was a great option. In addition, respondents felt that it was a good way to expose more people to their church. Some of the direct comments from the online participants were, “If you are homebound, it is a way for you to participate.” “I work, so I go one week physically, and the next, I watch virtually and am glad I can still attend and worship on the days I can’t make it there.”

Around 38 percent felt that it was not a good option because it was too distracting and should not be an alternative to traditional worship. About 3 percent were torn as to their opinion of digital worship. One of the direct comments was, "I honestly feel torn. I think it is good for those who are homebound or can't get out for some reason. It's good for those who won't enter a church building. For those who can use online because they are too lazy to get dressed and go, it's 'an easy way out'." Lastly, 1 percent did not have an opinion of the digital church. The researcher also wanted to understand congregants' views of the impact technology was having on their church services or events.

A survey question was asked: How do you feel about the digital worship services and the other online services and religious events conducted by your church? Around 75 percent were pleased and relieved to have the option available. A respondent shared, "It is great for sick people." There were 25 percent who did not feel good about the digital component of their church. The online responses were slightly different; around 90 percent felt it was an added blessing to the church. One of the direct comments was, "We are a drive-in church in a resort area. We have many 'snowbirds' who continue to watch online when 'home.' That is an important part of our ministry." Another respondent said, "I am glad we have the option. I am not able to drive at night, so I am very thankful for zoom." The researcher discovered that many congregants had a positive opinion of technology usage in the church.

Another question was, "Do you feel that digital churches are helpful or a hindrance to traditional churches?" 80 percent of the respondents said yes, it is helpful. The other 20 percent felt it was a hindrance.

The research sought to understand what, if anything, was causing people not to want to come to church traditionally. The researcher also asked questions about any challenges associated with attending a traditional church.

The question was posed: What is the most challenging thing you experience when trying to attend a traditional church service? One of the respondents stated, “getting ready.” Another direct comment came from an online respondent: “getting dressed or getting up earlier so that I can be there (laziness). Weather might be challenging.” Another online respondent stated, “Nothing.” Another respondent commented, “As a chronic pain patient, I need options.” The same question was asked about the digital church.

The question was, “What is the most challenging thing you experience when participating in a virtual service?” The in-person respondents stated, “Technical glitches.” Another said, “There are no challenges, but you get to experience a move of God in person.” The online audience responded, “Keeping my focus. Sometimes, I am not able to understand or hear what is being said if it’s a group and the mike isn’t passed around for whoever is speaking. I do use CC, but that is also challenging because of what it writes that doesn’t make sense.” Another online response is “connecting with others.” Some responses indicated there were no challenges regarding the virtual church.

The in-person respondents also responded to some other questions. One of the questions was: Do you believe a digital church could be a good alternative for those who can’t get to church for any reason? If so, why? The respondents indicated yes; it’s convenient for those who need it. A respondent commented, “That’s an alternative, not an excuse. Yes. I mean, I’m with whatever is comfortable.”

Following the in-person survey, the researcher had the opportunity to follow up on the Bible question using online technology as a method. The researcher followed up with some of the leaders and congregants on a couple of questions; one of the questions was about whether the online church is biblical. Some leaders were not sure if it was biblical; however, many leaders and congregants felt that having an online presence was a method that could be used to share the message of Jesus Christ.

One direct quote was, “Yes. I believe in the Great Commission, which says, GO and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you to do. We live and use technology for everything else. Why would it not be biblical to use online ministry to teach and make disciples of all nations? The online ministry has the capacity to go beyond our four walls. Jesus told his disciples to GO, and they used what they had before them.”

The researcher observed that this question stirred conversation among the participants in the survey, and the researcher observed that many had strong opinions about the subject. Some felt it was a good tool but should not be substituted for in-person worship; others felt that as long as the word is reaching, it should not matter how or where a person is getting the word of God. However, all felt it was a useful tool for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and exposing their church to a broad audience. Most of the participants who felt it was biblical talked about the great commission in the book of Matthew 28:16–20.

The second question that was followed up on was, “Is a person in error who chooses solely to worship online?” The researcher observed that leaders and congregants

had mixed views. The answer was mixed because some respondents felt that the technology should only be used as a tool and not as a replacement for going to church. “One respondent said no because they were going to church and just chose a different way to do it.” Others, however, felt that it reduced church attendance. The researcher observed that the older the participant, the more the feeling was that a person should worship in a physical building, and it was somewhat in error if they chose not to because they were not assembling among the saints in the church.

The researcher wanted to gain insight into the congregant’s feelings about their traditional worship experience and thoughts regarding technology usage in the church. Table 3 shows the congregants’ responses to the online and in-person surveys. The researcher categorized the organization’s responses to provide a comparison of the responses from the in-person and online surveys. A total of 16 members responded to an online survey, and 31 members responded to the in-person survey statements. These questions were geared toward participants’ feelings regarding the impact of post-pandemic traditional and online worship. The results are fashioned so that the information found can be easily understood.

The researcher prepared a series of questions to obtain an understanding of the congregants’ thoughts regarding traditional worship and the impact it was having on their lives. The researchers wanted to know if there was a change in their preference or view of traditional worship due to technology becoming a part of the worship experience. Some of the other information the researcher wanted to discover was how congregants were using technology in their current lives and if it was beneficial in helping to meet some of their current needs. This information was important in discovering a strategy to help the

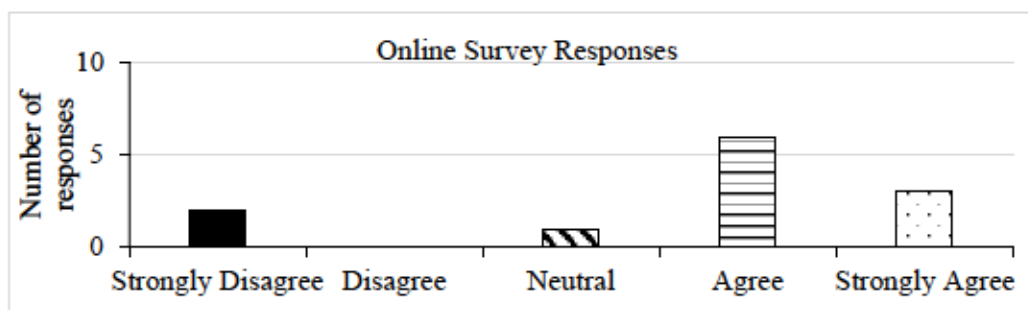
small church navigate successfully today. The questions and respondents' answers are shared one by one based on in-person surveys and online responses to the questions asked.

In-Person and Online Responses to Pandemic Worship and Technology Changes

Question 1. Pandemic Worship

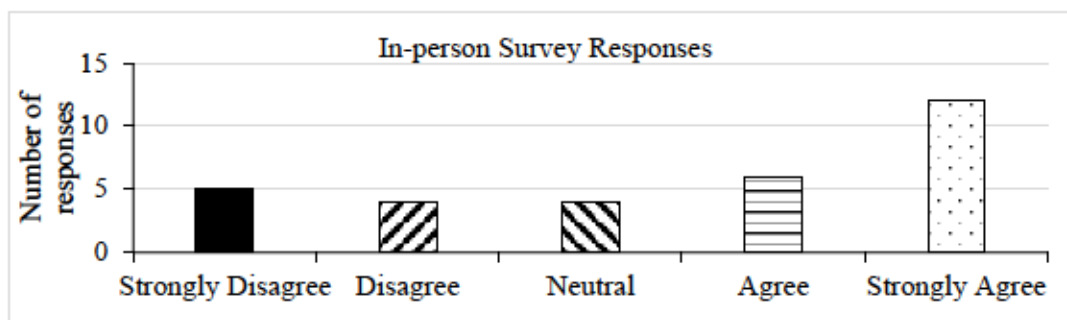
Figures 1 and 2 show both in-person and online survey responses to the statement, "I have preferred to attend traditional worship since the pandemic because it helps me to relax." Six online individuals indicated that they agreed with the statement regarding traditional worship. Two individuals chose strongly to agree with the statement. One chose the neutral position, and one disagreed.

Figure 1



"I have preferred to attend traditional worship since the pandemic because it helps me to relax." With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses from the participants who took part in answering the statement: five strongly disagreed, four disagreed, four were neutral, six agreed, and twelve strongly agreed.

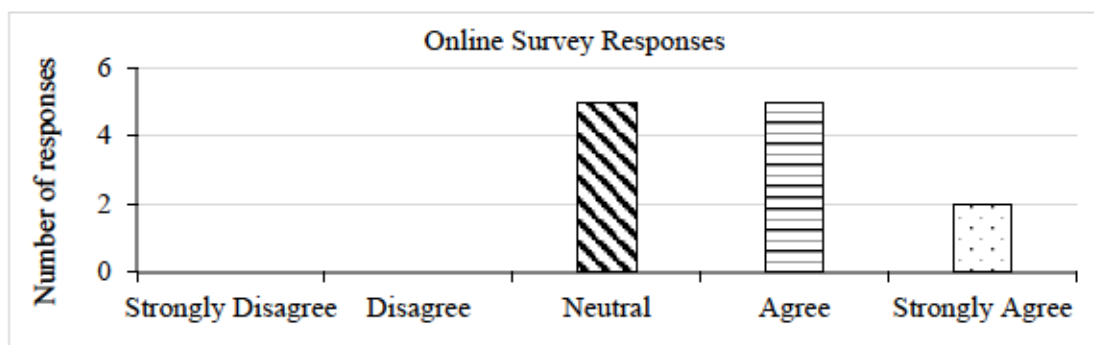
Figure 2



Question 2. Pandemic Worship

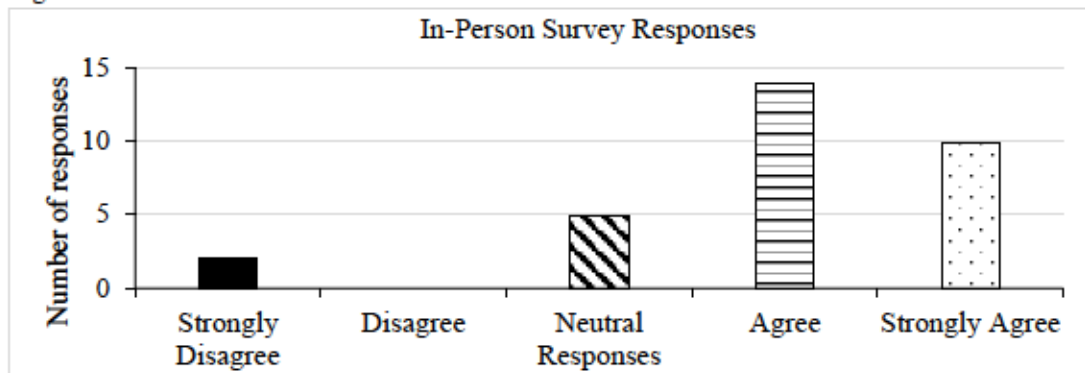
Figures 3 and 4 show both in-person and online survey responses to the statement, "I prefer to attend traditional worship because I have gotten to meet my friends and neighbors since the pandemic." With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses: five agreed with the statement, five had a neutral view, and one strongly agreed.

Figure 3



"I prefer to attend traditional worship because I have gotten to meet my friends and neighbors since the pandemic." The researcher received the following responses to the above statement from 31 in-person respondents: two strongly disagreed, five were neutral, 14 agreed, and ten strongly agreed.

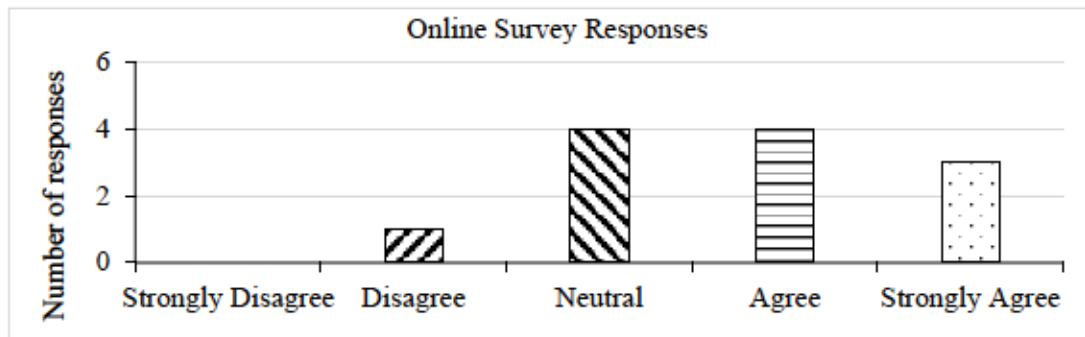
Figure 4



Question 3. Pandemic Worship

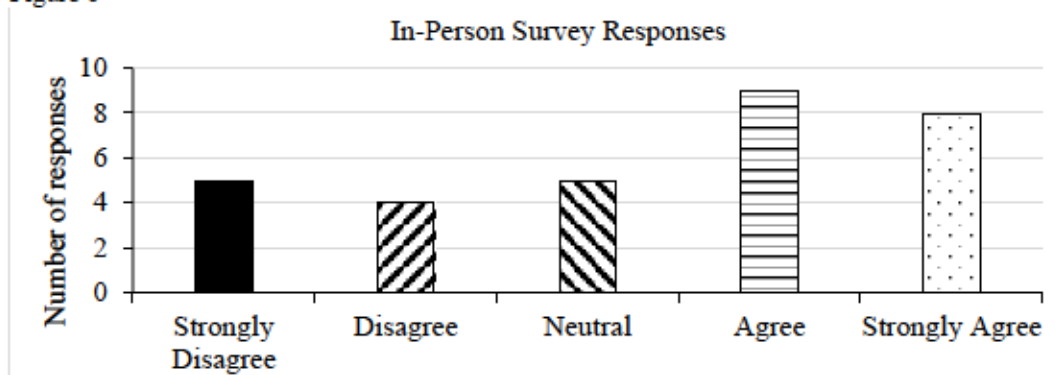
Figures 5 and 6 show both in-person and online survey responses to the statement, “It is easy to participate in outreach activities when getting involved in church since the pandemic.” The researcher received four respondents who agreed, three who strongly agreed, four who were neutral, and one who disagreed with the statement.

Figure 5



“It is easy to participate in outreach activities when getting involved in church since the pandemic.” With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses from 31 respondents: five strongly disagreed, four disagreed, five were neutral, nine agreed, and eight strongly agreed.

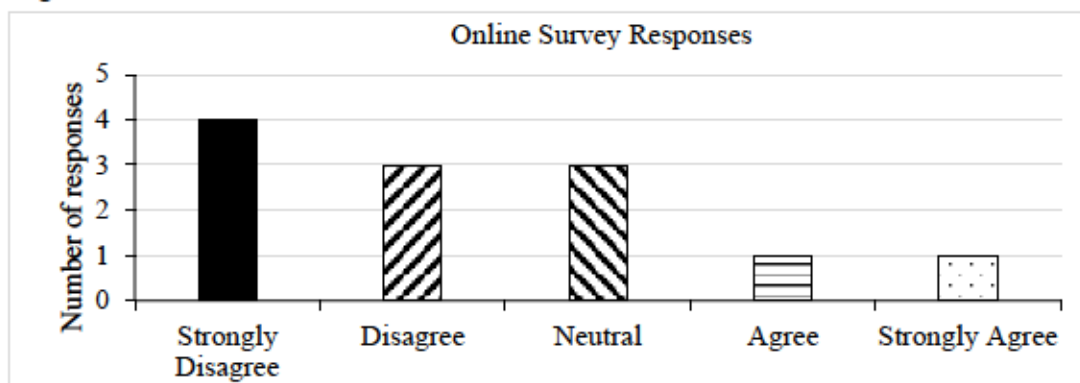
Figure 6



Question 4. Pandemic Worship

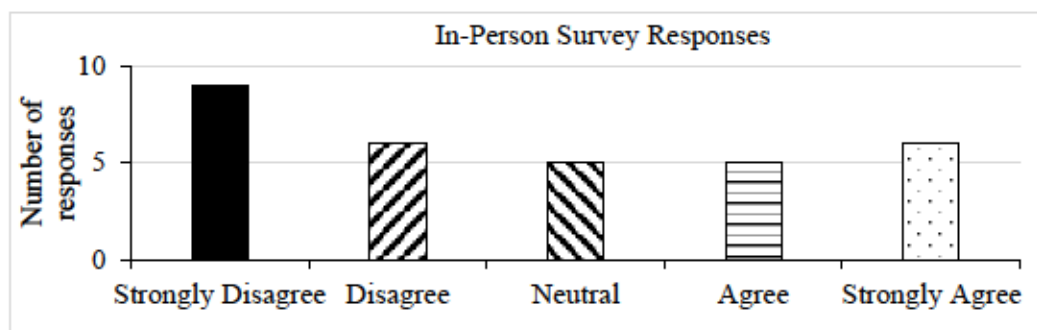
Figures 7 and 8 show in-person and online surveys to the statement, “I feel more comfortable worshipping virtually than worshipping in a physical building since the pandemic.” The responses with respect to the above statement were: three strongly disagreed, two disagreed, three were neutral, one agreed, and one strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 7



“I feel more comfortable worshipping virtually than in a physical building since the pandemic.” With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses: nine strongly disagreed, six disagreed, five were neutral, five agreed, and six strongly agreed.

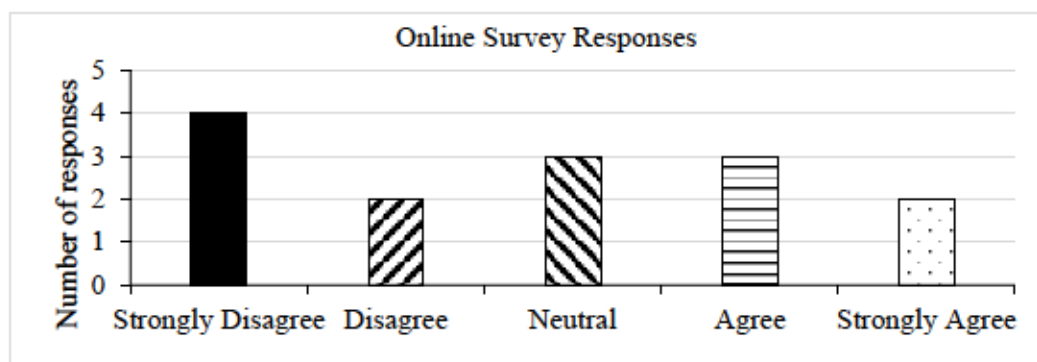
Figure 8



Question 5 Pandemic Worship

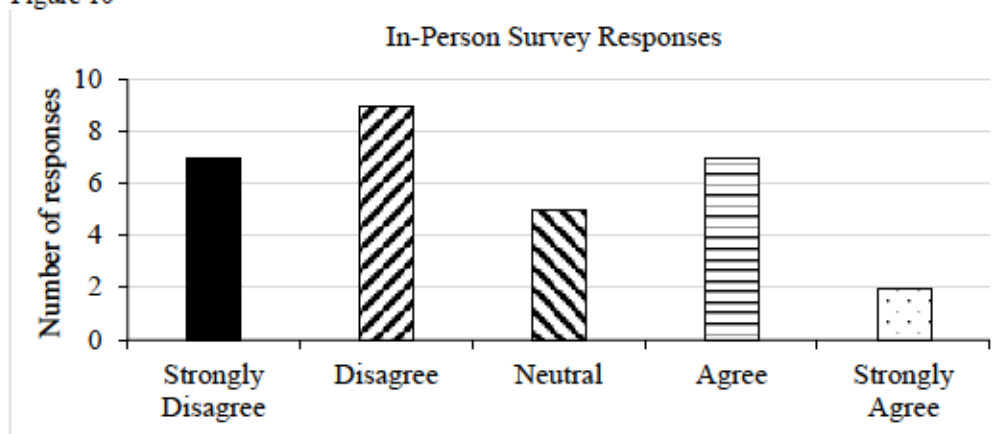
Figures 9 and 10 show the in-person and online survey responses to the statement, "It is easy for me to attend church online because it takes less time to prepare for church." The responses with respect to the above statement were: four strongly disagreed, two disagreed, three were neutral, three agreed, and two strongly agreed.

Figure 9



"It is easy for me to attend church online because it takes less time to prepare for church." The researcher received the following response to the above statement from 30 in-person respondents: seven strongly agreed, five disagreed, nine were neutral, seven agreed, and two agreed.

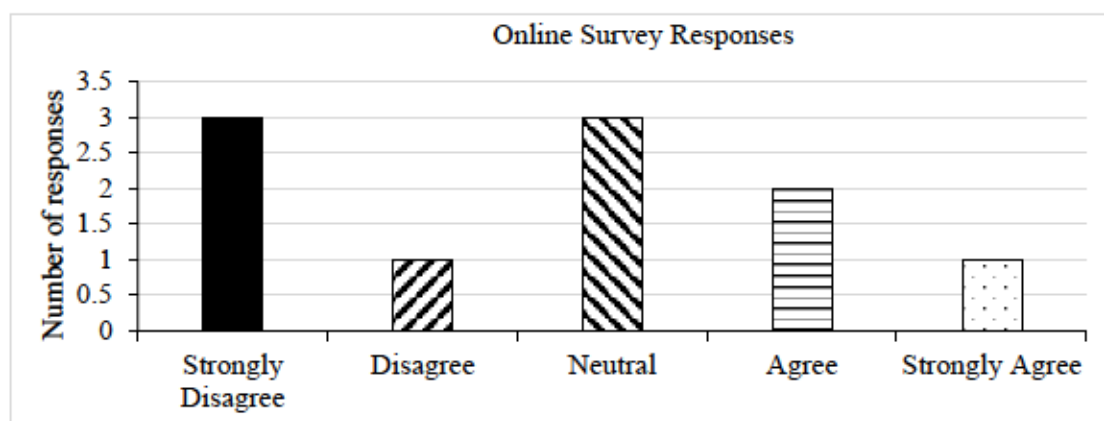
Figure 10



Question 6. Pandemic Worship

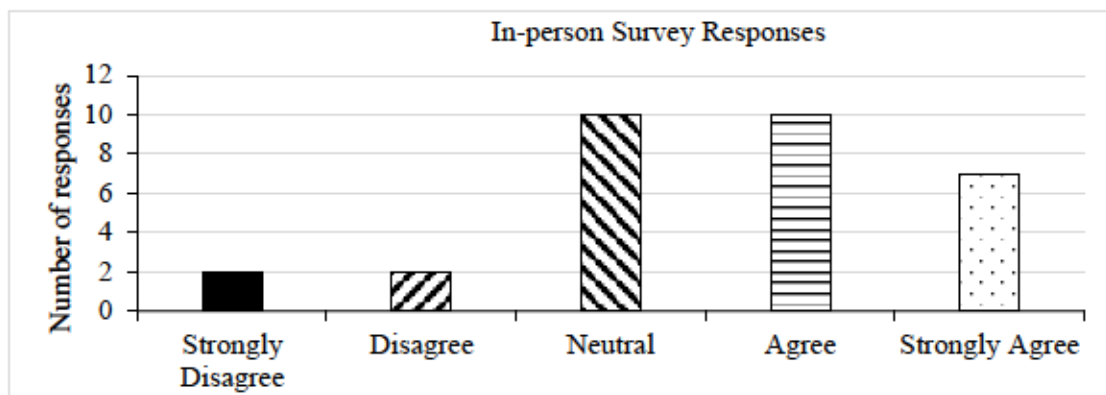
Figures 11 and 12 show both in-person and online survey responses to the question, “I prefer to get church updates through social media.” The responses to the above statement were: three strongly disagreed, one disagreed, three were neutral, two agreed, and one strongly agreed.

Figure 11



“I prefer to get church updates through social media or websites.” With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses: two strongly disagreed, two disagreed, ten were neutral, ten agreed, and seven strongly agreed.

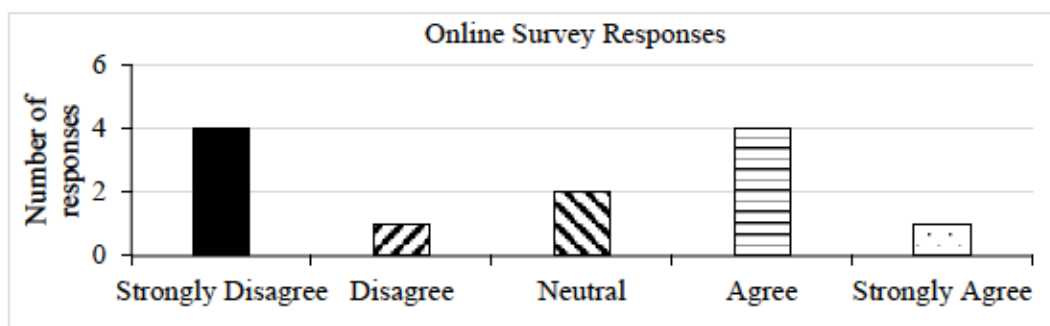
Figure 12



Question 7 Pandemic Worship

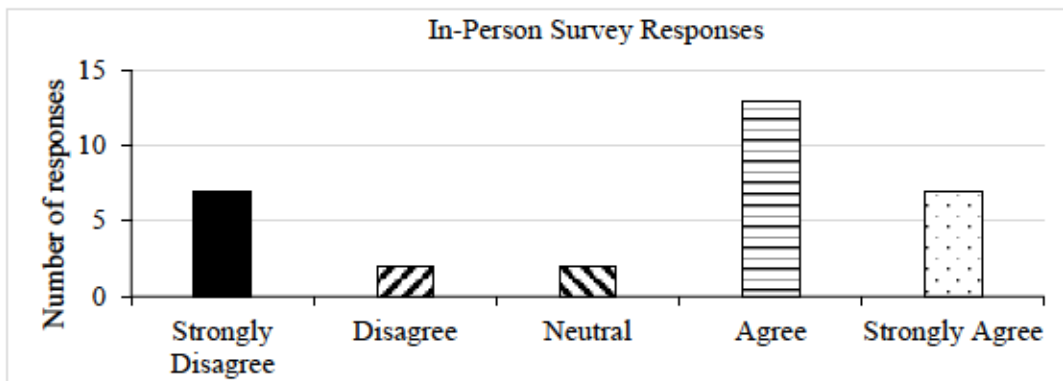
Figures 13 and 14 show both in-person and online survey responses to the statement, "I like to get religious quotes, Bible quotes, and motivational quotes through social media or the church website." The researcher received four respondents who strongly disagreed, one who disagreed, two who were neutral, four who agreed, and one who strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 13



"I like to get religious quotes, Bible quotes, and motivational quotes through social media or the church website." With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses from 31 in-person respondents: seven strongly disagreed, two disagreed, two were neutral, 13 agreed, and seven strongly agreed.

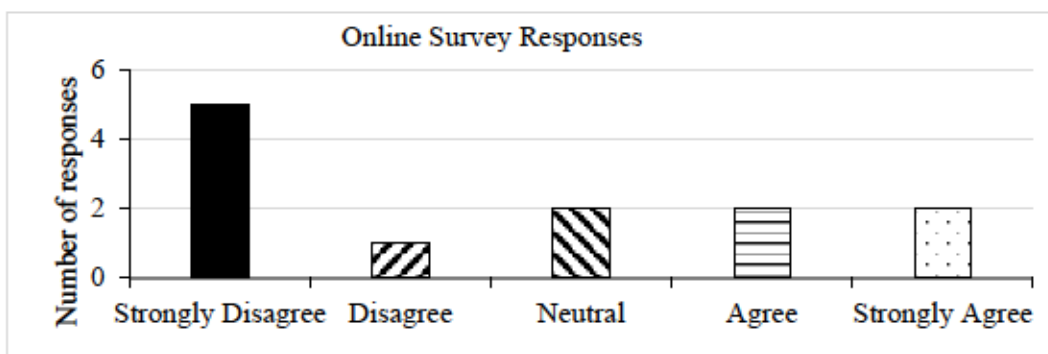
Figure 14



Question 8. Pandemic Worship

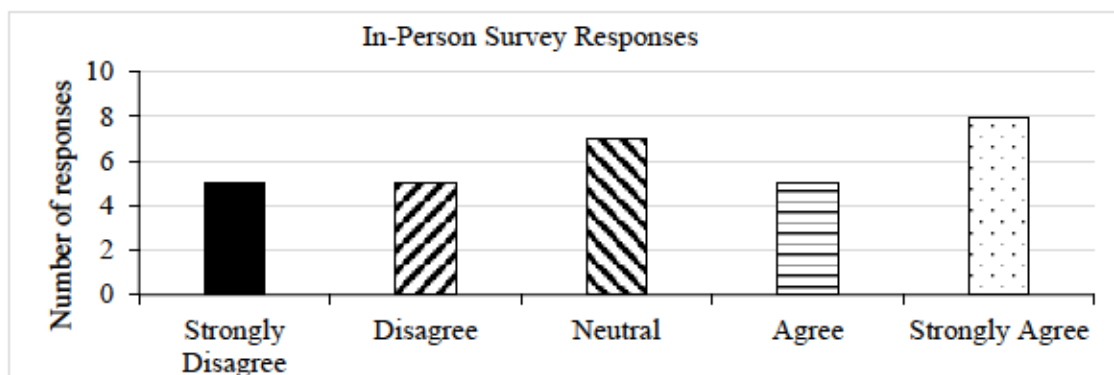
Figures 15 and 16 show in-person and online survey responses to the statement, "It is easy for me to donate money online." The researcher received the following responses to the above statement: five strongly disagreed, one disagreed, two were neutral, two agreed, and two strongly agreed.

Figure 15



"It is easy for me to donate online." With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses from 30 in-person respondents: five strongly disagreed, five disagreed, seven were neutral, five agreed, and eight strongly agreed.

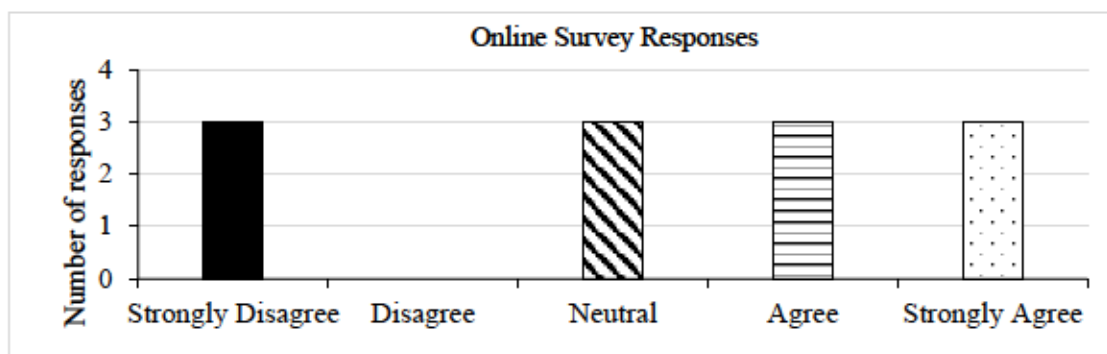
Figure 16



Question 9. Pandemic Worship

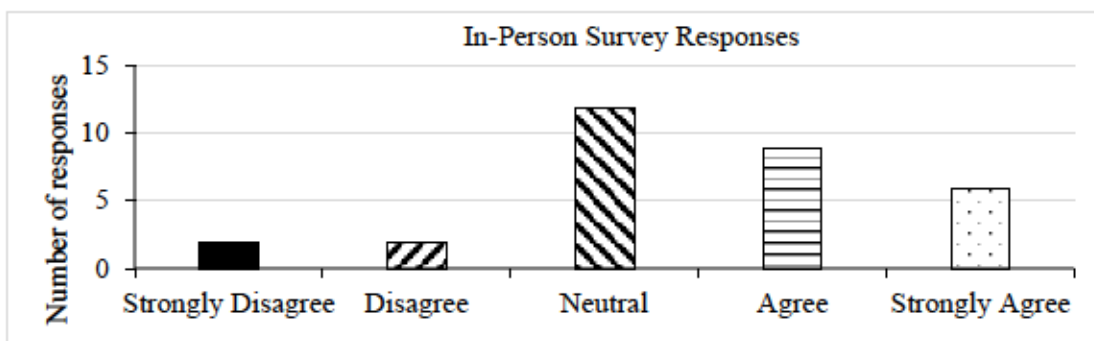
Figures 17 and 18 show both in-person and online survey responses to the statement, "I believe place (physical or virtual) is not important to practicing my worship of God or learning Jesus' teaching." The researcher received the following responses to the above statement from 12 respondents: three strongly disagreed, three were neutral, three agreed, and three strongly agreed.

Figure 17



"I believe a (physical or virtual) place of worship is not important to practicing my religious beliefs in God or Jesus' teaching." With respect to the above statement, the researcher received the following responses from 31 in-person respondents: two strongly disagreed, two disagreed, twelve were neutral, nine agreed, and six strongly agreed.

Figure 18



After reviewing the responses, the researcher understood that the participant's traditional way of worship was very important to many who felt it should remain the same. However, some respondents also felt that technology should have a part to play in church and that people should have the option of how they choose to worship. In addition, most of the participants are engaging in social media platforms, and their churches are also.

After reviewing all the information provided, the researcher understood that these pastors need some assistance with technology.

The researcher also surveyed the leadership during the study of the impact of technology on the small church. The questions for the different churches' leadership were slightly different in some areas than the survey for the congregants because the researcher wanted to hear the heart of the leaders regarding the impact of technology during the pandemic. The information provided summarizes the raw results of the in-person and online surveys. The following survey statement asked the leaders to respond.

In-Person and Online Church Leaders Questions and Responses- Pandemic Worship

The researcher also surveyed and interviewed the leaders within the churches to understand some of the challenges they faced during the pandemic and afterward. The

researcher structured the survey to obtain short answers and long answers. The researcher performed follow-up interviews with the leaders of the four traditional churches to hear their hearts and voices about their challenges in a post-pandemic society. The short answer questions were in the form of “disagree” and “agree” at different levels. The long answers were open-ended, and multiple choice was also part of the responses. The first set of questions dealt with worship after the pandemic. These questions allowed the participants to agree or disagree with the statement at different levels.

01. “I observed a significant decrease in the number of congregants worshipping at the church after the pandemic.” 13 strongly agreed, nine agreed, two were neutral, two disagreed, and two strongly disagreed. Online responses: two agreed, one was neutral, and one disagreed.
02. “Most of our congregants like to participate in traditional worship.” Eight strongly agreed, 14 agreed, two were neutral, six disagreed, and two strongly disagreed. Online responses: three agreed, and one was neutral.
03. “People need to attend church physically since it does not feel the same in virtual worship.” Twelve strongly agreed, twelve agreed, three were neutral, three disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. Online responses: four agreed.
04. “Our facilities are insufficient to start a virtual/ digital church.” One strongly agreed, two agreed, one was neutral, 16 disagreed, and nine strongly disagreed. Online responses: three agreed, and only strongly disagreed.
05. “It is difficult to maintain the standards of the church without having the physical participation of congregants.” Five strongly agreed, five agreed, seven disagreed,

- five strongly disagreed, three were neutral, and none disagreed or strongly disagreed. Online responses: two agreed, I strongly agreed, and one was neutral.
06. "Currently, we are sending all church updates related to congregants through the digital method." Two strongly agreed, 14 agreed, 10 were neutral, one disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. Online responses: two agreed, one strongly agreed, and one was neutral.
07. "I observe many preferring to hear the word online rather than attending a physical building." In-person responses: none strongly agreed, nine agreed, five were neutral, seven disagreed, and five strongly disagreed. Online responses: three agreed, and one disagreed.
08. "It is easy to get donations, contributions, and sponsorships through a virtual church." Face-to-face responses: two strongly agreed, eight agreed, five were neutral, nine disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. Online responses: one agreed, two were neutral, and one strongly agreed.
09. "I believe online ministry/church is a method that could be used for those who need an alternative way of hearing the message of Jesus Christ." Six strongly agreed, 14 agreed, two were neutral, 4 disagreed, none strongly disagreed. Online responses: one agreed, and three strongly agreed.
10. "I believe counseling can be done very efficiently online." 14 agreed, six were neutral, two strongly agreed, two disagreed, and one strongly disagreed. Online responses: three strongly agreed, one agreed, one disagreed, one strongly agreed, and one neutral.

11. “I think there is a new preference in worship style due to employing digital ministry.” Five strongly agreed, 14 agreed, three were neutral, one disagreed, and three strongly disagreed. Online responses: one was neutral, one agreed, and one disagreed.

Some additional questions were asked of some of the leaders.

Follow up Questions to In- Person Church Leaders-Pandemic Worship

After the in-person survey, the researcher had a chance to ask some follow-up questions to some of the church leaders of each of the participating churches. One of the questions asked was, “Did the church experience a decrease in membership or change in the style of worship as a result of the pandemic?” Four of the five leaders from the participating churches indicated that the pandemic did influence how they worshipped. The four indicated that during the pandemic, they had to make several changes in their style of worship. One significant change was the Bible study and establishing a stronger online presence for those who needed church but did not feel comfortable returning to church because of the pandemic.

Speaking with each pastor or leader separately, they each shared that it was a difficult period, and adjusting a technology format was very helpful in being able to provide a mechanism for the church to be able to function. There was a consensus among the pastors that the adjustment added a level of uncertainty regarding the church’s ability to function. One leader shared that “not being able to socialize with members and friends in the church was difficult because they wanted to be able to see each other.” Another leader talked about the difficulty of trying to follow the government’s rules regarding COVID-19 and how losing people to the disease was a difficult period because they had

to restrict others from being able to come into the building. The leader went on and shared, “Something new came out of it because they, as older leaders, learned about technology and its benefit to the church, especially for those who can’t do a night service. Technology is helpful because the leader can watch the service online with a little help on how to tune in and watch the services.” One of the things the researcher noted was the pain and deep breath that was taken as the description was given regarding the hardship that occurred during the pandemic.

Another follow-up question was asked regarding how technology helped or hindered the church during that time. Unanimously, all separately shared that technology was a lifeline for the ministry during that period. They were grateful to have it as an option to stay connected to the congregation. Regarding the decrease in membership, two churches did not see a decrease because many people had left before the pandemic. The other two churches experienced a 50 percent drop in membership and worship attendance following the pandemic. The online ministry saw no change in attendance.

The leaders recognized that, in a post-pandemic world, they needed to come up with new strategies to reach the younger generation and individuals who may not know about their churches. The researcher listened and observed that most of the churches were small and had a significant decline in reaching a younger generation that is very advanced in technology. To assist the churches with strategy, the researcher had to reach out to the group that each of these churches wanted to reach with the message of Jesus Christ.

The Voice of the Unaffiliated Church Goer

The last survey that was conducted was a random survey of individuals who were not affiliated with any church. The researcher felt that it was necessary to get this information to be more accurate in the study. By hearing the voices of those aged

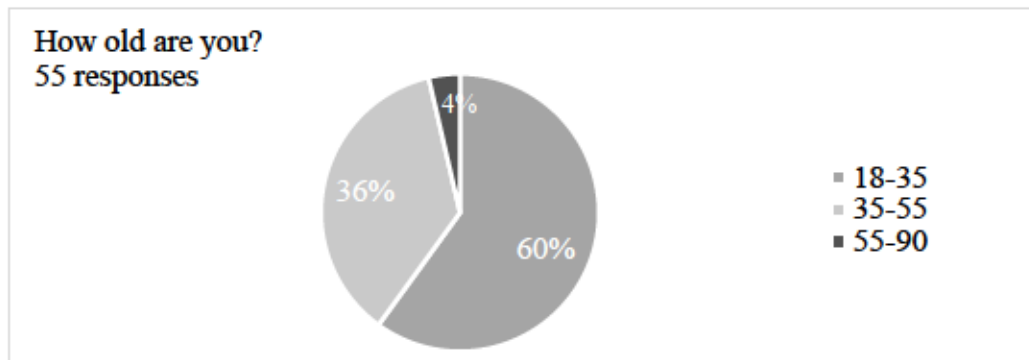
eighteen to thirty-five as well as those of other ages, the researcher was able to detect a gap in the research. The researcher felt that the information provided by these participants would aid in the development of a strategy. It is believed that asking those who are not affiliated with any church how they feel about church and what would cause them to commit to a church was data that needed to be incorporated into the study to help the small church be able to develop stronger and more targeted strategies. The researcher believed that by sampling these individuals, he would be able to learn how to reach out to them in a way that they would be interested in.

The researcher believed it was also important to investigate this group because this is an example of the kind of individual the churches are trying to reach. The researcher asked a few online questions and reviewed the answers in order to understand what those who may attend church but are not becoming members are looking for in a church. This was a random online study conducted with those who met the profile of not being members of a church and agreed to participate in the study. The study was prepared in such a way that the participants gave their consent to participate prior to starting the study. The demographics of the participants are outlined in the illustrations below.

The first-third illustration gave the researcher an understanding of the demographics of the participants in this part of the study. Through a review of the data, the researcher immediately found that the age group was younger than those who were surveyed in the small church. The survey indicates that 60 percent of those who participated in this survey were between 18 and 35. This was significant because the average age of those surveyed in the small churches was 55–90, which suggests that there

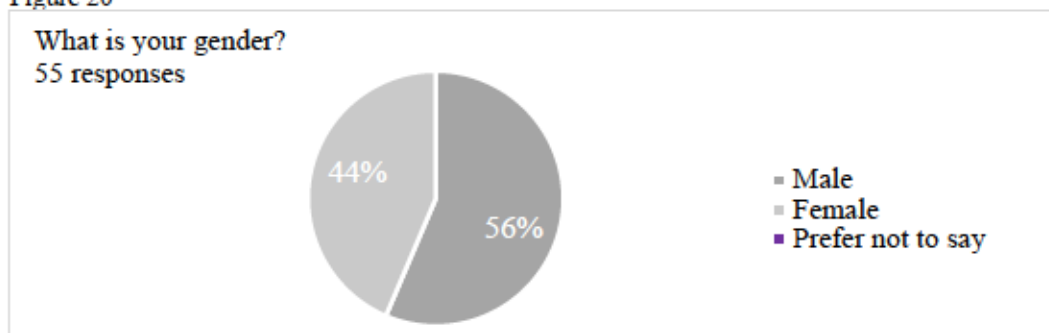
may be a difference in outlook or perspective about technology and the church among this group.

Figure 19



The second observation gained through the review of this data was that there were more men than women participating in this study. The data analyzed for those outside the church showed around 80 percent females and 20 percent males. This survey indicated that 56.4 percent were men and 43.6 percent were women. This information was significant because it allowed the researcher to hear the voice of those who are men but are not members of a church.

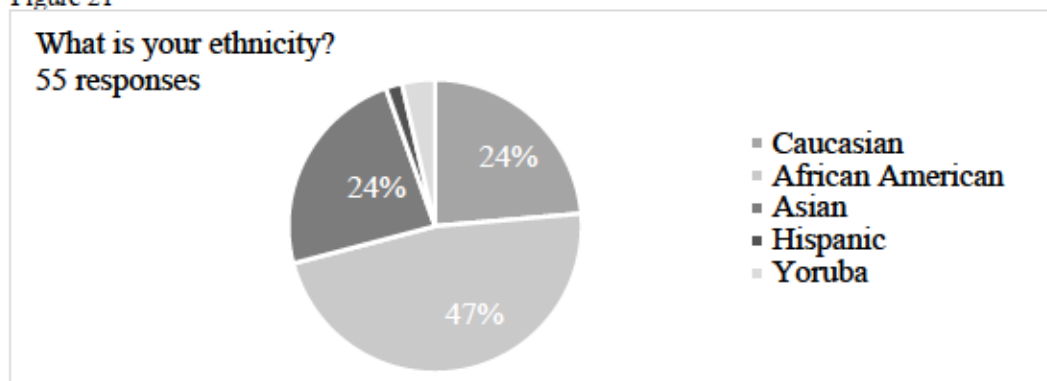
Figure 20



The researcher also discovered that the demographic that agreed to participate in this survey was multicultural: 47.3 percent African American, 23.6 percent Caucasian, and 23.6 percent Asian, and the other two areas were Yoruba and Hispanic, adding a

richer diversity of thought to the subject of this study. The researcher had diversity in the survey of the church participants; however, the participants in this study had broader cultural participation. The information the researcher receives will provide a richer thought process for the researcher to analyze and allow a broader viewpoint to be expressed by those who read the information.

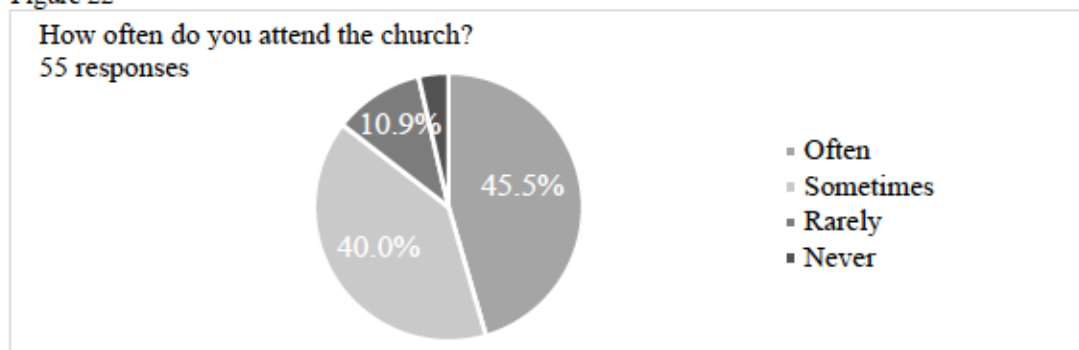
Figure 21



The research asks a series of questions to gain a greater understanding of why the participants are not members of a church and what they are looking for in a church. The questions that were asked are located below.

One of the questions that were asked had to do with attendance at church as a non-member. The researcher wanted to gauge the participants' interest in churches as a place to connect for spiritual or emotional support.

Figure 22

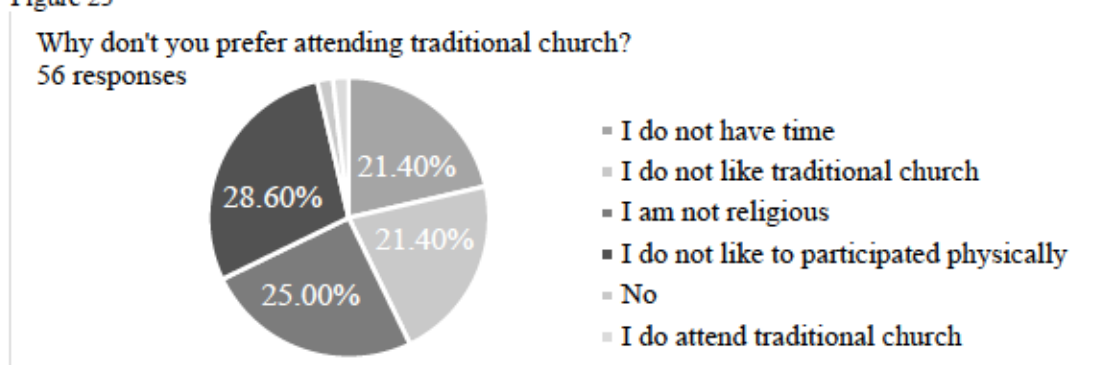


Reviewing the information above on the question regarding “How often do you attend church?” The researcher discovered that 45.5 percent “attended” church often, 40 percent “attended” church sometimes, and 10.9 percent rarely “attended” church. The information from this data suggests interest and willingness to attend church; however, the participants have chosen not to join any church but only “attend” worship. The question the researcher had to discover the answer to was: what does attending mean to the participants?

The researcher asked the question, “Why don’t you prefer attending a traditional church?” The previous illustration indicated that the participants attended church often and sometimes. However, upon the additional questions and answers, the researcher discovered that the participants were not talking about physically going into a building to attend church; they were speaking about attending church in some other way.

A follow-up question was asked, “Why don’t you prefer attending a traditional church?” 28.6 percent indicated they did not want to participate physically, 25 percent indicated that they were not religious, 21.4 percent said they did not have the time, and 21.4 percent said they did not like traditional churches. There was only a very tiny percentage that did go to traditional worship, and that same tiny percentage also included those who indicated no worship at all.

Figure 23



Having this information helped the researcher understand that these participants view attending church differently from the traditional church leaders and members that were surveyed earlier.

The researcher wanted to better understand some of the reasons why the participants were not physically attending the building to a large degree. The researcher broke down some of the responses in the chart to help better understand the voice of the participants. The results for the questions are listed in the table below.

Unaffiliated Church Goer Questions and Answers on Church and Technology

Figure 24

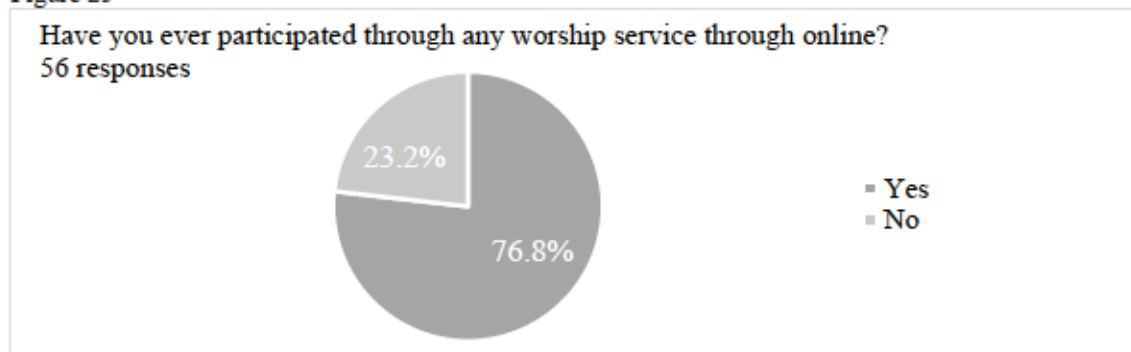
<i>Question</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
01. I don't have time to participate in the church due to other obligations	33%	22%	19%	24%	.01%
02. I don't like to visit crowded places after the pandemic.	28%	.26	17%	24%	.07%
03. I do not like to dress up for church.	22%	20%	17%	19%	11%
04. I do not like the traditional setting/procedure of the traditional church.	22%	22%	22%	19%	.07%
05. I would attend church services if I had the option of attending online or physically attending. (Hybrid)	13%	11%	26%	13%	31%
06. I would like to join or view the social media groups of the church if they are available.	01%	20%	20%	30%	22%
07. I would like to listen to worship services online if available.	11%	13%	15%	33%	22%
08. I would like to participate in the church services if they have online live streaming.	01%	20%	13%	26%	33%
09. I would like to be active or join the digital church if they deliver religious quotes, bible quotes, and motivational quotes through social media, text, email, or the church website.	11%	15%	09%	35%	28%

Based on the data findings, the researcher found that many participants wanted to be a part of a digital church. In addition, the participants desired the option of worshipping God through electronic devices. This is in direct contrast to many church members' and leaders' views of attending a traditional church. However, the similarities between both groups are that they both view technology as a good thing that can expand the gospel.

The researcher asked them how they felt about digital worship and other online religious events conducted by the church. Again, 92.9 percent of the respondents thought it was a good thing.

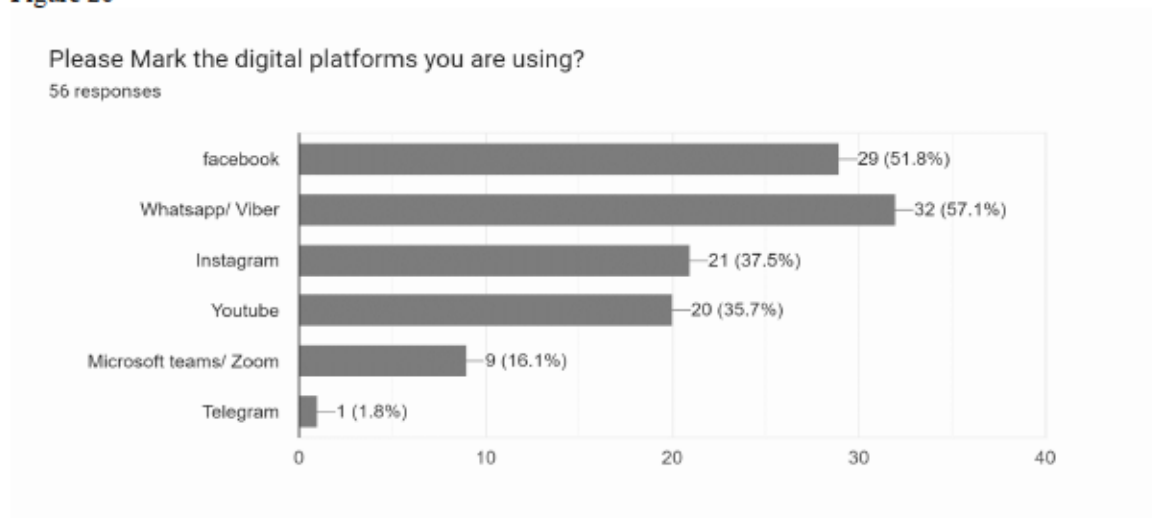
The researcher also asked the participants if they had ever participated in an online worship service. 76.8 percent stated that they had participated in a worship service online; 23 percent had yet to do so. The researcher observed that the participants are strongly influenced and impacted by technology.

Figure 25



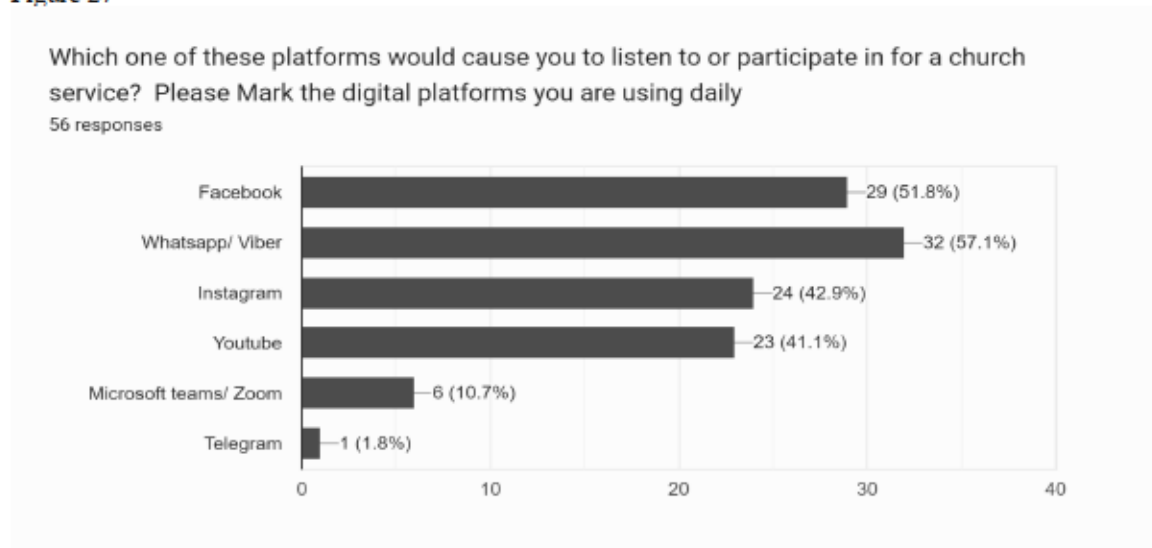
The researcher wanted to know what social media platforms they used on a regular basis. The participants shared the social media platforms that they were engaging with. This information was vital because it shared a sampling of the location where they are sharing their time and energy for various purposes.

Figure 26



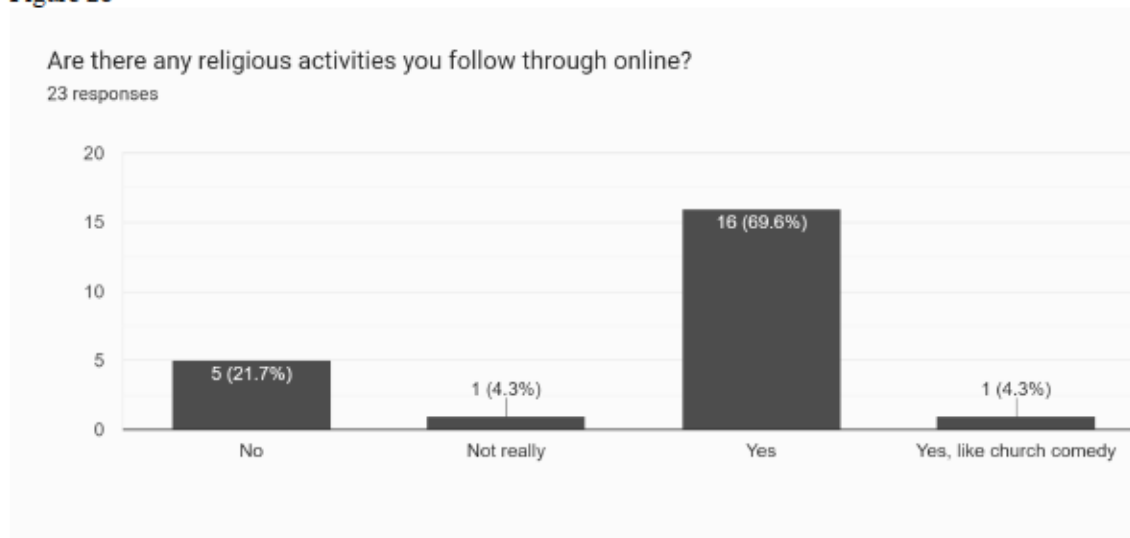
The researcher also asked what social media platform would cause them to participate in a church service. The responses showed that if services were held on these platforms, the participants might be inclined to participate. The researcher discovered that there is overwhelming participation in social media platforms of the kinds that are listed below.

Figure 27



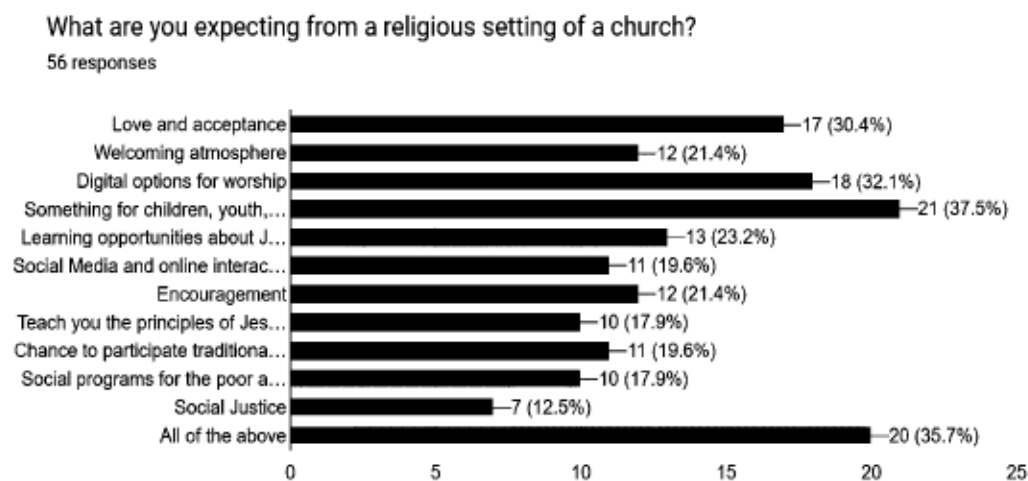
The researcher wanted to know if some participants were following any churches online. Upon questioning that, the researcher discovered that 69.6 percent of those who answered the question followed a ministry in some form online.

Figure 28



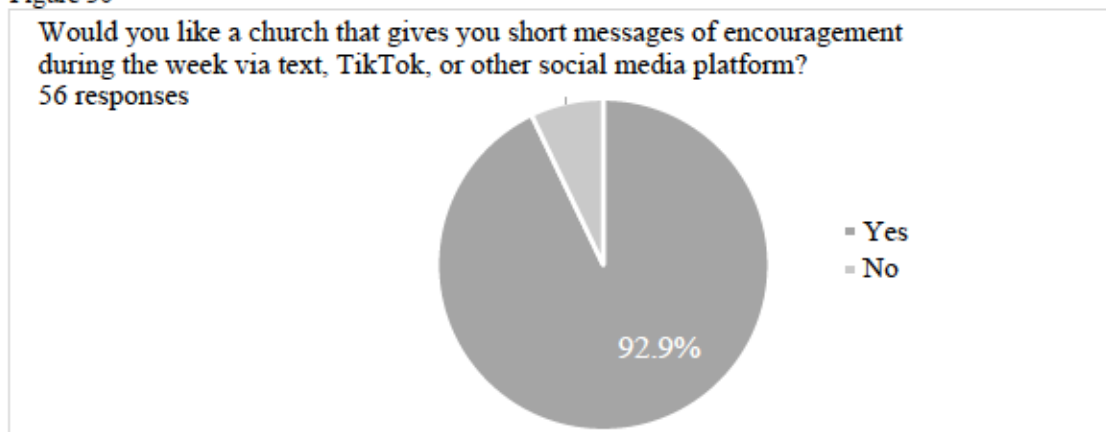
One of the main answers the researcher wanted to gain insight into was what the participants were looking for in a church. The research discovered that the top three areas were for children and youth, all items listed below, and a digital option for worship.

Figure 29



The research wanted to gauge how interested the participants were in hearing from the church personally. The researcher discovered a great interest in hearing from the church electronically; 92.9 percent indicated that they would like a personal word of encouragement from the church through electronic delivery.

Figure 30



Relevant Information

Another critical aspect of the study was the data collection component; this study involved reviewing pertinent documentation from five different churches within the United States. The evaluation of these documents complements the research study by linking them to additional data collected from the in-person and online surveys and in-depth interviews. This applicable documentation was gathered from the different organizations' websites and verbal (anecdotal) rather than written documents due to the churches not having it available.

Two churches participating in this study were members of the Disciples of Christ. The Disciples of Christ denomination arose in 1800 from the merger of two movements known as the Stone and Campbell movements. The church's founders are Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was founded in the United States and ministers across the nation and abroad.

The church is culturally diverse and practices restoring unity throughout the body of Christ. “The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) participates in the racial and cultural diversity of North America, including in its membership European Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Pacific Islander/Asian Americans.”¹⁰⁴ Disciples are working to become a unifying presence in the body of Christ by stamping out racism and focusing on unity. The church has 3200 congregations in 31 regions throughout the United States and abroad. The church hierarchy is set up with a General Minister, an Assistant General Minister, a Regional Minister, Moderators, an Ordained Minister, and a Licensed Minister.

The third church is the El-Bethel Temple of Jesus Orlando, originally the Gorman Memorial Church of the Nazarene. The church is 63 years old. Bishop Archie Williams was the church’s founding pastor in 1960. The church is a pillar in the community and is known for its love for the community and all mankind. The senior pastor is Elder David Thomas. The current membership is 120 on the roll, and the average attendance is 50. The church currently has 15 leaders that serve under the vision and guidance of the Senior Pastor. The church is under the umbrella of the El-Bethel Temple International, led by Presiding Bishop Cliff Morris Jr. The church leadership consists of the pastor, elders, prophetess, youth, and children pastors.

The fourth church is Except the Lord Build the House; it was founded in 1999 under the leadership of the founding pastors, Bishop Preston and Apostle Inez Nobles; it is 24 years old and a community staple. The church is known for its outreach efforts to

¹⁰⁴ “Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),” *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, last modified March 26, 2021, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://disciples.org/our-identity/history-of-the-disciples/>

assist those in need. The church has an assistant pastor, ministers, elders, church administrators, and children and children's church leaders. The current membership is 50.

The fifth church is the Tabernacle of Faith; it was founded by Bishop James and Apostle Emma McDuffie 22 years ago. The church was established in a rural community. The church has been a beacon of hope in the community for some years. The church has consistently worked towards healing the racial divide. The church has over twenty members who have been committed for several years.

Summary

This study took a mixed method approach. It set up online and in-person surveys with five churches. Additionally, the researcher set up online surveys for non-church members and shared verbal (anecdotal) rather than written documents with some of the smaller independent churches due to a lack of written documentation and reviewed relevant denominational documents. Through analyzing the data, many themes emerged that demonstrated the impact of technology on the small church.

The interview questions were completed in a semi-structured format. The selection of all subjects had a focused purpose for the study's sampling process. The online survey was coordinated with the questions in the interview guide to help provide additional information. The pertinent documentation review process was a distinct instrument for supporting the interviews and surveys.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of Project Design and Implementation

To complete this study, the researcher used the mixed method research design and took the case study approach to identify the impact of technology on the small church. The method that was used within the case study was the ethnography approach. The comprehensive development of this project was made possible by the seven steps explained in the previous chapter that established the context of this study. This information included examining biblical and theological historical data and the works of literature regarding technology's impact on the small church. The researcher followed with a field study, analysis, and examination of pertinent data. The formation of chapters two and three occurred chronologically; however, the formulation for the gathering of the research instruments overlapped with the implementation of the study.

There was a slight change in step three of the study with the participants the researcher initially planned to interview. The original plan was to interview three Disciples of Christ churches and three independent churches. However, due to scheduling issues, the researcher interviewed two Disciples of Christ churches and three independent churches in the researcher's vicinity. In place of being unable to conduct a study with six churches, the researcher conducted an online survey with individuals who were not affiliated with any church. This change contributed to the validity of the data gathered from all aspects of the individuals in the study.

The researcher identified 6 findings, 3 related to biblical foundations and 3 related to studies the impacts of COVID-19. Various findings occurred during the biblical foundation study method.

One finding was Paul's method of reaching other cultures through an unconventional approach. Acts 16:11–15 shares how Lydia became a follower of Jesus through the teaching ministry of Paul. Lydia was not of the same culture as Paul, but Paul had an unconventional method of explaining and proclaiming the gospel. This method reached her and the entire household, causing them to become followers of Jesus Christ.

The second finding, Paul's aggressive approach was discovered in Acts 13:6–17. In dealing with BarJesus, Paul used a direct approach to rebuke him and proclaim the Lord's judgment concerning his life and lifestyle. Paul's word came to pass instantaneously; as a result, the Roman official received Christ.

A third finding was regarding Paul's method of mentorship. Paul invested all that he knew in Timothy. He loved Timothy like a son and took the time to invest the message and teachings of Jesus Christ into Timothy. In Acts 16:3, Paul wanted Timothy to travel with him. Paul multiplied his method of teaching and mentoring by teaching Timothy to reach others for Jesus Christ.

The study of the related literature also produced three essential findings regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the small church pastor. The researcher could hear the hearts of the small church pastors who had been directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first finding was many Pastors and leaders describe the difficulty of learning how to use technology to keep their congregations together. Most had to admit that they had to adjust their view on the matter after trying technology and learning how to use it.

Pastors also shared that it was a method for sharing the gospel with their parishioners. Some churches never closed during that period, and many people transitioned from those churches due to catching COVID-19. Overall, churches that used technology felt it helped keep their congregations together.

The second finding was the financial impact. Surprisingly, the views on this issue are mixed. Many churches were not impacted financially by COVID-19. Some saw an increase in giving, and many received the PPP Loans. Some churches were hurt financially and had to close their doors; others experienced a severe change to the point that they had to lay off staff and reduce employment from full-time to part-time to make up for the lost membership.

The third finding was that one of the difficult things for churches was being unable to fellowship and celebrate each other's accomplishments. The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on many people who enjoyed companies and connecting with others. However, the new norm disrupted the ability to do that physically. In churches that minister communion within denominations, members would take their element home and watch the pastor on a screen administer communion to them.

A Variety of Strengths and Implementation

There were multiple strengths related to the design and implementation of this project. One of the strengths was conducting an online survey with sixteen church members and leaders, sixty-three in-person surveys of church leaders and members, and surveying fifty-three unaffiliated members of any church. The project's strength was surveying and interviewing a demographic mixture of those who often attend worship in person and those who do not. It was a strength beyond comparison because the researcher was about to hear the voice of a diverse group of people from different perspectives,

racess, and cultural experiences. These participants represented a cross-cultural base interested in being involved in the study as a researcher able to hear the voices of people from all walks of life, whether church members or not, giving the project a different perspective based on age, sex, and cultural experiences.

The second strength of this project was also having a topic of interest that caused people to want to participate in the study to add their voices and insights. Additionally, the project's strength was hearing congregants' and those unaffiliated with any church's thoughts on the impact of technology. The knowledge gained from this richly diverse population about the effects of technology brought a wealth of knowledge, insight, and depth of understanding to the small church.

The third strength was that the interview guide provided a semi-structured format and allowed further examination of technology's impact on the small church and its culture. The choice of the subject of the study was relevant, with needed and insightful guidance for the individual interviews and surveys that played a role in data collection. Reflecting upon the different perspectives shared during the interview, the researcher received a great deal of information and clarity from those who took part in the survey. In addition, the researcher was able to observe similarities in thinking and different perspectives based on age and participation in church culture.

The fourth strength was the relevance of the project. The project's relevance was a strength of the study because the subject is something current that many churches and small churches have had to figure out how to navigate and are still trying to figure out how to restructure the church and ministry. The researcher herself has been a part of a small church as a leader and understands the intricate dynamics that occur within small

churches when disruption hits a small congregation. The subject was something that was needed to gain better insight.

The researcher has worked with small church pastors struggling financially and having to become bi-vocational due to the loss of membership. In interviewing the participating small church pastors and leaders, all agreed that doing this study could help with the dilemma of navigating a church in a post-pandemic culture. This study became a strength because the researcher could identify with the leaders and members of churches who are grieving what once was but no longer exists.

Sharing the stories and amplifying the voices of the leaders and members' experiences by sharing the direct quotes of the participants' thoughts on the subject matter allows the reader to understand the perspective of those who live the experience of the pandemic and how life is occurring in a post-pandemic small church world. Additionally, having the ability to hear the voice of those who do not want to commit to a traditional church was necessary because they are the audience that the small church is trying to reach.

The Weakness of the Project Design

The weakness of the overall project design was dealing with churches that had suffered the loss of members. Not being able to survey members whose names are on the church roll but who do not attend the traditional church services causes the research to be limited in perspectives.

The first area of weakness in the project design was not being able to survey traditional church members in the 18 to 35 age range. Not having their perspective spoke volumes to the researcher regarding a demographic not as involved in church as the older generation. Some small church participants lost members during the pandemic and some

before. The researcher felt that not being able to gather information from that group, who are traditional members of churches, weakened the potential of the survey by not having their perspective as to their feelings regarding the impact of technology.

The second area of weakness was not being able to obtain written documentation regarding the church and its structure. Many small churches focus on keeping their doors open. In so doing, many of the members are operating in several capacities, making documentation regarding the ministry's structure unobtainable, and not being able to obtain those items and relying on the leadership to share the information by word of mouth brought forth a weakness in the evidence of the project.

The third area of weakness of this project was not being able to survey more people at a couple of the participating churches due to it not being Sunday morning. Sunday would have given a greater opportunity to survey a few more people to strengthen the findings. The researcher conducted the surveys during a midweek period.

Research Discussion and Findings

This project aimed to address the problem of understanding the technology tools and ministry methods that a small traditional church needs to establish a digital presence. In response to this problem, this research (a) examined Paul's unconventional ministry methods, used in the book of Acts to spread the gospel; (b) reviewed relevant literature regarding digital methods of ministry and how churches adapted an online presence during the COVID-19 pandemic; (c) conducted a qualitative case study on the use of technology in small traditional churches; and (d) identified strategies that could help a small traditional church establish a digital presence. To accomplish this study, the researcher analyzed the data using triangulation. The examination of relevant documentation, in-person and online surveys, and interviews with church leaders,

congregants, and non-affiliated churchgoers helped to authenticate this study, as many subjects emerged to illustrate the impact of technology on the small church. General conclusions and strategies were derived from the findings related to the different topics.

The result of this study is presented below.

- Is there a generational difference in preference regarding worship based on age?
- What is the non-members' perspective regarding attending church?
- Is there a generational difference regarding online ministry?
- What are some of the unconventional ways to meet a new generation?

Age and Value of In-person Worship

The demographics among the churches were, on average, 55–90 years of age, and most churches were filled with people who were settled in life. A series of questions regarding church attendance were asked of the participants online and in person. The findings show no significant changes among the participants in the survey regarding their traditional church attendance or beliefs about the value of being in church physically. The same question was proposed for online users, and the result was the same. However, the findings also showed that the traditional church members believed in having an online option for those who could not attend church, such as the elderly who couldn't get to church. The style of worship for those who attended a physical building was that a person should attend church and only use technology as a tool when it was necessary.

The results were the same among those who attend church physically on a Sunday morning. The question was asked of the leaders whether they had noticed a decrease in members physically attending church. Some of the pastors indicated that they had experienced a decrease in membership. During the follow-up questions, leaders shared

the difficulty of keeping the church together during the pandemic and losing some to other ministries after the pandemic was over.

Hearing and observing the difficulties many pastors and church leaders had trying to keep people together was heart-wrenching because they had been disrupted. Trying to help members through the worst time of their lives was difficult. The pastors shared about trying to follow the government's rules to keep people safe, and yet losing congregation members was very difficult. For some, adjusting to preaching to a screen was very difficult. Most were having a hard time because they could not physically connect to the members. After the pandemic, they now must deal with people not wanting to return to the building to worship or having decided that they like being online. The researcher observed the pain and confusion over what has happened in their church lives as they shared about the decrease in physically attending church.

It has been challenging to adjust, and most felt that attending church should be a non-negotiable option. Nonetheless, the lack of attendance and the desire of some members to be online for worship caused the leadership to see that it should be an option that should be kept post-pandemic. One of the positive aspects that came out of the pandemic worship was the connection with new people who frequently watched their service. Some pastors desire to increase their viewership; others want to increase church attendance and wonder how to do so. Since the decrease in physical in-person worship attendance, both sets of pastors want a strategy to reach those who are not members of the church as well as those who are.

Non-Member Perspective Regarding Church Attendance

Performing a survey with non-church members aged 18–35 and discovering their thoughts was eye-opening. The findings regarding the thinking of non-members in the

age range of 18–35 differed from those of those who attend church every Sunday. The 18- to 35-year-olds regard church attendance as viewing church online on a given Sunday rather than physically attending church. This is a huge difference from those who believe attending church means coming to the physical building. This indicates a huge generational gap and different thinking regarding technology and the church.

Generational Difference Regarding Online Ministry

One of the other questions was regarding online ministry being biblical. Some pastors, leaders, and congregants could not answer that question definitively, but they did express that it is a tool or method for sharing the gospel. On the question of whether a person is in error if they attend church online, the response was mixed. Some believe that people should return to church because it took away from church attendance, and others believe that as long as they heard the word, it does not matter. However, many participants felt that technology could be a method used to advance the message of the kingdom of God. Many of the participants are embracing technology, and it is being used as an alternative in many churches. Most participants believe that technology is a tool that will allow others to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. The answer regarding the great commission in Matthew 28:16–20 seems to be a similar response, although it was not said the same way. The researcher's findings show that traditional church members are open to having the gospel spread through technology but would prefer people to return to the physical location of the church. However, this is not the case for 18 to 35 year-olds; they see nothing wrong with the online church; they prefer attending a church that way and having the option to do so.

The churches differ in that very few people in the age range of 18 to 35 attend in the traditional way. The online survey suggests that online ministry is how they seem to

enjoy worshipping. If the church is going to reach these individuals, it will have to begin developing a strategy to engage that population. Sometimes that may mean reaching out to someone outside the four walls of the church who can give a different perspective from those who know church culture but do not know how to navigate in a post-pandemic age. Noticeably, the churches were not filled with members, which suggests that there has been a shift in people's thinking regarding how they worship and attend church. The age range of 18 to 35 did not seem to dislike church; they just wanted options for how they attended church. What was most encouraging was to see that the churches had some tools that they were using to engage people in other venues. The churches are involved in social media, which is a good thing because, based on the findings, many people between the ages 18 and 35 frequent those areas. These are areas where the small church can consider doing outreach in a different way to connect with them.

Unconventional Ways to Meet New Generation

Based on the findings, the researcher believes that there is a great opportunity to reach those who are between the ages of 18 and 35 if the small church is willing to meet them where they frequent. One of the observations the researcher believes is clear is that there is a decrease in attendance among s in many churches. However, as much as that may be true, there is a possibility that they are attending church; they are just doing so online.

The pandemic has allowed technology to disrupt patterns of worship that are dear to many who believe that the physical building is the only way to truly worship God. However, the findings indicate that there has been a shift in preference for eighteen to thirty-five-year-olds, and some may have once believed the same way. The pandemic

opened up a new channel for many individuals to experience things in the church through technology, and it was a preferred experience.

Strategy for Post-Pandemic Worship

This study has attempted to gain insight into the impact of technology on the small church during and after the pandemic. After reviewing the findings, the researcher believes that establishing a written plan for an effective hybrid ministry approach is something that would be of some benefit to small churches. The data from the in-person and online surveys and interviews indicated a desire for the options to be put in place by most of those surveyed. The researcher also believes that small churches should consider finding ways to utilize their social media platform to interact with their audience on social media to increase their presence and expand who listens to them. In addition, the researcher believes that in the current landscape, the church should consider developing new forms of outreach that allow the online audience to be a minister, too, through prayer and other options the church currently has in place.

The researcher encourages small churches to develop a platform that incorporates online outreach so that those who online do not feel overlooked but are constantly cared for. If the church has enough ministers, allow them to minister to that audience and constantly invite them to come to the church whenever they can. The small church does not have to abandon its traditional form of worship, but it should broaden its ministry to those in the community it wishes to reach. One suggestion would be setting up an advisory board of young people to help with the digital component of the church. If the church has enough ministers, it may be wise to set up an online campus minister who can interact with the audience. The researcher believes that the advisory board would be instrumental in implementing a strategy that would engage a young adult audience to use

their insight and gifts in the areas of technology. The advisory board would assist with the implementation of the I-Church Strategy.

I-Church Strategy

A good strategy would be for the church to approve a nontraditional ministry geared to young adults' needs. A ministry that can connect with other who are young adults that are looking for God in untraditional ways. Having a young adult ministry that offers an online and physical presence may interest many who feel the church is irrelevant. Additionally, it allows young adults to participate in, organize and develop church services they can be proud of. The young adults would put together their worship services and ministry advertisements.

Worship

The young adults could structure the online presence to interest other young adults, not in church. The young adult can organize there on mid-week service, which involves prayer, praise, and worship. The worship service would be tailored toward their age group, and they could insert some traditional aspects in the service but done by people within their age group.

Evangelism/ Outreach

The church could offer evangelism training to young adults so they could effectively share the word of God with their peers in an understandable way to their age group. The young adults would create social media, the platform for engaging online participants, text, video conferencing, email, and outreach to their friends, family, and others based on their training. In addition, the church could train in personal and social evangelism for their jobs, schools, and social gatherings. They can create a follow-up

strategy for those who desire constant contact with those who want to worship. In addition, they could develop outreach for things that are dear to them, such as homelessness, education, social justice, and equality in living.

Counseling

The church could provide training for young adults on how to interact with those who young adults that need services such as counseling for new parenting, depression, peer pressure, and various addictions.

Social fellowship

Young adults can construct fellowship times forgetting to know each other in person. They can create an online fellowship for those online via Zoom or set a date when they can meet in person for a meet and greet.

This strategy would be helpful because it will give the small church the opportunity to gain the insight of a new and younger audience. It will also give the church the opportunity to learn new things regarding technology and its ability to be a help to the overall welfare of the ministry. The strategy will also help the church train others in biblical foundation and how to use new methods of sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

As this dissertation has shared through the biblical and theological foundation study, there were uncommon methods used to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The study has proven that it is biblical to use technology as a ministry method to reach others with the message of Jesus Christ. Technology is considered an unusual way for many to have a church, yet it is an option that is biblically okay. One of the pieces of training that is needed is how God defines His Church on earth. This is an important study in the current

post-pandemic climate. As revealed in the research, having more academic data on the impact of technology on the small church would be useful for generations to come.

The researcher recommends including a study to help struggling churches navigate in a post-pandemic society. Many churches are grieving the loss of the congregation they had before the pandemic. Having resources available would help many church leaders heal and move forward with the transitions in the church culture that are happening today.

The research also recommends establishing a leadership curriculum on how to minister in a post-pandemic society and with the Gen-Z generation, which is not familiar with church culture or who Jesus is to them in their context of living.

Summary

Examining the project plan and enactment of this study included first reviewing the complete flow of the study and whether the project strategy provided a suitable framework for responding to the thesis problem and its following subproblems. It included a comprehensive examination of the strengths and weaknesses of this study. A complete summary of the conclusions and results from the findings of each theme covered in this study is provided. The component examined in this project assists with the initial research questions. It provided the scope and depth of the different areas of technology that have impacted the small church. The project provides a strategy that focus on the next generation participation in church through the use of technology.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION

This dissertation process has been a period of great growth and insight regarding the study of the impact of technology. I recall a time when the church frowned on the use of technology as an alternative way to worship. Most felt that it was scripture, yet I saw people finding ways to use it as an alternative because of their work schedules, home lives, sick loved ones, or because they wanted to worship with a church that was distant from where they lived. One of the constant debates was whether a person who worships online is acting according to scripture.

Several points in this study caused me greater insight and growth. I will mention a few in my reflection.

The first was the examination of scripture regarding whether using technology as a way of conducting church service was biblical. As a researcher examining the biblical text and discovering that it is the spiritual building, not the natural building, that most concerns God, he is constructing it on the inside of each person who accepts him as Lord and Savior. I believe in a hybrid ministry that allows a person to exercise each option when needed. I grew greatly from that research because it confirmed what I already knew about God's love for humanity. That section of the paper was one of the most impactful because it became clearer than ever that God's priority is the soul of humankind. I grew in my understanding that God will use whatever mechanism is available to establish a relationship with someone. The second thing that had a big impact were the interviews:

being able to observe and hear the feelings about online ministry vs. traditional ministry, as well as hearing the hearts of pastors who are trying to navigate in this post-pandemic world. Society really allowed me to see through their eyes the pain and difficulty many are having trying to adjust to what society is calling the new norm. The third step involved listening to and carefully analyzing the responses of non-church members.

The most revealing aspect regarding online church potential and current reach was the voice of a younger generation (eighteen to thirty-five); being able to receive feedback from that generation was insightful. I realize their world has always been filled with technology, and that is the norm for them, whereas for my generation and older, it is not the norm. Going to church on a screen is normal for them because many are accustomed to being educated through the medium of the screen. Hearing their take on online ministry and the church was revealed, and it gave me another perspective on thinking regarding developing ministry prototypes.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to participate in a study of the impact of technology and hybrid ministry on the small, traditional church. I hope to learn what technology tools and ministry methods are needed for a small, traditional church to establish a digital presence. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your membership in a small, traditional church that has been impacted by technology. This research is for a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Bethel University.

If you decide to participate, I (or Bethel University and associates) will contact you via email, phone, or text to inform you how to fill out a simple participant form indicating your willingness to participate. Once the form is signed, you will be able to select two options. One of the options will be the opportunity to participate in an in-person survey conducted at the church site. The second option is our online survey opportunity: The online survey will allow you to participate in an online survey. Regarding the online survey, after you have signed our participation form, a link will be sent to you to participate in our online surveys. The surveys will be set at a time not to exceed 60 minutes. When the surveys are finished, whether online or in person, someone will thank you for taking part and give you instructions on how to exit the survey. We ask that if you are going to participate in person, please be there about 15 minutes early so that we can go over all the housekeeping rules for the site. Once you arrive, someone will

direct you to where the surveys are being held on the church's campus. You will need to sign in upon arrival at the site, and someone will seat you until it's time to take the survey. We desire to do this survey as thoroughly as possible so that it will only need to be done once. Because we are still in a pandemic, we ask that you wear your mask.

Please be aware that the survey will be held at a small church, so space and accommodations will be limited. We will have some light refreshments available for you.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be linked to you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable, and only aggregate data will be presented. Any information released will be furnished in the thesis and made available for review with Bethel University staff professors and the selected committee for doctoral consideration. Any video interviews will be deleted after review by the doctoral candidate and, if needed, the Bethel University professors and select committee.

Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Bethel University, anyone associated with this research, or any survey connected to it. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please call Patreza D. Newton at or Dr. Julie Berndt at

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are deciding whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form, should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature Date

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

(This line should not appear on forms that will be given to persons consenting for themselves.)

Signature of Witness (when appropriate)

APPENDIX B: PASTORS AND LEADERS

Demographics For Pastors and Leaders

01. Name of Respondent _____

02. Gender: Please mark one with an X

a. Male	
b. Female	
c. Other	
d. Not prefer to mention	

03. Age group: Please mark one with an X

a. 18–34 years	
b. 35–55 years	
c. 56–90 years	

04. Ethnicity: Please mark one with an X

a. Caucasian	
b. African American	
c. Asian	
d. Hispanic	
e. Other	

05. Do you believe online ministry is biblical? If so, why? If not, why?

06. What is your opinion on “Should the Church produce a hybrid model of church for the new normal”?

07. Do you feel that online ministry has had a positive or negative impact? How so?

08. Please select your category

a. Pastor	
b. Church Leader	

Pastor and Leader Church Questionnaire

01. Name of the church you attached currently:

02. Your experience as a pastor or a leader (Please mark one with an X)

a. Less than five years	
b. 5–10 years	
c. 10–20 years	
d. 20–30 years	
e. More than 30 years	

03. What are the digital platforms that you are using the most (Please mark one with an X)

a. Website	
b. Online streaming	
c. YouTube channel	
d. Facebook page	
e. WhatsApp group	
f. Other (Please mention)	

Kindly check the correct box according to your experience and opinions

<i>Question</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
04. I observed a significant decrease in the number of congregants after the pandemic					
05. Most of our congregants like to participate in the physical building of church worship					
06. It is essential for people to attend church physically since it does not feel the same compared to virtual sessions.					
07. Our facilities are not sufficient to start a virtual/ digital church					

08. Maintaining the church's standards is difficult without congregants' physical participation.					
09. Currently, we are sending all church updates related to congregants through the digital method.					
10. I observe that many people prefer hearing the word online rather than attending a physical building.					
11. Virtual ministry makes it easy to get donations, contributions, and sponsorships.					
12. I believe place (Physical/ Virtual) is unimportant to worship God and to learn Jesus' teachings.					
13. I believe online ministry/church is a method that could be used for those who need an alternative way of hearing the message of Jesus Christ					
14. I believe counseling can be done very efficiently online.					
15. I think there is a new preference in worship style due to employing digital ministry.					

16. How do you feel about your church's digital worship services and other online religious events?
17. What practical issues did you face while moving or incorporating a digital platform?
18. Did the usage of technology have a financial impact on your church during the pandemic? Please explain.
19. How did the digital method affect the different departments within the ministry?
20. Do you believe digital worship is here to stay or a way of the future? If so, what are your plans regarding this change? If not, please explain why not?

APPENDIX C: CHURCH CONGREGANTS

For Congregants

1. Name of respondent: _____
2. Church: _____
3. Gender: Please mark one with an X

1. Male	
2. Female	
3. Other	
4. Not prefer to mention	

4. Age: Please mark one with an X

5. 18–35 years	
6. 35–55 years	
7. 55–90 years	

5. Ethnicity: Please mark one with an X

8. Caucasian	
9. African American	
10. Asian	
11. Hispanic	
12. Other	

6. How often have you attended church recently? (Please mark one with an X)

a. Often	
b. Sometimes	
c. Rarely	
d. Never	

7. How often did you attend church before Covid 19? (Please mark one with an X)

a. Often	
b. Sometimes	

c. Rarely	
d. Never	

8. How often did you attend church after Covid 19? (Please mark one with an X)

e. Often	
f. Sometimes	
g. Rarely	
h. Never	

9. Have you ever participated in virtual/online service? (Please mark one with an X)

i. Yes		
j. No		

10. Please mark the digital platforms you are using.

k. Facebook		
l. WhatsApp/ Viber		
m. Instagram		
n. YouTube		
o. Microsoft teams/ Zoom		
p. Other (Please mention)		

Kindly check the correct box according to your experience and opinions

<i>Question</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
11. I prefer to attend church because I feel relaxed and blessed.					
12. I prefer to attend church because I get to meet my friends and neighbors.					
13. It is easy to engage in charity work when attending physically.					
14. I feel more comfortable using online worship services than attending physically.					

15.It is easy for me to attend online since it takes less time					
16.I prefer to get church updates through social media.					
17.I like to get religious and bible quotes and motivational quotes through social media or the church website.					
18.It is easy for me to donate money online.					
19.I believe place (Physical/ Virtual) is not essential to practicing my worship of God and learning about Jesus' teachings and worship.					

20.What is your overall opinion on attending a digital church?

21. How do you feel about your church's digital worship services and other online religious events?

22. What is your most preferable method related to church services and events?

q. I like 100 percent physical	
r. I like 100 percent digital/virtual	
s. I like the combination of both	

23. What is/ are the most challenging thing/s when physically attending church? Does the congregation attend a worship service or event conducted by the church?

24. What is/ are the most challenging thing/s when virtually participating in worship to the congregation or virtual event conducted by the church?

APPENDIX D: FOR NON- CHURCH MEMBERS

For Non-Church Members

01. Name of respondent: _____

02. Gender: Please mark one with an X

a. Male	
b. Female	
c. Other	
d. Not prefer to mention	

03. Age group: Please mark one with an X

a. 18–35 years	
b. 35–55 years	
c. 55–90 years	

04. Ethnicity: Please mark one with an X

a. Caucasian	
b. African American	
c. Asian	
d. Hispanic	
e. Other	

05. Why don't you prefer to attend the traditional church?

a. I do not have time	
b. I do not like a traditional church	
c. I am not religious	
d. I'm not particularly eager to visit crowded places	
e. It isn't easy for me to travel due to my health.	
f. I do not find people of my generation there.	
g. Other (Please mention)	

06. Which one of these platforms would cause you to listen to or participate in a church service?

a. Facebook	
b. WhatsApp/ Viber	
c. Instagram	
d. YouTube	
e. Microsoft teams/ Zoom	
f. Other (Please mention)	

Kindly check the correct box according to your experience and opinions

<i>Question</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
07. I don't have time to participate in the church due to other obligations					
08. I don't like to visit crowded places after the pandemic.					
09. I do not like to dress up for church.					
10. I do not like the traditional setting/procedure of the traditional church.					
11. I would attend church services if I had to attend online or physically attend (Hybrid).					
12. I would like to join or view the social media groups of the church if they are available.					
13. I would like to listen to worship services online if available.					
14. I would like to participate in the church services if they have online live streaming.					
15. I would like to be active or join the digital church If they deliver religious quotes, bible quotes, and motivational quotes through social media, text, email, or the church website.					

16. What is your opinion on physical gatherings related to traditional church?
17. Would you like a church that gives you short messages of encouragement during the week via text, TikTok, or other social media platforms?
18. Are you willing to participate in an online ministry conducted by the church? If not, please state the reason.
19. What is your opinion on the hybrid church concept, which allows you to worship online or in person (a combination of Virtual and Physical)?

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