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The Push and Pull of Presidential Priorities: The Lived Experiences of College Presidents

by
Brandon Huisman

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This dissertation explores the intricate interplay of presidential priorities in the evolving landscape of higher education, particularly within the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Over the past 15 years, college presidents have confronted various challenges, from budget constraints and racial tensions to employee engagement and the Great Resignation, all amid a backdrop of eroding public trust in higher education. While researchers have explored some aspects of presidential experiences, there is a gap in understanding the lived experiences of college presidents who are fathers. Through qualitative phenomenological research, this study engaged nine CCCU college presidents to answer the research question: “What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?” Three central themes emerged. First, the CCCU college presidents expressed a profound sense of calling to their roles, underlining their “no regrets” perspective. Second, the CCCU college presidents revealed the challenge of “mutual encroachment” as a substitute for traditional work/life balance. Lastly, the CCCU college presidents shared valuable insights into “discovered practices and strategies” that enable them to navigate the interplay between their presidential duties and family life. This research provides critical insights into the multifaceted lives of CCCU college presidents who are fathers, shedding light on their experiences, sacrifices, and innovative approaches in this demanding role.

Keywords: Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, college presidents, fatherhood

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

William McRaven, the military commander responsible for planning the attack that killed Osama Bin Laden, was named chancellor of the University of Texas system following his military service. After 3 years in this academic post, McRaven announced his resignation, stating that “the toughest job in the nation is one of an academic- or healthcare-institution president” (Thomason, 2018, para. 1). McRaven, a man hardened through active engagement in the armed forces, explained that leading an academic institution was more difficult than leading deadly military attacks and affirmed that being a college or university president is a demanding job.

The last 15 years have further complicated the college president position. Historically, the United States has never been more politically polarized, economically unequal, socially isolated, and culturally self-centered than today (Putnam & Garrett, 2020). While always difficult, the college presidency has become more complex and demanding due to shrinking enrollments that cause budget challenges, controversies surrounding race relations, employees’ discontent leading to the Great Resignation, and broad public skepticism of the value of higher education (Busteed, 2020; Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019; Elliot, 2021; Ellis, 2021). One glance at daily trade publications such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or *Inside Higher Ed.* brings a steady dose of this sentiment: another day, another crisis in higher education, with college presidents responsible for both facing and leading through these crises. While the presidency in higher education has always been accompanied by pressures, these pressures have become more acute both during and following the pandemic (Kelderman, 2022; Tatter, 2021).

Christian colleges and universities—and their presidents—are not exempt from these increasing challenges. If anything, the leadership of Christian college presidents and the challenges they face are magnified by the lens of the Christian community. The Christian college

presidency may be best described as a lifestyle and presidential duties are increased in Christian circles because the role is cloaked with the religious ideals of vocation, calling, purpose, and spiritual leadership (Brooks, 2011; Ryken, 2018; Sasse, 2019). Christian college presidents are expected to be men and women of strong moral character who can tell a compelling faith-filled story of the legacy of what the Lord has called the institution and its students to be (Elliot, 2021; Sasse, 2019; Webb, 2003). In the early 1990s, Judith Richards Hope, a member of the Harvard presidential search committee, reflected that hiring a new president means that “You need someone with enormous energy, a brilliant scholar, who had done undergraduate teaching, who gives wonderful testimony before Congress, who is a fabulous fundraiser...God is not good enough to be a university president” (Kantrowitz, 1991, para. 9).

Christian college presidents face distinct challenges within Christian universities. Constituents of Christian organizations carry expectations for how an organization should respond to unique historical moments (Brooks, 2014; Mullen, 2018). While all colleges face enrollment challenges posed by the birth dearth, race relations issues following the murder of George Floyd, and employee retention hardships from the Great Resignation, Christian colleges face these issues amid expectations presented by religious circles (College Board, 2020; Ellis, 2021; Pendell, 2022). Most Christian colleges are tuition-dependent and face enrollment declines at a time when families are more selective based on specific theological and cultural criteria, often highlighting the polarization within denominations and broader evangelicalism (Adam, 2020, 2021). These factors are combined with a shrinking enrollment pool and increased competition for students (Adams, 2021; Grawe, 2018). When enrollment targets are missed, fundraising most often fills the operating budget gap, but donors also view colleges through specific theological and cultural criteria and it is not uncommon for donors to express concerns

over theological and missional drift. These same issues also divide churches and split denominations (Rogers, 2020).

The financial model of a traditional, residential undergraduate education with an emphasis on face-to-face instruction is expensive to administer (Adam, 2021; Clark 2013; College Board, 2020). Yet, many families who value the face-to-face instruction model believe a debt free degree is the only path to financial freedom (Kelderman, 2022; Tatter, 2021). These beliefs add to a public sentiment of questioning the price and value of higher education while higher education institutions continue to increase the starting prices for tuition and fees and use discounting strategies that leave net tuition revenue relatively flat (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Dickeson, 2010). Overhead costs for higher education increase from added requirements and documentation to meet accreditations and regulatory environment standards for Title IV funding, which is federal government funding to offset the costs of higher education (Busteed, 2020; Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019). These collective disruptive realities and expectations exacerbate the situation at Christian colleges, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.

For many Christian college presidents, their work, family, and life balance includes a spouse, children, church, and social commitments (Armstrong, 2016). The recent collection of disruptive realities creates tension for Christian college presidents between work and home and leaves them feeling stretched in multiple directions (Brooks, 2014; Ryken, 2018; Sasse, 2019). College presidents are pulled by their role as president, spouse, parent, child, church member, and citizen (Currie et al., 2019). Often, the role of the president turns into a lifestyle that impacts their personal and professional commitments. For some Christian college presidents, the lifestyle aligns with their stage of life and commitments outside of the office, while other Christian college presidents experience the push and pull of presidential priorities differently.

The profile of an average college president is a White male, 60 years old, with 6 years of experience (American Council on Education, 2023; Council of Independent Colleges, 2018). There is a gap in the research focused specifically on the presidential lifestyle for men who are fathers and serve as president at Christian colleges and universities, particularly the 185 member institutions of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), which were the focus of this study (Armstrong, 2016; Brooks, 2014; CCCU, 2022). Further, while limited research has been conducted on the experience of males who serve as president (Armstrong, 2016), the lived experience of CCCU presidents who are fathers has not been studied amid the societal context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unique set of cultural circumstances that followed.

Statement of the Problem

Research on the substantial expectations and challenges faced by Christian college presidents is limited. In the current landscape of Christian higher education, the position of president is becoming increasingly challenging. Yet, outside of the office, college presidents juggle home commitments alongside the lifestyle of serving as a Christian college president. At Christian colleges, male presidents are often husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and friends. Female presidents are often wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends. Each of these titles bears distinct responsibilities and expectations within Christian communities and greater society. To further explore the pressures of the college presidency in CCCU schools, I focused specifically on the lived experience of fathers who are CCCU college presidents.

To understand the context for the expectations and responsibilities currently being navigated by the position of president, this chapter explores the budget challenges, race relations challenges, employee engagement issues, and the Great Resignation, and the negative public perception of higher education over the last 15 years in higher education.

Budget Challenges

After the Great Recession of 2008, Generation X and millennial families had fewer children than their older Baby Boomer counterparts (Grawe, 2018). Higher education was built over time to meet a growing population and colleges had the luxury of growth in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Thelin, 2019). Economists predicted a birth dearth shortly after the Great Recession, signaling too many unfilled beds and classroom seats on college campuses and a decrease in students to fill those beds and seats. The downward enrollment trend was predicted to begin in the Midwest and the Northeast and it was also predicted to be felt the most strongly among colleges and universities in the Midwest and the Northeast (College Board, 2020; Grawe, 2018). Enrollment was predicted to fall precipitously in 2026 but it fell well before 2026 in the Midwest and the Northeast (Grawe, 2018). This shrinking enrollment pool has created intense competition and discounting at schools to attract students and 861 colleges and 9,499 campuses have shut down since 2004 (Barshay, 2022). Further, the overall college enrollment rate for 18-24 year-olds decreased from 41% in 2010 to 38% in 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). This decrease in demand for higher education has presented particularly acute budget challenges at tuition-dependent schools, which comprise the majority of Christian colleges. Ultimately, enrollment challenges equate to revenue challenges for tuition-dependent colleges and universities, which then challenge schools to meet operational budgets that are often built on a specific population of tuition-paying students.

Budget challenges come into focus on institutions' balance sheets, which look different today at tuition-dependent schools than in the past. The accreditation and regulatory environment in higher education continue to require more human resource investments to produce the necessary documentation to meet regional accreditation standards and Title IV funding

requirements through the federal government (Busteed, 2020; Charmorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019). Today, schools are increasingly dependent on fundraising to meet operational budgets because students' tuition alone does not balance the budget (Elliot, 2021; Forhan, 2010). Schools also face escalating overhead costs including food, energy, insurance, and other inflation-related costs.

There are additional reasons for increased costs in higher education. The pursuit of excellence and mission at any cost increases the price of administering higher education (Bowen, 1981). Higher education's employment model of highly trained faculty have the closest parallels to other expensive services of physicians, dentists, and legal services, where prices have also experienced similar growth (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Bowen, 1980). College leaders often address declining enrollment with academic prioritization, a designed process that strategically removes enrollment pressures on operating budgets and decreases overall expenditures (Dickeson, 2010). Resources move from one program to another based on each program's future value, and poor-performing programs must be eliminated after all programs are assessed simultaneously (Busteed, 2020; Dickeson, 2010). The process is often led by the college president, who bears responsibility for the outcome and must lead through the pressures of shifting and ending programs that are held in high regard by those most involved and impacted. Presidents must balance the pursuit of excellence with the escalating labor costs of the service model of higher education, which relies on highly trained faculty to deliver the educational product (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Bowen, 1980).

Within the context of the CCCU, schools have cut over 100 academic programs and areas of study such as language, humanities, ministry, and education, have been affected the most (Adams, 2020). While schools sunset programs that are not sufficiently producing revenue, the

ongoing cuts signal uncertainty for faculty, staff, students, and external constituents (Forhan, 2010; Hayes, 2013). These budgetary challenges, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, created a volatile environment for higher education, and then race relations came into focus in the summer of 2020 following a series of tragedies across the United States.

Race Relations

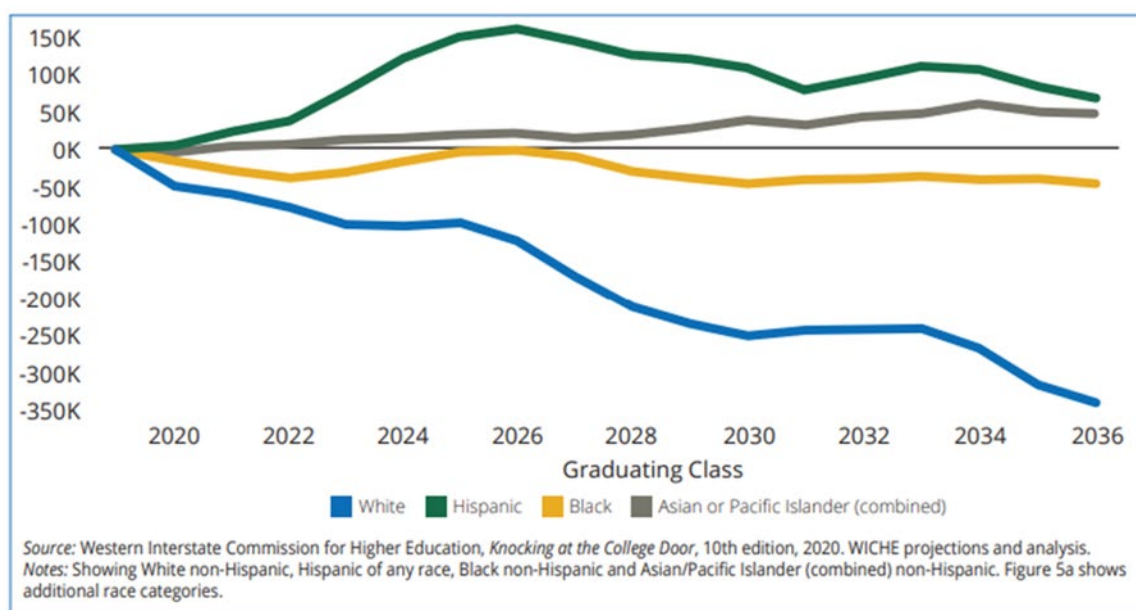
Race in America, precisely diversity on college campuses, joins the factors of shifting demographics and adds to the list of critical conversations and initiatives, which need to be addressed by college presidents. The CCCU (2020) institutions have increased student populations from diverse backgrounds, and most campuses have double-digit diversity, where over 10% of the student body includes students of color. However, these schools have struggled to create inclusive environments that honor the diversity God has created (Longman, 2017). The experiences of diverse learners on CCCU college campuses has not always been positive and there is a continued need for primarily White institutions to understand the racial identities of minority groups, and work toward justice and reconciliation in Christian higher education. The CCCU hosts conferences, has a multi-ethnic leadership development program, and offers resource sharing among colleges to address this need and CCCU college presidents must understand and address diversity on their college campuses.

Nationally, declines in college-aged students are not uniform across all groups. In fact, a projected half-million student decrease can be almost completely attributed to America's White student population (Grawe, 2018). Hispanic and Asian populations are anticipated to grow steadily over the next decade. This shift in diversity on college campuses is something to celebrate, while also being a change that college presidents need to navigate well. College campuses promote the opportunity for students to experience the ideal of learning in a diverse,

welcoming learning community (Longman, 2017). Race and ethnicity are tied to demographic shifts within the United States and colleges have worked hard at diversity initiatives to affect change in this critical area; however, these initiatives came into focus for students, faculty, alumni, and presidents in the shadow of the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 (McKenzie, 2020; Pendell, 2022). Figure 1 illustrates the projected change among United States public high school graduates compared to 2019 by race/ethnicity.

Figure 1

Projected Change in Number Among U.S. Public High School Graduates Compared to 2019 by Race/Ethnicity



After George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the summer of 2020, college presidents throughout the country issued statements of lament and commitment to supporting students of color and healing fractured constituencies (Chamberlain et al., 2021; McKenzie, 2020). The tragedy fell on a country already divided by the COVID-19 pandemic. Fatigued by pandemic mitigation measures, college students, alumni, and employees were now

enraged by racial injustice. Constituents who were also tired of the political positioning for the 2020 election were further unnerved by the immense economic uncertainty from pandemic shutdowns (Ellis, 2021; Matson & Gibbon, 2020; McClure, 2021). While college presidents longed to promote a diverse, welcoming learning environment, they faced a racially charged situation.

The employees' experiences during these budget challenges and race relations challenges was mixed. Conversations around race relations and diversity were not new to higher education and have long been a point of emphasis, but this time, faculty, staff, and students looked to the president for support on issues of race relations and diversity on their college campuses (McClure, 2021; Pendell, 2022). Employees emerged from lockdown and social distancing and, in some cases, continued working from home. At the same time, other employees returned to the office with questions about their institution's stance on race relations and renewed interest in diversity initiatives: a collection of difficult life circumstances seemed to cascade to college campuses, and faculty and staff wondered who cared about them and whether those leaders aligned with their deeply held beliefs on critical cultural issues (McClure, 2021; Pendell, 2022).

Protests throughout cities and college campuses ensued in the United States and across the world. Meanwhile, employees started to think deeply about what they wanted in their workplaces as they emerged from the pandemic with varied priorities informed by current events. Faculty and staff valued institutional alignment on deeply held beliefs and cultural issues and knew that if their current school was not aligned, the marketplace was such that other opportunities were possible (McClure, 2021; Schroeder, 2021; Tatter, 2021; Thomason, 2018). Many employees remained in higher education, while others took the option to pursue other opportunities. College presidents had yet another scenario to lead well: the Great Resignation.

Employee Discontent and the Great Resignation

The Great Resignation, a new term prompted by workers' response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, provided new opportunities for employees to consider the trajectory of their lives (Schroeder, 2021). During the summer of 2021, nearly 50% of U.S. employees were actively looking for a new job, compared to 20% of U.S. employees actively looking for a job in 2019 (Mosley, 2021; Pendell, 2022). Presidents worked to articulate their way through a series of budget woes and race relations debates as employees in higher education entered an employment reshuffle (Schroeder, 2021). In nearly every sector of the economy, leaders were challenged as employees quit or opted out at record levels (McClure, 2021; Telford & Gregg, 2021).

Higher education had long been insulated from the harshest impacts of economic downturns and benefited from employee loyalty, but the Great Resignation challenged this norm (Horowitz & Parker, 2022; McClure, 2021; Pendell, 2022). College presidents no longer had the luxury of resilient employees who stayed because of institutional loyalty. This movement created new demand for the higher education workforce (Telford & Gregg, 2021). Key employees opted out, and portions of college campuses were halted or were forced to slow down or rely on existing employees. Campus leaders reckoned with the cost of replacing key employees in a tight labor market, estimated to be 50% to 200% of an employee's annual salary (Society of Human Resource Management, 2022; Zahneis, 2022). The additional monetary costs and labor market hiring challenges only highlighted budget challenges and race relations woes and forced college presidents to shift from big picture strategy to operational execution. Now, presidents had to ensure adequate employees to cut the grass and build online classes. This practical shift seemed logical, but the impact of the Great Resignation on higher education came when higher education was already mired with negative public perception.

Negative Public Perception of Higher Education

National media, students, parents, and politicians watched college presidents juggle budgetary challenges, academic prioritization, the COVID-19 pandemic, controversies surrounding race relations, and the Great Resignation; this combination, along with the existing rising costs of tuition and high levels of student debt, reinforced and amplified a negative public perception of higher education (Adams, 2020; Busted, 2020; Kelderman, 2022; Paquette, 2021; New America, 2022). In fact, since 2020, the proportion of Americans who believe schools and universities positively impact the nation has declined 14 points (New America, 2022). A mismatch also seems to exist between what colleges offer, what employers expect in new employees, what families desire for their children, and what students want in their education (Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019).

Nationally, only half of Americans believe affordable, high-quality college education is possible (New America, 2022). While student debt reached all-time highs, legislators remain at odds regarding how it should be addressed (Agrawal & Marken, 2022; Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021). Today, more money is owed in student loan debt than on credit cards and auto loans in the United States (Paquette, 2021). Historically, higher education boasted about an assumed graduate income premium of nearly \$1,000,000 for students with a bachelor's degree compared to those without a college degree. Today, industry demand has shifted and more high school students are enticed by high workforce salaries immediately out of high school and forgo traditional college for shorter vocational education programs (Paquette, 2021).

Along with a supply and demand issue, a reputation problem is burgeoning for higher education. College presidents must care for the reputation of their college and their industry (McLaughlin, 1996). Nationally, the pandemic challenged societal norms and shared values, and

consensus on the purpose of higher education has further eroded. Questions proliferated as to which students should be served, and pundits inside and outside of higher education debated which programs should be offered, where the economic and societal value was, and whether higher education was creating more problems than it was solving (Agrawal & Marken, 2022; Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021). Prospective college students opt out of higher education and only half of those who enroll in higher education with the intent to earn a bachelor's degree attain the degree (Adams, 2021; McClellan, 2022). There is a gap between what the public expects from higher education and what higher education believes is crucial and how higher education currently functions. This gap has impacted the presidential priorities for their institution and the context in which they lead, causing presidents to focus on key areas of finances, mission, external relations, and campus culture.

Presidential Work/Family Balance

Within this higher education context, significant challenges exist for college presidents and must be addressed with clear strategies. The integration of work and home amid the challenges of higher education can create questions of priorities, balance, and health for college presidents. In senior leadership positions across sectors, work-family balance seems more an idea of the past than a realistic option for highly connected executives (Kantrowitz, 1991; Weiss Sorbeck, 2021; Zahneis, 2022). The expectations of connectivity and demands of the role have taken a toll on mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health and are a cause of turnover among college presidents and senior staff across higher education (Zahneis, 2022).

Senior leadership pressure affects the presidents' families as well (Brooks, 2008; Kelderman, 2022). While some Christian college presidents are single, others are married with kids, which adds a layer of beauty and complexity to their leadership. For Christian college

presidents, family values along with the presumed importance of God, family, and a calling to serve as president can also lead to conflict (Lee, 1999; Morris & Blanton, 1994a). When one priority, responsibility, or commitment is overemphasized, it can result in workaholism for the sake of the kingdom and ministry burnout (Freeman & Thacker, 2020; Sanford, 1982).

The profile of an average college president is a White male, 60 years old, with 6 years of experience (American Council on Education, 2023; Council of Independent Colleges, 2018). These men are fathers, husbands, siblings, friends, and sons who balance their multiple roles inside and outside of the job. Each of these roles carries certain expectations within the Christian community and the United States, where there are specific social and cultural expectations for being a male, spouse, and father (Brooks, 2022; Ryken, 2018). When the expectations of the Christian communities and religious and denominational traditions are added, these definitions grow even more complicated.

Christian environments can present a challenging atmosphere for male college presidents. Men are struggling today, and questions of a healthy masculine identity are raised inside and outside of the church (Brooks, 2022; Cox, 2021; Reeves, 2022). These challenges are also seen in classrooms across the United States where male college enrollment has decreased seven times more than female enrollment, and throughout the course of their lives, men earn substantially less money than they did in 1979 (Reeves, 2022). One in five fathers does not reside with their children and three out of every four fatalities from drug overdoses and suicide are men who die of despair (Reeves, 2022). In most academic fields, girls perform better than boys and men appear to be less ambitious (Brooks, 2022; Reeves, 2022). Thirty years ago, 55% of men said they had at least six close friends. Today, while 27% say they have more than six, 15% say they do not have any close friends (Cox, 2021). Men are struggling with wide-ranging issues of

healthy masculine identity. Naturally, men in leadership positions such as college presidents could step into this void of healthy masculinity, but the pressure of the current environment presents a unique environment to consider this opportunity.

Not all men are fathers, but those who do have children live in a unique context as they consider their own masculine identity and, as fathers, are responsible to shape the next generation of men. The family is the primary socialization environment for children and the place where gender roles are defined and each role was challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic (Schulz, 2021). The nuclear family unit is made up of three distinct parties: mother, father, and child or children (Manke et al., 1994). During the pandemic, the pressure on each party increased. Parents experienced higher levels of psychological distress while social supports were limited (Roos, et al., 2021). Unstructured time for children increased dramatically, as school was either canceled or parents were asked to teach from home while often simultaneously working from home. This scenario resulted in lower quality parenting and poor educational outcomes for children during the pandemic, and parental or caregiver depression was consistently linked to disruptions between parents and children (Schulz, 2021). Families faced time constraints, resource challenges, and high levels of stress during the pandemic.

In the family unit, mothers and fathers both increased their levels of housework and childcare responsibilities during the pandemic (Carlson et al., 2022). Thirty-eight percent of fathers reported they shared housework equally with their spouses prior to the pandemic, compared with 53% during the pandemic. Fathers perceived they participated in a greater percentage of household work and the percentage of couples in which mothers performed most of the housework decreased by 18%. Across practically every household duty evaluated, shifts away from traditional domestic arrangements and toward more equitable sharing were reported.

And yet, even though shifts toward egalitarian divisions of housework and childcare were documented during the pandemic, both fathers and mothers increased their activity levels, meaning neither parent saw a reduction in time or responsibilities (Carlson et al., 2022). Fathers and mothers added additional parenting obligations to their growing list of expectations. For higher education presidents who are fathers, particularly those with school-aged children, this was yet another addition to their schedule that brought the pressure of another presidential priority, namely the responsibilities in the home of attending to the house and raising children. Thus, the push and pull of work/family balance shifted yet again.

The presidency in higher education has always been accompanied by pressure, but this pressure has become more acute during and following the pandemic (Kelderman, 2022; Tatter, 2021). College presidents must navigate the denominational and religious expectations, along with the leadership responsibilities, within a Christian community. Ultimately, presidents feel the push and pull of family roles, vocational hopes, and institutional aspirations versus prosaic job responsibilities, all of which can lead to burnout and presidential transitions.

Presidential Transitions

College presidents must balance budgets, articulate a vision of racial and ethnic diversity, respond to growing employee discontent, and address a negative public perception of higher education. Leadership transitions have become the norm and no one so much as offers a second glance at the latest news about the financial woes of higher education, the latest on-campus scandal, or whether a prominent member of a university aligns with the proper cultural perspective on the hot issue of the day (Busteed, 2020, Elliot, 2021; Stoner, 2017). As society and constituents look for someone to take responsibility, the college president becomes the focal point of these crises, causing many leadership transitions.

Three in four Americans report they experience burnout at least some of the time and nearly 30% report they feel burned out very often or always (Robison, 2022). As the pressure mounts, college presidents burn out, presidential tenure drops, and others are called to the college presidency (Paquette, 2021). Rather than leaving at the onset of the pandemic, many presidents delayed retirement or resignation. In 2021, there were 107 resignations by college presidents compared to 80 in 2020 and 123 in 2019—and these numbers do not include those forced to resign or those who left due to health concerns or controversy (Kelderman, 2022). Presidents who chose to stay or just began their tenure faced a growing list of demands and boards of trustees with little patience for long-term results (Barton, 2019; Gagliardi, 2017; Kelderman, 2022).

While presidential search factors may change, little has changed in those who fill the president's office. In 2016, the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), the average president was a White male, just over 61 years old, with an earned doctoral degree, and had served in the presidency for over 6 years. In 2009, the average college president was similar: a married White, male, slightly younger at 59 years old (CIC, 2023). In 2022, the average president aged to 60 years old with 5.9 years of experience, 67% are male, and 72% are White (American Council on Education, 2023). These presidents are expected to devote significant time to fundraising, budgeting, strategic planning, and enrollment, which are the four most time-consuming responsibilities of independent college presidents (CIC, 2023; Song & Hartley, 2012). These functions are also of particular interest to boards of trustees and are tied directly to the institution's ability to fulfill its mission, complete goals, and carry out its strategic plan. Thirty years ago, Birnbaum (1988) identified that presidential searches required colleges to discover and understand their organizational goals and identify the right person to lead toward them. This

strategic discovery process remains, but the strategies and search factors have shifted, which has changed who is defined as the right person, no matter their background.

Unique Presidential Environment at Christian Colleges and Universities

Christian college presidents face the same set of pressures as their secular counterparts while also experiencing challenges due to serving in a faith-based community. While college presidents face budget challenges, college presidents at Christian colleges are often affiliated with shrinking denominations and declining denominational budget allocations for higher education (Davignon et al., 2013). All college presidents face the birth dearth, although the astonishing 71% growth at Christian colleges in the beginning of the 21st century (compared to an average of 13% at public four-year institutions) makes the current enrollment contraction particularly drastic and painful (Marsden, 2009). Every college president faces difficult race relations; however, Christian college presidents articulate deeply held religious beliefs, such as the axiom that all people are created in the image of God. Denominational relationships are weakening with historically sponsored schools at a time when theological alignment on key contemporary issues is highlighted (Burtchaell, 1998).

Further, every college president is facing the Great Resignation, but college presidents at Christian colleges have been uniquely affected by this phenomenon, as 11 CCCU presidents resigned or retired in 2019 and 14 presidents resigned or retired in 2020 from a possible 185 schools (14% either resigning or retiring; Adams, 2021). While all college presidents face shifting parental expectations, college presidents at Christian colleges often find themselves in the middle of the familial roles defined by the church and religious circles as the capstone to the covenant Christian education for future leaders of the church and of society (Elliot, 2021; Sasse, 2019; Webb, 2003). All college presidents experience the negative public perception of higher

education, yet college presidents at Christian colleges add a thick religious layer to the role (Beebe, 2018; Mullen, 2018; Parrot, 2018; Ryken, 2018).

Christian college presidents encounter a unique set of expectations, either real or perceived, from the faith community. Outside of the office, college presidents juggle home commitments alongside the lifestyle of serving as a Christian college president. These men are also sons, brothers, and friends of other Christians; they are husbands and fathers, and these roles each carry unique expectations in the United States and the Christian community.

Purpose of the Study

Christian college presidents must navigate their positions amid challenging higher education landscapes, evolving expectations for the role of president, CCCU institutions' religious values, and their personal values. This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers using Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind, which explains the dilemma derived from a conflict between two or more conflicting messages. Given options A or B, it does not matter which choice is made because either choice will be the wrong one (Currie et al., 2019).

Understanding the lived experience of presidents who are fathers has the potential to impact presidential hiring for all parties involved. A robust understanding of the current heightened demands of the presidential role at Christian colleges and universities, and the intersection of this role with the president's personal commitment to his or her family, will assist in providing a framework for future presidential leadership transitions in the CCCU. Due to the relevance and research gap, this lived experience is the focus of this dissertation study: what are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers? I will explore whether presidents feel tension among their responsibilities, and if so, how they manage this tension and

what strategies they have in place to work through the tension. Specifically, I explored whether presidents feel conflicted about their commitments to their spouse, children, and work. Further, I explored if and how CCCU presidents believe their children and spouse experience the impact of their office. This research is particularly timely as turnover rates within the CCCU show presidential hiring needs will continue and perhaps accelerate (Adams, 2020, 2021). The findings from this dissertation may enlighten schools regarding how they might attract, support, and retain college presidents.

Significance of the Study

A significant amount of literature exists on the experience of female presidents (Cox, 2014; Jackson, 2019; Quinlan, 2012; Zell, 2017). The career path of college presidents has also been robustly researched (Campbell et al., 2010; Green, 1983; Song & Hartley, 2012). Little research has been conducted on the lived experience of male presidents who are fathers (Armstrong, 2016; Cioffi, 2018; Gagliardi, 2017; Tatter, 2021). Further, there is a dichotomy of values within the presidency for CCCU schools which promote the idea of faith, family, and vocation or calling that may make balancing these roles untenable for college presidents (Clark, 2013; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Parker & Patten, 2013; Sanaghan et al., 2008).

This study may help future presidential candidates as well as their spouses, boards of trustees, and the CCCU understand the unique responsibilities of a Christian college president in today's world. Further, the research may provide insights to colleges and universities looking to attract, support, and retain strong presidential candidates given the growing list of demands for this difficult position. Finally, I hoped to identify and produce practical takeaways for specific audiences considering a college presidency, including presidential candidates with kids, spouses of potential presidents, on-campus presidential search teams, boards of trustees, and CCCUs.

Definition of Terms

There are several terms used throughout the dissertation that I defined for the reader:

Academic Prioritization

A step-by-step process that strategically removes enrollment pressures on operating budgets and decreases overall expenditures (Dickeson, 2010).

American Council on Education

The American Council on Education (2017) conducts the American College President Study has long been the most thorough, in-depth, and often quoted source of information about the college presidency and career paths to higher education leadership. Since 1986, the study has been conducted approximately every 5 years.

Administrative Cabinet

A university's senior leadership team that reports to the president and focuses on the best interests of the institution and the people served (Bowles, 2022).

College President

The leader of an academy or learned organization (Barnhart, 1988).

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU, 2022) is global higher education association dedicated to advancing faith and intellect for the common good, including 185 Christian member institutions. The CCCU seeks to be the leading national voice for Christian higher education.

Council of Independent Colleges

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC, 2023) is a nonprofit association of independent colleges and universities, state-based councils, and higher education affiliates that

works to support university leadership, advance institutions, and enhance public understanding of independent higher education.

Great Resignation

An unprecedented churn in the U.S. labor market following the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by employees citing low pay, few opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected. The Great Resignation is also known as the Big Quit and the Great Reshuffle (Horowitz & Parker, 2022).

Job Satisfaction

Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1304).

Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions and limitations inherently exist in the research design of this dissertation. Understanding the lived experience of someone is challenging to accomplish in an hour-long interview. Many variables have the potential to impact the responses of the interviewees and their expressions of their experiences. Further, this research study included nine participants, which is not generalizable to the entirety of CCCU college presidents. The experiences of each college president interviewed is highly individualized and other potential influences on participant self-reported data may impact the interview responses. Further, in qualitative research, the nature of the inquiry implies the researcher as the research instrument making meaning of the findings, identifying themes, and synthesizing what was shared.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The last 15 years have further complicated the position of a college president. This chapter explored the budget challenges, race relations challenges, employee engagement issues

and the Great Resignation, and the negative public perception of higher education over the last 15 years in higher education. Christian colleges and universities and their presidents are not exempt from these increasing challenges. If anything, the leadership of a Christian college president and the challenges they face are magnified by the lens of the Christian community. Research on the substantial set of expectations and challenges faced by Christian college presidents is limited. My research will focus specifically on the lived experience of fathers who are CCCU college presidents.

Chapter 2 of this study reviews the existing literature of college presidents including additional context on the history of the American college presidency as well as common presidential priorities. Next, the role of the presidency will be discussed specific to CCCU schools with particular attention to home engagement and the tension that may exist between the roles of president, husband, father, son, brother, and friend. Chapter 4 provides the methodology and theoretical framework that guide this study. Here, the research design, data analysis, and interview protocol are discussed. Chapter 4 documents the data from the interviews and subsequent analysis and findings, as well as the additional documents collected throughout the study. Finally, in Chapter 5, the findings will be analyzed according to the theoretical framework and pre-existing literature as well as a conclusion for the study and any implication found from the research, recommendations for specific audiences, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Serving as a college president is not for the faint of heart; a college president today is responsible for managing a complicated organization under rising demands from a variety of stakeholders (American Council on Education, 2017). College presidents must show leadership, exemplify the institution's values, and play a key role in fundraising initiatives. College presidents must interact with staff, faculty, students, boards, and other governing bodies and balance what they enjoy with what needs to be done. Although college presidents wear innumerable hats, many acting presidents list fundraising, community relations, budget management, and strategic planning as some of their top priorities, even though engaging with students, faculty, and the outside community give them the most satisfaction (American Council on Education, 2017; Birnbaum, 1988; Brooks, 2014; McLaughlin, 1996; Song & Hartley, 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation study was to explore the lived experience of presidents of institutions affiliated with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) who are also fathers. Thus, in this chapter, the CCCCU is provided as a necessary contextual foundation. A broader picture of the history of the college presidency and then the general factors navigated by presidents in the current higher education environment is reviewed. Then, the focus narrows to the priorities, roles, expectations, and home engagement specific to presidents at tuition-dependent, private, CCCCU schools and the prevalence of presidential burnout. Finally, the chapter concludes with the conceptual framework of this research study.

Council of Christian Colleges and Universities

Participants of this study are college presidents serving at member institutions of the CCCCU. This context is appropriate as a beginning point, as it will further inform the nature and

application of the research conducted. All CCCU (2022) member schools adhere to core standards: member schools must be accredited schools; have a Christian mission that is board-approved and Christ-centered; promote biblical truth, Christian formation, and gospel witness; operate with financial integrity; and hire professing Christians to serve as full-time faculty and administrators. The 185 members of the CCCU are unique, following a set of tenets consistent with a historic, orthodox, Christian perspective. These schools have a distinct purpose, mission, organization, and culture. Success at CCCU schools looks different than schools considered to be secular counterparts. The core standards provide a roadmap for this success, pointing CCCU institutions toward areas of focus and next steps. Although the CCCU is a subsection of higher education within which this research will be conducted, exploring the broader history and evolution of the American college presidency is a necessary foundation for understanding the professional “lifestyle” responsibilities of the participants in this dissertation study.

History of the American College Presidency

The roles and responsibilities of college presidents have been shaped by the systems, geographies, and unique contexts of the office. The title of president was first used in 1382 to refer to a person who served as a chief officer or as someone who presided (Barnhart, 1988). In 1448, the term *president* was introduced as a term to refer to the head of a college, and by 1660 it was used to refer to the leader of an academy or learned organization. Henry Dunster was the first American to be appointed as a college president at Harvard College in 1640 (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). Later, the term *chancellor* was used with a meaning similar to the president and signified the office of chief executive of a college or university (Ferrari, 1970; Prator, 1963).

Presidents have always carried a broad range of roles and responsibilities as the position has evolved throughout history (Thelin, 2018). In colonial and post-revolution America,

presidents were often drawn from the clergy and served as chaplains, librarians, admissions officers, registrars, and sometimes groundskeepers (Brubacker & Rudy, 2004). As the college industry and college campuses expanded, so did the president role. In 1780, there were nine colleges in the United States, in 1861 there were 182, and by the mid-19th century, there were nearly 1,000 colleges (Ferrari, 1970; Prator, 1963). The growth in colleges led to responsibilities of presidents shifting. Presidents were expected to form high moral character and develop good manners, discipline, and character in young people (Armstrong, 2016). The new responsibilities brought presidents from other backgrounds, which included clergy and faculty as presidential candidates.

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 marked the first time the federal government invested in higher education and led to the establishment and growth of educational institutions, graduate and professional programs, and research. The foundation of Johns Hopkins University, the University of Chicago, and several more schools across the United States exemplified the influence of the German university on the American higher education system where research and the pursuit of knowledge were valued above religious training for clergy and teachers (Ferrari, 1970). This model shifted the academy's focus from religious to secular and created a more complex academic organization for the president to manage. The Morrill Acts also turned a classical curriculum into a utilitarian curriculum that focused on specific vocational outcomes because the philosophy of education shifted from a product for the few to one focused on the masses, another shift that those in the presidential role needed to navigate (Ferrari, 1970).

At the beginning of the 20th century, World War I brought a period of industrialization, which changed the landscape of colleges and universities and the path to the college presidency (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008; Shapiro, 1998). Now businesspeople, lawyers, and politicians began

to hold presidential offices. Following World War I, the responsibilities of presidents increased significantly, given the increased structure built into higher education to manage student demand and increasingly complex organizations. After World War II, there were more than 1,900 colleges in the United States and business-driven models were combined with European university models to create the modern American university, which valued business management practices as opposed to the classic German model of education (Thelin, 2018). Increasingly, college presidents worked closely with a board of trustees to fulfill the mission of the college and the authority of the trustees was funneled through the office of the president to the campus, giving American college presidents exceptional levels of responsibility and influence compared to European counterparts.

Today, over 19 million college students are served by over 4,000 institutions of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Presidents now have little direct academic responsibility but carry high administrative responsibility and usually focus on the bottom line, enrollment, strategic planning, and fundraising (Rile, 2001; Song & Hartley, 2012). College governance has also grown in complexity as funding sources have evolved. Higher education accreditation has remained regionally privatized and self-governed; however, state and federal funding provides resources for colleges and universities, which often requires additional reporting to ensure proper management (Archibald & Feldman, 2014; Barr & McClellan, 2011). The role of the college president continues to become more and more complex, leading to several primary factors that affect the college presidency today.

The recent past has further complicated the position of a college president (Busteed, 2020; Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019; Elliot, 2021). The presidency has become more complex and demanding due to budget challenges, controversies surrounding race relations in

the United States, broad employee disengagement leading to the Great Resignation, and public skepticism of the value of higher education. College presidents are responsible for facing and leading through these situations. While the presidency in higher education has always been accompanied by pressure, this pressure has become more acute both during and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Kelderman, 2022; Tatter, 2021). Within this context, presidents must ruthlessly focus their time and attention on the most effective presidential priorities.

Presidential Priorities

Financial

Two primary revenue drivers of tuition-dependent schools are tuition and fundraising (Forhan, 2010). Most of the institutions' revenue typically consists of student tuition and fees (Forhan, 2010; Grawe, 2018; Paquette, 2021). Of the remaining top line revenue needed, the majority is fundraising, with this stream of funding growing over time. Relatedly, according to Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) presidents, enrollment management, budget and financial administration, and fundraising are their three most time-consuming responsibilities (Song & Hartley, 2012). College presidents who served for at least 10 years selected 16 essential work duties that required more time in 2007 than in 1997, demonstrating the role's continued complexity (American Council on Education, 2007). For instance, when a college begins a capital campaign, consultants recommend that presidents invest 50-75% of their calendar for fundraising activity (Song & Hartley, 2012). Add the time spent fundraising to an already significant amount of time presidents must devote to work responsibilities and the numbers begin to look more like a lifestyle than a job.

Because of tuition dependence, the work of enrollment, specifically tuition revenue, is a primary presidential priority—particularly in the face of the birth dearth (Grawe, 2018).

Christian college presidents vary in their day-to-day involvement in the enrollment process (Brooks, 2011). Some welcome each visiting group to campus and others host off-campus events. Some even seek to greet each student as they arrive on campus. At tuition-dependent schools, operational budgets are built on enrollment forecasts calculated by multiplying the net tuition revenue per student and the projected number of incoming students, current students who will retain, and students who will graduate or leave campus for other reasons (Song & Hartley, 2012). In recent years, many CCCU schools have increased the number of graduate and online offerings to compensate for traditional student enrollment revenue deficits (Adam, 2020). Some of these shifts have resulted from academic prioritization and moving personnel toward projected growth areas (College Board, 2020; Dickeson, 2010; Grawe, 2018). Regardless of the academic shifts, CCCU presidents must keep a laser focus on mission.

Missional

One primary responsibility of CCCU presidents is to articulate how faith and truth can and should be pursued together to prepare young people to lead and serve as image-bearers (Mullen, 2018). This articulation is often supported by the vision, mission, and strategic plan of the university. Accountability is built in both by the on-campus community of faculty, staff, and students as well as the board of trustees. Often, the community in which the university resides also has a vested interest in the continued success of the university and promotes the economic flourishing of the region (Brooks, 2014). A vision statement provides an opportunity for presidents to articulate to what the college aspires. In the case of CCCU schools, a vision statement allows presidents to discern and articulate the collective vocational calling of how the Lord will use institutions in a specific time and place (Mullen, 2018; Ryken, 2018). A vision statement speaks to why the college exists.

The mission of institutions is more specific and speaks less about why colleges exist and more to what the college does and how it accomplishes the vision (Robinson, 2018; Ryken, 2018). The strategic plan offers a contextualized playbook to fulfill the mission and vision statement, with broad internal and external constituent feedback. The strategic plan defines which initiatives the university will execute to fulfill the vision and mission.

One frequent critique of faith-based schools is mission drift, the idea that a college is no longer fulfilling the original mission (Brooks, 2014). Presidents wrestle with mission drift allegations and often schools face the tension of maintaining the school's mission with the heritage and beliefs of the supporting denomination (Ryken, 2018; Sasse, 2019; Webb, 2007). Various stakeholders interpret the mission differently and view cultural issues through their favored interpretation and often, faculty and denominational leaders do not align on critical issues causing controversy within the denomination and on-campus (Shimron, 2022). Recently, issues of sexuality have divided university boards, faculty, and denominations. It is important that CCCU presidents articulate their institution's mission and champion their university's vision to maintain its ethos while remaining faithful to sustaining organizational purpose and distinct value to students, donors, policymakers, and the broader community.

External Relations

To achieve financial and missional success, college presidents must also expand their focus to include external relations. The president is the living logo of the university (McLaughlin, 1996). As such, the lifestyle of CCCU presidents can feel as though they are always on display. Many presidents live on campus in a property owned by the college and host gatherings of constituents within their home. Externally, presidents need to prove the missional expectations of the role and articulate the vision to external audiences in winsome ways that will

win over donors and prospective student families and will work with policymakers to voice the university's priorities (Brooks, 2018; Song & Hartley, 2012). Many college presidents serve on local, regional, or national boards to develop mutually beneficial relationships, cultivate corporate donors, and seek to attain foundation grants. Some of these boards and associations include the CCCU, CIC, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), the Christian College Consortium (CCC), and other faith-based organizations, which are either directly or tangentially related to the university (Brooks, 2018).

In times of crisis, presidents need to articulate statements on behalf of the university, which satisfy what an average person would expect the college to say in the face of the crisis. Here, the president acts as the spokesperson for the university, and the president's words are perceived as the words of the institution: when the president speaks, the institution speaks (Matson & Gibbon, 2020; McLaughlin, 1996). Alternatively, when the institution is asked for public comment, often the expectation is that the president will speak in an honest manner that recognizes the situation, offers empathy and understanding, reminds listeners of the vision, provides clarity in the following steps if they are known, or commits to additional communication if they do not know.

At CCCU schools, a missional and faith aspect is often assumed. Times of crisis represent opportunities for campus communities to prove how they are fulfilling the mission (Ryken, 2018; Sasse, 2019; Song & Hartley, 2012). The CCCU college presidents face pressure on whether to issue statements on cultural matters, political positions, denominational decisions, economic policy, and community initiatives. If a statement is not issued, a president may need to determine whether they will sign on to a new initiative or declaration, positioning their college in a particular way given what they know of their external audiences (Stoner, 2017; Tatter, 2021;

Thomason, 2018). Along with the priorities of finances, a focus on mission, and external relations, particularly in this social and economic context, college presidents now need to ensure that the culture of their institution is strong.

Campus Culture

At CCCU schools, presidents must find balance between culture and strategy (Adam, 2020; Davignon et al., 2013). Culture is the compilation of an organization's shared beliefs supported by the strategy and structure (Society Human Resource Management, 2021). Strategy is how an organization competes to fulfill its mission (Porter, 1987). A healthy culture is a competitive advantage, but an unhealthy culture can result in a no-confidence vote from faculty for the president or the board and creates organizational gridlock (Shimron, 2021). Presidents steward their presence as cultural levers in time investments on and off campus (Adam, 2020; Beebe, 2018; McLaughlin, 1996). A healthy culture is critical to a healthy presidency.

Stewarding and moving campus culture forward involves change leadership (Kotter, 2012). Presidents must find the appropriate role and voice to move the right amount of change forward at the right time, given the university's unique culture. Sometimes change involves working with the people and shaping priorities that introduce creative initiatives to the industry; at other times, the operations of the day-to-day responsibilities are all-consuming. This was particularly true during the COVID-19 pandemic and, in many cases, led to burnout during a season that required daily innovation and change leadership (Agrawal & Marken, 2022; Kotter, 2012; Yoder, 2019).

Govindarajan (2016) suggested that leaders prioritize innovation with a three-box solution. In box one, presidents manage the core academic enterprise with peak profitability. Box two considers past ideas and requires leadership teams to abandon ideas, practices, and attitudes

that may inhibit innovation. Stopping programs and initiatives is particularly difficult in higher education, given the specific staff and faculty training needed (Yoder, 2019). Box three homes in on the future to take new ideas or minimum viable academic offerings, centers, or initiatives and converts these breakthrough ideas into new programs, centers, or businesses that will become the box one solutions of the future. Change leadership on a college campus requires intentional and frequent communication and the right people in the proper corrections to lead change (Govindarajan, 2016; Kotter, 2012). Effectively leading change is one way a college president positively impacts culture.

A healthy culture and change management is brought about through a well-thought hiring process that ensures the missional alignment of new campus community members (Asplund et al., 2014; Bowles, 2022; Kantrowitz, 1991; Pierce, 2012). There are often differences between hiring faculty and staff in higher education. Faculty must have extensive educational training and credentials to teach in an academic program (Burtchaell, 1998; Webb, 2003). Staff fill more traditional roles such as marketing, human resources, and maintenance. During the hiring process, presidents have varying levels of involvement. Some presidents are involved in every faculty and administrative staff hired, while other presidents delegate these responsibilities to the appropriate senior leader or the human resources office. Presidents must determine their role in finding the right fit and training new employees to understand and steward a healthy, transferrable organizational culture.

Campus culture is also shaped by the college president's regular and intentional campus communication (Horowitz & Parker, 2022; Kantrowitz, 1991; McClure, 2021). Some presidents choose to complete this function through all-campus meetings or employee town hall gatherings. At CCCUs, chapels, welcoming celebrations for new students, and traditional academic

ceremonies of convocation and commencement are opportunities to inform and shape and define organizational culture with consistent communication from the president (Webb, 2003).

Homecoming, chapel, and commencement represent external facing events with student families, which provide critical cultural moments for presidents to communicate a clear vision.

The priorities of finances, mission, external relations, and culture inform where the college president spends his or her time, thought, and energy. These priorities create a focus for the work of leading a college. These priorities shape the overall role of the college president, including the role of the college president at private, Christian, tuition-dependent colleges and universities.

Role of the President at Private, Christian, Tuition-Dependent Institutions

Many Christian college presidents view their work as president as a vocational call from God which they have been divinely appointed to fulfill (Beebe, 2018; Mullen, 2018; Parrott, 2018; Ryken, 2018). The president discerns the call of the Lord on their life to serve in the vocation of college president and there is a responsibility to the Lord to follow his or her call in obedience along with a responsibility to steward the role of leadership for a particular time, place, and cultural context. Ryken described the call of a Christian leader: “There are prophetic, priestly, and royal dimensions to the work of every Christian who is called to lead” (2018, p. 115). Work then is motivated by the chance to live out a calling before the Lord and an integral part of the Christian identity of the president and the work itself is considered worship to God.

The Christian community has long discussed the idea of servant leadership, where a leader takes the posture of Jesus, and lowers themselves to serve those who, in regards to the organizational chart and societal norms, should serve them. Ryken (2018) posited that the more like Christ Christian college presidents become, the more effective they will be as college

presidents as they model the distinct biblical work as a prophet, priest, and king or queen.

According to Ryken, this is the work of the spirit in the heart of a leader. From the posture of servant leadership, the earthly limits of an effective or ineffective president are transcended, and the leader becomes an agent of redemption to the world.

The Christian college presidency may be best described as a lifestyle. The role is not merely a position or job—it is a lifestyle that comes with expectations of the religious ideals of vocation, calling, purpose, and spiritual leadership (Brooks, 2011; Ryken, 2018; Sasse, 2019). Along with the broadly shared challenges all leaders face, Christian college leaders carry different expectations as spiritual leaders in a faith community. Presidents at Christian colleges must be men and women of strong moral character who can tell a compelling faith-filled story of the legacy to which the Lord has called the institution to be faithful—producing fruit for the kingdom, bearing the light of Christ, and serving as salt and light to the world (Elliot, 2021; Sasse, 2019; Webb, 2003). The appointment as president signals not only the senior administrative leader on the college campus formally accountable to the board of trustees but also extends the position as being informally accountable to students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, community members, and in many cases, a denomination. Parrott (2018) added to Ryken's understanding of the need to develop the heart of the president, stating the deep need for prayer to fulfill this holy calling,

The Christian university presidency is the single most intriguing calling in the world—working alongside gifted faculty, engaging idealistic students, partnering with alumni and friends in a vision with sweeping consequences, and dealing with a full range of exciting challenges from curriculum to football. However, more than ever, presidents need to be people of prayer and desperately need others praying for them. (p. 137)

The blend of spiritual and academic life provides an additional frame with which Christian college presidents view their work. Christian college presidents face unique expectations from the faith-based setting of a Christian college campus and the accompanying constituency—from students, faculty, staff, and parents to the surrounding community, the denomination of an affiliated school, and the broader expectations of evangelical America and the surrounding critics and partners (Song & Hartley, 2012). In addition to the administrative duties expected at all colleges and universities, Christian college presidents are expected to function in an executive pastor role and provide spiritual leadership to the members of their campus community and often to the broader denomination (Brooks, 2014). Historically, college presidents were taken from the pastorate to oversee the theological orthodoxy of the college and prepare future teachers and clergy (Armstrong, 2016; Brooks, 2014). These “defenders of the faith colleges” were to assure theological alignment and function *en loco parentis* to monitor students’ conduct and religious beliefs through a rigid academic curriculum with extensive religious course requirements (Brooks, 2014; Patillo & Mackenzie, 1965; Thelin, 2019). The historical expectation of theological alignment and pastoral care continues today, with Christian college presidents needing to balance expectations from the faith community and the day-to-day managerial responsibilities of operating a complex university.

The demands required by the work of the president at a Christian college or university often overflow into the home. Balancing the work and the home is a unique challenge for college presidents, particularly those who have children in the home.

Home Engagement for Christian College Presidents

While some Christian college presidents are not married, some are married and have children, which adds additional layers to their life and experience as college presidents. For those

with families, the values of the home with the assumed prioritization of God, family, and a unique calling to their work as president can create tension (Lee, 1999; Morris & Blanton, 1994b). This layering of priorities can add up to workaholism for the sake of the kingdom and ministry burnout when one area is over-emphasized such as work, or there is a conflation of multiple priorities such as work and God (Freeman & Thacker, 2020; Sanford, 1982).

Outside of the office, college presidents juggle home commitments alongside the lifestyle of serving as a Christian college president. The average college president is an older White male: 60 years old with 6 years in the position (American Council on Education, 2023). These men are also sons, brothers, friends, husbands, and fathers. These roles each carry unique expectations in the United States and the Christian community. Distinct social and cultural expectations exist for being a man, husband, and father in the United States and these roles become even more complex when layered with the expectations of the various faith communities and religious and denominational traditions (Brooks, 2022; Ryken, 2018).

Men are struggling, and questions abound surrounding a healthy masculine identity (Brooks, 2022; Cox, 2021; Reeves, 2022). Male college presidents in Christian circles lead in a vexing environment. In the United States, the decline in college enrollment was seven times greater for male students than for female students, and over their lifetime men earn comparatively less money than they did in 1979 (Reeves, 2022). Twenty percent of fathers are not living with their children and men account for three out of every four deaths of despair due to suicide and drug overdoses (Reeves, 2022). Girls outperform boys in most academic disciplines, men are less ambitious, men have fewer close friends than 30 years ago, healthy masculinity is declining, and the environment for fathers is also changing rapidly (Brooks, 2022; Cox, 2021; Reeves, 2022).

Husband and Father

Husbands carry expectations from their spouses and the faith community; however, the highest expectations they carry may come from themselves. Men spend less time with their children due to work and report conflict with wives who are frustrated with their emphasis on making an income rather than fulfilling the expectations of a father (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Men in leadership positions have the highest weekly working hours ranging from 46-75 hours, citing good career opportunities; however, this time at work was a tradeoff between spending time with children and doing household work (Halrynjo, 2009). Good career opportunities and spending the time needed to lead and do the work well has men playing a zero-sum game when it comes to their home life.

Fathers committed to equal parenting cite problems juggling work and home responsibilities (McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014). Men often report that taking on a more unconventional role of primary caregiver, where the man has more engagement in the home, brought about a diminished perception of their own masculinity (McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014). They acknowledged their reputations in professional and social networks changed even though they enjoyed their increased parental involvement. In addition, while many fathers are committed to the idea of equal parenting, mothers continue to take on more responsibility for children regardless of which parent is the primary income earner. There is often a mismatch between what parents report they believe about gender roles and what their time and behavior indicates (Carlson et al., 2022; Renk et al., 2003).

Parents employed by colleges or universities spend more time with their children, though it is not clear whether this was due to increased flexibility in their schedules or less traditional theories of gender expectations (McBride & Mills, 1993; Renk, et al., 2003). Fathers and

mothers with younger children spend more time with caregiving responsibilities than those with older children (McBride & Mills, 1993; Pleck, 1997). Interestingly, as it relates to highly educated college presidents who are fathers, the sex of the parent, gender role, marital status, and primary income earner are not predictive of the amount of time they spend directly with their children or time spent being accessible to their children (Renk et al, 2003).

College presidents who are fathers find satisfaction and significant positive relationships in parenting, citing the spiritual formation of their children, the support of their wives, and their efforts to care for their families as meaningful (Clark, 2013). A father's involvement at home matters: there is a correlation between fathers seeing themselves as responsible for the spiritual formation of their children and the children's measurable spiritual formation among protestant evangelical fathers (Clark, 2013). Relationships within the nuclear family play a significant role in how Christian college presidents approach their work, time, and priorities. However, the family's impact is not limited to the nuclear family.

Tending to the Home

College presidents are afforded benefits from their position that may change the calculations of how their time is invested. Yet, it is important to account for the invisible work of the home, which is unpaid work that often goes unnoticed (Daniels, 1987). Paying for time-saving services like house cleaning, lawn care, or supermarket delivery makes people feel better (Aubrey, 2017). Contrarily, spending money on goods or material items does not increase good feelings as anticipated. In the United States, married mothers devote almost twice as much time to childcare and housework as fathers (White, 2015). Women take on 3 of every 4 hours of unpaid labor for cooking, cleaning, and looking after children (White, 2015). While there are many tasks to maintain a home, and college presidents are often afforded certain luxuries such as

cleaning service, lawn care, and even dry-cleaning, it is worth exploring who carries the invisible work of these tasks—mostly mothers. Yet, males in the Christian college presidency role still struggle to find the balance between work and life.

Norms of parenting roles are also changing. Today, fathers are expected to have a more active role in tending to the home and higher levels of engagement with children than they have historically carried; further, egalitarian perspectives in paid work are more strongly embraced among U.S. adults (Dernberger & Pepin, 2020; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). While college presidents certainly carry a high level of professional responsibilities, parents' education level does not impact the time allocation to housework within a family (Schulz, 2021). While roles and expectations of parenting are changing for both men and women, women have retained most household tasks even though men are participating more than ever, which is reflected in a general shift to egalitarian divisions of household labor across many domestic tasks and childcare responsibilities (Carlson et al., 2022). In addition, this is also true of sons and daughters as girls contribute more to household work and chores than boys (Bonke, 2010). This trend begins in the early years in the home, becomes more pronounced as children grow into adolescence, and reappears in gender roles when the children marry and begin their own families (Manke et al., 1994; Renk et al., 2003).

Both the perceptions of parenting roles as well as the reality of parenting responsibilities continue to shift. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the domestic division of labor became more equal as fathers increased their domestic contributions (Carlson et al., 2022; Roos et al., 2021). Practically, this meant fathers spent more time on tasks like cooking, cleaning, dishes, and laundry and could be seen in line for school pick up. Fathers were more engaged playing and talking with children, organizing and assisting with homework, and taking part in disciplinary

activity like enforcing rules and bed times. Perhaps this represented a slight shift from attending sporting events and concerts and being more relaxed in housework. While fathers increased their investment of time and attention, mothers also increased time spent in housework and childcare responsibilities during the pandemic and retained the majority of domestic labor responsibilities. So while fathers are more involved than they were historically and society has shifted to a more egalitarian perspective, mothers still carry most household tasks and responsibilities (Carlson et al., 2022; Dernberger & Pepin, 2020; Roos et al., 2021).

Son, Brother, and Friend

Many Christian college presidents are not only fathers and husbands but also sons, brothers, and friends. This extended network introduces a new set of family dynamics. In the United States, the number of people living in multigenerational households has quadrupled since 1971 and no apparent decline in this trend is in sight (Cohn et al., 2022). Many United States adults are in the “sandwich generation,” with obligations to care for parents 65 or older and support a grown child 18 or older. These adults provide care and financial support to their parents and children and 38% report that their parents and grown children rely on them for emotional support (Parker & Patten, 2013). Home engagement and cultural expectations differ depending on culture and origins, significantly influencing family engagement.

In this dissertation, I focused on the nuclear family. When focusing on the nuclear family, acknowledging the work necessitated in managing an effective home is important. There are several relationships which men are a party to and these relationships do not neatly show up in the home life of the president. Instead, relationships often move from one sphere or section of life into another without stopping to check for permission (Clark, 2000). In short, relationships are messy.

Work-Life Balance for Christian College Presidents

For Christian college presidents, work-family balance seems more like a mythical concept of days gone by than a realistic option for highly connected, pandemic-proven executives (Kantrowitz, 1991; Weiss Sorbeck, 2021; Zahneis, 2022). Work-family balance has taken a toll on leaders' mental health and is one cause of the turnover among college presidents and senior staff across the higher education sector (Zahneis, 2022). Senior leadership pressure strains the presidents' families as well (Brooks, 2008; Kelderman, 2022).

The pressures college presidents face have been well documented (Bashman, 2012; Duderstadt, 2010; Gordon & Gordon, 2006; Pierce, 2012; Selingo, 2015). The personal experience of serving as a college president and the intellectual work poses a challenge for college presidents to find balance causing some to describe the position of president more as a lifestyle than a job (Sanaghan et al., 2008). This lack of balance combines with the changing nature of the higher education landscape, which often means increased job expectations and decreased resources, which can be a recipe for burnout (Armstrong, 2016).

Presidential Burnout

Educators who teach in kindergarten through high school (K-12) have the highest post-pandemic burnout rate among U.S. workers at 44%, followed by college or university workers at 35% (Agrawal & Marken, 2022). For all the stress the pandemic had on healthcare systems, healthcare workers came in at 31% (Agrawal & Marken, 2022). Rather than leaving at the onset of the pandemic, many presidents delayed retirement or resignation with a pandemic wave of 107 resignations in 2021 compared to 80 in 2020 and 123 in 2019 (Kelderman, 2022). Those numbers do not include those forced to resign or those who left due to health concerns or controversy. In the CCCU, 11 presidents resigned or retired in 2019 and 14 in 2020 from a

possible 185 schools (Adams, 2021). Former University president Frank Rhodes reflected on the stress of the presidency, sharing, “Overburdened university presidents do not suffer burnout; they create it, inflicting it upon themselves by their lack of responsible work habits” (1998, p. 5).

Three in four Americans experience burnout at least some of the time and nearly 30% report they feel burned out very often or always (Robison, 2022). Within this context, the leadership of the presidency has become even more challenging. The presidency in higher education has always been accompanied by pressure, but this pressure has become more acute during and following the pandemic (Kelderman, 2022; Tatter, 2021). Post-pandemic, presidents are not immune to burnout and must deal with a host of new problems related to enrollment, athletics, technology, health care, and space (Kelderman, 2022; Weiss Storbeck, 2021). The pressures of the position have impacted presidential tenure. In 2006, American college presidents served 8.5 years. In 2011, the average term dropped to 7 years, in 2017 it dropped further to 6.5 years, and it has settled to 6 years in 2022 (American Council for Education, 2023). Fifty-five percent of presidents plan to step down from their position within the next 5 years and 25% of presidents plan to step down within the next year or two (American Council for Education, 2023). As pressure mounts, presidents burn out, presidential tenure drops, and others are called on to take on the job (Paquette, 2021). The responsibility and pressure are handed to the next president, which adds to the stress of this incoming leader.

This research study was conducted within the specific subsection of private, tuition-dependent institutions that are members of the CCCU. This chapter provided a broader picture of the history of the college presidency, reviewed the factors at play for all presidents in the current higher education environment, and then focused on the shift in priorities, roles, expectations, and home engagement specific to presidents at tuition-dependent, private, Christian institutions

within the CCCU. Concluding with the prevalence of presidential burnout, the need to study the unique lived experience of CCCU college presidents who are fathers is evident.

Conceptual Framework

Limited research has been conducted on Christian college presidents' substantial expectations and challenges. All presidents—including those serving at CCCUs—face many issues, such as budget challenges, race relations, the Great Resignation, and the negative public perception of higher education. Yet, a gap exists in the research explicitly focused on the presidential lifestyle in Christian colleges and universities, which will be the focus of this study. In particular, presidents who serve at the 185 member institutions of the CCCU, which exist to bring together scholarship and service with biblical truth. Christian college presidents must navigate the position amidst an ultra-challenging higher education landscape and evolving expectations for the role of president within the expressed religious values of CCCU institutions.

A significant amount of literature exists on the experience of female presidents (Cox, 2014; Jackson, 2019; Quinlan, 2012; Zell, 2017). The career path of college presidents has also been robustly researched (Campbell et al., 2010; Green, 1983; Song & Hartley, 2012). Even though most college presidents are married men with a doctorate degree, many of whom have children at home, very little research has been conducted on the lived experience of male presidents who are fathers (Cioffi, 2018; Gagliardi, 2017; Tatter, 2021). Due to the relevance, need, and research gap, this lived experience was the focus of this dissertation study: What are the lived experiences of CCCU presidents who are fathers?

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers using the conceptual framework of Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind, which emphasizes the feeling of “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” (Currie et al., 2019).

Theory of the Double Bind

A double bind is a dilemma that comes from a conflict between two or more messages which conflict (Bateson et al., 1956). Given options A or B, it does not matter which choice is made because either choice will be the wrong one (Currie et al., 2019). An example to further explain the theory of the double bind may be helpful. For the role of a Christian college president who is conflicted by the growing demands of the presidency and a desire to carry out vows made to a spouse and the values to honor his or her family and raise children to know the Lord.

Imagine it is 5:45 p.m. on a Wednesday and a donor dinner is coming up at 7:00 p.m. Promises were made from the president to his seventh-grade daughter that he would make it to her volleyball game, but a crisis arises on campus at 5:30 p.m. just as he is on his way out the door. He committed to his daughter to make it to her game before his work dinner that night and committed to intentionally connecting with her before heading off to dinner. This situation competes with his commitment to steward the role as president of his institution, which demands his immediate attention. In this case, there are two options: he will break his commitment to his family or employer. The president does not have an option of “winning.”

Work/Family Border Theory

In addition to Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind, Clark's (2000) work/family border theory also assists with further understanding Christian college presidents' expectations. The work/family border theory expands on what is known about work and family balance and details the daily movement people make as they cross borders between work and family domains (Clark, 2000). The essence of the theory states that the primary connection between work and family systems is human, not emotional. People are the primary actors who transition between the worlds of work and family. They determine the density of the borders

between work and family—how much each aspect leaks into the other. Work/family border theory offers a theoretical framework missing from the literature on work/life balance or work/life integration as it further explains the dynamics a person experiences at home and work.

Central to the work/family border theory is the idea of the borders or boundaries between the separate but often intersecting spheres of work and family. People have the autonomy to create a sense of balance between work and home or work and life. Clark (2000) defined balance as good functioning and satisfaction with work and home, with little conflict. Clark's theory was developed while balancing the demands of academic work, a married relationship, and three young children. The research was conducted with individuals with competing work and family responsibilities. Participants were proactive rather than reactive, meaning they'd shaped their own lived experiences rather than reacting to the constraints of work and family (Clark, 2000). They showed up to their work and impacted their family rather than having to choose between their work or their family. Here, the person carries responsibility for their outcomes.

Being a president has always been difficult, but it is particularly challenging in this season given demographic shifts leading to budget challenges, a unique context for diversity on college campuses, and reputation challenges for higher education. Amid all of this, CCCU college presidents focus institutions on their mission, steward finances, broaden their schools' reputation, and tend to the unique campus culture needed to effectively lead change. Christian college presidents who are fathers add on the expectations of denominations and faith communities and seek to lead their university and fulfill responsibilities as husband and father as they tend to the home.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological dissertation study was to explore the lived experience of Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) college presidents who are fathers. Further, I sought to explore how these presidents navigate work and family responsibilities and identify strategies for presidential candidates at CCCU schools. The research problem sought to address a gap in the knowledge that ought to be addressed for the future health of Christian higher educational institutions and their leadership (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). CCCU presidents who are fathers may feel conflicted about their commitments to their spouse, their family, and their work; further, these presidents may perceive their children negatively feel the impact of their office. I explored whether an inherent dichotomy of values within the presidency at CCCU schools exists that promotes competing priorities.

Research Design

This study was conducted with a phenomenological research approach. Qualitative research includes a variety of philosophical orientations and approaches and positions the researcher to uncover new findings and make meaning as the research instrument (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Within qualitative research, the goal is not to generalize the experience of a few interviewees to the whole population, but rather to explore what is happening within a distinct subset of the population within a specific period (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative design with aspects of phenomenology was used to explore the lived experience of CCCU college presidents who are fathers. The purpose of this study was to better understand the lifestyle of a Christian college president and the impact of his role as a father on his work and the role of his work as president on his role as a father. I explored the values of the Christian community as experienced by the leaders and how those values intersect

with the role of a Christian college president—particularly the often articulated values of faith, family, and work, which are in a specific order. I delved into how work/family life integration is experienced for Christian college presidents who are fathers and what practices they employ to honor those stated priorities in their busy schedules.

Qualitative research relies on the researcher as the research instrument.

Phenomenological research explores the experiences of individuals in a way that is pre-empirical, pre-experimental, and pre-statistical—thus, it is experiential and qualitative (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research includes a variety of philosophical orientations and approaches and positions the researcher to uncover new findings and make meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patten & Newhart, 2018). The goal is to create meaning by combining the responses of interviewees to gain knowledge from the subjects to apply to the field.

The theoretical lens of Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind was selected as the broad explanation to guide interview questions and analysis (Creswell, 2018). The review of literature considered the history of the college presidency, the changes in the last 15 years that have created a specific set of challenges that presidents encounter, the unique aspects of serving in a Christian institution, and the additional set of expectations for college presidents in the context of Christian colleges and universities. The study was underpinned with theory of the double bind, offering a contextual perspective of the role of Christian college presidents as they experience the push and pull of presidential priorities. The scope of inquiry broadened beyond the literature review and pursue deeper qualitative understanding of the lived experience of this set of men who serve as Christian college presidents, are married, and are fathers.

This chapter will detail the methods utilized in this dissertation research study in concordance with the problem statement laid out in Chapter 1, and the review of the existing

literature found in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will address the research questions, theory framework, data collection, storage, and analysis, ethical considerations for research involving human subjects, as well as possible limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Questions

Qualitative research is designed with the understanding that the methodology evolves to produce themes during the process of inquiry and exploration. This study seeks to answer the broad question, “What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?” The research question was intentionally broad to avoid unintentionally limiting the investigation while also balancing the limits of the methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Secondary questions included the following:

RQ2. How do CCCU college presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities?

RQ3. What strategies have CCCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family?

Researcher’s Positionality

Researcher positionality is a key component of the qualitative research process that adds transparency and understanding to the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Researchers should be mindful of their positionality, refrain from judgment, and engage in a state of *epoche* (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). *Epoche* is a posture of curiosity rather than judgment that is also referred to as bracketing, approaching the research as though there is no prior knowledge about the subject and the ideas are being studied for the first time.

As I engaged in this work, it was important to acknowledge my own experience and prior knowledge of the office of the president in Christian higher education (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

As a vice president serving in Christian higher education and on an administrative cabinet with a college president at a CCCU school, I have a vested interest in understanding the lived experiences of Christian college presidents. Further, I currently hold a position as vice chair of the Commission for Enrollment and Marketing Innovation within the CCCU, and the president at my university, Dr. Erik Hoekstra, is a board member of the CCCU. Finally, I am married, have four children under 8 years of age, and have been invited to apply for open presidential positions within the CCCU. As I have visited others who are discerning such opportunities, they have often expressed concerns of the push and pull of presidential priorities and the impact this had on their home.

Theoretical Framework

Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind provides the theoretical framework for this study. The theoretical framework is the lens from which the interviews were conducted and the theory against which new meaning was created (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The theoretical framework differs from the theory of methodology—in this case, qualitative research with aspects of phenomenology—which explains the methods that were used to answer the research questions. Bateson et al.'s theory of the double bind explains a double bind as a dilemma that comes from a conflict between two or more messages which conflict. Given options A or B, it does not matter which choice is made because either choice will be the wrong one (Currie et al., 2019). There are many challenges that college presidents face today and I examined in detail the factors that male CCCU college presidents with children face.

Research Objectives

This study may provide potential college presidents an understanding of the demands of the role and the unique aspects of the role within the Christian community. The results may also

uncover practical solutions presidents have employed to address the double bind of the desire to honor work commitments and family commitments when the two conflict. Further, this study may also prove helpful to boards of trustees and presidential cabinets who work alongside the president.

Research Design Sample

This research used snowball sampling to identify nine CCCU college presidents who are fathers. In qualitative research design, a range of 6-16 interviewees is often used, but in this case, given the busy schedule of college presidents and the relatively elite population, nine were adequate (Chaim, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Snowball sampling, or chain sampling, relies on social networks to access data that a unique group often holds with specific, shared characteristics or responsibilities (Chaim, 2008). I relied on networks within the CCCU and Christian College Consortium as well as my advisor's connections to provide interviewee access. This design allowed me to expand findings and identify additional participants as the research progresses. Thus, the social network provides organic access via referrals to other interviewees who have specified knowledge of a particular topic (Chaim, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviewees must have met the parameters for eligibility: male, president at a CCCU institution for more than six months, married, and have at least one child.

Instrumentation and Measures

A semi-structured interview protocol which includes eight questions was used to collect data on college presidents to understand their lived experiences (Appendix B). The questions were developed to best understand the president's experiences and targeted to answer the research questions. Each question was intentionally open-ended and neutral to provide descriptive data from the interviewees. The first interview question was a safe question designed

to open the interviewee to begin sharing his story. As the interview protocol progressed, care was given to the sequencing of questions, specifically which questions may provide emotional response, and a broad question was offered at the end to allow the interviewee to add anything additional (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During the interview, I maintained a neutral and curious attitude toward the interviewees and sought to understand their experiences. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has the flexibility to include both structured and unstructured interview questions, and qualitative interview research allows the researcher to follow the direction of the conversation and still ensure the consistency of questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The semi-structured research questions were developed to address the research questions and add to the knowledge of what is known about the lived experience of CCCU college presidents who are fathers. The questions provided an understanding of the lived experience of CCCU presidents who are fathers, how these men handle the tension between their responsibilities at work and at home, and the strategies they have put in place to address this tension.

Field Test and Practice Interview

The interview questions were field tested by two experts—one senior leader in an adjacent industry and one senior leader in higher education—to ensure that the questions accurately addressed the proposed research questions. After completing the field test, the questions were revised as needed to ensure the participants' responses aligned with the research questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The first step for this research was to seek the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Bethel University. I invited eligible college presidents to participate in my dissertation

research study via an email sent to their university email account. Each participant needed to sign the informed consent (Appendix A) document included in the email before the research could commence. Once permission was granted to participate in the research, the interviewees were contacted to determine the appropriate time and location for the interview. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. Before beginning each interview, I conducted a permission check with the interviewees to record the interview via Zoom to assist with transcription.

Participation in the study was voluntary and I maintained confidentiality throughout the research. All electronic files and audio recordings will be stored on my computer as well as an external hard drive to ensure a backup of the findings. The information collected during the study were archived until I presented the findings, at which time I deleted the confidential information. Additionally, I followed up with participants and provided an opportunity for them to review the interview transcript. This important step of member checking ensured the accuracy of the interview and increased the quality of the study. Further, I recognized the personal nature of this research and ensured participants that they may drop out of the study at any time.

Data Analysis

MaxQDA software was used to record memos, code data, and analyze the themes of the interviews. Following each interview, memos were recorded of the interview to document the interview, the noticings and wonderings of the researcher, and initial themes that may have emerged. Following this, member checking ensured the accuracy of the interview. Data were analyzed through a series of five steps: read, adapt, categorize, code, and recode (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, the data were read and emerging categories and relationships were noted. Coding did not take place at this step. Second, based on these notes, a coding system based on the theoretical framework began to take root, and I started to create categories as they emerged.

Third, I categorized codes into parent categories informed by the literature review and the participants. Fourth, data were coded utilizing MaxQDA software. Here, peer examination was employed. Finally, the data were recoded to ensure the codes are accurate and consistent.

Limitations and Delimitations of Methodology

The use of semi-structured interviews for qualitative data collection has limitations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that the researcher as the research instrument assumes a level of researcher bias which is carried through the analysis of the interviews and subjectivity in field notes. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) added that another limit of the methodology is that when the researcher relies on their own instincts and abilities throughout the interview, social desirability bias becomes relevant, which describes the desire of both the interviewer and the interviewee to be liked or appreciated. Social desirability can taint responses so that they do not include an honest exploration of the subject but more of what the subject hopes the researcher wants to hear. This study was also limited by the size of the sampling and exploration of the lived experiences of nine college presidents.

Delimitations include all of the topics related to the topic that I was not able to include (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With this research design, the semi-structured interviews of nine presidents limits interviews to the president and does not include additional interviews with the spouse or children of the president, which gives a reflective response and relies on the president to make meaning of his experiences rather than asking family members themselves of their experiences. Further, the staff surrounding the president could also provide a unique perspective into the double bind of the presidency.

Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report described that ethical research involving human subjects includes

three broad categories: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Cooperative Institutional Training Initiative, 2019; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Respect for persons requires researchers to treat individuals as autonomous agents who can step out of the study at any time. The second principle, beneficence, ensures that each participant is treated ethically and their decisions are respected and their well-being is prioritized. The third principle of the Belmont Report is that of justice and requires equity in how the participants are treated. Researchers must protect human participants in their studies to ensure the future of research, as without shared agreement and ethical guidelines, participants may refuse to opt into future studies and limit the ability of researchers to answer the pressing questions which require research. Finally, each participant must be offered a consistent, informed consent process to participate in research involving human subjects. This includes transparency on why a participant was selected to be part of the experiment and any risk they may encounter during the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To protect individuals from ethical malpractice, I included my personal contact information as well as the contact information for my dissertation advisor in the consent to participate form (Appendix A). Participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the research given their signature of the agreement. To ensure the ethical treatment of human subjects, the Bethel IRB approved the study before potential participants were contacted. The data collected from the interviews were shared with the participants to ensure honest and fair reporting of findings and conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I also acknowledged my positionality and the worldview that I brought to the research, given Creswell and Creswell's (2018) exploration of worldview. There are certain biases I brought to the research based on my own experience, yet my subjective interpretation of my

experience was also important and helped me communicate clearly and understand the unique knowledge I added to the field through this research (Roberts, 2010).

Chapter 3 detailed the research questions, theory framework, objectives, research design, data collection, research procedures, and data analysis. Further, specific attention was paid to the ethical considerations for research including humans. Chapter 4 will cover the results of the research but will be limited to the findings of the research. The conclusions will be found in Chapter 5 along with a discussion of the implications of the research, recommendations for future research, and concluding comments.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological dissertation research was to study the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers. The conceptual framework for this study was Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind, which served as a lens through which the lived experiences of college presidents were explored.

The research findings are organized within key themes which emerged during the coding process and aligned with the three research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?

RQ2: How do CCCU college presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities?

RQ3: What strategies have CCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family?

The three primary themes that emerged from the interviews included: 1) No Regrets: Clearly Called to the Presidency, 2) Mutual Encroachment: Stewarding the Presidency as Husband and Father, and 3) Discovered Practices and Strategies. These three primary themes consist of several sub-themes and secondary sub-themes documented in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes, Sub-Themes, and Secondary Sub-Themes

Research Question	Themes	Sub-Themes	Secondary Sub-Themes
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?	"No Regrets:" Clearly Called to the Presidency	"This is What I'm Supposed to be Doing Right Now"	
		"Just Serving the Lord"	
		The Shape of Calling	"I was Mentored" "I read All the Leadership Books, but..." Previous Job and Formal Training
		Wanting to Be President Versus Wanting to Do President	"The Glamour Fades Quickly" "The Best Job in the World"
RQ2: How do CCCU college	Mutual Encroachment:	"Mutual Encroachment"	
		Children's Experience of	"A Gift to Children and a Burden to Bear"

presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities?	Stewarding the Presidency as Husband and Father	Mutual Encroachment	Hanging Up the Coach's Whistle "How'd You Get a Picture with the President?" "Our Children Would Reflect Almost Universally Positively"
		The Role of the Presidential Spouse	"No One Is Too Concerned About the Provost's Wife" "You Love Your Family More than You Love this Opportunity" Parenting Expectations Don't Fall Evenly "I Demanded She be Part of It"
RQ3: What strategies have CCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family?	Discovered Practices and Strategies	Calendaring	"You Control a Lot of Your Own Schedule" "We Really Did Work Around Their Schedules" "Five Buckets That Should Take Equal Amounts of Time"
		Managing the Stresses of the Presidency	"I Actually Have Friends" "If God Himself Isn't Going to Make it Happen" Spiritual Rejuvenation Time
		"There is No Escape"	"Small Bits of Shalom"

Theme One: "No Regrets:" Clearly Called to the Presidency

All nine participants interviewed reported a sense of call to the role of the presidency, a sense that God had made it part of His plan for their lives that they should lead a college. Theme One's findings answer the first research question: what are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers? Given the demands of being a college president alongside the call to serve as husband and father, each president was asked if they had any regrets about serving as a college president while a husband and father. President H reflected, "I don't spend a lot of time in the regret locker." After considering the impact of the role of president on their family and the strategies used to manage the demands of the presidency, all presidents interviewed emphatically responded that they did not regret their decision to serve as president.

Each participant noted, retrospectively, small-scale items that they would have done differently as they navigated their presidency and as husbands and fathers. President I elaborated on the interplay of the role and his family as his rationale:

No, I don't have regrets, not because it's always been easy, or that I've always been

correct or right, but I think the regrets would come if I ever felt like that continuity with my wife and to a lesser degree with my kids was eroded... if there was ever a time when the demands of the job or the pressure got so strong that it was eroding that sense of your marriage or the family dynamics. That would be regrettable for sure.

In the interviews, President G recounted a time when he was tired from work and was quick to respond to his son in a way that normally he would not have. President A noted that he also had a hard conversation with his teenage son around an activity his son wanted to be part of and with which he disagreed. President B explained that while he had no regrets, that is not the same as saying he would not change anything. He brought this back to his understanding of the Lord's call on his life in several areas of his life. He is called to each role and functions as a whole person who is the same person in each of those roles, yet it was also clear that the energy and head space required from each role did impact the others.

Presidents repeatedly returned to the sense of calling from the Lord to their presidency, to taking on the office as a family unit, and constantly evolving in the role to meet the competing demands of the presidency, the family, and as a husband. Each president emphasized the sense of vocational call to the role of president and their conviction that God had created them to be a college president. Certainly, their lives and skill sets could have taken a different direction, but this sense of call rooted them to stand firm amidst intensely challenging situations that arose throughout their presidencies. Due to this sense of calling, college presidents expressed no regrets about serving in the role. Three sub-themes emerged from the participants' verbal reflections during the interview, with these sub-themes describing a unique sense of discerning God's will in their lives related to the work of the presidency, an appreciation toward and articulation of the preparation for the work of the presidency, and the day-to-day work of the

presidency. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered.

“This is What I’m Supposed to be Doing Right Now”

The reason presidents reported they were willing to work the intense hours, juggle family and professional schedules, respond to constituent requests, and deal with the most complex problems at their university was their absolute conviction centered on the divine calling that God has given them to serve at their specific institution. As President B stated, “There’s a lot of people that want to *be* the president, but not as many want to *do* president. The initial fit is so important.” According to the president interviews, the lure of being a president may be strong for people, but without calling, the position can be short-lived and unfulfilling. This divine call seemed to provide the interview participants endurance for the task of the presidency.

President C described how he discerned his sense of call to the office of the presidency and the interplay of this high-pressure occupation with his existing call to serve as husband and father within his family, and shared, “I know God has called me to the college presidency, and he’s called me to my school. He’s not called me to do that at the sacrifice of my family.” He described the intense discernment that must occur related to God’s will and the presidency due to the difficulty of navigating the tension of family and work. His discernment led him to question anyone who would enter the presidency for the sake of the role or the status that comes with it rather than an intrinsic sense of calling. He shared, “I really do mean this for the Christian College presidency in particular. If it’s not a calling, not only do I think you shouldn’t do it, but the other piece is, if it’s not a calling, why in the world would you do it?”

Similarly, President H affirmed the need for an intrinsic sense of calling, citing the necessity of call to the position particularly given the challenging nature of the role and noted that while there are certainly financial benefits to the role, the stress takes a toll. President H

stated, “I think anyone who is a CCCU president could probably make a lot more money and have a lot less stress in a different kind of job. So why do we do it? We really feel a sense of calling to the work.”

The participants highlighted that a president must feel a fit as part of this call, a sense that they have been uniquely created and called to this role at their school. The importance of a sense of call, and a call to actually doing the daily work of the presidency, also emerged as the participants reflected on their career and life journey up to the presidency. President G noted the importance of a sense of calling to a particular school, rather than focusing only on the office of the president. This participant reflected on his presidential search process, explaining that although he was a younger candidate and faculty member prior to his appointment, “The other three finalists sounded like they wanted to be a president, and I was the only one that sounded like I wanted to be the president here.” Matching the sense of calling with a president’s skills and fit with a particular college setting seemed to be the combination that leads toward success and fulfillment. The presidents emphasized their process of discernment and those important in that process including spouses, mentors, faculty advisors, and their children.

“Just Serving the Lord”

The participants all emphasized the process of discernment related to their vocational call and God’s will for their life and leadership. For example, President A reflected on his calling to a form of ministry and emphasized the variety of ways the Lord could use that calling in the church, in the marketplace, or Christian higher education, and shared, “The only college presidency I could have considered would be one that the trustees of that institution regarded as a fit for the institution, and the only school I could or would be president is the school I serve.” His discerning of God’s will then led to an articulation of fit for his specific institution.

According to the interviews, while a sense of calling to the work of the college presidency is important, equally as important (and potentially more important) is the work that must go into discerning and seeking to fully understand God's will related to that call. According to the interviews, one way to discern God's call is to focus on all aspects of life as calling, which is what President E has done, viewing the presidency as one way a Christian could serve the Lord at the intersection of personal skill and institutional fit. President E summarized "vocation and calling is just serving the Lord." The majority of presidents ($n = 6$) reflected on how they discerned God's will within their journey to the presidency—noting the role of their wife, children, support system, and professional advisors.

The process to officially become hired as a college president can be lengthy, leaving much room and time for discernment. According to the participants, the process often began with a call or email from a search firm. Presidents interviewed indicated that having a consistent perspective with their spouse related to these calls and emails was important. President I and his wife had an agreement around calls from search firms that included thinking about their current role and how their children were doing and shared:

If they call us out of the blue, and someone nominated us, or there's some reason we were thought of, we're going to listen. We're going to pray about it. My wife and I were in a situation where we were really happy where we were serving. And look, our kids were doing great, the school is doing great, the job was hard but rewarding. I would get calls like that (from search firms). We prayed about a couple of situations, but in the context of saying no to those we kind of said, you know, how do we want to handle this? So we kind of said, let's not put a hard and fast rule together, but while we're not really pursuing anything, if they call us out of the blue, and someone nominated us, or there's

some reason, well, we're going to listen. We're going to pray about it. We see that as God kind of throwing something our way.

Another president, President A, shared a similar experience related to having a clear perspective when search calls and emails come in, but focused on the influence of professional authors. He reflected on a principle from Francis Schaeffer to describe his sense of calling and place and how to handle the search process and shared:

If you feel called to it, and if you feel drawn to it, you do not need to grasp it, and an opportunity may come along, or it may not be the right thing. If it's not, it may be preparation for another interview that you have, which is a whole different conversation about calling. But I've really been influenced by Francis Schaeffer and his idea that there are no little people and no little places. He talks about the difference between intrusion and extrusion. Intrusion is when you push yourself into a role that God is not pulling you into. And because you want this wider place of ministry, and if you're pushing your way into it, that's a sign you have no idea what you're really getting into. It is only going to mean more burdens and difficulties. The only reason why you should even want to (take on a presidency) is because God is actually pulling you out of where you are. This is what he would refer to as extrusion, and then it doesn't really matter whether you want to do it or not. It only matters that you are called to do it.

Similarly, President H, who is now serving in his second presidency, also underscored the influence that professional authors had on him. He reflected on the call of his life to serve as a Christian college president and the way he responded to inquiries. He cited Eugene Peterson's approach as he reflected on his decision to leave his first institution:

I think that to be faithful we need to say, "Lord, okay, my life is in your hands, and I ask

you to guide me.” But I say generally speaking, I do sort of take the Eugene Peterson sort of approach of being settled in one place, and it takes pretty extraordinary things for the Lord to unsettle us to another spot.

According to the interviews, that sense of divine calling was important to taking on the work of the president. This discernment work did not happen in isolation, but in the life of a Christian college president who is a father, in a marriage, in a nuclear family with children, and also in a lifetime of experiences, mentors, and a healthy support system. According to the participants, each of these inputs was considered in the idea of vocational calling.

“The Shape of the Calling”

Because the college presidents interviewed felt a strong call to the work of the presidency, a main focus of their lived experience related to preparation for the work. As the interview participants described their discernment process, they referenced other people, resources, and experiences which were significantly impactful, or what President A classified as the things that influenced the “shape of their calling.” This list included mentors, leadership books, previous jobs, and formal training. According to the participants, each source of preparation provided valuable insight and experiences related to serving in the role of the college president. As the president participants reflected on their lives, they could clearly see God’s hand readying them for the work of the presidency through the mentors they walked alongside, the materials that stuck with them, and the various job responsibilities and progressions they had to uniquely prepare them to serve their school at a particular point in the life of the that institution.

“I Was Mentored”

One of the main sources of training in their preparation to become a college president mentioned by participants was mentors in their lives, people who intentionally connected with

them and walked alongside them. In the interviews, presidents reflected on the collegial nature of the presidency and found mentorship from currently sitting presidents and faculty members.

President F stated, “I was mentored by three university presidents... and all three were formative in their own ways and in my own development as a Christian leader.” President B highlighted the role of key faculty members who believed in him and saw something in him that he did not see in himself. According to the interview, that faculty member saw a unique ability to lead and a specific gifting for higher education leadership, “He encouraged me in this direction, saw something in me that I didn’t see myself, and just kept encouraging me to be a key decision maker in higher education.”

An important theme discovered through the research process is that multiple presidents ($n = 3$) mentioned the mentorship role of their father-in-law as the first person that came to mind as critical in their preparation to take on executive level leadership. These fathers-in-law were CEOs or leaders of large non-profit organizations and significant in the way the president and his wife viewed the role of work and its interplay with the home. President F said about his father-in-law, “For many years of our marriage I was able to watch how he prioritizes his life and how he attended to the many commitments he had, including work, but also including family and spiritual life.”

Presidents interviewed also reflected on the role of their own fathers related to their preparation for the college presidency. President G reflected on the way his father (a Fortune 500 CEO) viewed employees and made sure that each employee was seen and recognized, he stated:

One day a year, he put on a janitorial outfit and he went and cleaned carpet and worked in the hospital for the day. He would say, “Nobody looks at you. Nobody knows that you’re even in the room. It’s as if you’re not there. You don’t even rise to the point that

people would pay attention. The doctors don't see you, the patients don't see you." And he said, "It's really important to remember that every person is actually our front-line revenue generator...so how do we make sure that each person you see feels seen by at least the company, because those they are serving won't see them at all, except to complain about something."

"I Read All the Leadership Books, but..."

In addition to mentors having a positive impact on the preparation needed for college presidents, those interviewed also cited leadership books as an important source of preparation. Being well-read in leadership texts was expressed as an important characteristic of those preparing to be a college president. But according to participants, being well-read was not enough. College presidents seemed to value those who could live out what they read and provide help and wisdom to others, as President I commented:

I read all the leadership books. But the people who made the most impact on my leadership were people that were living this out. It was not a book they recommended. But it's actually seeing them live it out. And then the reality of being able to approach them with a dilemma or question, or to seek their wisdom.

According to the college presidents interviewed, this mixture of understanding the important concepts of leadership and the college presidency while also being able to "walk the talk" was requisite. President F shared a nuanced perspective, stating that he is not a big reader of leadership books, though he has read his fair share, he works to be a "keen observer of leaders." Like other participants, he noted the importance of relationships with other leaders who are doing the work, maintaining proximity to other leaders, and asking questions. According to the presidents interviewed, there is a place for leadership books and conferences, but

relationships with mentors and friends put theory into action and is where observable lessons of leadership were often learned. In crisis situations, the presidents relied on the ability to pick up the phone and talk through solutions with trusted mentors and friends rather than picking up a book to consider a different theory to apply.

Previous Jobs & Formal Training

While mentors, leadership books, and having people in their lives who lived out what was taught in the leadership books were important to college presidents related to the lived experience of their preparation, so were previous jobs and formal training. The presidents interviewed emerged from a variety of previous jobs before landing in the presidency. Four presidents came from the college faculty, three came from academic administrative positions (including one who served in a K-12 school), one president formerly served as a senior pastor, and another president worked in government. Presidents cited the importance of their experiences they had in those previous jobs related to being prepared for serving as a college president.

In the interviews, presidents also expressed the importance of formal training related to being prepared to lead a college. All nine presidents earned their doctorate with fields including public policy, education, English literature, history, and economics. As for formal training outside of the academy and prior work experience, two presidents mentioned the Council for Independent College's (CIC, 2023) school for potential presidents. The CIC hosts an institute for potential presidents and their spouses which focuses on presidential vocation and institutional mission. Similarly, Harvard offers a seminar for new presidents, which was also cited. The presidents interviewed did not have a singular path to the presidency, but instead, their preparation seemed to be unique to the calling the Lord had for each of them.

Wanting to Be President Versus Wanting to Do President

In addition to the importance of calling, the work of discernment, and preparation for the work, college presidents interviewed for this research shared two additional themes related to the work of the presidency and their lived experience as a result: the work is hard, and the work is good. According to participants, after the glamour of the college presidency fades, presidents are faced with a tough road ahead. However, presidents included that while being a college president is extremely difficult, they experienced many benefits in their life because of their calling and how they are living into that calling. The participants emphasized that the idea of serving as a president is often attractive from the outside looking in, but as President B stated, there is a difference between wanting to *be* president and wanting to *do* president.

“The Glamour Quickly Fades”

The role of college president is extremely difficult, and the interviews illustrated the depth of the challenges. According to participants, the position is uniquely difficult because of the sheer number of issues a president must face, the heaviness of the work, the loneliness of the position, and the accumulation of burdens felt. President B summarized the thoughts of many presidents interviewed related to the difficulty of the role of college president:

I think there are a lot of people that want to be president but not enough that want to do president. I think the calling is just like living it out every day, getting up and doing what you need to do and what God has called you to into this role because the glamour quickly fades. There are profound burdens that no one understands. No one understands unless they are in that role, and I would channel some of my late mentor’s thoughts, even on this, there is that burden of loneliness. You’re never alone. But you are the only person in your institution that has no peer. And you bear that alone. There’s a burden of

accumulated grievances. The most intractable problems at the institution that are not resolved end up on your shoulders, and by the time they get to you, they're pretty heavy, because no one else has been able to figure them out, and they come from different places. So some of them might think, oh, that's the one thing that he's really dealing with. But they don't realize there's this thing, this thing, this thing. So there is a burden of accumulated grievances. There's a burden of initiative. You gotta like this. We gotta make things happen. There's a burden of hope, and when it's hard you gotta say, now you see this is the reality that we're dealing with. But we're going to get there and our best days are yet to come. This is the path forward. That is weighty, and people don't understand. They might understand it intellectually, but they don't understand it existentially. I worked alongside two great presidents at my former institution and they would talk about stuff like this, and I would say, "wow, that's kind of interesting." But until you're in this chair, you don't understand it. So that's why that sense of calling has to get you there. But even more so. That sense of calling to keep you there, you know.

Another reason that the lived experience of college presidents is uniquely difficult is that a commitment to the work of the presidency comes with time demands and expectations that extend beyond the traditional work week. President F joked that "to say that it's a 24/7 job is really almost an understatement." President H commented that due to the time and calendaring pressures, guard rails were necessary to dictate what a president will or will not agree to as "the presidency will take 70-80-90 hours of your time." President G referenced the content creation expectations of the presidency, as the president is often asked to provide a few words at events, host and emcee events, inspire donors, invite prospective students to attend, and win over new faculty and staff, "One of the things about these jobs is you are a constant content creator. Every

program at the college, you're often the person who welcomes at the event, or you're the primary content of the event.”

Many people want time and attention from the president. This burden of time was highlighted by President D, who reflected on constituents who wanted to get to know the president and then expected personal communication from the president thereafter. He also noted the sheer number of constituencies who desired this attention this intentional communication. Presidents have many internal and external stakeholders who demand many different things and each carries their own unique set of expectations. Some preferred to get to know the president personally, while others expected the news that impacts the university to be personally delivered to them given their time or investment in the institution. President D reflected:

You have the demand, it's just widespread in terms of the number of different constituents, people that feel they've got a vested interest in the institution. So that's anything from, of course, your students, your staff, your faculty, you know, and that's broad. Even within those three spheres. But then you've got alums, of course donors, trustees and then community members, you know. It's just been interesting to recognize and experience that there's a whole lot of people that want your time and attention because they've got some vested interest.

Another area of difficulty for college presidents that makes the role uniquely challenging is that the president must bring together a cabinet of individuals to lead the university. The president provides for the needs of faculty and staff through the leadership team that is appointed and then developed. Many presidents interviewed reflected on their view of leadership and how to ensure the president is serving the institution, rather than the institution serving the needs of the president. President H reflected on the need to see each employee, whether faculty or staff,

and thank them for their work and remind them of their significant contribution. President B emphasized the importance of assembling a strong team to do the work of the president together.

President E spoke of the role of president as a “leader of leaders” and the important role the voice of students must play for all these leaders as they seek to draw students in, serve them well, and retain them. President D emphasized the unique strengths and abilities each leader brings to a cabinet team. He regularly uses assessments such as the StrengthsFinder, the Enneagram, and The Working Genius to help his team understand one another and, in turn, serve each other and students. President I summed up the sentiments of many presidents related to the importance of leadership and providing for the needs of faculty and staff when he reflected on an inverted leadership pyramid:

My view of leadership in general is that it’s kind of an inverted pyramid. So it is not that you climb to the top, but rather, when you’re at that point of being a CEO or a president, you’re serving every single person in that organization. Having children also teaches you that. You do not have just dad time or time to do what you want. You have to always be thinking about everyone else, and that’s a good thing. Not to be paternalistic about college or the professional side of things, but it does ingrain some habits of thinking about your time not as your possessions, but as an opportunity to engage with and serve other people, and that calling is really rich for me. I mean, that’s why I do what I do.

The glamour of the presidency quickly faded for the president as the expectations were established. Presidents focused on building strong leadership teams, meeting the demands of multiple constituencies, and controlling their own expectations for themselves. The work of the president is difficult and presidents reflected on the difficulty of the role and echoed back to their firm calling amidst the difficult work. Yet, due to the intrinsic idea of calling, the sense the

presidents offered was that they were created to serve in this position and felt an obligation to God in this service also provided feelings that it is the best job as well.

“The Best Job in the World”

Many presidents referenced the numerous constituents they are called to serve and listed the difficulties of the job but went on to highlight the joys of the job as well. According to the interviews, while the lived experience of a college president included difficulties, it also included many high points. President B described the opportunity as a glorious role where he is “helping to shape, at least bend the curve a little bit, of a generation of students toward the good.”

President F focused on the spiritual significance of the relationships which come with the job:

I think it’s one of the best jobs in the world. There are just incredible opportunities to form relationships, to have a hand in building things that have eternal significance, and that matter. It is intellectually stimulating, and no day is the same. And some of it is just flat out fun.

President A has had children at his institution and reflected on one of the more powerful moments of his presidency as they emerged from the pandemic. The moment described was one that he would consider a high of his presidency:

I’m doing my usual start of the year talk on your calling and the College to our incoming students and it’s a stunningly beautiful night—seventy degrees, beautiful sunset, just a magical night. The worship was awesome, and I did a good talk, probably about as good as I can do. My daughter is a freshman and we had set the night up so that I have the last word with the benediction. What the students didn’t know was that there were going to be fireworks after that. So, I say “Amen,” turn, count down “3, 2, 1” to myself, and there’s the first firework going off. Then my daughter comes up, and she’s got tears streaming

down her face, and just gives me this big hug. What did that mean? Well, she didn't even have to say. I knew she meant that it was a great talk, and she was so glad to be there. It meant that this College was helping her know who she was and what she was called to do, and not a lot needed to be said.

Theme One Conclusion: “No Regrets:” Clearly Called to the Presidency

The glamor of the presidency faded quickly given the demands of constituents and the calendar, performance expectations, and as the reality of the magnitude of the role set in, yet presidents interviewed reflected that it was simultaneously the best job. This paradox seemed to imply that the presidency was both intensely difficult and good at the same time and that the presidents interviewed relied on an intrinsic sense of divine calling as motivation. Given the demands of being a college president alongside the call to serve as husband and father, each president participant was asked if they had any regrets. All the presidents interviewed ($n = 9$) emphatically responded that no, they did not have regrets about their decision to serve as president. President F observed that survivor bias may impact the research findings, but then went on to describe the reason he does not have regrets, which included the health of his marriage and his well-adjusted children.

Each president noted small-scale items they would have done differently, and decisions made that, with the benefit of time, they would have gone a different way. Yet they returned to the sense of calling from the Lord, taking on the office as a family unit, and constantly evolving in the role to meet the competing demands of the presidency, the family, and as a husband.

President B noted regrets on decisions he had made, but not regrets on the big picture as father, husband and president. President E emphasized the ministry of a college president and compared the work to that of a senior pastor and noted the challenges for the family of a pastor

as well, but emphasized he did not have any large regrets. President I shared that it was not that he did not have regrets due to the ease of the role, or that he had always been correct or right, and shared that if the role were to erode his relationship with his wife or his children, then he would have regrets, but in a challenging environment, he did not have regrets but gratitude to God. Overall, presidents recalled circumstances in which they would have responded differently given the benefit of additional time and context, but not regrets.

President H emphasized the grace of the Lord and his goodness to his family as he considered regrets. President A and President C quickly replied when asked if they had any regrets about serving as a president, husband, and father and the various combinations therein, that no, they absolutely did not have regrets. Certainly the work was challenging, and it took a great deal of intention and prioritization which showed up with very intentional calendaring, and rules of thumb to honor each role, but there were no regrets.

Theme Two: “Mutual Encroachment” over Work Life Balance

Theme two emerged from research question two: how do CCCU college presidents navigate the tensions between personal and professional responsibilities? Theme two introduces the idea of mutual encroachment, language used by President G which he believes is a better and more accurate description than the idea of work/life balance for a college president. President D described the pursuit of work/life balance as something that “really messed me up for a while.” Instead, mutual encroachment describes an alternative, more nuanced perspective of the interplay between work and family. The themes related to the second research question define how college presidents navigated the tensions between personal and professional responsibilities and include sub-themes related to children’s experiences, the wife’s role, and mutual encroachment. Combined, this theme and sub-themes offer an illustration of how the role of president affects the

roles of father and husband and how the roles of father and husband affect the role as president.

“Mutual Encroachment”

The idea of mutual encroachment arose during the presidential interviews conducted for this research. Rather than focus on the popular concept of work and life balance as a way that college presidents can fulfill the personal and professional responsibilities of the position, President G offered an alternative model. He scoffed at the idea of work and life balance, questioning the biblical basis for pursuing this balance. Instead, he explained the idea of mutual encroachment:

I have a principle that I try to use with people because everybody wants a perfect life balance, right? They want a very rewarding, great job and they want to be in complete control of their schedule all the time. And I just say, that’s just not life, and it’s just not life no matter what job you have because God calls you both to your family and to your job. Sometimes in our Christian communities, we can idealize family in a way that is actually not healthy. So the principle I try to articulate is there should be mutual encroachment—sometimes the family should encroach on the job, and sometimes the job should encroach on the family.

President A shared a similar perspective, that family life must be integrated within a leader’s ministry and will affect the shape of a person’s calling. Presidents A and G articulated what the other presidents implied: a president’s pursuit of work and life balance may be better articulated with the idea of mutual encroachment, which provides more flexibility for the realities of the role of the president. Similarly, President D commented on the importance of focusing on work and life when serving as a college president but not becoming obsessed with a perfect balance between the two. He purchased a home a distance from campus to provide a

stronger Christian day school for his family, one that also offered better athletic skill development for his children. He reflected:

The idea of trying to find that ideal work-life balance really messed me up for a while because I couldn't find it. I don't know if it's just me but I could never find it, and the place I landed that worked for me and still actually works for me is recognizing for better, for worse, that my life is chaos and that in the midst of that chaos, I'm going to do everything I can to be really intentional and carve out space and time to make family a priority. But I have never come to the place where I felt like I have family-life balance. I do think about this.

Each president interviewed ($n = 9$) showed great care and concern for the role of the presidency and their role of father and husband. President C reflected on this and shared the surety of his calling to the role, but that God would not ask him to do so "at the sacrifice of my family." Thus, the experience of the children is a vital sub-theme within the primary theme of mutual encroachment.

Children's Experience of Mutual Encroachment

Since a main focus of this research was to understand the lived experiences of fathers who were also college presidents in the CCCU, it was important to gain knowledge of the various experiences children have of their father in the college presidency. Better understanding of the memories of children led to the discovery of themes related to how college presidents navigate the tensions between personal and professional responsibilities.

"A Gift to Children and a Burden to Bear"

The ages and stages of the president's children at the point they took office varied. To be an eligible participant in this dissertation research, presidents were required to have a child in the

home during their presidency ($n = 9$). Eight of the nine presidents had at least one child aged eight or younger when they took office as president. President E went into the role having seen the toll that leadership positions could take on the family and was determined not to “be that guy that in the name of ministry and service to Jesus doesn’t have a relationship with his kids.” The college presidents interviewed all commented that they felt it important to clearly focus on what the college presidency meant for their children.

Presidents voiced that the college presidency can be both a gift for children as well as a burden to bear. The gift of the college presidency can include access to many opportunities for children and being part of the life of a college. The impact of the college presidency is felt by children because their father may not be as involved in activities and events. President F summarized the thoughts of many college presidents interviewed:

What an incredible experience and gift you can give your children by bringing them up on a college campus, exposing them to all a college campus has to offer from social and athletic to academic and intellectual resources. And as long as that life is managed well it can be a great benefit to your children. Yet, there’s no doubt in my mind that I have spent less time, been less available to, and probably to some extent have been less involved in the day to day activities of my children’s lives as a result of being a college president. I’m sure of that. Why am I sure of that? Because I’ve missed birthdays, I’ve not been the dad to be the coach on the little league team. You know I’ve missed games. I’ve missed recitals. I’ve missed some important events in my children’s lives as a result of the demands of the presidency, and so I’ve probably been a less present father than I would have otherwise. Now, what I would say about that is those have never been realized flippantly or without some regard to the potential impact of that or those sacrifices. Or

without kind of intentional conversation between at one stage just between my wife and me, and then, as our children got older, you know, involving them as well, and talking about the tradeoffs and the challenges that their father faced.

In the interviews, college presidents indicated that children felt the burden of the presidency demonstrated through the emotions that they expressed. Here the idea of mutual encroachment emerged again. President A reflected, “when you’re on campus you always feel like there are things you ought to be doing off campus, but as soon as you get off campus, you want to get back and do the things that need to be done back there.” Presidents described varied emotions experienced by their children, including excitement, sadness, happiness, and uncertainty. When President B was named to the position, his children experienced being excited for him, but simultaneously sad for the change that it would bring:

They were excited when they heard about it, and then kind of devastated when they thought about it, at least my older kids were. You know, you are uprooting us from everything that we know—our little house on our cul-de-sac, and our community, and our family and friends and church and, you know, for a promotion.

In contrast, some presidents indicated that their children were already prepared for the impact that the college presidency would have on them. President A explained that prior to the presidency he was in a demanding ministry job, therefore his family had already established routines and scheduling solutions built around a challenging vocational context. Although this previous experience lessened the transitional needs in the home, the move required by accepting the presidency created contextual needs as the family adjusted to the new community. Another participant reiterated the challenge of moving on children, explaining that their oldest child stayed home to finish high school before joining the family again at college.

In the interviews, participants indicated that the impact on children can depend on their ages and stages, and that as presidents they needed to invest in ways that children can be cared for while they performed their role. President H had a very young family when he began his presidency. He noted the need to put “guard rails of what you will or will not do because the presidency will take 70-80-90 hours of your time.” However, with the commitment necessary to fulfill the role of college president well, he and his wife needed help with parenting. Therefore, he was grateful for his parents’ willingness to come and watch their children while he and his wife were on the road. Further, they also hired a couple of students at the college at which he served, who helped for 20 hours a week each. In the interview, he estimated they spent \$50,000 on childcare during the first few years of his presidency, but that “it’s what allowed us to be able to navigate the issues and served us well.” President C recalled a time when he tried to explain his work with his young child:

Daddy has a role that is really challenging. And that means that I’m not able to be around quite as much as you would like, and certainly not as much as dad would like. But we are making it. Yes, we are making it work.

Hanging Up the Coach’s Whistle

According to the participants, events were a large part of their children’s lives, and their attendance at events was important for demonstrating their engagement in their children’s lives. College presidents indicated they needed to figure out how to attend these events. Participants reflected on their commitment to attending their children’s events, particularly during middle school and high school. President D had previously coached his son’s basketball team, which stopped after taking on the presidency. However, he continued to prioritize game attendance, often leaving the office at 3:45 in the afternoon to make the tipoff. Here, the role of father

encroached on the role of president. President A's children participated in golf and he noted he was not able to make all of their golf meets, but he made a lot of them.

President C's daughter participated in dance, but there was not a good dance studio in the community where their campus was located, so president C purchased a home off campus to prioritize time and space for his family, which also provided better access and training for his daughter. Each president noted the ebb and flow of their children's events and their own professional schedule and that the role of president did require them to miss activities at times when the role of president encroached on the role of father, but it also provided new opportunities for their children to participate in because of the benefits of the role. From the interviews, the push and pull of mutual encroachment was an important sub-theme.

“How'd You Get a Picture with the President?”

Presidents who had a child attend the college where they served as president provided a unique experience to navigate for the president and their child. Many of the participants ($n = 6$) had children attend the college at which they were serving. According to the interviews, the experiences and preferences of the children varied—some were happy to be associated with the college and even started social media parody accounts about their dad as president while others avoided the spotlight.

President G remembered their third child did not want to be associated with him after an early experience in the dormitories:

Our third child never used her last name when she was here for 4 years because she just didn't want to be looked at very closely, and she didn't want to be favored. She would never use her last name when she introduced herself... During her freshmen year, she was in one of her first open dorm things and some guy comes walking in and looks at her

bookcase and he goes, “Wow! How’d you get a picture with the president?” And she’s like, “Oh, he’s kind of like my dad.” Within about 30 seconds the guy had made an excuse to leave the room.

President G also reflected on his son, who played soccer. He worked hard to prove to his teammates that he earned his playing time, and it was not because he was the president’s son. He also worked to establish a group of friends in which he had earned his own identity rather than riding on the coattails of his father. According to President G, the athletic director made a meaningful comment to President G, stating “people see your son as a player, not as the president’s son.”

President G emphasized that as president “I didn’t expect anything from my kids on campus. Nor did I expect them to come here.” President B shared that the move was difficult for their children, but the silver lining was that given the uprooting to a new community, his kids found their community with each other. President F added the reality of hospitality expectations changed the home dynamics for children, explaining:

They’re inconvenienced from time to time, because we’ve got a house full of people, and they can’t run downstairs in their jammies to raid the fridge like they normally would.

There are sacrifices we all make because of the visible role we play, so I think there have been some costs, but I think there have been real benefits as well.

President D shared that a year into his presidency he overheard someone ask his daughter if the role had changed things for his daughter. She replied that it was not really any different, which he was grateful to hear, but the comment surprised him as well since when he was announced as president, the family sat for a photo shoot, was on the cover of the university magazine, and participated in the inauguration. He told another story of a time he was struggling

with a key decision at the institution early in his presidency and it affected his sleep, as key decisions often did over the last 2 years. His family prayed together as a family, and then his daughter, a singer-songwriter, asked if she could play a song to comfort him:

You know it was just super special. It was her special way of loving me. And there's that fine line, as you know. You don't want them to carry your burden. That's strange and would be imposing some suffering upon them. I want to be vulnerable enough to say that I don't know what to do and then ask, "Will you pray for me?" They see you as an authentic leader.

"Our Children Would Reflect, Almost Universally, Positively"

An important source of information related to how college presidents navigate the personal and professional responsibilities of the position is their own now-grown children. College presidents shared that their grown children would provide varied views on their experience of being the child of a college president. President F posited, "I know all of our children would reflect, almost universally, positively on the experience of growing up on the college campus because we've asked them." President E, who has children in college and out of college, was uncertain how his children would summarize their experience of growing up in the president's home. He described this past Christmas, when they were each reflecting on something they were grateful for and by the end, they were all "an emotional mess." He said, "But my kids all collectively, unprovoked, said, 'We don't know how you did that (serving as dad, husband, father) because you were everywhere. You didn't miss a thing for us, yet you were running this college.' And so, from their perspective, I was present." This example illustrates the resonance of the idea of mutual encroachment as to his children, President E was present when it mattered, though he was juggling calendars, commitments, and priorities.

President E, President F, and President G reflected on the opportunities to travel that the role of the presidency afforded their families. International travel, domestic travel, travel for work, and travel for pleasure, the office of the president provided a bevy of travel opportunities for the family.

President H cited the blessing of living on a college campus and the resulting student interactions it created for his young family and the satisfaction of those interactions bring. President E added the upside of meeting dignitaries like President Bush or celebrities such as Tony Dungy who came to campus to speak. President A also included that the college presidency provided many opportunities for his children and shared:

College presidencies are awesome for family life. That's basically our perspective, partly because your kids spend time with college kids, partly because there are music opportunities and sports. There is learning, and then there is just the fact that you have quite a bit of control over your schedule. Most college presidents also live in close proximity to their work.

The college presidents shared that an important way to navigate the personal and professional responsibilities of the college president was to not place too many expectations on their children and support them during their own transitions to new roles. Further, the children reflected positively on their experience growing up on a college campus and often in the spotlight. The presidents interviewed would give much of the credit for the children's positive feelings of their upbringing to their spouses.

The Role of the Presidential Spouse

The research criteria restricted participants to male presidents who were married with children. Thus, all spouses referenced were women. A clear theme emerged from the college

president interviews: their wives were extraordinarily important. College presidents indicated that their wives were a significant source of support in their navigation of the personal and professional responsibilities of their position and a world of mutual encroachment. Each president was effusive in their praise of their wife. These nine men unequivocally applauded their wives and gave thanks for their roles as spouses, as mothers, and often as employees of the college through the office of the president. According to the interviews, the role of presidential spouse often required their wives to sacrifice their own professional goals. College presidents appreciated the chance to discern openings together with their wives and noted the critical role of their wives' input, with President A stating "Your wife must be 100% in" when considering a presidential opportunity. According to the participants, not only are spouses critical in the discernment process of accepting a position as president, but also subsequently in navigating the mutual encroachment of the home and the presidency.

"No One is too Concerned About the Provost's Wife"

According to participants, the role of the wife related to a college president's ability to balance personal and professional responsibilities, and her specific role in identifying what the president himself is called to do, cannot be overstated. President E commented:

The biggest person that has helped me with all of this is my wife. Wives are really unimpressed with their husbands if you know what I mean? And I treasure that... I think the role of the spouse, for a president, can't be overstated...I think my wife would say that my role as a college president has been a blessing, and it's also been challenging. But in the end, it's what God would want, so I'm good. And that's when I think you have a true understanding of vocation and calling.

President I has held several roles on a college campus before serving as president,

including that of the provost, and reflected on the difference and specifically the spotlight. He explained that his wife has been a support for him the entire time, even though the public spotlight is different for a college president's wife. According to President I, a wife often has her own spotlight alongside the president, in contrast to the wives of other college leaders. President I stated:

It's different for the president than any other role on campus, and it's different for the spouse of the president as well. No one is too concerned about who the provost's wife is, and no one is really too concerned about the kids of the provost, you know? Or the Academic Dean or a professor...

President I reflected on some of the ways that he relies on his wife. He indicated that he looked to her for wise counsel, decision making, and as one to share the role of president with. In that way the calling of the presidency is shared. He commented:

I really value her wisdom. She is not just someone who is along for the ride. She is a wise counselor. There is definitely a sense of shared ownership of the mission of what we're doing, and that is a shared sense of calling.

President B noted the different communication styles of couples. He emphasized that the key is to figure out your preferred style and communication and tweak as necessary, stating:

I do enjoy debriefing with her at the end of the day, and some presidents don't-- they want to leave that at the office and their wives don't care. Some want to debrief, and their wife doesn't care and that does not help.

President G identified the need to determine early, even in the search process, the roles of the couple and uncover any unstated expectations. He underscored the importance of a wife and husband being on the same page regarding communication, parenting, and travel expectations so

that they can support each other well. Further, President G noted that the determination of the role and functions that will be fulfilled by the college president's wife on campus must also be clarified externally, stating:

Hey, my wife's not like the previous president's wife, and she'll do things differently.

She will do things differently and do them in ways that everyone will love but don't make her do the Faculty Spouse's Book Club. She's not going to do that. She is who she is.

Yeah, that's the expectation, and you can only do that kind of thing your first year, so you just cut off expectations a little bit, and that was helpful. It was helpful to her. It was helpful to me.

“You Love Your Family More than You Love this Opportunity”

While supporting the college president and his balancing of personal and professional responsibilities was an important role for wives, these women also had important roles as mothers. Many presidents ($n = 6$) noted that with young families, their spouse's primary role was not to attend on-campus events, but to care for the kids and then attend to things on campus as time allows. As expectations for the role of president and the spouse were being developed, President E ensured the search team understood his family season, stating:

And I told them (the search team) if you are looking for a president's spouse to be at everything with the president, there's no way, I have a four year old for goodness sake.

Look, you know you love the Lord and you love your family more than you love this opportunity.

To the participants, shared expectations among the spouses that were shared with the university community around what it meant to have a young family and the accompanying obligations was vital. In most situations, as the time of life in the president's family allowed for

more responsibilities on campus, it resulted in a paid role for the president's spouse with the institution through the office of the president. For President G, it was neither the president nor the first lady (a much debated term for some) who pushed for compensation, but their daughter:

I think they started paying her, maybe 7 or 8 years after we were here. It happened because my daughter said to her, "Mom, you work for the university you should get paid" and she (my wife) said, "No, I don't want to be paid, I just want to volunteer." Well, my daughter pressed her again, and the third time she said it. "Mom, you work for the university you should get paid." The third time she said it, there was a little bit of respect for the work that she does that my daughter felt wasn't being respected enough. So that was an interesting dynamic. So she really pushed that. And that's been good.

However, President B's wife prefers not to be on the university payroll:

She's not on the payroll at our school, and she doesn't want to be. She does a lot of work for the school, but there are some seasons where it can be too much and she wants to back off a little bit... we have had to cultivate our marriage in the crucible of leadership and we've had relational recalibration moments through this where she thinks I'm working too hard or prioritizing the wrong way.

The role of the presidential spouse cannot be overstated. Presidents reported that this role may change to match a given season of familial life, and seemed to agree that the experience of the spouse of the president and their family is quite different than any other office on campus.

Parenting Expectations Do Not Fall Evenly

Within this theme, divisions of labor and gender roles were commonly discussed. Thus, a reminder that the participant selection criteria for this dissertation research study were presidents who are fathers, so no women presidents were interviewed, is salient. Further, each college

president was married, meaning presidents talked specifically about their wives' experience.

According to the interviews, fulfilling the role of the spouse of the college president often included the sacrifice of or limited the spouse's own professional opportunities. College president participants indicated that this discussion of professional loss was important to have before taking the college presidency. President H reflected on the significant sacrifices his wife made in order to serve as the primary caregiver for their children and included, "She has had to pick up a larger share of the parenting than I have."

In contrast, President C illuminated the personal and professional support his wife provided him, through her own professional wisdom and experience. President C credited his wife for helping him see his own reality and that of the staff and faculty and his university differently. His wife worked outside of their home, and he reflected:

I do think I'm a little more attuned to the issues of gender equity in the workplace and potential gender discrimination. Understanding how, even in my own family, that home and parenting expectations don't always fall evenly and thinking about how that impacts how women work and their availability, and how they're treated.

Ultimately, the presidential participants indicated that they viewed the calling of president as a shared calling, something that both the president and his wife professionally fulfill with one another. The two individuals achieved the personal and professional responsibilities of the presidency together through using each of their personal and professional talents and gifts.

President A described the shared calling to the office of the presidency:

Her primary calling is to make our house a home and her basic perspective is what she learned from her mother because her father also had a demanding schedule. Her orientation was to be content when he's home, be content when he's away. And if the

mother is content, everybody else is going to be content. One reason that works for us is because my wife knows with absolute certainty that when the chips are down I'll drop everything to orient around what she needs. There's no question about that, and she's careful about it, but she'll let me know when she needs what and when I need to think of family needs and I think that that empowers her to persevere through some of the times where she has to give more. You have to know that the other person is there for you, and we've had enough life situations where she just knows that without question I am there for her.

President F spoke of the intensity of parenting with young children and the attention that season of life demands. His wife served as the primary caregiver for their children:

During our time with all of our children at home, she spent the majority of her time attending to our children's needs and running much of the household, so that I could be occupied with the children and of course the opportunities of the presidency.

The presidents did not reflect uniformly on exactly how their parenting expectations were divided out. In some households, presidents scheduled time with their children and separate time with their spouses. In other homes, family engagement included many presidential activities—attending events together, vacationing at the camp owned by the college, and hosting distinguished guests together. The relationships between the president and their wives seemed to determine the parenting style and family involvement as they discerned together their family, ability, and desire to participate in presidential responsibilities on and off-campus.

“I Demanded She be Part of It”

According to the interviews, when considering the role of the president, it is essential for the husband and wife to discern opportunities together. Presidents indicated just how crucial it is

for spouses to discuss, pray about, and come to a decision together regarding opportunities related to the college presidency. In this way, couples can support each other as they navigate the personal and professional responsibilities of the position. President G spoke to the importance of discerning a presidential opportunity together and his wife's role in their discernment. She sat in for interviews and was an integral part of each step in the process and he shared:

I demanded that she be part of it. So she actually was in the room when they interviewed me and I said, because if you don't get this, then I'm not coming, which is, if we both don't think it's a good idea then I'm not coming. I've heard people say "but we'll bring her [your wife] in after we decide to pick you." and I would say, "Nuts! Then I'm not interested. You don't understand us." This is going to be a group decision between the two of us and she needs to feel as comfortable with the people in that room as I do. That strikes people as weird, and I don't care. I was setting the tone.

President D spoke of the shared calling he and his wife have in the role. He recalled a story from their college years that he felt was almost prophetic, looking back now:

We shared this sort of calling and it's funny, so when she was a senior at college we were engaged. I was a year ahead of her. She was in a Bible study that year, some 20 years ago now, and one of the questions was to create your ideal job— maybe it actually exists, maybe it doesn't. Her answer was to be in a ministry of encouragement on a college campus. That is just her. But the tension of being a mother with kids at home, that's been intimidating. We don't want to compromise the attention on the family, but there are expectations and demands, absolutely.

Multiple presidents reflected on instances when they were navigating difficult situations at the college and their spouse was their partner in discerning their direction. Presidents spoke

with affection of their spouses and held up their marriages as a reason for their durability and success in the role of president. They reflected that the role of spouse was not a passive role, but an active role that provided incredible love, support, and value to the president and the presidency.

Theme Two Conclusion

While work-life balance is a challenging topic for presidents, they were quick to offer discovered practices and strategies for how to balance the demands of their family with the demands of the presidency. These lived experiences and strategies illustrated how the principle of mutual encroachment was lived out by the presidents. Given the language of mutual encroachment, presidents seemed to navigate the relationships with their family and the campus community well and shared their lived experiences which are different in the home of the president than any other position on campus. Further, the presidents articulated their admiration for their spouses and the important partnership they have in discerning what mutual encroachment looked like for their nuclear family. The next section will detail the third theme that emerged: discovered practices and strategies.

Theme Three: Emerging Practices and Strategies

The first research question for this study focused on the lived experiences of college presidents in the CCCU. Theme one illustrated the lived experiences of these college presidents and highlighted their sense of calling for the role and the process of discernment they needed to conduct as a result. College presidents indicated helpful lived experiences related to preparation for the role as well as how they have experienced the role as both hard and good. Theme two emerged from research question two: how do CCCU college presidents navigate the tensions between personal and professional responsibilities? The themes related to the second research

question defined how college presidents navigate the tensions between personal and professional responsibilities and included sub-themes related to children's experience, the wife's role, and mutual encroachment.

Theme three now focuses on the answer to research question three: What strategies have CCCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family? Theme three considers practical advice in the form of discovered practices and strategies that CCCU colleges have implemented to honor the important roles of both college president, parent, and spouse. These discovered practices and strategies include an intentional commitment to calendaring, the need to manage the stresses of the presidency and focus on being a healthy person with established supportive relationships, and finally, the presidents reflected on the strategies to escape the pressure of the presidency.

Calendaring

One discovered practice and strategy that assisted the college president participants in honoring the interplay of the presidency and the family was calendaring. College presidents interviewed indicated that maintaining a calendared life was vital, to have regular calendar meetings, to use the calendar to focus on the family, and to prioritize their time by their use of the calendar.

“You Control a lot of Your Own Schedule”

The college president participants did not view having a calendared life as something nice to have, they viewed it as a necessity. Each president interviewed ($n = 9$) utilized the calendar as the key tool to manage their lives. Many hosted joint meetings with their staff and spouse to calendar weeks and months out and to ensure strategic priorities were accounted for on the schedule. According to President A, the calendar was the key tool, but also one which the

president can and should dictate, commenting, “You’re the boss, you control a lot of your own schedule.” President H referenced the ability to create integration between family and work responsibilities and to ensure it shows on the calendar and included: “I am convinced that one of the great opportunities that exists when you’re in leadership is that you can craft your own schedule and you can develop ways that you bring your family into your job.”

Even with healthy priorities strategically scheduled and staff and family on the same page, the demands of the job are challenging. President F described his relationship with the calendar as a defining feature of the job and commented:

The work is never finished, right? There’s always something to attend to. And so the calendar really becomes the challenging feature of the job. No amount of time that presidents give the job is enough. There’s always somebody who could fill that spot on the calendar. There’s always an issue that could fill that spot of thinking or effort. And so the calendar really does become the most challenging part of it.

“We Really Did Work Around Their Schedules”

One strategy that has assisted presidents in respecting both the areas of the presidency and the family is regularly calendaring meetings and family events so that the two can be balanced and prioritized. President I shared that his calendar “almost without exception” was completely scheduled every hour of the day from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and most often included evening events as well as family events that he needed to prioritize. Most presidents ($n = 7$) brought their staff and spouse together to review their calendars. Some presidents even met with their children when discussing calendaring. President C held a weekly meeting with his daughter, who is under 10, to look at the calendar together and identify times when they would have key moments together. This regular meeting provided opportunities for him to explain his work to

her and also show her that she is a priority amidst his work. All of the participants were intentional about regular calendar meetings, and who participated in those meetings, to ensure they could honor their family and work commitments.

According to interviews, an important feature of the college president's calendar was that it must be complete and shared. President A emphasized that all of his family items were on his calendar, and his staff had visibility into these as well so they understand when a competing calendar priority comes in, which family event it may be in conflict with and what the president's priorities are. In this way, his staff helped to create a boundary for the work and assisted the president in keeping his stated priorities. Presidents mentioned this visible prioritization of the family set a norm for the campus culture and aligned a stated value of family friendly with action when appointments are scheduled.

The presidential participants also indicated the importance of having a coverage plan in place for the office. President D noted that there are some who may be surprised that there are times when the family comes first and there are times when the college comes first. For many, he noted, there was the view that the college must always come first. He shared his priority of the home and stated:

It's good to just say, hey, the university will need to be third at least, you know, and the most enduring relationships are not made in the campus, but in the home.

According to the interviews, when both professional and personal responsibilities were included on the calendar and when both employees and the president's spouse were involved in the process of calendaring, a college president could successfully live out his desire to attend well to both the roles of college president and family member. For example, President E needed to regularly calendar around their family, which included young children when he took office.

He had a “huge philanthropy expectation” and noted “I can’t raise money from my office phone,” so he packed as much as he could into his travel calendar for work and then booked red eye flights to be back for key events for his children. He shared he was a bit of a night owl, and it was often the times past 10:30 p.m. that he would connect the most with his kids and they would open up to him:

Our kids were young, and as they got to be in middle school and high school, they added club sports and high school sports, and I’m telling you, we really did work around their schedules.

“Five Buckets That Should Take Equal Amounts of Time”

According to the interviews, another practice and strategy that allowed for the college president participants to balance personal and professional responsibilities was to be clear with others about what priorities exist. Presidents reflected that this initial clarity acted as a filter to accept or decline opportunities and ensured priorities matched the time spent. President H assigned a percentage breakdown to his calendar, and while the times were approximations, he asked his staff to review his calendar and provide a regular audit. He designated 20% of his time to developing his senior leadership team, 40% on external facing activities (including fundraising, external relations, time with public officials, and alumni relations), 25% of his time on administrative tasks such as email, phone calls, and meetings, and 15% of his time on student and faculty items.

President B also asked his staff to audit his calendar to ensure the major priorities he shared with the board during his initial interview were intact, though his priority buckets were equally balanced, as he noted:

I would say there are five buckets that should take equal amounts of time and I told the

board this when I started. My priorities have changed, and I do change, but these categories haven't changed. One is to be very engaged in what is happening with the board of trustees for the development and continuing education of the board. I do this with the board chair. They are the governors of the institution, so that president and board relationship is key and does take time. It should not be taken for granted. Number two is vision and team building— setting a vision for where the institution is going and building the team to make it happen. This team is the executive leadership of the institution. Number three is being the ambassadorial voice of the institution internally and externally. Internally to stakeholders like students, faculty, and staff, and externally to religious leaders, legislators, alumni, parents, prospective students. Number four is resource development which is a cute name for fundraising, right? For some people it's not worth their money if it's not worth my time. So I spend a lot of time on fundraising and truly the president is the chief development officer of the university. Fifth is, and I told this to the board and have to hold myself accountable, but it is my own personal professional development as a leader. Those are the five buckets that should get relatively equal coverage.

The presidents emphasized that they needed to be clear about their own priorities and identify and filter those priorities for those around them, including their time management and calendaring. While the various priorities were titled and proportioned differently, the ruthless monitoring of the use of time, particularly through the tool of the calendar, was evident.

Managing the Stresses of the Presidency

Based on the interviews, it is clear that the role of college president is demanding and difficult. In order to balance the professional and family responsibilities of the role, presidents

indicated a need for holistic health. Specifically, presidential participants reflected that healthy people make healthy presidents. Presidents reflected on social health as they spoke to their friendships, on spiritual health and their reliance on prayer and the Christian community, on emotional health and the importance of a strong marriage and good mentors, and ultimately pointed to shalom as God's intent as to how things ought to be.

The presidents relied on habits to address each area of their health and manage the stresses of the presidency. Some habits, such as regular physical workouts seem obvious to address physical health. Other habits such as connecting presidential peers to pursue friendship and professional connections are less obvious. Here again, the clear connection of the president's identity, calling, and role took on a spiritual aspect as many presidents reflected on the decisions placed before them and their need for discernment. The presidents indicated that factors that lead to their health included connecting with presidential peers, scheduling self-care, and prayer. These sub-sub themes emerged as integral markers of the president's health and many presidents posited that these practices positively impacted their longevity as president as well.

“I Actually Have Friends”

Five of the six longest serving presidents in the study focused on peer relationships with presidents as a key to their health and longevity. These bonds were notable in the interviews and seemed to bring relational joy to the presidents, as they spoke of their friends who are in the profession alongside of and with them, often with whom they have grown up within the office of president. President F shared:

There's 10 of us Christian college presidents and our spouses that have gotten together now for 12 years, and we've created a kind of support group for one another, and I would say that my longevity in the presidency, and my ability to manage the various parts of my

life in a somewhat constructive way, has been in large measure due to the accountability and the advice and counsel I've received from that group of presidents. I can call any one of them. We're on a Zoom every few weeks where I can say, "Look, I'm really challenged with this", whether it be something directly related to the presidency, or more indirectly related to family life or spiritual life. Having that as a resource for me, and I suspect for the others, has just been absolutely invaluable. And, interestingly, when we get together, whether it's on a monthly Zoom or we get together every summer face to face, it would be easy to assume that we talk a lot about work with things like enrollment or financial positions. And we do talk a little bit about those things. But mostly we talk about how we're managing the stresses of the presidency, how we're attending to our own marriages and families and spiritual lives. For me, and I suspect for others in the group, those have been the most durable conversations in the sense of really creating resilience in what is otherwise a pretty difficult role.

The peer-to-peer connections between college presidents were important as presidents managed the stresses of the presidency. In fact, presidents interviewed indicated that these connections were essential to their success in the role of both president and family member. Presidents invested in these friendships and often it was the shared burden of leadership, and the vulnerability offered in reflection, which increased relational capital and trust.

President B remembered the prompt for their first meeting. It was a single question that took two days to answer. He shared:

And we had one question for those first two days together—What is the biggest strain that you have had as a couple in your time as president. And we had no problem filling up two full days... and we bring our spouses to every retreat, so we can't lie.

Similarly, President G doubled down on the value of friendship and peer-to-peer connections in the presidency. He stated:

You know about the group, right? Yeah, that has saved me. Goodness, because I actually have friends. It's super hard to have friends in these jobs both because you don't have a lot of time, right? And because the people you spend time with have a lot of work friends. I just don't have friend-friends who don't care that I'm a president.

Based on the interviews, the friendships of presidential peers have sustained the longest serving presidents in this study. The bonds they have were notable in the interviews as they laughed and even became emotional as they reflected on the power of these friendships and the critical moments in their lives, where as noted by President F, "we're managing the stresses of the presidency, how we're attending to our own marriages and families and spiritual lives." The type of peer support offered could only come from other presidents.

"If God Himself Isn't Going to Make it Happen"

Having peer-to-peer relationships and friendships with other presidents and scheduling time for self-care were both indicated by presidents as being crucial for balancing the roles of president and family members. Presidents reflected, too, on the need for prayer in these roles given the task of Christian higher education and the difficult leadership context. Further, that once he did his best, and committed his actions and efforts to God, it was out of his control and he needed to accept the outcome and move on. President E actively prayed through his fundraising visits and shared:

If I'm going to meet a million dollar donor, in the end, I know there are not going to be any slick words that I am going to come up with that are going to anoint this ask and make it happen if God himself isn't going to make it happen. And so there's a peace for

that right? That I am okay with whatever happens... I never asked to do this (job) anyways, but God placed me here.

President F noted the rhythm of prayer in his marriage and noted, "You know, obviously praying together, praying for our community, and our campus is something we do regularly." President I extended the concept of prayer to his family as they discerned together whether or not they would take the role of president and explained, "We process as a whole family, and we pray through the process." President A noted the importance of praying with and for other presidents and again referenced the importance of presidential peers:

There's a group of presidents and their spouses that have this shared calling of the presidency. As much as knowing and sharing about what's happening at our institutions, this is a place where we're praying for the kids of other families. We have a sense of what some of those burdens are. It's supportive. We're in this together. We all have things that we're navigating in family life. We want to pray for one another in those areas.

Prayer appeared to be a central tenant to the rhythms and practices of a healthy president living as a healthy person, as were strong peer relationships. Prayer and friendship were important approaches for managing the stresses of the presidency and each practice provided presidents the ability to stay focused, empowered, and encouraged in the work.

"Rejuvenation Time"

In addition to prayer and presidential peer connections and friendship, college presidents indicated that scheduled self-care was important to the level of success they experienced in their role as president and family member. President B found a formula that works for him to build in moments of self-care and ensure he is able to serve well in his role as president and indicated:

I have a kind of a little formula that I use one hour a day, early in the morning. It is just kind of my spiritual rejuvenation time. One day a week during the weekday, not counting weekends, I try to have a no-meeting day, but I can just do other things that I need to do. One day a semester I try to get away for a personal spiritual retreat. One weekend a year, I will retreat somewhere completely by myself. I try to have those intentional moments because if you don't schedule these, everything just fills up in your calendar.

The college presidents also named physical health and exercising as a way to escape the pressures of the presidency. President C, President D, President D, President H, and President I all pointed to working out, usually early in the morning before everyone else is awake.

Beyond these rhythms of self-care and calendaring, presidents intentionally schedule their calendars well in advance with opportunities to escape the pressure of the presidency. This form of self-care varied for the presidents: some took the opportunity to escape with their spouse or their whole family, while others noted the need for time alone. With the intensity of the presidency, healthy presidents included regular rhythms of respite.

“There is No Escape”

The job of college president is intense. With many priorities battling for a finite number of resources, time, and energy, the presidential participants emphasized the need to be intentional about taking opportunities to escape the pressure. Interviewed college presidents indicated that escaping this pressure is important to the sustainability of the president in his role. President A described the pressure and the always-on mentality of the presidency and commented:

In one sense, there is no escape. In one way or another, the president connects to the mission of the college or university every day. And even days off, vacations, and family times can and will be interrupted. Days that could be happy and relaxed unfortunately at

times are completely derailed by a sudden, time-consuming, anxious crises.

College presidents also need to retain their other identities or the additional hats they wear in life, those other than college president, in order to escape the pressures of the presidential role. President F described his need to be known fully as other parts of his identity when he is home as a dad and husband and explained:

Almost every time I go home I'm not the president of the university. I'm a dad and husband. I have the ability to take off that role (of president). I think it's healthy. I think if I didn't have opportunities to intentionally take that role off there could be some really negative consequences to my mental health, or you know, to my ego, or otherwise my character. And then I hope it brings grounding and a centeredness that I hope pays dividends.

The challenges of identity are tethered to the president throughout their careers. President G illustrated the difficulty of the all-consuming nature of the role and how it has become intertwined with his own identity: "So how do I separate my identity from the role? Both for the healthy institution, but also for my own spiritual and emotional health." President G is in the latter stages of his presidency and is looking at the end of his career with great intention. He understands the difficulty of the role of president and the challenge to separate his identity from the role which has captured his imagination and his skillset.

"Small Bits of Shalom"

In the interviews, the presidents shared their experiences and the strategies they employed to provide occasional relief from the pressures of the college presidency role. President A honed in on habits of Sabbath-keeping, reading, and physical exercise, along with calendared time away in the summer to provide needed rejuvenation:

Sabbath-keeping helps immensely. So does physical exercise, which is really a necessity in physically debilitating leadership roles. We go away to a camp for 3 to 5 weeks every summer. Some of those are working weeks, but I typically work from 6 to 12, then take time with the family, possibly read for an hour in the late afternoon, and then we go out on the lake or play games in the evening. I try to seize small bits of shalom when I can—sometimes savoring even 15 minutes to read a book. Speaking of reading, there is no end to work-related reading. But I am almost reading at least one book for pleasure, and giving myself permission to do so, even when I am behind (which I almost always am). I don't really have hobbies, per se, but I am a more active birder than when I began, so that counts. Five years ago—when we had more kids at home—my answer would have been simpler: mainly, enjoying whatever my kids are enjoying.

The participants indicated that the college boards, or chairs of the boards, have also been intent on helping their leaders escape the pressures of the presidency, so that they can more effectively balance their professional and personal roles. When asked by his board how they could support him in this area, President G requested time in the summer to be closer to family, so he implemented a practice of spending a summer month away from campus and near extended family. During that time away, he worked half days and played for half of the day and then enjoyed the anonymity of a new location. He shared, “I can go to a restaurant, and nobody knows who I am. I can just be out of the bubble.”

President G also emphasized the power of a sabbatical. In the interview, he shared that he has taken two sabbaticals throughout his presidency, the first following a tragedy and the second following the COVID-19 pandemic. During his second sabbatical, his kids highlighted the toll his leadership had taken on him personally. He shared:

I had no idea how worn out I was by the pandemic until I was in sabbatical for about six to eight weeks. In fact, my adult kids said to me during the first week of the sabbatical when I was with them, “Listen, dad. You got to be better. You either need to go to counseling or you have to quit your job. You’re pretty stressed out, and you’re really cranky.” So it took 6 to 8 weeks before I unwound, but it enabled me to imagine another 4, 6, or 8 years in this role... This one (sabbatical) I took from basically June through October 1, so I missed the beginning of the year, but I was back for the fall board meeting. You have to miss something for it to actually be a sabbatical.

More practices were included related to ways to escape the pressures of the presidency. Presidents added participation in family events and gatherings, listening to Christian music, and church life, often outside of the community where they lead and a bit further away from campus. Many ($n = 6$) emphasized travel and intentional vacation time with family and with only their spouse as well. President F noted the expense associated with this, but that he is “buying sanity.” He went on to share, “Travel afforded our ability to get away and get out of the fish bowl. So that’s been really important.” President B purchased a house on the other side of the country and he and his wife travel there for one week every four months. This escape has been particularly helpful for his wife as she can “completely be herself and not have to prepare the house for another big meal. You need moments where you escape.”

Conclusion: Chapter 4

The lived experiences of Christian college presidents who are fathers varies, but common themes of their calling, discerning God’s will, mutual encroachment, and discovered practices and strategies. These themes explored the path and preparation for the presidency, and the realities that the work is both hard and good. Further, for Christian college presidents who are

fathers, the importance of their spouse cannot be overstated and the children's experience of the presidency seems to flow directly from this marriage and associated expectations. Seemingly from this covenant of marriage, these Christian college presidents honor the interplay of the presidency and the family. According to the participants, intentional strategies were needed to navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities. These practices are important and underscore that presidents need healthy relationships with peers and a healthy dependence on God in order to fulfill the calling that is the vocation of a Christian college president.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this final chapter, the research findings are discussed, implications analyzed, and connections are drawn to the literature. The significance of the research topic, as stated in Chapter 1, and the conceptual framework that guided the study will ground the analysis and implications. The analysis incorporated Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind and its connection to the research results, presenting a dilemma derived from conflicting messages. Further implications are presented to build upon Bateson et al.'s theory.

The last 15 years have further complicated the position of a college president. College presidents have faced budget shortfalls, race relations challenges, employee engagement issues and the Great Resignation, along with the negative public perception of higher education (Busteed, 2020; Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019; Elliot, 2021; Ellis, 2021). Christian colleges and universities, and their presidents, are not exempt from these increasing challenges; if anything, the leadership of a Christian college president and the challenges they face are magnified by the lens of the Christian community.

Outside of the office, college presidents juggle home commitments alongside the lifestyle of serving as a Christian college president. These men are husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and friends. Each title bears distinct responsibilities and expectations within the United States and the Christian community. Hence it is important to understand the lived experiences of Christian college presidents and to equip future leaders to better support themselves and their institutions. By exploring the experiences of presidents in Christian higher education institutions who are also fathers, I aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of their roles, motivations, and struggles, ultimately for the purpose of benefiting current and future leaders.

A gap was identified in the research, in the lived experience of Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) college presidents who are fathers. Research existed on the experience of women presidents, the career trajectory of presidents, and presidents from historically underrepresented people groups, but the lived experience of male presidents who are also fathers lacked research. Nine presidents were interviewed in a qualitative research study with aspects of phenomenology. This study sought to answer the question, “What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?” The research question was intentionally broad, to avoid unintentionally limiting the investigation while also balancing the limits of the methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The secondary questions included the following:

RQ2. How do CCCU college presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities?

RQ3. What strategies have CCCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family?

The conceptual framework expands beyond the problem statement, guiding the exploration of the key question addressed in this study. By incorporating this framework, the analysis aimed to illuminate the experiences of CCCU presidents as they navigate their roles and responsibilities. The research questions served as a roadmap to uncovering these experiences and offered insights into the various aspects of presidential leadership in faith-based institutions.

The research problem sought to address a gap in the knowledge of a significant problem that ought to be addressed for the future health of Christian higher educational institutions and their leadership (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The CCCU presidents who are fathers felt conflicted about their commitments to their spouses, their family, and their work.

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers using Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind as the conceptual framework. A double bind is a dilemma derived from a conflict between two or more conflicting messages. Given options A or B, it does not matter which choice is made because either choice will be wrong (Currie et al., 2019). This study sought to provide future candidates for college presidencies a research-informed understanding of the role's demands, the unique aspect of serving at a Christ-centered institution, and the practices and strategies presidents have employed to address the double bind of the desire to honor work and familial commitments.

Summary of the Findings & Conceptual Framework

Three key themes emerged from the interviews and aligned with elements of the conceptual framework and research questions (Table 2).

Table 2

Primary Research Themes

Research Question	Theme
What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?	No Regrets: Clearly Called to the Presidency
How do CCCU college presidents navigate the tensions between personal and professional responsibilities?	Mutual Encroachment
What strategies have CCCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family?	Discovered Practices and Strategies

In many ways, Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind provided the beginning of understanding to frame the lived experiences of CCCU presidents who are fathers as it lacks the sufficient nuance to explain the actual lived experience that balances the idea of career and calling for college a president who wears multiple hats as a husband, father, president, and more.

Consider again the hypothetical example provided in the literature review. Imagine it is 5:45 p.m. on a Wednesday. A donor dinner is coming up at 7:00 p.m. Promises were made from

the president and father to his seventh-grade daughter that he would make it to her volleyball game, but a crisis arises on campus at 5:30 p.m. A work crisis and family commitment are in direct competition, and he will break his commitment to his family or employer. The president does not have an option of “winning.” President A articulated this well when he shared,

When you’re on campus, you always feel like there are things you ought to be doing off campus, but as soon as you get off campus, you want to get back and do the things that need to be done back there.

This is a near-perfect articulation of the double bind and this experience was not unique to President A. Certainly, presidents experience the double bind, which is not surprising. What is more interesting about the research is not that the double bind exists, but in how the presidents dealt with the reality of the double bind.

Discussion of Findings

Finding 1: No Regrets: Clearly Called to the Presidency

Each president ($n = 9$) recalled the Lord’s direction in their life and emphasized the profound impact of their calling on their leadership journey. Finding 1 directly responds to the primary research question of “what are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?” At the end of the interview protocol, presidents were asked, “Do you have any regrets (about serving as a president, husband, and father)?” Presidents quickly replied that no, they did not have regrets in serving as a president while also serving as husband and father, and the theme of No Regrets: Clearly Called to the Presidency emerged. Each president interviewed ($n = 9$) did not hesitate to say they did not have regrets and then returned to God’s divine calling on their life to serve as a Christian college president at this time at their institution. Several ($n = 3$) also noted things they would have done differently and/or decisions they would have changed

given the benefit of history, but there were no regrets in taking on the role.

Over the recent past, the circumstances in which presidents are called to lead have evolved and they are now responsible for the financial, missional, external relations, and cultural aspects of the university (Brooks, 2014; Forhan, 2010; McLaughlin, 1996; Paquette, 2021; Yoder, 2019). Furthermore, budget challenges, race relations tension, the Great Resignation, and a negative public perception of higher education are evident in the reflections of the presidents and the literature (College Board, 2020; Longman, 2017; McClellan, 2022; Pendell, 2022). Yet, the presidents interviewed articulated that the felt sense of call that sustains them through the highs and lows of the job. President C described the real difficulty of the job, but his commitment to the work as well. “If it’s not a calling, not only do I think you shouldn’t do it, but the other piece is, if it’s not a calling, why in the world would you do it?”

The research findings illustrate the power of the president’s personal sense of calling to the work, which sustains them through the various trials and tribulations they encounter. This finding aligns with the literature, which suggested that presidents view their work as a vocational call from God, which they have been divinely appointed to fulfill (Beebe, 2018; Mullen, 2018; Parrott, 2018; Ryken, 2018). Further, while the glamor may quickly fade in the presidency, this also seems to align with the servant leadership framework in the literature review. The presidential participants consistently reported and reflected that they would consistently lower themselves to take on the most challenging problem and serve. President B articulated the depth of the challenge, as he reflected on the complexity of problems that reached his desk. “The most intractable problems at the institution that are not resolved end up on your shoulders, and by the time they get to you, they’re pretty heavy, because no one else has been able to figure them out.” According to the participants, the power of the vocational call seemed to serve as a sustaining

and focusing source, despite the extent of the challenges encountered.

Preparation for the role of president and the shape of the call resonated with the literature and the interview findings. The literature review documented the research on the different paths and backgrounds that prepared presidents for the work (Brubaker & Rudy, 2004; Rile, 2001; Song & Hartley, 2012; Thelin, 2016). The nine presidents interviewed similarly showcased a variety of backgrounds that brought them to academic leadership and were representative of both traditionally academic and atypical paths through government and ministry as well. According to the findings, the presidents also benefited from training from organizations such as the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and Harvard, yet their personal relationships with mentors and friends seemed to shape their calling into the presidency more than a specific preparatory path.

The literature suggested the Christian college presidency may be better described as a lifestyle than a particular position or job (Brooks, 2011; Ryken, 2018; Sasse, 2019). This lifestyle includes expectations from religious ideals of vocation, calling, purpose, and spiritual leadership. Parrott (2018) called the Christian university presidency “the single most intriguing calling in the world” and concluded that due to this “presidents need to be people of prayer and desperately need others praying for them” (p. 137). In this research, the discovered practices the presidents reported, such as presidential peers, prayer, and self-care, seemed to provide the ability to sustainably live out this intriguing calling to the lifestyle of the Christian college presidency.

The research appears to confirm that presidents’ sense of calling and institutional fit sustain them through the highs and lows of their jobs. The profound influence of their divine calling seems evident in the leadership approaches they adopt and the perseverance they demonstrate in their roles. Even more so, the presidents reflected they do not have regrets for responding positively to God’s call on their lives to serve as a Christian college president.

Finding 2: Mutual Encroachment

Presidents find themselves at the intersection of multiple responsibilities, often facing conflicting demands from family and institutional commitments. The concept of mutual encroachment emerged as presidents navigated the delicate balance between work and family life, echoing Bateson et al.'s (1956) double bind theory (Currie et al., 2019). This finding highlights the constant tug-of-war that presidents seemed to experience in managing their multiple commitments. Surprisingly, the presidents appeared to prioritize their spouse and their children, setting clear boundaries and modeling a healthy family life, which, according to the participants, was positively confirmed by their grown children. This prioritization demonstrates the importance of striking a balance between family and work obligations, even when the work obligations are daunting. Yet, the language of work/life balance did not seem to fully capture the nuance the presidents experienced and described in their interviews.

Work-life border theory and the literature on husband and father roles aligned with the research findings of the push and pull of presidential priorities (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Halrynjo, 2009). Clark's (2000) work/family border theory offers context for better understanding Christian college presidents' expectations. The work/family border theory expands on what is known about work and family balance and details the daily movement people make as they cross borders between work and family domains (Clark, 2000). The essence of the theory states that the primary connection between work and family systems is human, not emotional. People are the primary actors who transition between work and family. In this case, presidents who are fathers, their wives, and their children are the people who determine the density of the borders between work and family and how much each aspect leaks into the other. Mutual encroachment provides another way to describe this leaking, and President G shared that this push and pull of

presidential priorities is ongoing but can be managed with intentional practices and shared expectations.

As presidents leave the office at night and often cross campus to their on-campus home, they walk the transition between the world of work and family, but it exists within the environment of the campus community. Once home, the president is still the president, but there he is also dad and husband, just as he carried each of those roles when he was in his physical presidential office across campus. The presidential spouse also wears multiple hats as wife, mother, first lady, professional, and discernment partner. Each person wears multiple hats or has multiple roles, and for Christians, this includes multiple priorities that are informed by faith and a sense of vocational calling to each role (Morris & Blanton, 1994a; Sanford, 1982). Mutual encroachment gives permission to allow these priorities into life and language to recognize the tension each of these good priorities can create. It is up to the individual and the community around them to discern how to meet the expectations that come with these priorities. According to the findings, as parents and within the presidential home, the president and his wife navigated these decisions together as they led within the campus community.

In the household, parenting responsibilities must be divided up, and presidents reflected that this division was not equal given the weight of presidential responsibilities, though they also indicated they received assistance from the campus community and often their extended families to fulfill these duties. There is more to do in the household than maintain the house, and in the role of president and the hospitality expectations that accompany it, time-saving services like house cleaning, lawn care, and even grocery delivery were provided for the president and proved to be a valuable investment (Aubrey, 2017; Daniels, 1987; White, 2015). The presidents seemed to live out traditional gender roles in which each male president fulfilled the primary provider

role outside of the home, and each wife covered most of the household duties as primary caregiver, and several spouses had formal professional roles through the office of the president. The affectionate language the participants used to show appreciation for their wives and how they were uniquely suited to partner in the external work of the presidency and manage the household, was affirming. This finding aligned with the literature (Carlson et al., 2022; McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014; Renk et al., 2003). However, the presidents were inspiring in their characterization, care, love, and pursuit of their wives. They spoke glowingly not only of the way their wives maintained their home, which would be expected of a traditional gender roles approach, but also how they were active in the campus community in discerning opportunities and challenges with the president. Their wives had agency to direct the family and respond with the president, characteristics that would follow more of an egalitarian perspective.

As fathers, the presidential participants seemed to genuinely care about their children's events and prioritize their attendance, even when it meant leaving the office early. Here, presidents reflected positively that this took a stated value of caring for the family and illustrated how to live that out for their campus community. This prioritization and subsequent action is acceptable, and in a Christian college campus, presidents expressed it ought to be expected, to model what healthy family priorities look like, including times when it is inconvenient to the presidency. This, too, is subject to the push and pull of the double bind, or mutual encroachment, as there were also times when children's events had to be missed for mission-critical campus activities such as convocation or commencement. Yet according to the interviews, donor visits and alumni event schedules were often flexed around the priority of the family.

Presidents reflected how, as fathers, the college presidency afforded additional positive activities for their children that they would not have been able to offer them outside of the

position. These family opportunities included international travel, having college students in the home to learn from, meeting dignitaries and famous speakers, and the wealth of conversations curious children get to be part of in an academic community. Here, beyond attending events and making time for their children, the participants emphasized the positive reflections of their grown children as ultimately showing the effects of the office of the presidency. According to participants, these children recognized that though time is finite, their fathers' intentionality when he was with them was more memorable than the specific amount of time invested. This finding aligns with research that shows that if a father is mentally present when he is physically present, the amount of time is not as important as his intention and attention during the time spent (McBride & Mills, 1993; Renk et al. 2003). The surprise here was that even with leading the chaos that is the Christian college presidency, not only did presidents not have regrets when reflecting on the role's impact on their ability to serve as husband and father, but according to the participant's recollections, their adult children also reflected positively on the experience. This confirmation would seem to suggest that the children had a positive upbringing and remember fondly life in the president's home.

This dissertation research study also offered an opportunity to consider the state of a subset of leading men in America. The literature suggests that men are struggling, and questions about healthy masculine identity, loneliness, and friendship are swirling (Brooks, 2022; Cox, 2021; Reeves, 2022). President B echoed this loneliness when he reflected, "You are the only person in your institution that has no peer. And you bear that alone." However, these Christian college presidents appeared to differentiate themselves from existing research, as they seemed to deeply rely on presidential peers. To the extent that, President F, when wrestling with the difficulty of the position and the importance of his peers, said, "I actually have friends." He

credited these friends for his longevity in the role and their advice, accountability, and encouragement as invaluable in his marriage as well as his presidency.

According to participants, these presidential peers or friends step in during trials or tragedies and sit with one another, whether in person or on the phone. In this way, mutual encroachment can be seen as the messiness of human relationships and the priorities that shift when people rightly care for one another. Crisis does not follow a schedule; tragedies give no warning. For the presidential participants, it was in the most difficult moments when a text of prayer support or an offer to spend time processing seemed to mean the most. Certainly, men, young and old, are struggling in America, yet witnessing the intentional community found by these presidents with one another was inspiring and offers hope for those whom President B described as “helping to shape, at least bend the curve a little bit, of a generation of students toward the good.”

Mutual encroachment seemed to provide participants a how-to guide to better navigate the tensions in Bateson et al.'s (1956) theory of the double bind, enabling presidents to understand and prioritize their spouses, children, and institutional responsibilities. According to the double bind theory, specific scenarios can result in a participant feeling obligated to do more than one thing at the same time, but in which the simultaneous fulfillment of the tasks is not possible, causing strong internal conflict and anxiety, as there is not a clear path or clean win. Yet, the presidents interviewed seemed to have language to deal with these issues before the issues arose, as if they had thought through the contradictions that would come as a result of their multiple roles, which they understood would contradict at times. Here the language of mutual encroachment gives not only language, but perhaps provides an antidote to the conflicting demands of the family and the presidency.

When combined with the first theme—No Regrets: Clearly Called to the Presidency—the language of calling and vocation that flows from a Christian worldview seems to further mitigate the effects of the double bind. Certainly the challenges inherent in the double bind are still felt, but they appear to be dulled. The presidents interviewed seemed to indicate in their responses that they did not have regrets in serving their roles of husband, president, and father; instead, the divine appointment to serve as a college president provided language to understand, explain, moderate, and even diminish the double bind. This finding highlights the necessity of adopting intentional strategies to address the competing demands on the participant's time and energy. With an understanding of the divine call to the role of the presidency and the language of mutual encroachment to navigate the double bind, the next step is to consider what practices and strategies presidents employed to navigate their competing priorities.

Finding 3: Discovered Practices and Strategies

Several discovered practices and strategies emerged, which the presidential participants used to chart their course through the presidency. The finding illuminates the importance of calendaring and self-care in supporting presidents' endurance and effectiveness in their leadership roles. Conflicts caused by the family calendar and the calendar of the president were predicted to be a double bind, but did not emerge as a significant factor, although it intuitively makes sense. Presidents acknowledged the importance of time management but did not attribute its effectiveness solely to calendaring. The emphasis on self-care emerged as a critical element in sustaining long-term leadership. Although self-care looked different for each participant, themes such as healthy limits, practices, and even spiritual disciplines were consistent.

Healthy people seemed to be healthy presidents, and the presidential participants interviewed suggested some of this health could be controlled with a calendar. Aspects of this

health aligned with the literature as presidents pursued their relationship with God, their spouses, and in the Christian community (Brooks, 2014; Mullen, 2018; Ryken, 2018). What pre-existing literature did not document was the importance of healthy limits. President G indicated his two sabbaticals have saved his presidency. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, he took a second sabbatical which gave him the opportunity to hear feedback from his family that “he was really cranky” and “if he’s going to stay in this job he needed to make some changes.” According to participants, the reason presidents obsessed over their calendars and pulled in their spouses with their staff was due to the all-consuming nature of the presidential lifestyle. This presidential experience aligns with the literature on executive and presidential burnout (Adams, 2021; Kelderman, 2022; Tatter, 2021). The calendar, when used as an appropriate tool, seemed to provide the guardrails for a healthy functioning president, and each participant acknowledged its role in their lives.

Leading a Christian organization provides a unique context for presidential service including a variety of new factors and expectations when compared to secular organizations (Adams, 2021; Lee, 1999; Morris & Blanton, 1994b). As the literature posited, and the findings of this study corroborate, lines appear to blur quickly due to the religious language of calling and vocation (Adam, 2020; Beebe, 2018; McLaughlin, 1996). When a president perceived they were designed by God for a specific task at a specific point in time, it is understandable that they would disregard their health and any sense of work-life balance or even the improved idea of mutual encroachment. After all, they believe this is the Lord’s work. In this context, the double bind is magnified. If God has called the president to be a father and a husband, and he’s also clearly called him to be president, these callings inevitably collide. The president carries the burden of responsibility in multiple places with conflicting demands all at the same time, which

is uniquely tenuous. The inevitability and intensity of this challenge is why it is essential for Christian college presidents who are fathers to lean on one another, to learn from the experiences of one another, and to share practices and strategies to manage the stresses of the presidency. These practical insights provide a roadmap that is outside of the body of literature but may be essential to increasing the longevity and effectiveness of presidents.

Implications and Advice

As a result of the research performed, practical recommendations emerged for presidential candidates, first-year presidents, spouses of presidential candidates, spouses of first-year presidents, and boards of trustees and presidential search teams. These collected recommendations can function as practical tips and advice gleaned from the interview participants. The research provided the opportunity for unique and fantastically wise counsel, that emerged from the interviews but was more detailed and practical than the themes. Due to the astuteness of the learnings, this section on practical tips and takeaways complements the results.

The interview protocol called specifically for presidents who are fathers, so women presidents were not interviewed. Each college president was married and had at least one child, thus each president spoke of the experiences of their wives and children. This has been incorporated in the practical tips as advice for spouses and while these tips reflect the wisdom of the participants, the core can be generalized to presidents regardless of gender. The rules of thumb begin with presidential candidates with children, and the audiences that follow assume knowledge of the practical tips and takeaways, which includes spouses of presidential candidates, boards of trustees, and presidential search teams.

Practical Tips and Takeaways

Practical Tips and Takeaways for Presidential Candidates in the Search Process

1. Your spouse has to be 100% in.
2. Be selective on which presidency you take. You may not want to jump at the first opportunity.
3. Ensure you have personal theological alignment at the institution where you will be serving.
4. There is never a good time to take on a presidency, but God's time is the best time. Do not limit God.
5. The most effective presidents are ideally suited for their particular campus and many times may not be that effective at another campus.
6. Be cautious of headhunters. Their job is to create a strong pool rather than identifying your best fit. Listen to friends, mentors, and colleagues who know you well.
7. Identify seasoned leaders who can mentor you in the presidency and then pay it forward when you are there.
8. Expect a minimum of a 65-hour work week.
9. Recognize you will not be able to prioritize leadership roles in other areas of your life such as your church, school board, or community.

Practical Tips and Takeaways for First-Year Presidents

1. Know your strengths and lead out of them.
2. Find a group of peer presidents you trust with whom you can enjoy friendship. The presidency is lonely.
3. Understand that most decisions you make are judgment calls. Make the best judgment call you can with the available information. When you regret how something turned out, you will also know that it seemed like the best thing to do in the moment and from your

wise counsel.

4. Provide space for your children to be their own people.
5. If you have children at the college you're leading, create clear boundaries for family conversations and school conversations, and share upfront with your family and staff which items you will act on and which ones you will not.
6. Win the calendar. Schedule your priorities first including family time and major projects and include your spouse in calendaring meetings with your staff.

Practical Tips and Takeaways for Calendaring in Year 1

1. Insist on daily quiet time for devotions and reflection.
2. Measure your travel and do not travel more than 40% of the time. Sleeping in your own bed is important.
3. Schedule family time upfront.
4. Do 80% of your entertaining at lunch rather than dinner. Lunch has a clear end time and keeps the nights free for the family. Plus, donors like lunch too.
5. Protect one night of the weekend for family time.
6. Only commit to off campus speaking engagements that fulfill advancement or admissions objectives.
7. Identify fun ways to turn work commitments into family time. Sure, Dad may have to leave the table and say hello to other guests but get dressed up and enjoy a night out together.

Practical Tips and Takeaways for Spouses of Presidential Candidates

1. Understand your priorities and your non-negotiables and talk about what you need with your spouse before you decide together whether or not to take the role.

2. Sit in on the interviews and get to know the campus community. Discern the opportunity together.
3. Understand the extent of the role of Christian college president and also discern a sense of familial call to the role.
4. Consider if you desire to be employed at the college in a formal role. If so, what role fits your strengths and interests, and does this family season allow for that role?
5. Determine your communication preferences as a couple: will you process the day together?

Practical Tips and Takeaways for Spouses of First-Year Presidents

1. Participate in calendaring meetings with presidential staff.
2. Identify trusted help to assist with parenting during travel and hectic seasons.
3. Classify which events you would prefer to have family involvement, which events to have your involvement, and which events you do not need to plan or attend.
4. Prioritize friendships with spouses of other college presidents.
5. Intentionally travel together: enjoy international trips, fun destinations, and entertainment.

Practical Tips and Takeaways for Boards of Trustees and Presidential Search Teams

1. Know the president will serve God and the institution through the strength of family life and should not serve at the expense of family life.
2. Be clear on your expectations for the president. Five key areas of responsibility:
 - a. Engagement with the board of trustees,
 - b. Executive Leadership of the institution: vision and team building,
 - c. Institutional Ambassador– internal and external,

- d. Resource Development: the president as chief development officer,
 - e. Personal Development as a leader.
3. Consider the hospitality responsibilities of the president and their stage of life and be flexible to the needs of the family.
 4. Consider adding a Presidential Care Committee to the board of trustees for the president's evaluation.

New Findings/Discussion and Analysis

This dissertation research uncovered several new and unexpected findings that add depth to the understanding of the lived experience of presidential leaders in faith-based institutions. The findings highlight the prominence of near-obsessive calendaring as a strategy employed by presidents to manage their time and commitments effectively. Further, the emphasis on self-care and the direct correlation with a president's endurance and effectiveness in the role was more pronounced than anticipated. Presidents need peers, friends, and community to sustain and may need to search beyond their college campus or immediate community to identify this support and friendship. Sabbaticals, often associated with church leadership and in the academic side of higher education, also emerged as an important means for presidents to recharge and refocus, ultimately lengthening the time in office. Finally, the concept of mutual encroachment emerged as a helpful model to weave together the roles of husband, father, and president.

Implications for Future Research

The research findings have several practical implications for policy and practice at Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions. First, the CCCU should focus on developing a robust senior leadership pipeline. Establishing programs to nurture and prepare leaders who are 5 or more years away from assuming presidential roles may ensure a

pool of qualified candidates equipped with a Christian imagination and practical toolkit to step up and lead should the call occur.

The concept of work-life balance is not the appropriate term for CCCU college presidents who are parents and should be reconsidered. Instead, the idea of mutual encroachment, which offers language to describe the effects of the family on the role of the president and the role of the president on the family, can take the place of work-life balance and represents a more accurate description. The qualitative nature of this study provided valuable insights into presidential lived experiences and their alignment with the existing literature.

In future research, scholars could utilize a comparative analysis at secular private colleges. Such research may provide a comparison and contrast of leadership experiences in faith-based and non-faith-based institutions. Exploring the lived experiences of female presidents would provide an understanding of the unique leadership challenges associated with their gender and their specific strategies for maintaining competing commitments. Future researchers could explore the lived experiences of the spouses and family members of the college president, through directly interviewing spouses and children. This research design would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of presidential leadership on the roles of the nuclear family.

Researchers could use a similar interview protocol but pull in additional segments of college presidents including those at secular private institutions and public institutions. Similarly, a more focused study could compare the CCCU with the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE). Given this was a qualitative dissertation study, quantitative research would build on these findings to explore a broader understanding of presidential leadership experiences and would provide the opportunity to add in statistical correlations and trends.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to answer the primary research question “What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?” Two additional research questions were added to explore how these presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities and what strategies they implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family. The role of the presidency is changing, and the pressures continue to mount. Yet, these presidents understood their work as a vocation call from God, which they have been divinely appointed to fulfill (Beebe, 2018; Mullen, 2018; Parrott, 2018; Ryken, 2018). This divine call, and language to describe the vocation of Christian college president, provides an additional layer of expectations from the Christian community when compared to presidents of secular institutions. Even so, there is a felt need for leaders to steward the role of presidency at Christian colleges and universities for such a time as this.

The findings of this dissertation research provide a field guide to those considering the Christian college presidency. A comprehensive review of the responsibilities of the job is provided, including how the role has evolved over time and the current salient demands of the position. The real challenges that presidents face and the dire circumstances of many schools, given contemporary problems of budget challenges, demographic changes, race relations incidents, employee discontent and turnover, and the negative public perception of higher education are all documented. The accumulation of these challenges has resulted in increased presidential turnover. For those considering the role of Christian college president, a firm understanding of a president’s priorities including finances, mission, and external relations is needed, in order to guide a campus culture with their leadership. These seemingly intractable challenges and grand expectations create pressure on the president, which could then be felt by

the president's family and affect the home life. All of this underscored the gap in research, to understand the lived experiences of a Christian college president who is a father, and, even more, to understand what strategies they employed to successfully navigate the role.

My hope is that by sharing the experiences of these men, as well as their most practical advice and experiences, I have stewarded the trust given to me by the research participants, and thus benefit Christian higher education, the CCCU, and all of higher education. The research explored the path and preparation for the presidency, and the realities that the work is both hard and good. These men navigate the double bind each day and honor the interplay of the family and the presidency. In their investment in this research, my hope is that their lived wisdom will provide a running start for the next generation of college presidents as they take up the mantle of leadership in a time of division and despair. Further, that the next generation of leaders is equipped for this good work and passionately leans into the cultural value of Christian higher education that Brooks (2016) articulates:

You (Christian colleges) have what everybody else is desperate to have: a way of talking about and educating the human person in a way that integrates faith, emotion and intellect. You have a recipe to nurture human beings who have a devoted heart, a courageous mind and a purposeful soul. Almost no other set of institutions in American society has that, and everyone wants it. From my point of view, you're ahead of everybody else and have the potential to influence American culture in a way that could be magnificent.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Interview

Dear xxxxx,

Greetings,

I am a student in Bethel University's Doctor of Education program and serve as Vice President for Enrollment & Marketing at Dordt University. In conjunction with my professional career, my doctoral studies have led me to my dissertation interest, a qualitative study entitled "The Push and Pull of Presidential Priorities: A Qualitative Study to Understand the Lived Experiences of CCCU College Presidents Who Are Fathers."

After consultation with my dissertation advisor, Dr. Jessica Daniels, as well as the president at Dordt University, Dr. Erik Hoekstra, and the president emeritus at Bethel University, Dr. Jay Barnes, I would like to invite you to consider participation in my study. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes of your time. All information will be kept to the utmost confidential standards.

I've arranged for the interviews to take place in person at the 2023 CCCU Presidents Conference at the Westin, Washington D.C., from February 1-3. If we cannot find a time at the conference, I'm also glad to schedule a Zoom meeting.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions. My email address is Brandon.Huisman@dordt.edu, and my cell phone is 712.441.2541.

Best Regards,



Brandon Huisman, MBA

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers?

1. “Would you start by explaining why you decided to become a Christian college president and how that decision affected your role as a father?”
2. Talk to me about the demands of being a CCCU president and what takes most of your time?
3. Presidents in Christian higher education often refer to a sense of vocational calling that is rooted in their faith and a larger Kingdom impact. Has this understanding of calling impacted your work, and if so how?

RQ2: How do CCCU college presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities?

4. How has your role as president impacted your role as a father and a husband?

Prompt: What aspects of the presidential role create the most felt tensions with your family responsibilities?
5. In contrast, how has your role as father and husband impacted your role as a president?

Prompt: How do you decide which events are non-negotiables for you? Have you had to miss any non-negotiables?
6. Suppose you had a magic wand and could create the perfect work/family life balance. What might this balance look like?

Prompt: How would this balance show up in your calendar?

Prompt: Has your Christian community, denomination, or Church shaped your own expectations or perceived external expectations toward these roles? If so, how?

RQ3. What strategies have CCCU college presidents implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family?

7. What or who, if at all, has helped you navigate the tensions of being a successful president and father/husband? Perhaps going into the presidency, or as you evolved in the role, did you identify any strategies that you found supported your desire to be a successful president and father/husband? What were they?

Prompt: Did any people in particular help you navigate the tensions between the responsibilities of the different roles?

Prompt: Was this a tension that was proactively addressed with you by the search firm, BOT, CCCU trainings, etc.?
8. Let me put my cards on the table. I have four young kids-- 8, 5, 3, and 9 months. My beautiful wife and I have been married for 14 years. Last year, I was surprised to receive not just the form email from the headhunter but a call on my cell phone about a presidential opportunity at a

CCCU school. What advice would you give me?

Prompt: Do you have any regrets (about serving as a president, husband, and father)?

9. We've discussed my research interest in the lived experience of CCCU college presidents who are fathers, and I appreciate your investment in my research. Is there something that I should have asked about but didn't that you would like to add?

Appendix C: Request and Response for Interviews to CCCU

Shirley,

I hope you are doing well. Thank you for joining our recent Innovative Enrollment and Marketing Networking Zoom call.

The last opportunity I had to visit with you was as part of my doctoral work in higher education leadership, and I'm writing to that end again today. My studies and professional career have led me to my dissertation interest, a qualitative study entitled "The Push and Pull of Presidential Priorities: a qualitative study to understand the lived experiences of CCCU college presidents who are fathers." I'm particularly interested in how these presidents navigate the tension between personal and professional responsibilities and what strategies they may have implemented to honor the interplay of the presidency and the family. I hope this research will be of value to the CCCU, presidential search committees, and future presidential candidates and their spouses.

In conversations with my advisor, Dr. Jessica Daniels (cc'd), and President Hoekstra (cc'd), we believe the 2023 Presidents Conference would be the ideal setting for conducting interviews. We hope visiting college presidents outside the office will lead to better interviews. It would also be a fun opportunity to attend the Awards Dinner as Dordt alumna Wendy Matamoros receives the 2023 Young Alumni Award.

I'm working with Dr. Daniels to complete my proposal this month and defend the proposal in early January. The research design includes six interviews with CCCU presidents, and I envision this taking place in public spaces at the Westin. As Erik and I have discussed this research, I wanted to reach out for two practical purposes:

1. I wanted to both provide the background of my intentions and give you a courtesy heads-up if you have any concerns. My credentials do not allow me to register for the conference. Is there someone I should connect with about registering for the conference?
2. I'd like your advice. I've visited Erik, Jess, and Jay Barnes regarding potential participants for the interview. Interviewees must meet the parameters for eligibility: male, president at a CCCU institution for more than six months, married, and have at least one child. Who would you recommend?

Best Regards,

Brandon Huisman

Response:

Dear Brandon,

It is good to hear from you. This is a terrific topic and will be a great study for CCCU presidents and prospective presidents. I do not think it will be a bother for you to conduct research in the free time of the conference. Katie O'Malley copied above is our events coordinator. She can provide a link for you to register and provide schedule information for you to find free time during the conference.

In looking at your list of interviews, I think you have made fantastic choices.

Warmly,

Shirley

Shirley V. Hoogstra, J.D.

President

Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

321 Eighth Street NE | Washington, D.C. 20002

Appendix D: Signatures

“I certify that the information furnished concerning the procedures to be taken for the protection of human participants is correct. I will seek and obtain prior approval for any substantive modification in the proposal and will report promptly any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse effects in the course of this study.”

Student: Brandon Huisman, 1.5.2023

Advisor: *Jessica R. Daniels* 1.7.2023

Methodologist: Marta Shaw, 01.09.2023

Reader: Timothy Van Soelen, 1.09.2023

Appendix E: Responses from CCCU Presidents

1. College President 1

a. Good morning, Brandon. I'd be happy to chat with you, but my schedule at CCCU is unpredictable. Why don't we schedule a Zoom call in February or March. My assistant, XXXX, will set up a mutually convenient time for us. Thanks. New year's blessings, President 1

2. College President 2

a. Brandon, Of course, I would be happy to participate. Feel free to be in touch and we can find a time that works. Most likely it will need to be on a Saturday. Blessings, College President 2

3. College President 3

a. Hello Brandon, I am willing to participate. I arrive on the 2nd and leave in the 3rd, so an in-person interview may not work. Please work with my colleague XXXX to try to get us scheduled. Blessings, College President 3

4. College President 4

a. Good Morning Brandon, Happy New Year! College President 4 asked that I reach out regarding your interview request during the CCCU conference. He is willing to do the interview; however, he requested that it be held at another time either over the phone or zoom. Please let me know if this option works for you, and we can work to schedule a time. Kind Regards, XXXX

5. College President 5

a. Brandon, He'd be happy to talk with you at the CCCU conference in February. I'm not sure when the breaks are. Did you want to suggest some times after the schedule is published? Also, if you'll send me the questions ahead of time, I can pass them along to College President 5 so that you'll get his most thoughtful answers. Best, XXXX

6. College President 6

a. Thanks for reaching out, Brandon. If we can find a reasonable time at CCCU, I'll do this. XXXX will try to help—we may need to know more about the schedule there, however. I try to do a few of these every year, without having time for too many. I value your role at Dordt, though, and I like the topic. Let's try to make this work. College President 6

7. College President 7

a. Happy to help, Brandon. My cell # is XXX.XXX.XXXX. Just text me when you get to the conference (or if that is too loose) we can set something up in advance. (I'm just not sure yet what my schedule will be.)

Appendix F: Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a phenomenological study on the lived experience of CCCU college presidents who are fathers. Research on Christian college presidents' substantial expectations and challenges is limited. In the current landscape of Christian higher education, the position of president is becoming increasingly challenging. Yet, outside of the office, these college presidents juggle home commitments alongside the lifestyle of serving as a Christian college president—these fathers are also husbands, brothers, sons, and friends. Each of these titles bears distinct responsibilities and expectations within the United States and the Christian community. To further explore the pressures of the college presidency in CCCU schools, I will focus specifically on the lived experience of fathers who are CCCU college presidents.

This research is being conducted in fulfillment of dissertation requirements in the Educational Leadership Ed.D. program at Bethel University in St. Paul, MN. If you decide to participate, I will schedule a private interview. The interview will occur either at the 2023 CCCU President's Conference in Washington, D.C. or virtually via Zoom and will last approximately one hour. Interviews will be recorded via Zoom and make use of Zoom's transcription service whether in-person or online. Regardless of interview format, the recording will occur in a private meeting space, the computer audio will be used, I will verbalize when the recording begins and end, and the recordings will not be publicly shared. F

I would like to remind you to protect your privacy by completing the interview in a private and quiet space, to ensure conversations are not overheard and also to limit interruptions. For those interviewing in person at the CCCU President's Conference in Washington, D.C., the CCCU has reserved a private room for confidential interviews.

Regarding Zoom, you should also understand that Zoom recordings are not private as Zoom may have access to them. Further, you should understand that Zoom recordings (audio or video) are considered identifiable data.

During the interview, I will request that you share your lived experience as a CCCU college president and as a father. We will explore your personal and professional responsibilities and the strategies you have implemented to honor the interplay between the presidency and the family. Interview questions have been designed to delve into your reflections. You retain the right, at any time, to refrain from responding to questions that are too personal, sensitive, or distressing. You may also withdraw from the study at any time and pause the interview as necessary.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential, though please note the risks of the Zoom recording as noted above. No participant will be identified by name or institution in any written reports or in the publication of the approved dissertation. Further, no other identifying characteristics will be included within the discussion of thematic content, as only aggregate and generalized data will be presented.

I will record the interview via Zoom to document the interview content. These recordings, interview transcripts, and any materials shared by you during the study will be stored and locked in a secure place at my home, away from public access. These records will be destroyed upon the

university's full approval of my dissertation.

Your decision to participate will not affect your future relations with your place of employment. Further, your decision to participate will not affect your future relationships with Dr. Erik Hoekstra, research affiliate and president at Dordt University, or Dr. Jay Barnes, research affiliate and Christian College Consortium president. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans has reviewed and approved this research project. If you have any questions about the research and research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

Jessica Daniels, Ph.D.

Program Director/Professor

Bethel University

3900 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN 55112

j-daniels@bethel.edu

651.635.8972

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 above and decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix G: Next Steps Email

Insert Date

Greetings,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my phenomenological study on the lived experience of CCCU college presidents who are fathers. Research on Christian college presidents' substantial expectations and challenges is limited. In the current landscape of Christian higher education, the position of president is becoming increasingly challenging. Yet, outside of the office, these college presidents juggle home commitments alongside the lifestyle of serving as a Christian college president—these fathers are also husbands, brothers, sons, and friends. Each of these titles bears distinct responsibilities and expectations within the United States and the Christian community.

Since you have agreed to participate in the study, I have made arrangements with _____ on your team for the interview to take place at XX:XX time on X month XX date, 2023 via XXX modality at XX location.

I've attached a consent form as well as a confirmation of the approval of this study from the Institutional Review Board of Bethel University. Please sign and return the consent form.

Best Regards,

Brandon Huisman, MBA

Appendix H: Affiliate Permissions

Email exchange with Dr. Jay Barnes:

December 1, 2022

Hi Jay,

I hope you are doing well. As you know, my doctoral studies and professional career have led me to my dissertation interest, a qualitative study entitled “The Push and Pull of Presidential Priorities: A Qualitative Study to Understand the Lived Experiences of CCCU College Presidents who are Fathers.

I’m working with Jessica Daniels to complete my proposal this month and defend the proposal in early January. With that, I hope to conduct research in person at the 2023 CCCU Presidents Conference. I reviewed my notes from our discussion this summer, visited with Jessica Daniels and Erik Hoekstra, and compiled the following list for my interviews. The research design calls for six one-hour interviews.

(List of Interview Candidates)

Given your relationships with many of these men, I wanted to reevaluate and see if you would recommend I proceed with this group or if you would suggest a few shifts.

All my best to you and Barbara during this Christmas season.

Kind Regards,

Brandon Huisman

December 2, 2022

Brandon,

Thanks for your note and request for input. The first X on your list are ones I would recommend. XXXX is a really good person.... XXXX had X children when he started and their youngest is still at home. He has more external pressures to deal with than most presidents because of XXXX’s visibility. He is a very good leader - thoughtful, articulate. I would not recommend XXXX Another person to consider is XXXX at XXXX. He is a terrific leader.

Hope this is helpful feedback.

Jay

Jay Barnes

President

Christian College Consortium

President Emeritus

Bethel University

Email Exchange with Dr. Erik Hoekstra:

1.10.2023

Thank you for sharing your insights and expertise regarding interview subjects for my research at Bethel University as part of my EdD program. Given your valuable input, you are classified as a research affiliate for my proposed research. I appreciate your time thinking through my proposed research with you, particularly the list of CCCU presidents who are fathers. Do I have your permission to list you as a research affiliate and list you in the consent form for my participants?

Best Regards,

Brandon

Dear Brandon,

I've been so privileged to assist you in this project. I am thrilled to be listed as a research associate!!! I wish you all the best in the rest of the journey.

Regards,

Erik Hoekstra

President, Dordt University

Dr. Hoekstra