

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A MIXED-METHOD STUDY: EXECUTIVE PASTORS AND  
THE PERFORMANCE OF FAST-GROWING  
CHURCHES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education  
by  
Donald Wouter Bosch

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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PERFORMANCE OF FAST-GROWING CHURCHES

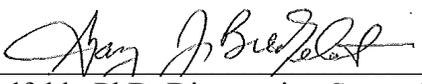
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## ABSTRACT

Based on available literature, little systematic investigation has explicitly considered the extent to which investing in church management, including hiring executive pastors, affects church performance. The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed-methods study is to assess phenomenological and correlational data from one hundred of the fastest-growing churches in the United States, as ranked by LifeWay Research (2018) for calendar years 2017-2018 and draw available conclusions on church executive leadership capacity versus performance.

Phenomenological data was used to qualitatively examine the executive management functions at these churches and analyze how each determined its need for such expertise based on leadership team organization. Statistical data was used to quantify non-causal relationships between time and money invested within eight individual aspects of church executive management and the rate of growth for those churches. The desired outcome was further insight into executive management taxonomy specific to fast growing churches and an understanding of how executive management investment may factor into church performance in particular. Church leaders desiring to make effective personnel staffing decisions consistent with their particular vision, ministry, organization, program, and financial stewardship goals may find utility in study findings.

*Keywords:* Leadership, executive pastor, ministry team, human resources, church performance, COVID-19, mixed-method

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## **Dedication**

To my Pensacola Girl, who turned the humble promises of Ruth 1:16 into a grand adventure.

## Acknowledgements

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Finally, this could not have been done without my wife, best friend and constant study partner. Thanks to her the answer to "Do you have homework?" is at last "Not tonight, LeAnn."

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Executive Pastor (XP)

Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Qualitative Analysis (QUAL)

Quantitative Analysis (QUAN)

Return on Investment (ROI)

Transcendental Phenomenology (TPh)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

Does the amount a church invests in management, including positions and salaries of dedicated executive pastor and support staff, predict how it will perform? One could argue that such investment has no link to performance but rather is driven simply by necessity in larger and more complex churches. The growing number of executive and business-focused associate pastors on church leadership teams suggests they have some actual value, even if it is only perceived, and even if a measurable return on investment (ROI) is undetermined or even unnecessary. So why consider such an ambiguous topic?

About eighteen years ago this researcher was invited to join the leadership team of a 10,000+ member congregation in Southern California. Together this team ran the main church campus and large sanctuary with six auxiliary campuses, a Christian elementary and secondary school campus, and a global radio, television, and internet ministry. The physical plant of the church would impress any city engineer. The number of paid and unpaid core staff easily exceeded U.S. Small Business Administration criteria of 250 employees or more. The Small Groups Ministry alone had more than 270 lay leaders, each tending to a different weekly gathering of various sizes and focus areas across San Diego County. Local road circulation was adjusted to handle Sunday and weekday traffic. In fact, one of the church's biggest demands on volunteer labor, after youth programs and ushers, was the Sunday parking ministry. Within the staff itself, strategic planning, finance and budget administration, human resource management, training and education, civic engagement, and legal compliance were all carefully prioritized and tracked to support each ministry goal for the church.

The senior pastor occupied a visible and well-appointed office. While his executive secretary appeared to fulfill the normal “little old lady in tennis shoes” role as the hub of church activity, the real center of operations was one floor below, in the corner of a makeshift office created for the executive pastor (XP) and his staff. On one particular day, this XP’s workload included drafting an agenda for an upcoming ministry-wide strategic planning conference, wrangling with county officials over compliance concerns about the church’s robust recycling program, crafting a logistics plan to present a Bible to every home in the surrounding city, and making staffing decisions driven by the impending departure of key personnel. Thankfully, the XP also made time over lunch to share his testimony with a young Christian lay-leader who was, those same eighteen years ago, beginning to get a passion for the topic of management excellence within the Christian church.

Such curiosity ultimately led to this study, which necessarily begins with background on the research concern, the thesis problem statement, and the research questions being asked. The assumptions and delimitations of this study are next, along with definitions of key terms. Chapter One concludes with a summary of the significance of the study and its overall design. Subsequent chapters contain a review of recent and historic literature on church management in both biblical and business settings, a more in-depth explanation of the quantitative and qualitative research conducted, a summary of the findings, and a few conclusions and recommendations.

### **Background to the Problem**

Somewhere in the U.S. this week, a pastoral search committee is meeting. They have seen executive pastors work effectively in other churches and are gathering to consider whether to invest their finite resources into hiring an XP. How should they decide?

Those considering this important decision might ask how it would benefit their church from a functional standpoint. One goal might be freeing up the pastor to focus on the pulpit and other ministries for which he or she was hired, expecting gains in both quantity and quality in this area. Another might see this as an ability to expand into new ministry areas that current workloads do not permit. Are these motives reasonable? Assuming the answer is not clearly at hand, another committee member might ask whether an executive pastor is too much of a boardroom concept for a spiritually driven mission. And in any event, what would make the duties of this leader distinct from those of the pastor? Finally, one might ask whether hiring an XP could help a church more effectively deal with—even attain—church growth. This of course assumes that a larger congregation and more influence on the surrounding community is a ministry objective.

These questions fall into timeless discussions of *management* and *performance*. For Aristotle, excellence was never accidental, but rather the result of intention, effort, and execution (Martin & Samels, 2015). As a group of people contributing to a defined mission, often certified by a formal charter, underlying order is always needed to carry it out. Is a stone soup ministry an exception? People may certainly congregate via word of mouth with their bags of beans and vegetable sacks and morsels of venison for a stew, boil it all up, fellowship together, and depart with body and spirit satisfied. But someone still took the initiative to find a kettle, fill it with water, hang it, and light a fire under it. Couples would admit that organizing even two people takes a fair amount of intent.

Over objections to churches becoming “too corporate” then, an entering assumption is that ministries must be managed, and effective ones are managed well. Some on the committee might be happy with these qualitative arguments; [insert necessary functions] are not getting

done and need attention by someone other than Dr. Senior Pastor (or the pastor's wife). Others in the group remain unconvinced. Why must managing become a separate effort? Where are the quantitative outcomes to support this as a good investment? For churches seeking excellence (cf. Dan. 6:3)<sup>1</sup> these are important performance questions.

One of the board members, a retired corporate executive with several years of experience helping this church with its business affairs, is quietly listening. He will be considering whether to apply for the position were it to be approved. This prospective XP might also appreciate an objective appraisal of such a position's value to missional organizations. He would, however, be disappointed to learn that little quantitative analysis (QUAN) has been done to predict an ROI of XPs' important contributions across church ministry areas.

During the meeting one board member even challenges such a premise. Performance language, it is argued, ignores the fundamental purpose of the Church. One soul saved for eternity is sufficient for the entire effort. And yet, the group finally concedes, there is much work to be done that goes beyond what is "merely sufficient."

This study, then, is a modest attempt to lend analytical support to their difficult decision. Chapter Two offers a theological, historical, sociological, and theoretical survey of the available literature on church organization and management in both the Old and New Testaments. It assembles opinions of leaders from the last four or five decades on what an executive pastor specifically contributes to a church leadership team. It also briefly examines the contemporary challenges that churches tackle today to remain relevant and influential in their communities. Chapter Three notes that data for this study was collected from those at the front lines who are

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New American Standard Bible*.

managing dynamic ministries today through some very trying national events, including a global COVID-19 pandemic. Chapters Four and Five summarize and assess the data collected and offer conclusions and recommendations for related study.

Continuing with the introduction, and contrary to some thought, both church performance and executive pastor roles are open to examination across educational, organizational, ministry, and theological contexts. Leadership, education, and the social sciences are connected fields of study, rooted in a shared theory base, all of which can and should be approached in the context of a biblical world view (Bredfeldt, 2019). New, focused research can reveal how XP roles are defined and may also appraise them through the lens of organizational science, within the leadership versus management debate, and relative to the development and delivery of biblically based training and education.

One area of analysis here is the different types of executive management structures and processes that churches put in place. How do such business abstractions impact the operation of a church? Mackenzie (1969) defined management as those activities dealing with ideas, things, and people. Three functions—problem analysis, decision making, and communication—are always important to the manager’s effectiveness. They are also not static concepts. The general understanding of management in churches has changed a great deal in the past few decades. Definitions of Christian leadership are being articulated and broken down by researchers into areas such as organizing, planning, staffing, directing, and evaluating. Like any complex, productive organization, these require competent, visionary, highly functional executive leadership to carry them out (Boersma, 1988; Fletcher, 2004; Kiel, 1988.; Woodruff, 2004).

In terms of church growth, Christian ministries are analogous to small businesses in the sense that, beyond a certain size or level of activity, their administrative functions can no longer

be managed well as secondary duties, either by the senior pastor or even committed volunteers (Wagner, 1979). Like many small business owners, pastors are also usually so-called technical experts in their positions in terms of their pastoral and extra-pastoral duties (Powell, 2009) and can be just as reluctant to distribute their emerging non-technical workload to others for fear of losing control of the organization. Observing the negative experiences of their fellow pastors who retain all duties despite increasing congregation size and activities, many are now doing the opposite. While the title of the executive pastor or XP has been in use since the mid '80s, and while job-descriptions, titles, and assigned tasks vary to some extent (Hawco, 2005), many pastors have joined the movement toward partnering with managerial clergy.

From a performance standpoint the goal is not simply completing tasks but being highly effective in *both* ministry and the management that sustain it. XP investment is seen from this vantage point as a ministry enabler. Military chaplains are a helpful example of this. U.S. Air Force Major General (Retired) and Chaplain Dondi Costin (2008) sought to define both the pastoral and executive competencies that the Air Force Chaplain School needed to teach its senior officers. By national necessity, its graduates must be both highly effective pastors and strong military leaders. A good deal of a military officer's time in fact is spent capturing and writing up reports on the performance of subordinates, while providing the same information to one's own superiors. This is a major basis for promotion, so it is no surprise that it gets attention. In this light there are a few pertinent observations from his research with regard to ministry performance.

First, pastors are rarely prepared vocationally for their management role. There is, Costin (2008) found, a disparity between the amount of time invested in management-related preparatory education at seminary and amount of time pastors spend doing administrative work

(Boersma, 1988). Seminaries exist to deliver their professional specialty, i.e. the pastoral competencies needed to direct the spiritual life of a congregation (Welch, 2011). No doubt these are foundational. However, researchers are only starting to grasp executive roles in pastoral leadership teams, something Boersma (1988) began to address some time ago. Church committees like the example provided here often seek an XP leader expressly to close this competency gap in their own ministry, showing that such a need is a reality (Woodruff, 2004). But this only punctuates the ongoing need to examine, characterize, and incorporate management competencies among pastoral leadership standards. And then, to identify the best way of attaining this from a staffing standpoint.

Second, organizations perform as designed. Or, as is attributed to W. Edwards Deming, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.” There is among churches a typical management structure, a heavy level of investment in that structure, various activities which are performed within that structure, and many outcomes of such activities, all of which may be subject to performance analysis. Costin (2008) came across many researchers who had defined executive pastor competencies and exhaustively described these systems, but who agreed with him that frank and independent performance assessments of churches were generally lacking. He stated this as a need to “further explore executive management in ministry effectiveness as determined by objective measures of success” (Costin, 2008, p.4).

Costin’s statement is easy to say but not easy to execute. One problem, as noted by the dissenting board member earlier, is it assumes that objective performance measures for churches exist, that there are means to approach them, and that there is inherent value to Christian ministry in doing so. Along with the practical problem of figuring out how to weigh church performance, Costin’s statement also raises the uncomfortable point that performance in ministry actually

matters. It is frankly this statement, coined here as “Costin’s Challenge,” that catalyzed this particular dissertation topic. The research questions are fairly brief. The answers, not so much.

There are various methods to approach quantifying churches’ organizational performance. Business models are available which evaluate traditional measures of organization success like profit, loss, and outcomes (Yukl, 2012). Nonprofit organization performance has also been measured in terms of practical results, such as the amount of disaster aid provided to victims by relief agencies such as the American Red Cross relative to management overhead costs (Drucker, 1992). There is also a scriptural basis for exceptional performance (Josh. 1:8; Matt. 5:14; Col. 3:23-24). However, one still could argue that calculating the amount of “souls saved” versus that which a church spends in a particular period of time, for instance, would be a tenuous—and rather contentious—performance assessment at best.

Recognizing the complicated nature of church performance, this research focused on one method of measuring success. The solution was to do research on a reasonably sized population of churches that has already been independently recognized in terms of particular performance criteria. Specifically, this dissertation used a group of churches for which performance has been defined in terms of *growth rate*.

In partnership with Pew Research, LifeWay Outreach annually surveys over 30,000 churches across the United States. Over time it has developed robust criteria for defining the fastest-growing ones (LifeWay, 2018). The specifics of this study population are discussed at length later in subsequent chapters. Most importantly, while there may be other ways to measure the performance of a congregation beyond how fast it is growing, these LifeWay Top 100 churches at least seem to fall under Costin’s (2008) performance criteria as having “objective measures of success.”

Performance and management aside, any recommendations for investing in an XP should be consistent with core beliefs. For the Christian church, this means drawing conclusions through scripture and authoritative Christian literature. Why is this important? Because there are many executive management models to choose from, including some that rely on competing world views or even deny the existence or deity of God. Such models could be useful in a broader discussion of executive management in religious organizations. However, since the churches being studied here are Christian ones, this research began with assumptions about church activities and motivations that would not be benefited by the practical application of business models antithetical to their basic faith tenets. For a group of Christian churches, then, the study of executive management and performance should encompass the theological, historical, social, and theoretical contexts in which they exist. Such has been attempted here.

One could begin with an example of relevant theology that is in plain view. St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians specifically calls out gifts of administration among the appointments of God enabled by the Holy Spirit (12:27-29). There are biblical references to pastors, overseers, and elders that could support the hiring of an executive pastor and staff. These decisions often occur in the context of planning for significant church growth. Theologians often see management as being consistent with servant leadership (Fitch, 2011). This sort of theology codifies improvements to the nature and function of church management as support to overall missional goals. Ultimately and most importantly, whatever model is chosen for investing in executive management, it should, by design, be based on a Biblical worldview. Such theological evidence, both pro and con, is intended as part of this research.

Historically speaking, existing church business models did not emerge in a vacuum. Church leadership and management roles including senior pastors, teachers, lay-leaders,

executives, and non-pastor staff have matured over thousands of years. Many denominations carry over vestiges of many centuries of managerial tradition from Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Churches are also influenced by organizations that preceded them or currently surround them, including nonprofit and for-profit corporations and civic governments. The concept of a pastor, elder or bishop as a senior executive, for example, is a phenomenon that post-dated the Church of Acts. It appears to have emerged several hundred years after the establishment of Christianity in the mid-to-late first century. A pastor's use of Robert's Rules of Order to run a church business meeting is actually using Army parliamentary procedures written by General Roberts a decade after the end of the Civil War (Slaughter et al., 2012). One should consider the perception and functions of executive management in this historic context.

There are also some fascinating contemporary management models to examine. Consider the modern synagogue, where a full-time rabbinical position is usually posted to manage the business affairs of the temple. Is this an ancient role or a new one? One can also stand in awe of the global corporate and infrastructure management systems that are within today's Anglican Communion or the United Church of Christ. These examples also provide strong evidence of management activities, including those directly related to church growth.

Finally, there are several emerging theories as to why a well-defined and performance-oriented executive pastor model suits today's church. One view simply acknowledges the higher complexity of running a large church in the U.S. today. Churches must address challenges of which earlier generations of pastors never dreamed. Church shootings have tragically heightened the need for expertise in church campus safety, anti-terrorism procedures, and pastor protection measures. Pastor burnout is another unfortunate growth area, as the stress of administrative and ministerial workloads increasingly strains the work and personal life of these leaders and their

families. The demands of digital production and social media provide unprecedented—and sometimes essential—abilities to distribute the Gospel message. But like many brick and mortar retail establishments, they are also transforming conventional notions of community and driving a search for new—and presumably younger—talent capable of harnessing this new environment. Since the 1970s, facilities management has become drastically more complex, thanks to environmental and zoning regulations at the federal, state, county, and municipal level. Concurrently, financial regulations regarding nonprofit entities and their employees have increased and changed, raising financial risks to ministries. Internally, church leadership teams themselves are seeking to be more competent in strategic planning, including running capital campaigns to finance all of these new ventures and increasing paid and volunteer staff loads to execute them.

Workforce planning provides another theory. One of its fundamental tenets is linking strategic planning to organizing. A hiring strategy should be an integral part of the overall mission and vision of the ministry, which declares why the organization exists. A vision lists goals the organization wants to achieve, important for designing and carrying out the strategies, including the hiring of key personnel to meet those goals. Organizational goals should include the activities on which the church plans to focus, how it intends to accomplish those activities, and the larger context in which those activities occur. It may also consider information technology or the local environment. The needs of the organization are assessed by profiling the core competencies required and identifying areas of persistent understaffing. An action plan is developed to close those gaps. Where such gaps are managerial, an executive pastor or volunteer equivalent might be considered, along with outsourcing or restructuring options. Implementing the plan further requires a realistic assessment relative to allotted budgets. That more churches

are investing in mission, vision, and strategy development and setting goals to meet these suggests they are being led toward an executive pastor solution as a way to meet specific workforce competency requirements.

It is worth adding that hiring an executive pastor is not always advantageous to a church staff. Additional management may cause tension, if not outright conflict. What happens, for example, when what makes good sense from a management standpoint, even when prayerfully considered, clashes with the overall vision of ministry for a congregation? On the other hand, an XP could be a trusted and objective advisor who helps the leadership team “count the whole cost” (Luke 14:28) of pursuing a particular path of discipleship. These are just a few of the topics relative to management theory that have implications in any research, including this thesis, on executive management investment and church performance.

### **Statement of the Problem**

To summarize, the problem considered here was how highly performing churches utilize executive pastors, and whether a church’s investment of salary and labor effort in an executive management model, including the hiring of an XP, can be correlated with overall performance. Researchers including Boersma (1988), Costin (2008), Fletcher (2004), Hawco (2005), Kiel (1988), Welch (2011) and Woodruff (2004) have developed various helpful taxonomies of the day-to-day managerial tasks of church leaders from the perspective of senior pastor workload. The qualitative portion of this research combined both newly collected survey data and previous research efforts of others to ensure the models of church executive management remain contemporary and understood.

What is relatively new in this particular research effort, however, is the attempt to measure how these models actually work in practice. In other words, a *quantitative* analysis of

executive pastors, not just a *qualitative* one, was performed. This research seeks to further inform this decision by aggregating qualitative assessments of the value of XPs and support staff with quantitative measures of effectiveness. Without generally understanding ROI, many church leaders and search committees may be appointing XPs or executive staff without enough information to make a truly informed decision.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed methods study is to characterize current executive management models, their best practices, and their functions within a pre-determined population of fast-growing churches across the U.S., and then discern any correlation between relative per capita investment in executive management, defined as labor cost and hours expended, and rate of church growth as an independent measure of church performance. The theory guiding the qualitative portion is transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) as being the most suitable approach to complement the simple comparative statistical method used for the quantitative portion (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What executive management models are consistently found in fast-growing churches?

**RQ2.** What is the perceived contribution of the XP position to church size and growth?

**RQ3.** Is there a correlation between church growth and executive management investment?

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

This research assumed the researcher would have relatively unfettered access to the survey population, and that a statistically significant group of respondents would participate in replying to the research instrumentation in a way that provides qualifiable and quantifiable

results. It is also assumed that some Christian denominations incur executive overhead by virtue of the demands of higher ecclesiastical bodies, so a certain degree of management investment evaluated by the study may be externally imposed and not linkable to performance. Management investment may even be considered overhead or a performance inhibitor by some respondents. Research assumed findings may not be widely generalizable, though they may be of some general utility for those seeking further information on the roles and impacts of executives on ministry teams.

Finally, it might be noted that there are honorable differences of belief among church leaders as to whether church growth equates to ministry effectiveness. This research does not assume any attempt to characterize the ministry effectiveness of any churches within the research population per se, nor of thousands of Christ-centered congregations faithfully serving God but lying outside of the sample population.

Delimitations are as follows:

1. This research is delimited to the population created by the validated methodology used by LifeWay Outreach (2018) to construct its 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America list. Churches that did not participate in this study are excluded even if they met LifeWay's fastest growing church criteria.
2. This research is focused on executive management related to church performance and not Christian affiliation, so it is delimited in that it did not attempt to evaluate the data or results by denomination.
3. The LifeWay survey period only considers growth over a two-year study period (2017-2018), so this research is delimited to the 2018 survey period.
4. This research is delimited to the topic of executive pastor management workload and investment within the research populations as it relates to growth as a single measure of performance.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. *Church*. The physical premises and real property therein under the purview of a single incorporated body and its leadership, together with all the activities and functions conducted on or associated with it.

2. *Church Administration (or Management)*. The processes and functions which integrate, guide, direct, and enable various business and managerial functions, budgets, and physical property management in support of all areas of church ministry, including support to executive strategic planning and decision-making with respect to annual and long-term goals.
3. *Church Performance*. A characteristic of the overall operation of churches as recognized nonprofit (501(c)(3) organizations relative to defined, independent criteria. This is distinct from effectiveness, particularly in terms of fulfilling Christian ministry consistent within prescribed doctrinal or denominational objectives regardless of church size or growth.
4. *Executive Leadership*. The persons or functions within an organization formally appointed to make decisions and direct actions to guide the overall activities of that organization. These decisions and actions may be further informed by committees, working groups, team leaders, and individual subject matter experts.
5. *Executive Management Investment*. The total of labor costs, measured by salaries and other monetary compensation, and labor hours expended regardless of costs, consumed for the purpose of church administration or management, excluding non-labor expenses such as utilities, rents, and personal transportation.
6. *Executive Pastor*. A compensated, full- or part-time senior church staff member, distinct from but generally reporting directly to the senior pastor, whose primary duties are to lead, manage, or execute the administrative functions of the church, including budgeting, staffing, facilities, organizing and strategy, planning, and evaluating, as opposed to primarily preaching, teaching, or undertaking other traditional clerical duties.
7. *Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches*. The fastest growing one hundred churches identified within a group of 30,000 respondents, which were solicited to participate in the LifeWay Outreach (2018) self-reported survey, based on attendance averages greater than 1,025, a numerical gain of 176 or more, and a percentage gain of at least 3% over the previous (2017) average for the same reporting months. Final rankings reflect both numerical and percentage gains. Also referred to as the “fastest-growing” group or population.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was intended to uncover emerging management models in fast-growing churches and identify and analyze the workload and costs associated with this support to ministry. It began with the presumption that the researcher approached this topic from the perspective of a Judeo-Christian worldview (Pearcey, 2008). Results are intended to inform

Christian church leaders who want to make informed staffing decisions to suit their ministry. This philosophy is expressed in a theory that pastoral and managerial functions can and should be a unified concept within the church (Costin, 2008). And likewise, that qualitative and quantitative analysis can together yield a more complete picture than each individually (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study may also contribute further to insights into the current taxonomy of executive management structures in growing churches, and to a potential ROI for hiring executive pastor personnel. It may further suggest whether executive activities are optimizable for a certain size of church, if a specific goal is measurable organizational size or growth, or both.

### **Summary of the Design**

To approach both the taxonomy question and the ROI concern, the research design employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. This mixed methods approach blends the strengths and overcomes the limits of individual quantitative and qualitative methods and reinforces confidence in the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gliner et al., 2009). Mixed design was also chosen because earlier methodology used to research XPs focused solely on qualitative results, which were not ultimately able to satisfy the need for objective performance assessments. However, a purely QUAN of performance would be difficult without the larger qualitative context or without an executive management taxonomy as a baseline for the discussion.

The exploratory sequential mixed-method design used here was chosen as being optimal for developing better instrumentation and improved outcomes for a sample of a defined population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) such as the LifeWay Top 100 list. Qualitative and quantitative portions are approached sequentially. In their description of the employment of the

exploratory sequential mixed method, Creswell and Poth (2018) advocate for the use of an initial qualitative focus group within the study population, to facilitate the development and refining of the mixed methods survey tool. The authors also recommend against including the focus group subjects in the larger population analysis to avoid complicating the results. Thus, it was in the original study proposal to first explore answers to RQ1 through RQ2 qualitatively through precedent literature and generate a small focus group drawn from the study population using a direct interview method. The finalized instrument, an online survey, solicited answers specific to each church's investment in executive leadership relative to RQ3, defined as time + cost, while also seeking open-ended answers to the qualitative investigation of RQ1 and RQ2 across the rest of the study population. Data was analyzed to determine if evidence exists to suggest executive pastor influence correlates with church growth (Berman, 2017).

The actual research tool was an online survey. A copy is reproduced in Appendix A. It was designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data consistent with Liberty University research protocols. It was informed by earlier research by Boersma (1988) to obtain general data on the presence, types, and compensation of executive pastoral staff employed by each church. It also solicited input on other investments, such as technology and facilities. Notably, every church in the study population previously demonstrated a propensity for responding to requests for survey information, suggesting that a follow-on survey is a familiar and neutral setting for information gathering. Creswell (2018) states that the researcher is intended as the key instrument for developing RQ-relevant questionnaires and obtaining follow-on data through interviews, surveys, and documents. That was also the intent here, although any data collected outside the survey (for example, coordination or informational phone calls with survey takers) was redirected back to the survey instrument as the official submission.

The study is designed to be emergent, particularly as the taxonomy of executive pastoral management structures is continuing to be collected, processed, and refined. It is expected that particular queries relevant to a biblical executive pastor model will emerge that would be used in interviews to gain additional insights on biblical models or scripture-based thought processes of surveyed churches.

With respect to data integrity, empirical (aka transcendental) phenomenology was the proposed method as noted, with the intent to approach the topic freshly, free from the researcher's own bias incurred through experience in executive management both in church and business settings. Member checking was used to determine the validity of findings by providing a summary back to the original participants and soliciting final comments prior to survey submission (see also Appendix A). Four external auditors not affiliated with Liberty University were identified to provide an additional objective assessment of the project.

Precedence literature used as a basis for this mixed method is described in the next chapter. Design specifics are described in more detail in Chapter Three. As noted earlier, the results and conclusions are found in Chapters Four and Five, respectively.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Precedence literature provides a theological, theoretical, and practical framework for this study. It also provides its rationale, including gaps in the available literature, summarizing and profiling the research presented here, and speaking to important related matters. Literature reviews can integrate and generalize findings, resolve debates within a field, or bridge the language across fields (Randolph, 2009). There may also be additional goals, including organizing the research topic (Cooper, 1988) in a manner that provides the reader a “map of the research landscape” (Randolph, 2009, p. 3). With respect to building a unique analytical framework for this mixed phenomenological and correlational study on the performance impacts of executive pastors in churches, *integrating* and *organizing* are two broad intentions here.

Integrating is important. The concept of applying executive management, organizational performance, and other business concepts to a church setting, which many see as an entity solely existing in the realm of theology, can demand a fair amount of multi-disciplinary integration across a few uncomfortable barriers—namely, the preference to separate pastoral (i.e. spiritual) and managerial (i.e. temporal) work. With a nod to Pearcey (2008), it is a bias of this researcher that such barriers are both artificial and human centric, and that the Almighty, as the Original Organizer (Van Engen, 2018) expects the Christian church to function seamlessly across all spiritual and physical realms.

The Church is also expected to do so in pursuit of excellence with perfection as its highest goal (Matt. 5:48), and to do so without shedding managerial burdens as menial, unspiritual, or non-compensable (Gen. 2:15; Prov. 12:11; 1 Cor. 9:9; Col. 3:23). That said, it could be perceived as paradoxical to argue on one hand that executive pastor tasks are distinct

from ecclesiastical duties, and on the other to suggest that they be fully integrated together to most effectively drive church performance. It is not. Like bone and sinew, one is meant to function smoothly with the other for the benefit of the whole. The reader should simply be aware that sections of this literature review conscientiously reflect this bias where the theological, theoretical, and integrative arguments are made. Views to the contrary are duly regarded.

Organizing is also vital. Congregations that are considering hiring an XP to tackle management challenges might rightly struggle with this decision in terms of stewardship (demanding to know what return is expected on this investment), spirituality (desiring a biblical basis for doing so), practicality (fitment into the current leadership team), and pragmatism (solving problems, meeting needs). From a practical standpoint, church leadership teams prayerfully focused on ministry areas such as teaching, fellowship, worship, evangelism and service (Acts 2:42-47) are frequently overwhelmed—or even thwarted—by the mundane but exhausting realities of running what is viewed, from a secular standpoint, to be a religious nonprofit organization (Malphurs, 2007). These realities include such diverse issues as changing tax structures, volunteer and staff labor relations and health care, environmentalism and conservation, and church security in view of recent tragic church shootings. Then there are the negative impacts pastors' workloads have on their families, the demands of a digital and social media presence, the need for strategic planning to organize and schedule everything, and the running of capital campaigns and ministry fundraising to resource it all.

The latter half of this literature review attempts to summarize such practicalities, making note of common church leadership team taxonomies where useful. The author has adopted a more neutral personal philosophy in this portion of the roadmap, acknowledging that such are generally matters of fact in operating a church in today's environment and that preferences and

situations vary widely among America's more than 300,000 Christian churches (Randall, 2017). What God intends for one congregation may simply not suit another, and one pastor's experience may be completely different from that of his or her colleague across town.

In the end, it is hoped that this literary roadmap charts a considerate course through available thought for those seeking to advance their ministry calling in pursuit of the greatness that is the Kingdom of God.

### **Theological Framework for the Study**

For a church leadership team, any recommendation for making an executive management investment to hire an executive pastor, especially with the goal of improving church performance rather than out of sheer managerial survival, should be consistent with scripture and a reliable reading of church history. Fortunately, an initial justification for doing so is in rather plain view.

St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians specifically calls out gifts of administration among the appointments of God to individuals enabled by the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:27-29 (Smalley, 1968). There are also biblical references to pastors, overseers, and elders that could support the hiring of an executive pastor in the context of God-breathed management planning for significant growth. Some would argue the opposite, that applying a business paradigm to church matters is not a particularly scriptural activity. David Fitch (2011), the B. R. Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology at Northern Seminary Chicago, "recoils" at how leadership and management business concepts have been incorporated into evangelical vernacular. Fitch (2011) argues that 'diakonia' or *servant* appears far more often, citing several examples (Rom. 11:13, 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6, 6:4, 11:23; Eph. 3:7, 6:21; Col. 1:7, 23, 4:7, 12; 1 Thes. 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:5, 11). What Paul and Fitch (2011) both seem to agree upon is this: Whatever church leadership model is chosen should rest soundly on a Biblical world view.

Theological relationships associated with administration in the Church include administrative aspects of the theology of God, administration as a spiritual gift, and the concept of servant leadership. This seems to be a normative model for church leaders (Powell, 2008).

Fletcher (2004) points to such realities by quoting an excerpt from “A Pastor’s Job Description” by Minirth:

A pastor is expected to make house calls as willingly as yesterday’s country doctor, to shake hands and smile like a politician on the campaign trail, to entertain like a stand-up comedian, to teach the Scriptures like a theology professor, and to counsel like a psychologist with the wisdom of Solomon. He should run the church like a top-level business executive, handle finances like a career accountant, and deal with the public like an expert diplomat at the United Nations. No wonder so many pastors are confused about just what is expected of them and how they will ever manage to live up to all those expectations. (p. 165)

While such expectations are understood, their scope is not always fully comprehended, even by those who are to perform them. Pastors preach, visit, counsel, console, and lead. They are also expected to lead through vision and strategy, communicate such clearly to the congregation, manage and lead change, build up lay leaders, and shepherd the ministry staff, all the while balancing their relationships with God and family. Taylor (2015) defines the executive pastor role as being to oversee the effective implementation of the vision of the church cast largely by the senior pastor. As such, the origin of pastoral leadership may gravitate either toward the executive or toward the pastoral duties. “Are you a capital ‘E’ or a capital ‘P’?” (p. 41).

As a result, a senior pastor spends significant time performing administrative tasks which many do not feel adequately prepared or fully staffed to do (Costin, 2008; Boersma, 1988; Welch, 2011; Woodruff, 2004). This is typified in a senior pastor of a larger church who, by sheer necessity, needs a great deal of administrative and management bandwidth for such activities, raising doubts as to whether there is time left for pastoral disciplines and sermon

preparation (Fletcher, 2004). Further, the expectation of success in each of these areas by the pastor, the congregation, or his family may also be unrealistic (Woodruff, 2004). Despite these realities, few pastors graduate from seminary hoping, or even expecting, to become administrators (Cousins, 1990).

Would a biblically based and scholarly assessment of the topic of executive management move them toward this reality? And if so, what would a theological basis for the executive and administrative functions of church leadership look like? Further, should one assume that God expects excellence in all the affairs of church leaders (Luke 12:48), would it inspire pastors to know if such functions could be tied explicitly or implicitly to ministry performance? And if so, to what extent? And is an executive pastor ultimately the answer? To address these questions, the nature of administration in scripture and theology will be considered first, with the literature on administration and church performance to follow shortly thereafter.

### **The New Testament Church**

The ongoing challenge of balancing both the managing and shepherding of the church means that the executive pastor concept is evolving (Woodruff, 2004), but neither the problem nor the intended solution is new. While the pastoral challenges described by Fletcher (2004) above may be perceived as modern problems, they are not. Church bureaucracy, in the most charitable sense of the word, appears on closer inspection to be a necessary evil of the privilege of participating in heavenly activities. Perhaps it might even be considered a valuable gift of the Spirit of God.

Recall the early Christian Church in Jerusalem. In the Book of Acts, new patterns of servant leadership were forming in the context of a growing church, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Woodruff, 2004). This led to a memorable debate over how to ensure no one

was neglected by the ministry. To get at the matter, the disciples did some foundational thinking on church leadership roles and responsibilities:

So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:2-4)

Beyond establishing what has now become generally understood as basic doctrine for the diaconal functions in the church (Latvus, 2010; Thurston, 1913; Walker, 1970) this decision of a workload distribution solution raised three points on executive leadership relative to ministry and church performance.

First, the Church had an emerging ministry burden which required additional, specific expertise, thanks to the rapid growth evidenced by adding 3,000 members in a single day (Acts 2:40-47). Second, this group of Christian leaders believed their calling to preach was being inhibited by such executive tasks. The solution to delegate these tasks was described not as a means of sloughing off “menial” labor, but rather, to enhance the larger ministry capability of the church as a whole (Acts 6:2).

Such tasks may not actually have been menial. Despite popular use of the word “food” in various English translations of Acts 6:1, Mowczko (2014) argues that the task was actually *managerial*. Any suggestion that Hellenist widows were being starved at communal meals, for example, seems rather unlikely (Danker, 2000, as cited in Mowczko, 2014). A more likely possibility is that what was being distributed was funds, not food, while sitting at banking tables.

The Greek word *trapezai* used in Acts 6:2 can refer to such tables, a word still in use in Greece today. This idea has credence when we realise [sic] that the use and context of the Greek word *diakonia* in the New Testament shows that it may be used for a ministry of collecting, conveying, and administering funds for charitable purposes (Acts 11:29-30; 12:25; 2 Cor. 8:4, 9:1, 12-13). (Mowczko, 2014, p.1)

This is consistent with the thinking behind the appointment of the Seven, with the caveat that each gift was to be used to serve others as faithful *stewards* of the grace of God in its various forms (1 Pet. 4:10). Paul's collection for the Jerusalem Church occupied significant portions of his letters (Rom. 15:14-32; 1 Cor. 8, 11:8-9, 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15). In fact, collection was of such importance to Paul that he was willing to endure hostility (Rom. 15:30-31) and be arrested for performing it (Acts 24:17).

A third observation is that the Apostles did not relinquish these duties randomly, but rather deliberately and prayerfully sought out reputable, wise, and spiritual leaders to carry out this work (Acts 6:3). These recipients were exemplified by Stephen, who continued to perform great signs and wonders until he was stoned by the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:57-60).

Such a view toward administrative ministry is not an isolated interpretation of early New Testament theology. The epistles routinely defined managerial work as inherent to and aligned with the spiritual work of the Church. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, included leadership and service among the spiritual gifts of prophecy, preaching, teaching, giving, and showing mercy (Rom. 12:6-8). He distinguished between Spirit-prompted demonstrations of wisdom (gr. σοφίας, learning, sage-ness) and knowledge (gr. γνώσεως, facts, information, and skills) (1 Cor. 12:8), suggesting that these are distinct gifts (Bauer, 2000; Smalley, 1968). He counted gifts of administration and gifts of direction among those of healing, helping, and interpreting languages (1 Cor. 12:28). Paul's wording suggests that these functions may occur in a supportive role to the apostolic functions of prophecy, teaching, and miracles, reinforcing the important role of executing pastor-type activities in support of ministry. Scholars believe these two, *administration* and *direction*, were being articulated as gifts that described all kinds of assistance, and particularly, as alluding to the pilotage or steering of a ship (Carson, 2019).

Even Paul himself demonstrated these traits when operating in roles outside of the church leadership (Cole, 2011; Meinardus, 1979). In chains, while on his way to Rome, he gained favor from Julius, the ship's captain (Acts 27:3), and helped develop practical plans for soldiers working on the ship (Acts 27:31-32, as cited in Cassidy, 2001). Paul's ministry partner Barnabas followed Paul's example of intentional focus on both ministry and those elements supporting it (Bartlett, 1993). He was recognized for speaking, serving, and giving of his time and money, as well as mentoring leaders within the church, even though he had not yet received his appointment as an apostle (Acts 14:14).

### **The Old Testament Tabernacle**

An executive pastor paradigm for church ministry and performance is not unique to the New Testament. It began long before Christ founded the post-Resurrection church, a fact alone that may prove that church administration is a fundamental activity of God's people. One could argue it began with Adam being charged by God to tend the Garden in Genesis 2. But there is little doubt that this paradigm is fully operational in the tabernacle.

After delivering the Mosaic Covenant on Mount Sinai, God commanded the construction and maintenance of a mobile sanctuary, in which God would dwell with His people, according to an exact pattern (Exod. 25:1-8), using particular materials (Exod. 31:1-11), and prescribing a specific workforce of hand-picked craftsmen and administrators who were known for excellence. The handling and transporting of the tabernacle and its contents, along with other various duties, were clearly prescribed (Exod. 26:1-27:21) and assigned to the Aaronic Priests (Exod. 28:1) and other members of the Levite Tribe. The latter family members were to fulfill the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle (Num. 3:7-8). These duties were exclusive and

distinct from priestly duties, to be carried out exactly as prescribed under penalty of death (Num. 18:3-4).

In terms of public administration, God directed Moses, Israel's spiritual leader, to use Aaron as an assistant and spokesman as needed (Fletcher, 2004). This was in addition to Aaron's duties to ease Moses's workload and to provide additional capacities to Moses that he himself did not possess. Like the Seven of Acts, this was also not an incidental role. "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet" (Exod. 7:1-2). Later, Jethro recommended that Moses delegate his executive (in this case, judicial) duties, again not arbitrarily, but to "capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials" (Exod. 18:21). This recommendation came out of concern for a lack of efficiency in meeting the legal needs of the community (Exod. 18:18—akin to the proper regulatory and judicial functions of public bureaucracies today—as well as the individual health and well-being of Moses during a time period when God blessed the nation of Israel with one of the highest known growth rates in post-Flood history (Pelletier, 2014).

Referring to other sections of the Old Testament, Fletcher (2004) notes similarities in the executive roles of Joseph, Vizier of Egypt, and Daniel, aid to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, noting that they were both recipients of nearly unlimited delegated royal power. Egypt was rapidly expanding and would continue to do so with its Hebrew workforce, while the Neo-Babylonian Empire had likewise grown, following the conquest of Jerusalem. Effective and loyal executives who were familiar with the population and committed to excellence were crucial to the effective management of these two kingdoms. Hawco (2005) points to the fact that God blessed both monarchies with success through these men (Gen 47:7-10; Dan 2:36-38);

something, he emphasizes, that should not go unnoticed. Joseph was particularly instrumental as an executive officer and steward of the “embryonic church” represented by his family (Hawco, 2005). He also exemplified strategic fiscal and managerial stewardship in his position as a governmental leader in Egypt, and thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, became the key factor in the consolidation of Egypt’s wealth through seven years of great plenty, followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41:54). Such wealth would eventually follow the Children of Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 12:36). Joseph, along with Daniel, fully embodied the fundamental essence of the biblical leader-steward in the role of the chief executive (Costin, 2008).

Nehemiah is another example of Old Testament executive leadership. Born in Babylon, he was a shrewd and creative administrator and advisor to Artaxerxes I of Persia, whom God used to rebuild the city of Judah (Neh. 2:1, 2:5). Nehemiah exemplified Godly managerial acumen (Maclariello, 2003). He faithfully executed his task with excellence, dealt in a straightforward manner with those in authority, offered both problems and solutions, conducted research to know exactly what was needed for the rebuilding project, and added so much value that Artaxerxes gave him more than what he asked for (Maxwell, 2002; 2008). He also set a biblical example of working as an executive on a team. He took initiative to meet workers on-site in the rubble (Neh. 2:11), identified collective needs and solutions including worker security, shouldered opposition when it arose, developed plans for productivity and adversity (Neh. 4:1-6), consistently demonstrated concern for others, and finished on-schedule and on-budget (Maxwell, 2002; 2008). The fact that Nehemiah was not a builder by trade, but a cupbearer for a foreign king, makes God’s use of him even more remarkable (McCullough, 1975).

## The Modern Era

Scrolling forward, one can find contemporary examples of what Salvation Army Major Gerald Peacock affectionately called *administry* (Robinson, 2017). One could hardly obtain a more compelling case study of the administrative workload of the emerging church than the Jesuits of the sixteenth century. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) established the Jesuit Order at a time of significant upheaval from within—as Martin Luther famously pointed out—a substantially corrupted Catholic Church. Loyola’s administrative approach also differed from his contemporaries in the Dominican, Benedictine, and Franciscan brethren, in that he avoided grass-roots leader selection from the bishopric in favor of appointing those leaders who could make the best informed, fastest decisions impacting ministry development, regardless of nationality or Catholic affiliation (Lowney, 2005).

The Jesuits quickly became victims of their steady global growth. New schools required school buildings, and the order became increasingly saddled with property holdings and vast facilities to manage, including leaky roofs and boilers and plumbing problems (Pfang, 2015). More than 450 years after its founding, the order’s 21,000 professionals now run 2,000 institutions across more than 100 countries (Lowney, 2005). As of 2012, the Jesuits are the largest single religious order in the Catholic Church and the single largest property holder therein (Lapitan, 2012). Interestingly, Payer-Langthaler and Hiebl (2013) find that, in order to comply with the Benedictine mission laid out in the *Regula Benedicti*, Benedictine abbeys need to balance sacred and secular goals. The authors also derive six key actions in order to accomplish identified performance goals. Their case study shows that an imbalance in these key actions may cause severe financial distress (Payer-Langthaler & Hiebl, 2013).

Turning to a contemporary example in the Jewish tradition, Swatez (2002) informs us that the role of synagogue administrator is not just an Old Testament phenomenon, but an important function that continues even to today:

Like most lay people, when I thought of the individuals involved in a synagogue I considered the same players as identified by Heilman (1998) in his classic examination of synagogue life: The Rabbi, Cantor, President of the Board, lay-people involved in the worship service, members and guests. The behind-the-scenes staff that make a nonprofit organization such as a synagogue function effectively were exactly that: behind-the-scenes. Only later did I come to recognize the important leadership role played by Synagogue administrators and their support team. (p. 1)

The Administrator, he continues, is a stage manager enabling the performers (i.e. clergy) to put on a good show (i.e. worship service). At a meeting of the Board, the administrator is the clerk and facilitator. To those inexperienced in Temple business, he is a mentor. To the staff, he is synchronizer and scheduler and prioritize-er. To new prospective congregants, he is the voice of the community, imparting information and helping a family weigh the various options of affiliation. These synagogue administrators have also become retitled executive directors in many congregations. Whatever their title, they are vital to the continuity of Jewish tradition (Swatez, 2002).

### **Closing a Sacred-Secular Gap**

In concluding this survey of biblical fundamentals of executive management and performance, it is important to note that the division of spiritual duties between the sacred (preaching, teaching, prayer, and pastoral ministry) versus the secular (administration and management of the church) is a relatively recent dichotomy. It could also be said that this separation deviates from the basic, integral truths of scripture (Schaeffer, 1990). The power of God in the church is intended to invade all aspects of the body:

The eye [the portion observing from the top of the body] cannot say to the hand [the portion doing the manual labor], “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. . . . God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Cor. 12:21-26, author comments added)

Pearcey (2008) shares an equivalent conundrum that frequently occurs in academia.

Christians in higher education are strongly, though subtly, “tempted to compartmentalize their faith,” she writes (p. 37). Religion is considered relevant in special areas like church and campus religious activities, but when teaching or doing research, the attention is centered on the conventional subject matter in one’s respective discipline (Pearcey, 2008).

An example of de-compartmentalization is in a hermeneutic of church growth itself. For Wagner (1987), church growth “leans toward a phenomenological approach which holds theological conclusions somewhat more tentative and is open to revise them when necessary in the light of what is learned through experience” (p. 38). Today a church might embrace sociology, clinical therapy, demography, and marketing in its outreach strategies, using as a biblical justification the text in 1 Corinthians 9:22, becoming “all things to all men so that by all means some might be saved.” Such a hermeneutic would accompany a proper theology of church growth, which recognizes the *a priori* existence of God, the subsequent creation of mankind in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), the intent that mankind be in fellowship with God (Rom. 1:18-21), even in restoring that fellowship after it was broken by mankind (Gen. 9:6; John 3:16-18), including drawing all creation to Him and building up His church (Matt. 28:19; John 17:20-24).

In short, all aspects of ministry, whether pastoral, diaconal, or administrative in appearance, when performed in the context of presenting the church to the body of Christ, while

seeking to add to her membership in the interim, are God-breathed and suitable for theological admiration and discussion.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Having offered a literary basis for a theology of executive management in the church, including scriptural examples that describe management within the body of Christ and the links such management has to church and organizational (even national-level) improvements, attention will now be turned to applying management theory, particularly to the challenge of defining an assessable theory of church performance as an organization.

#### **The Church as an Organization**

Miles et al. (1978) define an organization as “both an articulated purpose and an established mechanism for achieving it” (p. 547). Applying this definition, the Christian church has an articulated purpose in its foundational Old and New Testament scriptures, including the creation of man in God’s image, the Fall, the redemption of the lost (Matt. 28:18-20), and current Christian church’s existence as a model of human community (Acts 2:42), an eternally unified family (1 John 3), and a global influencer (1 Pet. 3:15). It also has an established mechanism for achieving these purposes, namely, by way of the resurrection power of Christ in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:18). As an institution, then, the Church meets conventional criteria to be defined as an organization.

Once it has chosen qualified officers, developed bylaws and rules of order, and registered as an entity recognizable by the laws of a particular state, a church meets the common standards of a private philanthropic organization (Morgan, 2006). It would then select or designate the senior pastor, elders, deacons, and other church officers, in accordance with denomination or

faith group criteria. Church formation includes crafting position descriptions and hiring key ministry team members based on organizational desires for particular education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and level of spiritual maturity. The church develops and publishes statements of faith, charters, bylaws, tax submissions, and other nonprofit management documents to define the organization spiritually, functionally, and legally. This activity must be carefully aligned with an assessment of demographics and spiritual and social needs relevant to the surrounding community and implemented conscientiously to ensure the vision of the congregation is faithfully represented in the organization (Bosch, 2019a; Wagner, 1990; Warren, 1995).

### **Church Executive Management**

One should pause here to acknowledge the common distinction made between leadership and management. Some define executive functions as those tasks performed by the senior leader, with leadership activities being distinct from management functions and tasks in both person and activity (Nayar, 2013). In the unique case of church leadership, it is generally the senior pastor who is ultimately responsible for leading and directing a whole church, conducting both the primary leadership and management roles within it (Costin, 2008), though as Kruger (2015) notes, church practice regarding the leadership positions of pastors, elders, bishops, and deacons has varied over centuries. Reflecting the commonly understood early church model described above, however, a pastor's primary focus, expertise, and contribution to the church is mainly with regard to ministerial duties such as preaching, teaching, leading prayer, and pastoral counseling. In the modern era, these functions are also conventional expectations commensurate with his or her professional licensure. Given that the size of the average American church is about 300 members, with many smaller than this (NCS, 2010), it is often possible to vest both the leadership and management functions with a single individual.

As an emerging concept over the past three decades or more, the role of the executive pastor (or alternatives such as assistant pastor, associate pastor, administrative pastor, or other personnel performing like functions) has come to signify the person to whom particular responsibility for non-ministerial administrative and management tasks has been assigned and acknowledged (Boersma, 1988; Fletcher 2004; Kiel, 1988). Likewise, for the purposes of this dissertation, the terms executive, management, and administration and their derivatives are utilized somewhat interchangeably to denote all church functions which are non-ministerial in nature, even though the senior pastor may be the one performing them.

Mackenzie (1969) defined management as those activities dealing with ideas, things, and people. Three functions—problem analysis, decision making, and communication—are important at all times and in all aspects of the manager’s job and are all integral to smooth ministry operations. These functions are also characterized as those entrusted to, or being commensurate with, executive activities (Drucker, 2011). Recognizing that the state of management in churches has changed in the past several decades, these competencies are also broken down into organizing, planning, staffing, directing, and evaluating (Costin, 2008).

Like any organization, one might also assume that an effective church requires competent, visionary, and highly functional executive leadership to carry out these managerial tasks (Boersma, 1988; Fletcher, 2004; Kiel, 1988; Woodruff, 2004). As noted, these tasks may be performed either by the senior pastor or committed volunteers (Wagner, 1979). Still, one must acknowledge the apparent need for XPs who are particularly skilled in these duties (Powell, 2009), despite the relatively recent use of this title since the mid-1980s and the many variances in job descriptions, titles and tasks that exist (Hawco, 2005).

## Seeking Church Performance

After making a theological and theoretical case for the church as an organization, it is necessary to articulate what performance means, and its implication on church leadership and management.

To begin, there are many public and business sector models available for analyzing organizational performance. At the risk of oversimplifying, the latter is usually interested in success in terms of corporate profit and loss, where executive and management salaries are directly evaluated in terms of return on investment (Collins, 2001; Yukl, 2012). Were a church to operate this way, an XP's salary might be contingent on the number of new parishioners or "income" from tithes and offerings. Doubtless there are ministries motivated by this to some extent, though they may not readily admit it.

Performance models for nonprofit entities are usually oriented toward practical outcomes, such as the amount of aid delivered following a disaster versus the overhead costs of doing so (Drucker, 1992). By definition, the ideal fiscal end state of a not-for-profit enterprise is zero, with all grants and other incomes being perfectly routed to those for whom the organization was chartered, with minimal overhead. This appears to be closer to the ideal performance model for an XP, at least at first blush.

Now, the primary mission of the Christian church, according to Scripture (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; Rom. 10:15) and the scrolling banners on thousands of church websites, is seeking Christ's restoration of the lost. It is, from a business standpoint, an intangible result, with eternal consequences, for which applying supernatural calipers of objective measures of success can be troublesome at best. Yet to add to the theological implications noted earlier, the need for Christians, and the body of Christ as a whole, to

prayerfully seek out the means of performing ministry in an excellent way that glorifies God is fairly clear. Scripture routinely speaks of excellence (Dan. 6:3; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:23; Titus 2:7; 1 Cor. 8:7; Phil. 1:9-10; 2 Pet. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:9; Prov. 22:29; Eph. 6:7-8) and the intent of Christians to demonstrate strong performance in the world (Josh. 1:8; Matt. 5:14; Col. 3:23-24), and by doing so, to reveal a knowledge of, and relationship with, God the Father through Jesus Christ.

Costin's (2008) contribution of defining the gulf between the need for and appreciation of executive roles in pastoral leadership teams has already been mentioned. Further, his call to understand the nature of executive management in ministry effectiveness as determined by objective measures of success is a fundamental challenge to understand and improve church performance. Applying objective measures of success to church performance may, for some, uncomfortably raise the rather delicate subject of what constitutes "successful" ministry in terms of managerial capability. So how can performance be measured?

### **Defining Church Performance**

Performance measurement must address two problems: (1) the challenge of defining success and (2) doing so in a way that yields assessable data, from which results and conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made.

Church size as a measure of performance remains an often-debated metric. Church population is usually stable, depending on demographics and geography (Robinson, 2017), since most churches have conventionally served a community in which people are likely to travel only a certain distance to attend worship. Size is relatively easy to measure. In fact, LifeWay also reports an annual Top 100 Largest Churches in the U.S. study that parallels its 100 Fastest Growing Churches survey. With tens of thousands of churches contributing to this survey

annually, there is at least a modest interest in church size as a performance standard, if not merely a curiosity.

Size versus performance arguments are many. Megachurches, it is argued, lack the ability to provide individual spiritual connection and personal growth (Robinson, 2017), something smaller churches may be more adept at, despite relatively fewer resources. To this point, many of the Top 100 Fastest Growing churches surveyed in this study grew by adding campuses, rather than expanding existing ones. Likewise, effective megachurches have small groups or “cell churches” under their sponsorship. The Apostle Paul criticizes this tendency to consider larger or more visible activities within the Church over smaller ones (1 Cor. 12:16). Church size can be measured, but is not always evidence of performance, even though it is apparent to this researcher that large churches nearly always seem to require a robust executive and management framework to support their operations.

Spiritual formation and discipleship are considered by many to be important criteria for success or failure (Nouwen et al., 2010). Hodge (2007) has developed a tool he terms the “spiritual ecomap” for use in assessing the spiritual development of individuals, couples, and families in diverse spiritual traditions. Others have sought to assess spiritual formation in the context of educational settings (Anthony & Benson, 2011; Estep et al., 2008; Knight, 2006; Jones, 2001). Shedding light on this analytical challenge, Burkhardt (2016) seeks to determine the means and extent by which ministry candidates assess their spiritual formation, finding that most tend to prefer more individual and subjective expressions of personal faith. In terms of this measure of church ministry effectiveness, executive pastors are reported to be a vital asset to senior pastors in large “megachurch” settings (Fletcher, 2004; Kiel, 1988; Travis, 1999; Woodruff, 2004). There is much to suggest that a critical task for an XP is ensuring ministerial

and discipleship staff are fully equipped to focus on the spiritual formation of church members through Christian education and discipleship (Fletcher, 2004; Hawco, 2005; Powell, 2009). Such duties appear routinely on executive pastor job announcements. But few if any researchers have identified administrative components in their models or definitions of effective ministry (Nauss, 1974; 1980).

Broader attempts to assess Christian ministry performance are phenomenological and aimed at the church or Christianity writ-large, rather than at the level of individual congregations. For example, there have been explorations into current social topics such as improvements to gender climates at Christian university campuses (Bryant, 2006) and spiritual formation in Christian seminary communities (Reisz, 2003). Bonnie Miller-McLemore, seeking an answer to how well various pedagogical approaches to practical theology actually work in the real world, describes a process of sending students in the field to interview, observe, and encounter ministry practitioners, with the goal of qualitatively assessing a congregation's practices of care or collaboration on community projects (Bass & Dykstra, 2008). This may be relevant in improving curricula but does not particularly apply to staffing models in so far as adding an XP (as opposed to training senior pastors in administrative work) is concerned.

Others have focused on measuring or assessing how the church interacts internally and externally. Mulyanegara (2011) and White (2007) both empirically investigate links between market orientation (branding) and church performance, with the latter confirming Barna's assumption that churches are more effective at bringing in new parishioners when they adopt a market-oriented philosophy. Emmanuel University's W. Brady Boggs and Dale L. Fields (2010) explores how dimensions of organizational culture, and particularly the strengthening of families through culturally relevant and engaged parenting, relate to church performance. Some take a

capitalist stance. In a sample of 53 Christian churches, Pearce et al. (2010) find that churches with a more entrepreneurial orientation have been assessed as being higher performing. Other research explores patterns of relationships within church management teams, characterized as the senior pastor and various team members (leader-member exchange), and compares this dynamic to levels of giving and annual growth of offerings collected (Perkins, 2003).

Zech (2010) developed a compilation of useful best-practices in Catholic Church ministry performance management that considers human resources management, including performance evaluation of clergy, lay parish employment practices and standards, and performance appraisals for deacons aligned to the values of the Church. “The Church is not a business,” he writes, “but it does have stewardship responsibility to ensure its resources are used as effectively as possible to carry out God’s work on earth” (p. 1). Finally, Davis et al. (2010) use a strategic choice perspective to examine the relative duration of leader tenure and church market growth implications for senior pastors at 1,415 church organizations over a period of six years, finding that the length of service by senior pastors does indeed relate to financial and non-financial church performance.

While defining the realm of managerial tasks needed within a church, and understanding how these might be assigned to a dedicated person to carry them out, and acknowledging the biblical basis for doing so, it remains largely to be discovered how such an arrangement measurably influences church performance, particularly since clear criteria of what defines performance for a congregation also appears to be lacking.

### **Church Growth and Performance**

As of this writing, a search at ProQuest’s eBook Central on the topic of “church growth” yielded over 110,000 results. About a third of these results were doctoral dissertations on the

subject. There is also a biblical foundation for growth and the “adding of numbers” of disciples to the Church, as may be interpreted through a plain reading of Acts 2:47, 5:14, and 9:31 (Parsons, 2008). Writers of church performance literature tend to focus on church growth and evangelism (McGavran, 1990; Perkins, 2003), consistent with Christian texts that declare the fundamental role of the Church as being that of adding to its ranks (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:4-8). As the principle performance measure for this particular dissertation’s study population, church growth as a performance measure deserves its own hearing.

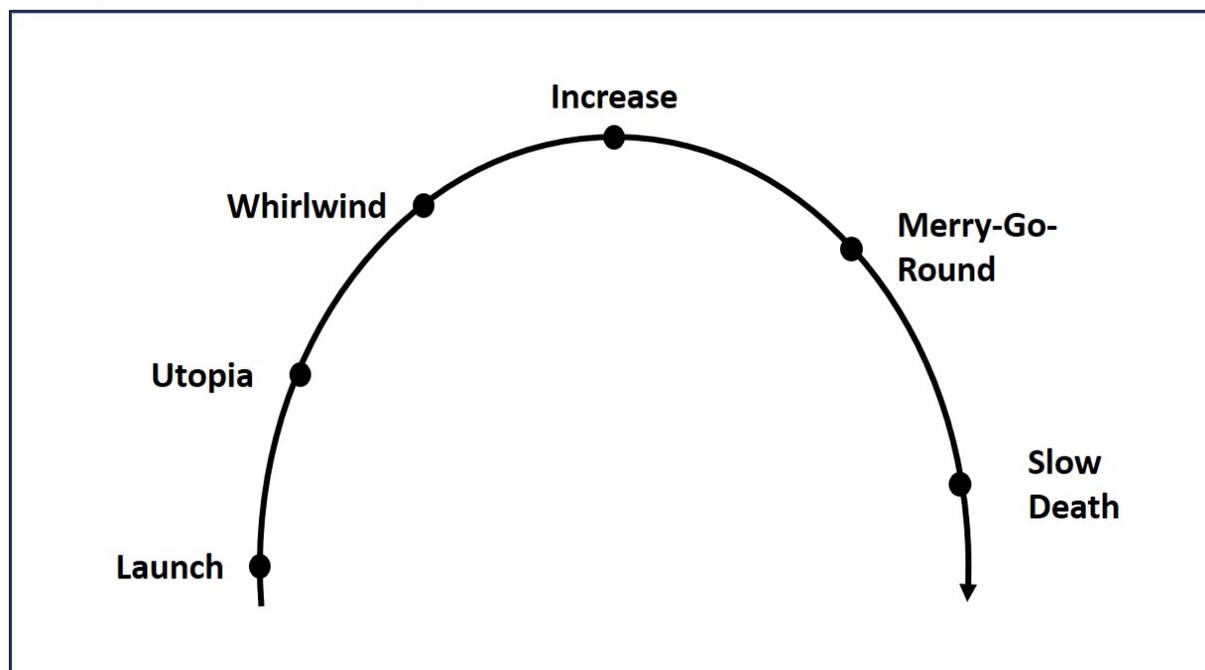
Growth as a concern of the Church was pioneered by Donald A. McGavran, a missionary program leader responding to what he perceived as poor growth in various church plants in India (Wagner, 1987). McGavran (1990) defined the pedagogical discipline of church growth as “that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting multiplication, function, and health of Christian churches as they relate to the effective implementation of God’s commission to ‘make disciples of all people’ (Matt. 28:18-20)” (Wagner, 1987). The 1955 publishing of McGavran’s *Bridges of God* expanded the working definition of evangelism into theological, ethical, missiological and procedural areas, emphasizing the importance of discipleship and the resulting church growth as the proper end-state of evangelistic activities (Wagner, et al., 1986). Church growth became recognized as a distinct movement when McGavran institutionalized church growth theology at Northwest Christian College in 1960, and its recognition expanded at the Iberville Consultation of 1963, sponsored by the World Council of Churches in Canada (Rainer, 1996). Later invited to Fuller Theological Seminary, the Institute of Church Growth became an influential hub within Fuller’s School of World Mission. McGavran’s contributions to the topic concluded when his *Understanding Church Growth* was published in 1970, but the

Church Growth movement continued under the tutelage of Fuller faculty Ralph Winter, Arthur Classer, Charles Kraft, Allen Tippett, C. Peter Wagner, and McGavran himself, along with Win Arn, founder of the Institute of American Church Growth, and John Wimber (Rainer, 1996).

Throughout the next two decades the church growth movement sought an identity among various critics. Some argued that church growth theology lacked a sound hermeneutic for its theological endeavors, or was misreading scripture (Costas, 1974). The book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (Kelley, 1972), published while the author was a National Council of Churches executive, presented evidence, highly controversial at the time but since proven to be correct, that conservative churches were growing faster than liberal ones. Some objected to the kind of evangelism inherent in growth models, particularly when viewed as offering “inoffensive appeal” or “evangelism without the gospel” (Rainer, 1996). Still others were concerned about church growth concurrent with ecumenism, a perceived negative influence of Pentecostalism, and an overemphasis on attendance numbers as opposed to “the actual number of souls gained.” Since then, in what has been called the C. Peter Wagner Era of the Church Growth Movement, its proponents have sought to effectively address these criticisms (Rainer, 1996). It should be noted that this generational change occurred alongside other energetic and internecine dialogue, regarding the proper rendering of scripture in various ways vis a vis the King James and other translations, as well as debates on the proper place or even existence of God’s supernatural works of healing, signs, and charismatic spiritual gifts.

**Figure 1**

*The Stages of Church Life in Six Categories, as Described by Sonksen (2017)*



Mechanically speaking, church growth has particular characteristics which can be observed empirically. Sonksen (2017) divides the stages of church life into six categories: Launch, Utopia, Whirlwind, Increase, Merry-Go-Round, and Slow Death (Figure 1). Launch is the birthing stage of a church plant, or a turnaround church, and the struggle is primarily money and people. As finances gain strength and attendance and team membership grows, the church enjoys a state of Utopia; growth is enjoyed, but the reasons for it are not well understood. Then comes the Whirlwind, stage three, the point at which significant management capability is lacking to create consistent and sustainable growth. Sonksen (2017) describes Whirlwind thus:

There are so many areas to correct, you don't even know where to start. The problem is you can't stop Sunday from coming each week, and you can't seem to slow down the already overwhelming pressure you're experiencing from day to day. Where in the world are you going to find the time, energy, or maybe even the right person to help you put all this in place so you can keep growing? (p. 75)

It is interesting that after alluding to the need for particular management expertise, Sonksen (2017) pauses to recall the experience of a small but popular restaurant that rapidly outgrew its success. It ultimately lost customers because the appeal of its menu did not outweigh the fact that it did not have a system in place to serve customers efficiently enough. It had a great product but did not have the management investment in place to sustain growth (Sonksen, 2017). This is an apt analogy, in terms of the desire to feed the spiritually hungry within the body of Christ, which deliberately harkens back to the apostolic investment in diaconal management in Acts, chapter 7. Performance and executive management investment continue to appear to be intrinsically related.

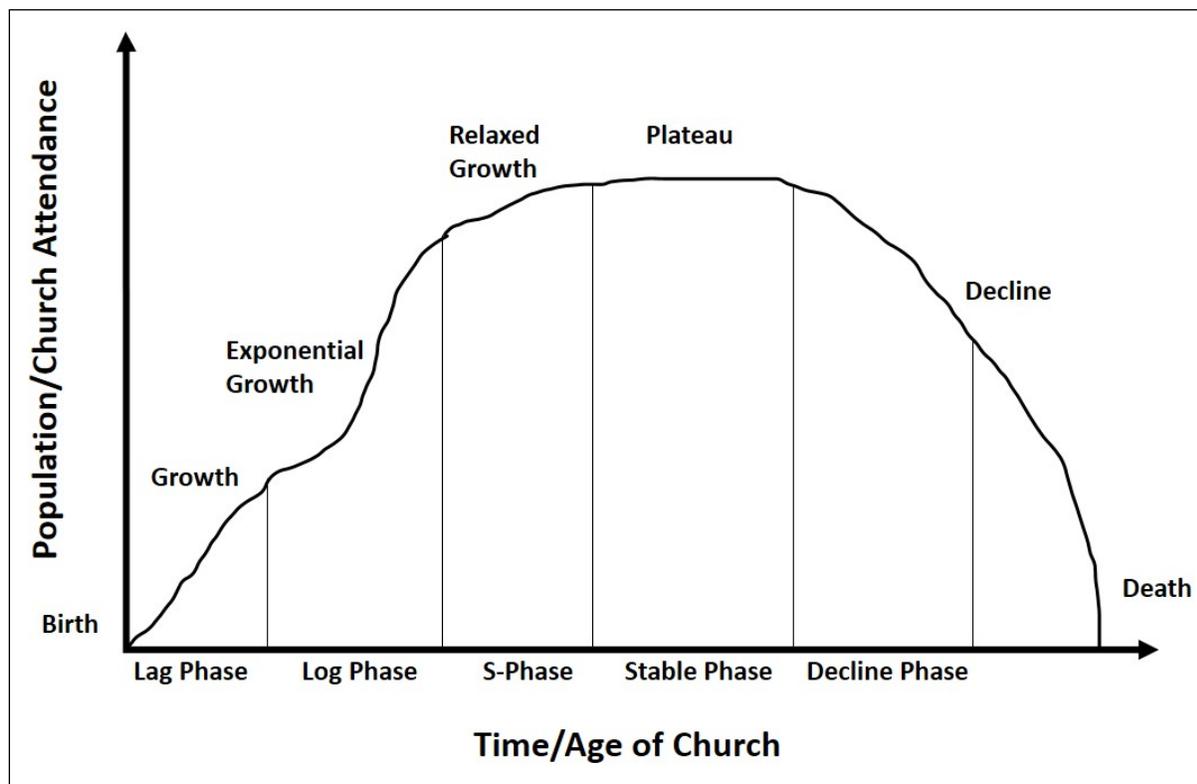
Churches that go on to develop stronger, healthier, and more sustainable structures and processes must break through what Sonksen (2017) calls the “attendance lid.” Remaining at the ideal point—called stage four: Increase—requires dedicated clarity of mission, organizational strategy, defined values in what to do versus decline to do, measurements and accountability, team alignment, growth-oriented organizational culture, and services and ministries that reflect mission and strategy. Generally, these stages could be seen as the same environment in which the church found itself during the period of Acts 1:4-5. These stages cannot be skipped, it is argued, but a church can move backward and forward through the stages. The goal is to move through the first four stages and remain in the Increase stage, avoiding non-productivity (stage five’s Merry-Go-Round) or decline and Slow Death (stage six). It is also at the Increase stage that investment in an executive pastor could be effective in evaluating an entire church—staff, ministries, facilities, programs, events, processes, finances, departments, volunteers, and leadership teams—and importantly, to press a perhaps reluctant pastor to make difficult but necessary decisions that bring all these functions into alignment (Sonksen, 2017).

There is value in church growth as a performance measure. Vernon (2011) reflects the frustration that can result when church plants do not grow as desired. Searcy (2010) articulates a connection between the intentional readiness for growth through activities that position a congregation to receive it, in terms of being trustworthy of God to bring said growth. God will not send people who need church membership, the author writes, to a church that it is not ready to receive them (Searcy, 2010). Ross (2017) examines the members of a modestly sized Baltimore church and finds a primary hindrance to growth to be a lack of personal ownership and commitment of members. They knew the church's growth goals but did not partner with the church to accomplish those goals. *Apropos* to this dissertation, Jordan (2019) assesses how church pastors contribute specifically to growth. This researcher's version of a church life cycle curve, which includes milestones of growth, expansion, plateau, decline, and death (Figure 2), appears to reinforce—or at least arrive at a similar conclusion as—the model by Sonksen (2017). Jordan (2019) describes an empirical relationship between the activities of church leadership, epitomized by the pastor, in attaining healthy church growth:

Using birth, growth, plateau, decline, and death as the descriptors for the growth cycle of a local church, the researcher asked each senior pastor participating in this thesis project to designate the position of their church at the initial stages of their administration. Participants were also prompted to describe the strategic steps they implemented to advance the church toward a healthier position of growth and vitality... Findings of this research endeavor showed pastors developing and implementing growth strategies for their church were inclined to take a more holistic approach to stimulating, maintaining, and measuring church growth. Senior administrators who placed emphasis on developing modes and means for the church to accomplish its mission and vision experienced the greatest percentage of total growth over the delineated time parameters. (p. 93-94)

Figure 2

*The Life Cycle of a Church, as Adapted by Jordan (2019)*



Still others have sought those variables that precipitate and inhibit growth. Rainer (1996) finds that where event evangelism fails, revival evangelism continues to be effective in growing the number of disciples in a church, or what contributes to a church's "evangelical effectiveness" (p. 34). Yang (2015) notes that some churches, particularly those mostly comprised of ethnic minorities (in this case, Korean American) have difficulty with inherent language and cultural differences.

As an analog to the individual church, the American small business shares key characteristics in terms of growth and maturation. In the U.S., most business entities are small businesses, and most are owned and operated by families. Here, the challenge for founders is how to most effectively transition from founding generations to subsequent generations, since only half of businesses survive the first transition, only a third survive to the third generation,

and fewer still survive the transition to non-family executive management (Kornberg, 2019). Deliberate succession planning, both in terms of endurance and growth, appears to be both vital—and usually lacking—in family owned small businesses and family-run churches (Harrell, 2016; Kornberg, 2019; Nwuke, 2017).

Finally, Goodhew (2016) caps off his survey of several authors on church growth by concluding that the practice of church growth is both historic and integral to the Christian faith. Key figures, from the early Christians to the Celtic saints to St. Francis, from Thomas Cranmer to the Wesleyans, were more focused on the numerical growth of the church than is often recognized. Modern “Decline theology” is often detached from or distorts church tradition. It is not, as the author puts it, about “bums on seats,” and congregational growth should occur commensurate with personal holiness and societal transformation. But considerable historical and church history exists, from Genesis onward, that God desires that His family should increase, many-fold (Goodhew, 2016).

### **Related Literature**

To round out this integrated roadmap of church executive management activities, this section discusses other factors, including some new pastoral competencies that can be used to evaluate executive pastor effectiveness and church performance. This section briefly considers the literature regarding other significant collateral activities and impacts that churches and pastors must prioritize within the context of their current community settings and physical situations. Such areas of concern include but are not limited to church safety, pastor workload and burnout, the demands of digital and social media, creation care and facilities management, the growing complexity of nonprofit entities and ministry fundraising, strategic planning challenges, and staff and volunteer management.

## **Church Safety and Security**

Protecting the flock is one of the highest callings of a shepherd. Only in a narrow reading of 1 Peter 5:2-12 can one assume that protection is solely from intellectual or spiritual harm. David was lauded for his skill at physically protecting his flocks (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Such unfortunately is also the new normal for today (Rainer, 2018). The openness of church buildings, an orientation toward newcomers and youth, and a general assumption of being a haven for a diverse group of the downtrodden make churches vulnerable as targets of abuse and violence (Chupak et al., 2019). Other threats to churches include embezzlement, vandalism, assault, hate crimes, and, in rare cases, an active shooter (McLamb, 2015). Beyond the confines of the church, members or their children may be in domestic disputes or under the influence of drugs or alcohol, all or any of which may consume scarce pastoral resources (Hefner, 2016).

The GuideOne Center for Risk Management (2008) published what it terms a handbook for “missing ministry,” which considers physical risk management and planning, emergency preparation, facilities safety, protection for children and youth, and transportation safety. Others have published specific recommendations for church security and the protection of pastors and key personnel from a law enforcement perspective (Moloney, 2017). Church buildings as private entities have been exempted from some occupational safety and health requirements for their religious services employees, but employees, including volunteers, who carry out “secular” duties are covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA, 1975). Churches must also comply with access and disability accommodation. More states are requiring the installation and upkeep of automated external defibrillators in schools—to include those schools associated with churches—which may require an emergency response plan that trains staff in the recognition and response to cardiac arrest (Sherrid et al., 2017).

Safety is a rapidly emerging area of management. If they are not already, soon churches will be assessed by potential parishioners, not only by expository preaching, but in terms of physical safety for themselves and their family members while attending worship and other church-related activities (Hefner, 2016).

### **Growing Pastor Workloads and Family Impacts**

An unfortunate but emerging area of statistical analysis is the field of pastor burnout. This would be of particular utility should administrative workload be associated with and measured by burnout statistics. One UK-based study assesses clergy burnout, particularly among those engaged in people-centered caring professions, used findings to construct (and internally validate) a scale of emotional exhaustion (Francis et al., 2004). Miner (2007) also considers mental health impacts to pastors, though this researcher's interest was with respect to the psychological effects of relating to a secularized society, not workload. Anderson (2008) describes a pastor's choice of response to a "maxed-out" workload as one of several limited but clear options: (1) Limit the size of the church to the leadership style and relational needs of the pastor, (2) push the pastor until burnout happens, or (3) hire a pastor who relates differently, and seek a church that fits his or her style (Anderson, 2008). The fact that most chose the first alternative may relate directly to the fact that most congregations do not grow beyond 250 or so people (Fletcher, 2004). Adding an executive pastor to the staff may then be either a strategic precursor to growth, acknowledging the personal limits of the incumbent pastor to managing a larger ministry, or a reactive response to growth out of sheer survival instinct.

In 1956, Samuel W. Blizzard made a study of 690 clergymen and concluded that the pastor has the following six major roles, ordered here from least to most important:

1. Administrator

2. Organizer
3. Pastor
4. Preacher
5. Priest (performing religious functions, baptisms, etc.), and
6. Teacher.

He then described the “minister’s dilemma” in which the pastors surveyed agreed with his initial role rankings, but also reported that time spent on each activity was almost the inverse to its relative importance (Hoge et al., 1981). Ash (2015) recounts that the results of a pastor’s working day revealed the following:

Blizzard found that the professional working day averaged just under ten hours ... and divided up as follows: as administrator, 40 percent; as pastor, 25 percent; as preacher and priest, 20 percent; as organizer, 10 percent; as teacher 5 percent. Notice that over half of his total time goes to administration and organization. (p. 6)

Many arguing against executive pastor hiring to share this workload would be wise to consider the number of pastor’s wives and children functioning as willing (or unwilling) volunteers in this capacity. When asked, this researcher’s mother, a Southern Baptist minister’s daughter, expressed keen interest in this line of research on burnout. She readily gave her first-hand experience of the administrative and management burdens routinely taken on by these minister’s spouses and other family members, causing stress and distress in these family units (Bosch, 2019b).

Pastor’s wives suffer higher levels of stress than ordinary parishioner’s spouses. Factors for this are, not unexpectedly, financial and family matters, but also loneliness, the demands and expectations of others, a lack of privacy at home, work overload, and poor self-image (for not doing more to support their husbands’ ministries) (Nandasaba, 2011). The single greatest disadvantage of being a pastor’s wife, according to another study, was “time pressure due to

husband's heavy schedule," immediately followed by "husband serving others, neglects own family (Ash, 2015). The dangerous practice of a senior pastor becoming all things to all people and conforming to roles which are not realistic can wreak devastating effects on marriage. So much so that in recent decades among professionals, clergymen rank third in the number of divorces granted each year (Lavender, 1976).

It has been said that every pastor needs a Jethro (Langford, 1998). When one is the senior pastor, finding a spiritual mentor and trusted advisor aside from one's spouse on which one can candidly express one's own challenges can be difficult (Fuller, 2015). When one is placed in this role for others, in addition to formal pastoral counseling responsibilities, such a challenge is intensified. Along with balancing workloads, one emerging role that has been defined for XPs is mentor and coach for the staff. This role supports the team by mitigating pressures on the senior pastor to carve out time from sermon preparation, counseling, and other clerical duties in order to handle mentor and coaching activities, while in turn providing an executive leader—who has more time resources—directly dedicated attention to the staff and positive impact to team performance overall (Fletcher, 2004).

### **Digital and Social Media Environments**

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Dr. Peter Beilenson, Sacramento County Department of Health Services Director, confirmed that at least 70 people at the Bethany Slavic Missionary Church were infected with a new strain of coronavirus called COVID-19. This report had been preceded by various daily media accounts of churches across the country scrambling to respond to the virus, which appeared in the U.S. approximately four to six months previously (Becker, 2020). Churches sought to comply with state and federal guidance issued to faith-based organizations, which included sending staff home to telecommute and limiting meetings and events that

required close contact (CDC, 2020). Several governors and mayors expanded these restrictions even further, banning church services outright, even those held as “drive up” services in church parking lots (Massey, 2020).

The research and data collection phase of this study were thus overshadowed by this pandemic. During several phone calls with the LifeWay Top 100 XPs to coordinate their participation in the study, it was clear that all of these leaders were on the front lines of this pandemic response in their communities. A consistent theme for all of them was how their already robust online presence and technical capabilities in social media, media streaming, outreach to those in need, and event coordination had set them up to successfully respond to this crisis.

Nieuwhof (2018) appears prescient now when he defines seven disruptive church trends that will rule 2018. The first is a move beyond today’s conventional paradigms. “If coming to Christ means coming to your church in a set location and a set hour, you need a new strategy” (para. 24):

If you think about it, most churches (even growing churches, new churches and large churches) effectively say “We’d love for you to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and to do it you need to join us at a set hour every Sunday in a particular space we meet in. Beyond that, we’re not sure what to do.” (para. 12)

The argument is that while people have access to retail stores and entertainment twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week, the Church model remains thus: “We have 1-3 services on Sunday. We do [insert midweek activities]. And that’s how we help you come into a relationship with Christ” (Nieuwhof, 2018). Alternative models that may inevitably arise never suggest ministering to a majority of one’s parishioners in person. Rather, these models would depict ministry that is location-independent and not based at a particular location or building, the proliferation of pop-up churches, the movement of church ministries into unconventional venues

such as abandoned strip malls and movie theaters, the prioritization of preaching (facilitating experience) over teaching (conveying information), and a collective team presence online over a single charismatic individual (Nieuhof, 2018). One might simply ask how a single senior pastor, regardless of church size, might feel competent to manage such an impactful online presence. Some senior pastors may simply have nothing to do with a virtual presence, or at least nothing beyond a minimal one (Richardson, 2016). But this decision surrenders a mission and discipleship field.

Expectations for a church's digital presence have actually gone well beyond a Facebook™ page, a link to online giving, and posting streaming video of sermons to a website. These efforts are like the digital facilitators of brick and mortar ministry, the way websites once contributed to sales at major department stores. Like Amazon™, core religious understandings of identity, community, and authority are now being shaped and reshaped by the communicative possibilities of the internet, in its current and future iterations, into some version of a digital religion that will never see the inside of a building (Cheong, 2012). The social church is also expected to be online and interactive (Wise, 2014).

Campbell (2013; & Garner, 2016) notes that digital media and theology together offer important resources for helping Christians engage in a thoughtful and faith-based critical evaluation of the effect of new media technologies on society, our lives, and the church. It also stands to broaden the average parishioner's interest in engaging in other international religions that directly conflict with Scripture or denominational understanding of truth, behavior, and the like. Church leadership teams must be equipped to take on these discussions. Finally, Lowe and Lowe (2018) maintain that the digital revolution is also transforming Christian education in light of new technologies, causing them to fundamentally reassess how students, professors, and other

teachers might foster new “digital ecologies” in which spiritual growth—even transformation—can take place. Digital community is rapidly replacing parish ministry (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

A single leader will struggle to fully comprehend, let alone engage, such fundamental changes. At a minimum, the challenge will be effectively directing staff and volunteers saddled with the task of competing for souls in this vast, largely uncharted ministry territory.

Incorporating the media and internet comprehensively will continue to impact church performance.

### **Facilities Management and Creation Care**

The 1990s saw environmental stewardship develop significantly within churches. Some denominations and para-church organizations embraced green politics, almost to the point of Christian eco-paganism. Others sought a biblical perspective on environmental stewardship consistent with reformed evangelical Christian theology (Beisner et al., 2000). Such sound environmental stewardship celebrates and promotes human life, freedom, and economic development as compatible with, even essential to, the good of the whole environment (Mic. 6:8). Belknap (1998) likewise provided an overview of why Christians should be proactively involved in environmental stewardship, incorporating Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground," with contemporary arguments for environmental stewardship within the church.

Such programs are institutionalized in many churches, including annual trash cleanups, recycling programs, and creation care inculcated into Christian education. But these do not come without cost. Environmental programs mentioned in Chapter 1 of this research paper involved the operation of a separate recycling facility, staffed by a paid team of 10 to 12 occupational

health and safety-trained employees, further complicated by the level of administration and documentation required by city and county waste management regulators. Permits, training, and equipment must be added to the costs of environmental stewardship, often completely offsetting whatever revenue may have been gained.

Like safety and security, environmental programs are usually tied to an overall facilities management effort. Depending on the size, age, and location of church buildings, this effort may be significant. Whether purchased, leased, constructed, or borrowed, consideration of and consistent attention to church property, facilities, utilities, and communications is essential (Powers, 2008). Off-campus challenges also remain. Zoning and parking requirements are subject to change, and ideally a senior representative of the church should be present when council members make decisions that will potentially impact visitors and regular parishioners. Security, communications, and other systems demand maintenance once installed, as do roofs, siding, and windows. There are tax considerations for major renovations and facilities modifications too, along with permitting processes, all of which must be considered or in some cases approved in writing before work can start (Powers, 2008).

Certifications are available from such organizations as Church Facility Managers, which confers written proof of competencies such as planning and project management, operations and maintenance, real estate, quality assessment and innovation, team leadership, environmental factors, finance, communication, and technology (Cooper, 2008). Whether a senior pastor or another leader should attain such a certification to improve church management may be the operative question.

## **Nonprofit Entity Management and Financing**

As traditionally established as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit corporation, a church exists within a legal framework to bring about positive change to individuals and society. Like its for-profit relatives, nonprofit corporations need sound management, perhaps even more so, due to their lack of a “bottom line” (Drucker, 1992). Utilizing limited resources effectively requires churches to budget wisely, adhere to the budget, and distribute funds from limited resources in keeping with congregational wishes (Caldwell, 2008). As a profound external influence, numerous changes often occur in legal matters that impact the local church, including Internal Revenue Service rulings, tax code changes, and tax court decisions. The taxation of church properties, employees, and activities continues to be explored (Caldwell, 2008). Remaining current with these financial constraints is vital, whether an attorney is on permanent retainer or not. Coordinating and aligning church planning with trustees and elder boards is also imperative but can become contentious and time-consuming. Commissioning and decommissioning aspects of the organization are necessary, but can likewise become troublesome (Dale, 2008).

Stewardship is always labor-intensive. It typically involves the commissioning and supervision of a stewardship or finance committee and permeates all church activities on a year-round basis. Periodic audits improve accountability, increase transparency, and may identify opportunities for cost savings (Ellis, 1953). Scripture contains several references, both direct and indirect, to accounting and basic accounting concepts. In particular, it discusses financial planning (Luke 14:28-29), accounting (2 Kings 22:7), internal controls (Luke 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:20), and management accounting (2 Chron. 24:11-12). There are various challenges associated with managing money in both small and large congregations, the former being scarcity, the latter being decision-making.

In either case, sound business practices suggest separating tasks (collecting offerings, writing checks, recording contributions, reconciling bank statements, making deposits, etc.) among various key personnel (Smith, 2005). Decentralization again necessitates a committee, with leadership and coordination of it. Clergy and lay people alike view accounting with a belief that integrates their church's mission with the need to raise and manage the money necessary to mobilize that mission (Irvine, 2005). The pastor or another senior leader must ensure this integration happens.

Out of concern for the health of nonprofit activities, Drucker (1992) believed donors were better converted into contributors, particularly since every donor dollar competes for priorities (personal enrichment, entertainment). General agreement with this philosophy has driven growth in the capital campaign movement, where periodic and even full-time fundraising has become a complement to, or largely a substitute for, traditional tithing and offerings to sustain church finances (Bisagno, 2002; Carlton, 2009; Burnett, 1980). It is worth noting, however, that the results of such campaigns on key performance indicators such as growth and church unity have been mixed and suggested significant time and political capital was required by the senior pastor to be effective (Bjorklund, 2003).

### **Strategic Planning**

Capital campaigns, as all financial and other church management processes ought to be, find their source of alignment with the prayerfully sought framework for a given church (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Generally, strategy is thought of as a result of first defining organizational purpose (why it exists) and translating purpose into a vision (where it is going), with higher-level strategy and lower-level objectives to guide the organization (Mosaic Projects, 2019). While every Christian church exists to fundamentally align with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-

20, John 20:19-23), it is also essential to ask what a particular church's role is within the body of Christ (Warren, 2014). Strategy ties together all management activities as described, but also entails alignment with missional activities, discipleship, and Christian education (Forman & Miller, 2007).

A senior pastor's vital role is communicating the missional purpose, including a periodic focus on particular themes such as annual ministry campaigns, and to synchronize this planning to create an actionable vision and strategy (Forman & Miller, 2007). In this case, a unique aspect of the executive pastor is bringing sustained focus to bear on the transition from themes to action, including follow-ups, and regularly communicating with team members to create shared mental models which in turn are shown to improve performance (Dionne et al., 2010).

### **Staffing and Volunteer Management**

If a church is to sustain growth momentum, staffing must become an extremely high priority (McIntosh, 2000). There is a positive relationship between health and growth in churches when a mobilized laity is present, along with other supporting characteristics such as discipleship, engaging worship, and effective structures (McKee, 2003). What may be unique in staffing and volunteer management in churches, as opposed to other for-profit and nonprofit organizations generally, are the common objectives of seeking individual participation as part of a larger effort to help members grow, mature, and develop spiritual awareness as Christ's disciples (Powers, 2008). Research demonstrates, for example, that older adult volunteers in religious congregations report higher levels of faith maturity, faith practices, life satisfaction, and motivation to serve (Myers et al., 2013). Programs and functions within the church may thus be developed as means or ways to invite participation, and not ends in and of themselves.

A practical effect of this may be counterintuitive in terms of hiring actions. The right person for a position may be the one who seeks (or needs) the opportunity for growth, not necessarily the person preferred for the task from a merit promotion or knowledge, skills, and abilities standpoint (Powers, 2008). Some positions, however, are appropriately filled with targeted individuals with the commensurate spiritual, emotional, and intellectual acumen for their assignments. The senior pastor, elders, and other leaders will normally appoint these positions, which may include church staff, program directors, stewardship and other committee chairs, and church council members. Often a few of these positions will be modestly salaried or expenses covered, which may change their status as either religious or non-religious employees for legal or tax purposes. Once organized, even volunteer staffs require consistent two-way communications, guidance, and assistance with a focus on particular tasks, all of which can be time-consuming on pastors and staff.

Operating a church unavoidably requires a significant amount of volunteer participation, particularly a church with a full suite of programs in Christian education, discipleship, men's and women's ministries, youth, music and worship, and outreach (Powers, 2008). Such volunteerism ranges from fairly sophisticated (writing and presenting Christian education materials) to the menial (stacking chairs), but all activities require a certain level of leader investment in terms of proper motivation and guidance (De Oliveira, 2008; Perry et al., 2008). It is worth noting that the work of volunteer teachers has been cited as particularly effective historically, and statistically and phenomenologically shown to be an essential key to church growth (Heflin et al., 2014).

Some argue that church administration is ministry, not methodology (Dale, 2008). Still, the intent of exploring the related literature in these additional management areas fully highlights the demands and opportunities for an executive pastor that may not be readily apparent to those

focused solely on pastoral ministry. A decision to consider hiring an XP should be assessed as part of the overall personnel strategy, consistent with the vision and purpose of the church, and its desires for sustainment, growth, or other specific aspects of performance.

### **Rationale for the Study and Gap in the Literature**

Based on this researcher's experience in government and nonprofit organization management over three decades, this point of view stimulated interest in understanding how executive functions in a church influence its performance. Put more succinctly, this writer wanted to know whether an executive pastor could be crucial to the performance of large or fast-growing churches or was a necessary reaction in the interest of pastoral ministry. Culling through survey data on 100 fastest-growing churches in America, as an objective measure of church success, and collecting qualitative data on the composition of their particular leadership teams yielded insights into the taxonomy of executive management structures among these churches, something the current literature does not address. This research also suggests whether executive activities are optimizable for particular sized ministries, answering a key question that remains in the minds of many church hiring committees: whether one should expect an ROI of resourcing an XP position. This ROI is something the literature does not currently articulate.

There are particular ministry management areas that may be more productive and efficient under the purview of an XP in lieu of a senior pastor who is concurrently tasked with the ministerial functions of the church. These ministry areas lack sufficient information to determine whether such a supposition is true or not and pose further gaps in the available literature. That many churches are already investing in an executive management strategy to support their ministries suggests that they have determined that an XP meets a *bona fide* workforce need. Such churches view executive staffing as part of a strategic plan for the future

of their ministry. XP position descriptions have been widely developed for the benefit of others. What remained to be done was a quantitative assessment of the impact these leaders may have had on these other churches. Those churches that are considering joining them in this staffing model will benefit from objective data in their decision-making process.

### **Profile of the Current Study**

The rationale for selecting a phenomenological, qualitative element to this research design was two-fold. First, there was a need to determine emerging themes to create a current and consistent executive pastor taxonomy from the research population. And second, there was a need to build a sufficient dataset to enable a focused and efficient collection of statistical data collection under the statistical analysis, with the subsequent comparison and integration of all results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Such qualitative research is consistent with previous phenomenological analyses undertaken to understand executive pastor roles, relationships, and activities by Boersma (1988), Costin (2008), Fletcher (2004), Hawco (2005), and Kiel (1988), with appropriate modifications applied as noted to create a framework for the additional quantitative portion of this sequential mixed methods study, which has been lacking up until this point.

Phenomenology as a research tool can be examined as transcendental. This is not a spiritual concept as it is used here, but rather, one where “everything is perceived freshly for the first time” (van Manen, 1990) or is a purely psychological collection of information (Moustakas, 1994). Since the research questions focused on describing the experiences of research participants, Transcendental Phenomenology (TPh) was chosen as the most suitable qualitative method for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also has the advantages of combining textural and structural data for understanding a shared experience. The authors note that TPh has a strong

philosophical component, which argues for its use in settings where Christian or related religious or firmly held philosophical views are likely to influence (i.e. improve) the outcome. TPh is consistent with previous analyses undertaken to understand executive pastor roles, relationships, and activities (Boersma, 1988; Costin, 2008; Fletcher, 2004; Hawco, 2005; Kiel, 1988), with modifications applied as noted to create a framework for the additional portions of this sequential mixed methods study.

The particular over-arching framework for this taxonomy employs a composite view of work by Welch (2011) and Boersma (1988), who both exhaustively characterized all areas of church management and thus provide a ready baseline. This is only a baseline, however, and the expectation is that research will inform the final research taxonomy to some definable extent. Samples within the test population had the potential to be used to inform and fine-tune the final instrumentation for the remainder of the survey takers (Creswell, 2018), though a different quality control method using external expert review was eventually employed.

The quantitative portion appears unique in the current research on XPs. It sought a simple correlation between fast-growing churches as a performance measure and XP investment within the subject population as measured by salary and various workload data.

The variety of church leadership models in LifeWay's respondents was predicted to yield a data set that was statistically non-Gaussian without parametric data. Neither was a binary yes/no answer likely. Instead, general ranking was sought in terms of a numerically based ministry commitment to executive management, gathered through survey instrumentation as proposed in the Appendix, to tabulate workload data in estimated labor hours and compensation. Percentages were requested rather than raw data so that salary and related cost information would not need to be normalized based on regional economic factors. Such methodology is

consistent with a Wilcoxon signed-rank  $t$ -test for matched pairs, as it is useful for assessing populations without assumptions of normality.

The objectivity and validation of mixed methods instrumentation inherently depended on the quality of the research population and underlying data collected by LifeWay (2018). Each church leadership team in the subject populations demonstrated a propensity for responding to requests for survey information, suggesting that a survey method is a familiar and neutral setting for information gathering. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher was the key instrument for developing RQ-relevant questionnaires and obtaining follow-on data through interviews and documents. The study design was deliberately expected to be emergent in nature, particularly as the taxonomy of XP management structures is collected, processed, and refined. By necessity, the research setting was equivalent to the national scope and scale of the original LifeWay (2018) survey. Additional insights on biblical models or scripture-based thought processes of surveyed churches were extracted from literature review sources and interviews where authorized by the research method.

The methodology for this study will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter synthesizes research methodologies for this study, which was an investigation into how investing in executive pastors within church leadership teams might correlate with the performance of churches in terms of growth. It began with a qualitative study of how such churches are organized, followed by a qualitative examination seeking to correlate ROI with XP labor within those teams. This synopsis includes a brief restatement of the research problem, the purpose, and rationale for the research methods relative to this problem, the qualitative and quantitative questions and hypotheses proposed, the methodology for the overall design of the exploratory sequential mixed method used, and the analytical and statistical controls employed. Also included are the selection of the population and samples tested, the qualitative and quantitative instrumentation used, the data collection methods, and the statistical procedures involved in the analysis.

### **Research Design Synopsis**

#### **The Problem**

This research challenge was characterized by constructing a simple study to try to correlate church performance with measurable investments in executive management. Doing so meant understanding church executive management phenomenologically, measuring church performance statistically, and then devising a way to compare them. Several researchers have already accomplished the former. As Costin (2008) found, church executive competencies may be categorized as organizing, planning, staffing, directing, and evaluating, while, as has also been noted, pastoral leadership teams may not always have the necessary executive and management skills represented on a church staff (Boersma, 1988; Welch, 2011; Woodruff,

2004). Senior pastors may depend on family members, volunteers from the congregation, or outsourcing to obtain these capabilities, while some have hired XPs to close this gap (Woodruff, 2004). These concerns reinforce the utility of being able to determine whether an ROI exists for hiring such personnel and how that return might be characterized.

Costin (2008) also wrote that an understanding of pastor competencies should go further. In describing a disparity between educational investment in management at seminaries and the actual managerial workload pastors could expect, Costin's research provided an understanding of XP knowledge, skills, and abilities at the human resources practitioner level. It also established a basis for additional value in quantitatively defining the extent to which executive pastors improve church performance. He did this by specifically suggesting follow-on research be done to explore executive management in ministry effectiveness using "objective measures of success" (Costin, 2008, p. 4). Responding to this research challenge was a principal focus of this design method.

The research population of churches was selected based on known and objective performance criteria, i.e. a high rate of church growth. Qualitative analysis (QUAL) of these XP leadership teams, their strategies, and each church's management investments was conducted through phenomenological techniques including interviews, narrative oriented surveys, and reviews of church publications. QUAN was further conducted by statistically comparing growth with data, including executive hours worked as a percentage of total full-time equivalent work hours for church staff, or relative salary expended on executive management efforts and expertise. Merging these allowed the QUAN to be informed by the QUAL, and vice versa, enriching this analysis overall (Roberts, 2010). It was hoped that a mixed strategy using qualitative methods to develop objective measurements and refine quantitative survey

instrumentation would result in useful analytical data for comparison.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed methods study is to characterize current executive management models, their best practices, and their functions within a pre-determined population of fast-growing churches across the U.S., and then discern any correlation between relative per capita investment in executive management, defined as labor cost and hours expended, and rate of church growth as an independent measurement of church performance. The theory guiding the qualitative portion is transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) as being the most suitable approach to complement the simple comparative statistical method used for the quantitative portion (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

### **Research Questions and Null Hypotheses**

**RQ1.** What executive management models are consistently found in fast-growing churches?

**RQ2.** What is the perceived contribution of the XP position for church size and growth?

**RQ3.** Is there a correlation between church growth and executive management investment?

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no statistical correlation between church growth and executive management investment.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** The presence of executive management investment is not a useful predictor of church performance as characterized by church growth.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Mixed methods provided a means of blending the strengths and overcoming the inherent limitations of individual methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Together these methods reinforced the confidence of their analysis (Gliner et al., 2009). In terms of choosing a particular

mixed methods design, the recommended design used here—exploratory, sequential, mixed methods—was advantageous for developing better measurement instruments, with the expected outcome of a test of better measures for a sample of a population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This exploratory sequential mixed methods design was characterized by an initial qualitative phase of data collection and analysis, to establish a common executive pastor taxonomy, followed by a phase of quantitative data collection and analysis, to relate the level of XP investment to church size and growth, with an interim phase of integration or linking of data from each of the two separate strands of data, to finally comparing these two strands to determine whether sufficient evidence existed to suggest XP influence on church growth (Berman, 2017). The intent was to first explore the sample first using focus groups (direct interview) to refine a quantitative instrument (website survey) to analyze each church's investment in executive leadership (time + cost). This mixed design method was chosen in part because earlier methodology focused solely on qualitative results which were not ultimately able to answer Costin's (2008) challenge of object performance assessment. However, a purely quantitative analysis of performance within the research population would have been difficult without a qualitative taxonomy as a baseline.

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

The same purposive, non-probable sample study population was used for both the QUAL and QUAN. The senior pastor or duly appointed representative on the leadership team of each church, within the group of churches distinguished by LifeWay Outreach (2018) in its "100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America" study, was proposed as the study population. The fastest-growing one hundred churches were identified within a group of 30,000 respondents solicited to participate in the LifeWay (2018) self-reported survey, based on attendance averages greater

than 1,025, a numerical gain of 176 or more, and a percentage gain of at least 3% over the previous (2017) average for the same reporting months. Final rankings reflected both numerical and percentage gains (LifeWay, 2018). The research setting adopted an equivalent survey approach.

While alternative means to assess church performance exist, this group met Costin's (2008) criteria for "objective measures of success" for this particular research design. From this researcher's perspective, fastest growing churches offered the additional advantage of utilizing a purposive sample gathered through a well-established analytical model, negating the need for model creation and validation prior to analysis. Using the LifeWay (2018) survey data for the subject population was consistent with Walliman (2018), for whom there is always a context in which research is carried out and a history of work that has gone before it.

### **Limits of Generalization**

This research was limited to the particular topic of executive management investment within the research population. The intent was not to generalize findings, though the results of the phenomenological analysis may be transferrable to some extent. Any correlation of the general statistical measures of performance may be of some utility for those seeking further information on the effect executive pastors may have on church performance, or perhaps when such an investment might be worthwhile, say, in the context of a continuum of (or in anticipation of) congregational growth.

This research depended on the reliability of LifeWay's (2018) survey methodology, which was incorporated into the analysis of the findings. New or relatively slower growing churches were not included by definition, nor were churches that did not self-report, even if such churches met the survey criteria. Since Lifeway's (2018) research spanned all Christian

denominations, and since this study was specifically focused on executive management and not Christian affiliation, results were not evaluated by denomination. The LifeWay (2018) data being only one year in time, detailed trends to predict future outcomes were not suggested. Finally, this study only utilized growth as an independent factor, and did not seek to understand *how* growth occurred within the study population. This researcher acknowledges that a variety of spiritual, organic, organizational, demographic, and macroeconomic factors were operating in concurrence with the observed variables.

It is also worth pausing to note emphatically that there are genuine disagreements as to whether church growth equates to ministry performance and thus effectiveness. This research sought answers specific to church performance organizationally, and explicitly did not seek to characterize the overall ministry effectiveness of any of the LifeWay 100 churches, nor dismiss the tens of thousands of congregations lying outside the sample population(s), in terms of overall contribution to the important work in advancing the individual or overall mission of the Christian Church in America.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Phenomenology may take a hermeneutic approach, according to van Manen (1990), an empirical, transcendental, “everything is perceived freshly for the first time” approach, or a purely psychological one (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological study chosen here explored the nature of a specific situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It endeavored to describe the meaning, for several individuals, of combined experiences of the concept or phenomenon of church management. Since it specifically focused less on the researcher and more on describing the experiences of research participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018), TPh was chosen as the most suitable method for this study with a few important advantages. The combining of textural and

structural data was useful for understanding a shared experience, in this case, managing the unique day to day executive management challenges over and above pastoral responsibilities in churches, in order to develop practices or policies and a deeper understanding about the phenomenon. This is something a narrative study, focused on individual experience, would have been less likely to yield.

This study was purposefully directed at the experiences of those within the research population rather than the researcher. Thus, there was an objective, motivational rationale for the researcher—a 30-year veteran manager within the federal government who undertakes a variety of leadership roles in church settings—to set aside individual bias and embrace a genuine curiosity for the perceptions and experiences of these ministry leaders. Creswell and Poth (2018) further note that transcendental phenomenology has a strong philosophical component, which argues for its use in settings where Christian or related religious or firmly held philosophical views are likely to influence the outcome.

With respect to both QUAL and QUAN, the researcher's role was to collect salient information from relevant literature, develop useful analytical tools, establish an open and collaborative relationship with the study population, and faithfully collect and assess the results. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher was intended to be the key instrument for developing RQ-relevant questionnaires and obtaining follow-on data through interviews and documents. The desire throughout was to minimize researcher bias and approach the topic objectively. Other important roles of this researcher included communicating the research honestly, faithfully safeguarding participants and all the data provided, and presenting and interpreting the results with integrity and objectivity.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research subjects were adults working on church leadership teams across the U.S. who had previously voluntarily responded to LifeWay (2018) survey requests either personally or through their organization. This list of participants and their ranking within the study population is publicly accessible, though the participants and their data were anonymized here for research and privacy purposes. All survey responses in any form were voluntary, with appropriate notifications, disclosure agreements, and disclaimers made in writing. The approved Informed Consent Form utilizing the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved template is provided in Appendix B. All research used the current IRB Application Checklist, which includes the completion of all checklist requirements and submission of necessary supplemental documents per Appendix C, to gain IRB approval prior to research start. No updates to IRB and faculty advisor approval were sought, as no changes were made to survey instruments. Shortages of survey responses below statistically significant levels were properly acknowledged and addressed in the final dissertation analysis. All required human subject ethics research training (i.e. Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) for the student were completed prior to work start.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The proposal was first to explore answers to RQ1 and RQ2 through precedent literature and a targeted sample of the study population, using a focus group (direct interview) method. In their description of the employment of the exploratory sequential mixed method, Creswell and Poth (2018) advocate for the use of an initial qualitative focus group within the study population to facilitate the development and refining of the mixed methods survey tool. However, the authors recommend against including the focus group subjects in the larger population analysis

to avoid complicating the results. As a compromise, a small focus group of pastors known by the researcher was solicited for voluntary participation, particularly due to the relatively small number of respondents to the survey request. Interview worksheets were utilized as the agenda to assess the clarity of the questions and presentation of the survey tool in a focus group format, ensuring their consistency with the RQs. Notes of the discussion are provided where taken by the researcher. The finalized quantitative instrument (online survey) solicited each church's investment in executive leadership (time + cost) relative to RQ3, while simultaneously expanding the qualitative investigation of RQ1 and RQ2 across the rest of the study population.

Data was analyzed to determine if evidence exists to suggest executive pastor influence correlates with church growth (Berman, 2017).

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

The rationale for the TPh data collection approach selection was two-fold. First, there was a need to determine emerging themes to create a current and consistent executive pastor taxonomy from the two subpopulations. And second, there was a desire to build a sufficient dataset that would enable a focused and efficient collection of statistical data collection under the later quantitative analysis, with the subsequent integration of both results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research was also consistent with previous phenomenological analyses undertaken to understand executive pastor roles, relationships, and activities (Boersma, 1988; Costin, 2008; Fletcher, 2004; Hawco, 2005; Kiel, 1988), with modifications applied as noted to create a framework for the additional qualitative portion of this sequential mixed methods study.

Objectivity and validation of qualitative instrumentation inherently depend on the quality of the research population and underlying data collected by LifeWay (2018). Each church leadership team in the subject populations had already demonstrated a propensity for responding

to requests for survey information, suggesting that a survey method was a familiar and neutral setting for information gathering. The study design was deliberately expected to be emergent in nature, particularly as the taxonomy of XP management structures was collected, processed, and refined.

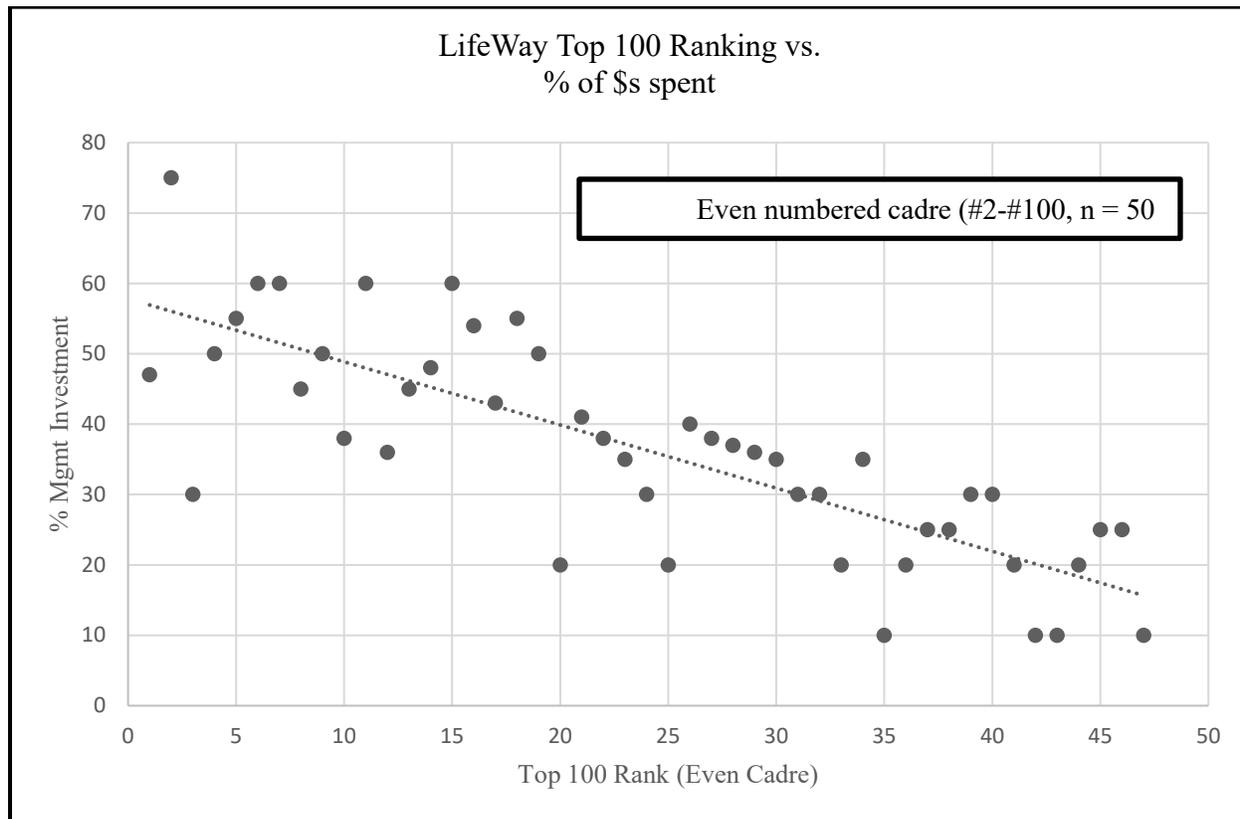
The desired outcome of the qualitative portion was a useful taxonomy relevant to RQ1 and RQ2 on the presence, types, structures, daily duties, and salary bands of any executive ministry staff employed, and a basis for quantitative correlational instrumentation design in support of RQ3.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

The quantitative portion sought to conduct correlational analysis to examine the relationship between fast-growing churches, as an applied definition of church performance, and the investment of time and money in executive management within the churches in the subject population. The correlational design utilized the study population that participated in the phenomenological study to statistically assess whether the presence of an executive pastor was a reliable predictor of church growth in the fastest-growing subpopulation. Correlational data was collected using an online survey instrument proposed in Appendix A, using the results of the earlier QUAL research, to capture XP investment data based on labor hour and cost estimates as compared to the total labor hour and cost investment of the church leadership team (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Sample Display of Potential Research Results Using Notional Data*



The wide taxonomical distribution of church leadership models in the LifeWay (2018) research populations was expected to be statistically non-Gaussian. This suggested that a truly parametric data set for the quantitative portion of the analysis might not be feasible. Neither would a binary yes/no answer to an executive ministry commitment have been a likely scenario. Rather, the correlational research methodology here sought to arrive at a general ranking of each church within the research population(s) in terms of a numerically based ministry commitment to executive management, defined by survey instrumentation which gathered executive workload data measured in terms of estimated labor hours and executive management compensation. This correlational methodology was consistent with a Wilcoxon signed-rank t-test for matched pairs, as it is useful for assessing populations without assumptions of normality.

Research hypothesis statements were provided earlier in this Chapter. Generally, the research premise was that the group would establish a non-normal but consistent distribution, with all churches having some level of investment in executive management, but that the propensity for stand-alone investment in an XP would increase with church growth rate. Using this scale as a rough baseline, *t*-tests for churches within the fastest-growing group could be compared to determine whether their relative commitment to executive management suggested it was a factor in their growth, including whether a statistical minimum could be identified.

The desired outcome of the quantitative portion was a statistically significant correlation between XP investment and church growth as a performance measure, as stipulated in the RQs, with rejection of the null hypotheses in  $H_{01}$  and  $H_{02}$ , which stated that there was no statistical correlation between church growth and executive management investment, and that the presence of an XP was not a useful predictor of church performance as measured by church growth. However, alternative outcomes such as a statistical validation of some or all null hypotheses were also valuable for the purposes of understanding the relationship between XPs and church performance.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Qualitative Instrumentation**

The progression of the qualitative portion was to first utilize executive pastor subject matter experts to refine the study instrumentation. A portion of the churches was initially used to help form a baseline taxonomy of church leaders within the study subpopulations, in which the executive functions were characterized and could be further quantified among the other churches. However, respondents were not in a quantity suitable for this purpose.

The qualitative portion sought to objectively describe how and under what circumstances certain churches utilize executive pastors, and specific to the fastest-growing sub-population, whether the employment of executive pastors either led to or resulted from, church growth. The intent was to identify the phenomenon or “object” of human experience. In this case, the experience being researched was confined to the church management workload which lies outside of traditional pastoral duties such as expository preaching, Christian education, worship and music programs, discipleship training, and pastoral counseling. Typically, the researcher collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, with the intent to develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals, both “what” was experienced and “how” it was experienced. In this case, the phenomenon was a more relevant and current XP (or church management) taxonomy as viewed by individual church leadership teams within the research population.

It was proposed that two deliberately open-ended questions would be asked, using an online survey tool designed to lead to a textural and structural description of experiences to understand the common experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). These instrumentation questions (IQ) as Moustakas (1994) defined them generically were as follows:

**IQ1:** What have you experienced in terms of [the phenomenon]?

**IQ2:** What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of [the phenomenon]?

Since there was particular additional interest in the thought process surrounding the hiring of an executive pastor, a third question was added:

**IQ3:** How would you describe the way executive management is incorporated into your church leadership team?

Phenomenological methods used could have included interviews of a representative sample of the population(s) to establish a baseline, which would have been sequestered from the remainder of the analysis to avoid complicating the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Instead, experts were used, because the number of respondents did not reach one half (50%) of the total population of 100 churches. Additional qualitative data collected included soliciting and reviewing church business plans, organization charts, and articles of incorporation, which were cataloged upon receipt. A final draft of the three qualitative survey questions is found in Appendix A.

### **Quantitative Instrumentation**

QUAN specifically sought to obtain measurable data on the amount of investment, in terms of per capita labor hours worked and dollars spent, within the study population. This index was compared to determine the extent to which the relative effort of executive pastor labor might be a reliable predictor of performance as demonstrated by church growth. As noted, the desired outcome of the quantitative portion of this analysis was an uncomplicated and statistically assessable index of XP labor investment in comparison to church growth as a performance factor, as stipulated in the RQs. It was proposed that requests for quantitative data would be incorporated into the online survey of the large sample subpopulations as a defined series of questions. This was opposed to the open-ended questions which constituted the QUAL portion. These questions, continuing numerically from the qualitative portion, sought to identify the percentage of costs and staff labor (as a proportion of the total) invested in seven executive functions:

- strategy and planning
- staff management, including paid personnel and volunteers

- financial management
- facilities and environment
- occupational and public safety
- special projects
- technology

Demographic questions were incorporated into the qualitative portion, including current population and budget data. A final draft of the proposed quantitative survey questions, formatted using the QUALTRICS™ survey tool, is also located in Appendix A.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Correlational data sets of data on cost x time were generated for the population using Question 3. Using a *t*-test (i.e. a pair of *t* distribution tables applicable to each data set), the final correlational table of data was recorded and plotted for comparative analysis, to the second quartile. As with all quantitative methods, appropriate validation methods were applied, including cross-checking of results and the use of predicted vs. observed plots, mean absolute error analysis to assess deviance, and mean absolute percent error analysis appropriate for the sample size in each subpopulation. Correlational data were compared to determine relationships that might exist, including the correlation between the rate of church growth and the relative commitment to executive pastor labor, either measured in cost or in labor hours as a percentage of the total staff.

Data reliability was confirmed by splitting the population in two parts, assessing them independently, and reporting any statistical variability in the results.

## **Research Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in the phenomenological portion of this study is a function of Credibility and Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Credibility was established through triangulation by asking the same research questions to every study participant. It was also established through member checks. Participants were provided an opportunity to review and verify their statements and to fill in any gaps or missing information that may have occurred during survey data collection and interviews. The design of these steps is to seek validity from the qualitative methods and data collected. These techniques were also intended to reinforce dependability, along with the expected reliability inherent in the LifeWay (2018) data set.

With respect to confirmability, the TPh methodology chosen consisted of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's own experiences, and collecting data from several persons who had experienced the phenomenon. The researcher reduced the information received into streams, key quotes, and themes, leading to a textural description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how they experienced it in situational context, ultimately combining them to convey the essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conscious or unconscious research bias was addressed, and ideally minimized, by conforming to this approach. There was also no explicit goal of replicating earlier qualitative research, and thus internal rules pertaining to the categorizing of data, such as taxonomical information on XP functions, were not envisioned by this approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Nonprobability sampling maximized the link between the data collected and the context in which it was found. Transferability may not have been definitively proven through this study. However, the research questions and hypotheses were crafted to determine whether the findings,

particularly with respect to XP performance and ROI, may be of some utility to those seeking additional information for XP hiring decisions.

Four academic doctors acting as external auditors, not affiliated with Liberty University, were identified to provide an additional objective assessment of the project.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Qualitative Data Coding and Analysis**

Consistent with TPh methodology, data was analyzed by reducing the information into significant statements or quotes and then combining the statements into themes. From this, a textural description (a written summary of what the participants experienced) of the experiences of persons was developed. Then, a structural description (how they experience it in terms of conditions, situations, and/or context) of their experiences was constructed. Finally, the two were combined to convey the overall essence of the experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The outcome was to be a descriptive statement that was personally relatable to the reader and informed subsequent research decisions or conclusions. NVIVO<sup>TM</sup> was utilized as necessary to support data management and to protect data integrity and confidentiality.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Since correlational design does not seek to assess cause and effect, the expected result was at best an observation in terms of how the two sets of data (ordinal list of churches vs. ordinal lists of management investment in dollars and labor hours) related. The hypothesis associated with the quantitative portion was that the “fast-growing” population would reveal a non-normal but consistent distribution, with all having some level of *time + cost* investment in executive management. Using this scale as a baseline, *t*-tests of the strands of data for churches

within the *fastest-growing* subpopulation were compared to determine whether their relative executive management investment suggested it was a factor in their growth. Finally, as per Berman (2017), interpreting the quantitative data became part of integrated findings for the exploratory mixed-method approach to understanding the topic.

Data analysis for statistical procedures are generally performed to demonstrate the validity of the analytical method. Primary parameters included calculation of the mean (or average), the standard deviation, the relative standard deviation, confidence intervals, and regression analysis. Based on  $n \sim 100$ , the expected acceptance criteria for accuracy, precision and repeatability could be calculated based on a confidence interval probability of 95%, assuming a sample mean of 50 and standard deviation of 5. Appropriate quantitative validation methods would then be applied, including cross-checking of results and the use of predicted vs. observed plots, mean absolute error analysis to assess deviance, and mean absolute percent error appropriate for the sample size in the population ( $n \sim 100$ ).

Ideally, the null hypotheses—that there is no such statistical correlation, and the executive pastor is not a useful predictor of church performance—would be rejected. However, since validation of one or all of the null hypotheses would be valuable for the purposes of understanding the impact of XPs on church performance, these results would be important as well.

### **Chapter Summary**

Using a study population for which performance (in this case, growth rate) was pre-determined, this study sought to qualitatively explore the population's executive management taxonomy, quantitatively assess its financial and temporal investment in this portion of its workforce, and determine if executive management investment correlated to church

performance. A description of the research methods selected and their implementation has been largely discussed above. However, a few final points can be made.

From a practical standpoint, it was helpful to normalize a working definition of the executive pastor. This is due to the wide-ranging and rapidly changing nature of the taxonomy of management-related activities across Christian churches in the United States, as described today in the literature and by Christian popular media on the web. This research method offered a way to do this concurrently with the collection of the qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. From an academic standpoint, there was a desire to explore both the psychological and mathematical margins of the topic and accomplish more well-rounded social research in the context of this student's dissertation process (Bernard, 2012; Punch, 2013). Finally, from a functional standpoint, this method provided a general sequence for the conduct of research. The intent was to first explore the purposively chosen sample population, using focus groups to refine a quantitative instrument that then would be used to analyze each church's *per capita* weighted investments in executive leadership (time + cost). Appendix A forms the basis for the discussion, which was memorialized by student notes. It was hoped that this would yield a statistically useful instrument for the correlational inquiry (the "what" and "how much") while also providing a necessary framework for the accompanying phenomenological inquiry (the "why"), and ultimately a coherent synthesis of both in mixed fashion.

If an overarching objective of mixed methods design includes concentrating on a pragmatic topic which is achievable in terms of adding informative and practical value to the knowledge base, this particular research approach appeared reasonably suitable to the task.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

The theoretical framework of this study was that hiring an executive pastor to a church leadership team and investing in church management functions have a measurable impact on church growth as an objective measure of performance. To test this theory, 100 fast growing churches in the U.S. were surveyed to examine their leadership teams and collect data on their management investment in seven key church business areas. This chapter summarizes the qualitative and quantitative data collected. Data interpretation, comparison to the research questions and hypotheses, and other conclusions and recommendations follow in Chapter Five.

### **Compilation Protocol and Measures**

The sample population was the senior or executive pastor at each of the LifeWay Top 100 Fastest Growing Churches in the U.S. for 2018. To collect the data, an online survey was developed which combined qualitative and quantitative questions with a few demographic questions. The qualitative answers were assembled, organized, and categorized. The quantitative data was incorporated into a series of comparative models for analysis. A brief summary of these procedures and the resulting data is presented here.

### **Final Survey Questions Development**

The survey process began by developing a rough outline of the desired information based on literature review outcomes in Chapter Two and the research plan proposed in Chapter Three. Survey data fields were identified using core XP task areas defined by Boersma (1988), Costin (2008), and Welch (2011). Other XP tasks emerged from the literature review. For the sake of data manageability and to reduce the burden on the respondents, the researcher elected to limit the survey to seven pairs of quantitative questions. These are shown in the final survey found in

Appendix A. All of the original XP tasks had merit as criteria for interpreting survey results, however, so they were employed as review criteria for the qualitative portion (see Appendix E).

Once the XP tasks were determined, a simple method was needed to measure the effort used for each task by the study population. Organizations usually measure their effort in two fundamental areas: time and money. Therefore, each of the research tasks were assessed in terms of work hours and labor dollars spent. At this point a concern surfaced regarding the impact of demographics.

The study population provided a group of churches (1-100) organized only by growth rate over a two-year period (2017-2018). In creating this list, LifeWay did not account for size or socioeconomics in this group, other than as minimum criteria for being put on the list. The problem is that a church of 35,000 attendees might have a much larger workforce than a church of 5,000 attendees, even though the two had similar growth rates. This could skew the data by implying that larger churches have a heavier investment in their workforce, when in fact increased workforce dollars could reflect the increased budget total. Likewise, a church with 5,000 members in a high cost of living area might need higher compensation for personnel than the same sized church in a low-cost area. And so forth. The decision was therefore made to collect this data as a *percentage* of the total in each area, rather than raw numbers. While not a perfect solution, it provided a normalizing function across the wide variety of churches that literally spanned the United States.

The qualitative information was collected using three open-ended phenomenological survey questions using the TPh framework conceived by Moustakas (1994) and described at length in Chapter Three. These are also found in the final survey shown in Appendix A.

## **Survey Creation, Approval, and Employment**

Once the quantitative and qualitative questions were refined, they were entered into the institution's QUALTRICS™ online survey tool. Modules were selected within the tool to create an initial welcome page, followed by a page with two text boxes for voluntarily collecting survey taker identity information. The next page in the survey provided three open text (no word limit) boxes for the answers to the qualitative questions. This was followed by a page with seven pairs of sliders to collect the percentage of time and work hours estimated for each of the seven XP task areas (Strategy and Planning; Staff Management, including paid personnel and volunteers, Financial Management, Facilities and Environment, Occupational and Public Safety, Special Projects, and, Information Technology).

The slider tool allowed the test taker to choose his/her survey answer by dragging a bar on the screen to indicate his/her estimated percentage. This provided a simple way for respondents to interact with the survey on either a computer or a mobile device. It also allowed a wide range and flexibility in scoring (values of 1-100%) and permitted the use of statistics tables within the QUALTRICS tool online. Bias was reduced by placing the slider in the center of the scale so every response for every survey taker began from the same data point. Since the survey was voluntary, respondents did not have to move a slider in order to continue with or submit their results. An example from the survey is shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Sample Survey Questions for Estimating Cost and Staff Workload Associated with Church Planning and Strategy*

Q: As a proportion of all church <b>resources</b> spent on your total staff, both paid and reimbursed volunteers, how would you characterize the <b>relative cost</b> (\$) dedicated to strategic planning?	
	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Estimated % of total staff costs spent on planning and strategy ()	
Q: As a proportion of all church <b>staff workload</b> , both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of <b>staff time (hours)</b> dedicated to strategic planning?	
	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Estimated % of total staff time spent on planning and strategy ()	

A final survey page had three text boxes to capture additional voluntary church demographic data on size and total budget. The completed survey was screen-captured and submitted for research faculty and IRB approval in December 2019. Approval was subsequently granted in February 2020, accompanied by survey consent forms and an introductory letter. A copy of the IRB approval is in Appendix B.

Each church was contacted directly using the available information on its published website. 62% of the churches provide the name and contact information of either the senior pastor, XP, or both. The other 38% required the researcher to contact the church by phone to obtain the information. Once contact information was collected, two general methods of outreach were used. In one method a group of churches were mass emailed with a solicitation to take the survey, including the anonymous survey link, a blank copy of the survey consent form, and a brief narrative consistent with the IRB approved introduction letter. This method did not generate any responses.

A slower but more productive outreach method employed involved direct contact with each church individually until the XP or alternative leader of the church completed the survey and the release form. This also required setting up a phone appointment to discuss the research

prior to the survey. Three contact attempts were made until the church accepted, disregarded, or directly declined the invitation to participate. Based on the registration of responses in the survey tool, at least six surveys were started but not completed.

## **Demographic and Sample Data**

### **Demographic Data**

Acquiring and tracking demographic data in this study posed an interesting challenge. The primary demographic for this study was the LifeWay Top 100 group (2018). It was deliberately used as a cohort to represent fast growing churches as an objective measure of performance, since this list of churches is based on an independently validated and published survey process.

According to LifeWay Research (2018), the Outreach 100 is a collaboration between *Outreach* magazine, LifeWay Research, and *Exponential*. The annual survey is compiled by soliciting participation from approximately 30,000 churches across the United States through fax, email, letter, phone, and certified mail. The Outreach 100 is a self-reported survey based on attendance averages for February and March of 2018, excluding Easter weekend. It is based on attendance averages and not membership. The figures collected are compared to previous averages for the same period in the past year. For the 2018 group utilized in this study, the attendance periods used to calculate growth rates by LifeWay were February to March 2017 and February to March 2018. All data is confirmed by the churches themselves and reflects their church attendance as they tally it. The 2018 list included surveyed churches with attendance greater than 1,025, a numerical gain of 176 or more, and a percentage gain of at least 3%. The

results of this survey, including pastor names, church names, websites, and other data have been in the public domain since March 2018.

As noted, this research survey opened with two demographic questions which had to be optional under institutional protocols: the participant's name and the name of his/her church. These were requested because of survey anonymity limits imposed by the institution, including the use of an anonymous link for data collection. The results of these two demographic questions were retained by the researcher and translated into a two-letter random church identity code in order to track, organize, and present the data. This was particularly key with respect to the quantitative analysis, as shall be discussed subsequently. These two sets of demographic data were not published here, to limit the risk of correlating the data with those providing it. In cases where the survey taker chose not to answer these identity questions, only the qualitative answers could be utilized as examples of experiences.

### **Qualitative Data Collected**

The outcome of the QUAL was the combined experiences of all the executive pastor and pastor respondents with respect to church management. The researcher reduced the information received into streams, key quotes, and themes, leading to a textural description of what the participants experienced, a structural description of how they experienced it in situational context, and ultimately a combination of these descriptions to convey the essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative survey data, including key streams, quotes, and themes, were incorporated into the discussion of the Research Questions in Chapter Five.

There was also a desire to update the present-day taxonomy of XP responsibilities through this study. Key terms were gleaned from the respondents and compared to the taxonomy of XP workload tasks collectively developed by Boersma (1988), Costin (2008), and Welch

(2011) to determine how often they appeared. To compare survey responses to the core tasks of clergy, the tasks described by Blizzard (1956) were also included. A third column was added for new tasks suggested by the literature review. A fourth column adds key tasks offered by survey respondents. A summary of these results can be found in Appendix E.

### Quantitative Data Collected

The QUAN statistically compared growth rate versus time and money investment in executive management areas within these churches. The survey responses were put in ranked order (lowest to highest growth rate). The validity of the results depended on a statistically significant number of participants providing quantitative data. An ideal model, with a full data set, was shown earlier in Figure 3. Only six out of the 100 churches identified as study participants completed the survey. This was not enough to enable more than a rudimentary statistical analysis of growth rate versus cost and time investment. A summary of respondent answers appears in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Respondent Relative Investment in the Seven Executive Pastor Task Areas*

Church Code	Strategy/Planning		Staff Management		Financial Management		Facilities	
	% Cost	% Time	% Cost	% Time	% Cost	% Time	% Cost	% Time
DZ	20	19	30	30	10	10	10	10
FB	60	60	30	50	25	26	10	20
IF	20	5	80	95	9	10	--	7
DH	25	20	25	30	51	25	17	5
NL	30	30	25	45	10	5	20	10
AD	20	20	40	10	75	20	30	25
Church Code	Safety/Security		Projects		Information Tech			
	% Cost	% Time	% Cost	% Time	% Cost	% Time		
DZ	5	5	5	5	5	5		
FB	15	5	20	45	15	10		
IF	1	15	3	10	2	10		
DH	5	5	15	15	15	8		
NL	5	3	5	5	5	2		
AD	50	25	25	—	50	75		

*Note.* — indicates no answer was received (the slider was not moved).

A summary of the results of each of the seven task areas is provided under Appendix D and in the Analysis Section. A *t*-test was not feasible due to the small number of data points.

Following the qualitative and quantitative questions, three additional demographic questions were asked about current church gross annual budget, total amount spent on staff salaries, and current average membership, to round out the understanding of respondent demographics. A summary of the answers provided is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Church Demographic Data Reported by Survey Respondents*

Church Code	Gross Annual Budget (in millions)	Total Staff Salaries (in millions)	Registered Members Today (approximate)
DZ	\$5.5	\$2	3,000
FB	—	—	—
IF	\$15	\$6.1	9,000
DH	—	—	—
NL	\$6.3	\$1.886	3,100
AD	\$6.3	\$3.15	6,500
Mean	\$8.275	\$3.284	5,800
Median	\$6.3	\$2.575	4,800

*Note.* — indicates no answer was received.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

A summary of the combined qualitative experiences is incorporated into the RQ discussion.

Scatter plots generated from the statistical findings of church growth rate compared across the seven XP task areas in terms of cost (\$) and labor time (T) are in Appendix D. The bottom line of each plot is the relative growth rate of that church relative to the others. The smaller the number (i.e. the closer to zero on the X axis), the higher the church ranked on the Top 100 Fastest Growing list. A discussion of this data is as follows:

1) Planning and Strategy. Both trend in planning and strategy (costs and time invested) favored the faster growing churches (negative value for y). One church had a particularly strong investment in these activities, which decidedly skewed the results.

2) Personnel Management. The trend line (slope, or y) was roughly the same as Planning and Strategy, but the values were higher across the board, suggesting a significant investment in personnel in terms of time and money for these churches. While the average was approximately 45% investment, one church's investment was recorded as nearly 100%.

3) Financial Management. From here the trend lines reverse, suggesting the fastest growing churches do not necessarily invest (relatively speaking) as much time or money in managing finances. However, there was a great deal of variance among the group.

4) Facilities and Environment. This data was notable in that the group fell very closely along the trend line, with faster growing churches investing somewhat less than slower churches in their facilities. It may reflect an emphasis on many of the faster growing churches to focus less on brick and mortar facilities, and more on the use of flexible spaces and virtual means to hold worship services.

5) Safety and Security. The trend line again suggested a smaller investment in these factors by faster growing churches. Generally, the fastest growing groups spent less than a fifth of their financial or time investment on safety and security.

6) Special Projects. The group was more dispersed here, and this was the first pair of data where the cost of special projects (favoring slower-growth church investment) was the opposite trend with regard to time investment. This suggests faster growing churches may take advantage of key volunteers or other low-cost options to accomplish special project related tasks.

7) Digital Media. Although the slowest growth church could be an outlier, most churches invest a surprisingly modest amount of time and budget into digital media (under 15% of both).

### **Evaluation of the Research Design**

The design of the research appeared unique in the study of church leadership teams generally, and executive pastors specifically. Studies have been done over the past four decades to understand what XP-type functions might be completed on a church staff, whether by a senior pastor or other dedicated paid or volunteer leader hired for this purpose. However, few have considered how to measure such activities quantitatively. The final section of this Chapter reflects on the strengths and weakness of this study as designed.

#### **Strengths**

A strength of this study was the mixed method used for analysis. It added to the knowledge base of available qualitative studies that have been completed to date. It also offered a new test to quantitatively investigate executive pastor activities in churches. In terms of individual methodology, the TPh and simple comparative statistical tools used appeared to complement one another well and were relatively easy to assemble into a survey instrument format. They also offered a systematic way to assemble the research plan.

Despite the inherent challenges involved in utilizing this particular study population, another strength of this design was this particular group of XPs. The reader might recall that the ability to access these pastors was one of the original research assumptions. One would expect it to be somewhat difficult to get on the schedules of these executives or their senior pastor bosses under the best of circumstances. This cadre of pastors, by definition, are among those who are

managing the busiest churches in the country. Some manage thousands of volunteers across several campuses.

One could also submit that pastors as a group are fundamentally difficult to assess. Is this an innate reluctance to submit to statistical measurement? Indeed, a common discussion thread that arose when speaking with a few of these XPs was the relative insignificance of assessing performance statistically compared to the monumental importance of the work of the church. One single conversion to Christianity is, in the larger scheme of things, worth all of the energy, time, and money a church might invest. Bonem (2012) might agree, noting:

“Measurement has been a troublesome thing for the church for two thousand years.” That’s how Jim Mellado of the Willow Creek Association responded when I asked about measuring congregational success. “It’s incredibly hard to measure transformation in a heart,” he continued, “and that’s what we’re all after” (para. 1).

Hence, getting XP performance data under normal circumstances might be challenging.

The research period for this study did not occur under normal circumstances. Historians and politicians will debate the wisdom of shutting down entire national economies, including nearly all places of worship around the world, in the face of a potential global coronavirus pandemic. What is clear is that the study period for this research, from February through April of 2020, including Easter Holy Week, was a time unlike any other in church history. As the President and governors issued quarantine orders, study participants and other XPs were thrust from their typical roles of keeping the proverbial trains running on time. Instead, they were called to manage congregational business through a period of immediate and highly dynamic transformation. They had to completely reorient their ministries from the usual in-person worship and fellowship experiences, to be completely online and virtual or try to innovate other solutions, such as in-car worship services in parking lots, without running afoul of local law

enforcement. This transformation had to be accomplished within a matter of days and in advance of the most important weeks on the Christian calendar.

At the same time, entire church staffs were sent home to self-isolate. XPs and senior pastors had to discover how to run their organizations from home. This required these leaders to either set up or heavily lean on existing telecommuting and team communications procedures in order to facilitate all the other activities and decision making. Finally, as ministries characterized by dynamic growth, these leaders had to continue to sustain all the other church operations and functions that provide comfort, relief, outreach, and ministry services to their local communities, along with sustaining effective relationships with local public officials.

This lack of responsiveness amid a global health crisis could be viewed as a weakness in the design—particularly since communication challenges plague survey methodology—or a weakness in the study population, who mostly failed to respond to a simple survey. On the contrary. Collecting data during this time yielded insights into the significant value of XPs to support dynamic flexibility and missional focus during both conventional and unconventional circumstances. The reader should view the results presented here in this larger context.

### **Weaknesses**

More data points would have significantly improved statistical confidence. Having only 100 churches to start with and only six respondents means that as a statistical study, the findings here were very rudimentary.

It is worth noting here that an attempt was made during research plan development to expand the survey population. The top (1-100) fastest growing group was publicly available, but the rest of LifeWay's sample population were not. The researcher consulted the director of LifeWay *Outreach* to see if he would permit access to the next proprietary group or two of 100

churches (churches #101-200 and #201-300 in their survey results). Despite suggestions that modeling a larger group would be beneficial, he declined. Likewise, LifeWay was asked to provide contact information for the churches on the published Top 100 list, since only a portion of those churches publish pastor contact information, with the assurance that this would be kept confidential. Being referred by the LifeWay team might have also lent interest and credibility to this particular research effort, again increasing the likelihood of survey participation.

Unfortunately, LifeWay declined to participate or assist with this research in any way.

Limits imposed onto the online survey tool also posed a weakness. A key function in online survey tools like QUALTRICS™, Survey Monkey™, and others is the ability to assign a custom survey link to each respondent. This is transmitted directly from QUALTRICS™ to each respondent at their email address of choice. QUALTRICS™ then registers survey receipt and tracks responses until closed out, including follow-on reminder emails. It also provides the researcher with a list of those who have yet to reply. The researcher asked to enable this link tracking feature, but university policy dictated that surveys be solicited by only using a single anonymous link. The same link had to be manually emailed to each test taker, with responses also tracked manually. This increased the risk of applying the wrong responses to a given church. More importantly, any church that did not voluntarily self-identify in the first demographics section could not be used for the qualitative portion of the research, since it would be impossible to know where their data should appear on the ordinal list (#1-100). Only the narrative responses would be useful at that point.

The need for anonymity in research is not disputed. However, the research population here was not anonymous, but defined in a widely distributed online report that included church names, pastor names, and growth rates, all of which were publicly available, and all of whom

had voluntarily participated in the LifeWay survey already. It is believed that this feature could have been enabled without jeopardizing confidentiality and would have resulted in a much higher and potentially more accurate survey response rate.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed-method study was to collect and analyze phenomenological and correlational data from one hundred of the fastest-growing churches in the United States, as ranked by LifeWay Research (2018) for calendar years 2017-2018, and use this data to draw available conclusions on church executive leadership capacity versus performance.

Phenomenological data was collected and used to qualitatively examine the executive management functions at these churches. The purpose of this effort was to understand how each determined its need for such expertise based on leadership team organization.

Statistical data was also collected. Its purpose was to try to quantify any statistical, though non-causal, relationships between time and money invested within seven key aspects of church executive management and the rate of growth for those churches.

The desired outcome was to gain further insights into two areas: (1) to understand the current state of executive management taxonomy specific to fast growing churches, and (2) to understand how executive management investment may factor into church performance in particular. It was hoped that this would provide church leaders with information on the ROI of hiring an executive pastor to support effective personnel staffing decisions consistent with a church's particular vision, ministry, staffing, programming, and financial stewardship goals.

This Chapter summarizes how this study answered the research questions and hypotheses. It also offers conclusions, implications, and applications for further research.

## Research Questions

### Summary of RQ1 Findings

RQ1 asked, “What executive management models are consistently found in fast-growing churches?” Precedent literature documenting the rapid growth of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament period described strong organizational constructs, with specific delegation of pastoral and managerial responsibilities in the administration of the Jewish tabernacle in the time of Moses. Literature also pointed to several examples of Hebrew leaders installed as effective and influential chief executives in expanding national governments, such as the Egyptian and Babylon empires.

New Testament period literature explicitly described the assignment of apostolic, pastoral, and diaconal duties, including administrative functions, during the rapidly growing period of the early Church. This was further reinforced by apostolic writings that prescribe administration among the spiritual gifts of Christian leaders in the context of church growth across Europe and Asia in the first century. Roman Catholic and Orthodox management hierarchies in various forms dominated Christendom as it expanded globally for nearly 2,000 years, even subsequent to the Reformation. Interestingly, today’s Jewish synagogues still utilize staff administrators.

Contemporary literature of the 1950s included organization and administration among the core tasks of clergy. With the rise of complexity in nonprofit management generally in the late 1970s, and in an increasing number of large “megachurches” particularly, these tasks began to be disseminated to specialists. In the past two decades, XP work has been defined in business-related terms such as strategic planning, staff management, financial management, marketing,

organizing, directing, and evaluating. Emerging tasks include oversight of facilities, safety and security, and information technology.

The most common management model among the cadre of churches studied through a February-April 2020 survey is one with a full-time senior pastor who delegates most or all day-to-day church management to a full-time executive pastor. This XP may have assistant XPs, both paid and volunteer, to carry out tasks in support of all church ministry areas. Full-time volunteers managing business processes under the supervision of the senior or assistant pastor, both traditional clergy members, were a less frequently observed but also common model. The pastor of a smaller fast-growing church may carry out both pastoral and managerial tasks, but the amount of work invested in these activities appeared proportional to larger ones. It is important to note that no church responding to this study appeared to lack a formal organizational structure that ensured that management tasks were properly completed. Likewise, a review of available information on these ministries through church websites provided circumstantial evidence for formal organizational structures in the majority (63%) of fast-growing churches that included a senior pastor supported by associates carrying out church business activities.

Survey respondents attested to many organizational aspects captured in the survey model, but three trends particularly stood out. First, proper attention to administration was instrumental to sustaining a healthy organization, including growth. One respondent commented that prior to hiring executive management, church staff consisted of employees with high relational skills but low administrative acumen, or vice versa. Specific improvements in this area helped shift church culture, align needs to spiritual gifts, and energize activities overall. While sharing this observation with a fellow pastor who was an advisor to this research project, he noted succinctly, “Well, yes. If you are running an organization, you have to organize it.” Invariably this

necessitates a senior pastor applying his or her own energy to the task or appointing the right people with the right skills to do this when such tasks become overwhelming.

Second, executive pastor activities tended to span across ministry activities, to such an extent that they may even defy conventional taxonomy. The XP was often seen—and required—to be a Jack of all trades. Those responses were echoed by Taylor (2015), who underlined the difficulty of defining a particular XP role “when there are so many variables involved” including church size, cultural and denomination, leadership and governance structures, congregational demographics, and other factors (p. 13).

Third, the XP often was described as holding a key position as ministry team leader, driven not by hierarchical necessity, but more often in keeping with what McChrystal (2015) called *leading teams of teams*. One church divided management into church development (future planning and requirements) and church operations (current issues), with a single XP overseeing both, all in support of the senior pastor’s strategic ministry vision. As a senior pastor (but not *the* senior pastor), the XP was seen organizing and directing the efforts of several groups of people, perhaps each led by another key team leader, that focused on particular areas of ministry. This was described by survey participants as a commitment to be in support of all other activities. This is consistent with Bonem and Patterson (2005) who call such leadership “leading from the second chair” (p.23). A second chair leader, they argue, is a person in a subordinate role whose influence with others adds value throughout the organization (Bonem & Patterson, 2005).

In short, despite the limited number of responses, it does appear based on this research that there were at least a few fundamental benefits to enacting an executive management model that included the coordination of these efforts by an XP. This conclusion appears to be bolstered by precedent literature, including historic examples in scripture.

## Summary of RQ2 Findings

This previous point, with respect to the role of the executive pastor in supporting the strategic vision of the senior pastor, provides a useful transition to RQ2: “What is the perceived contribution of the XP position to church size and growth?” The research premise was that the presence of an XP (or XP-type competencies and activities) was *related* to church performance in terms of ministry growth. A clear statement of causality here might say something like an XP was deliberately hired to grow a particular ministry, and that growth actually happened over a given period of time, perhaps even during the 2017-2018 period of the LifeWay survey. Such a statement never materialized, due to a lack of statistically significant findings. What was recorded, however, were activities that, while not a definite predictor of growth, linked up with strategic pastoral visions in keeping with the Christian Great Commission (Matt. 18:16-20).

In other words, the presence of an XP may not be a *determining* factor but does appear to be a *contributing* factor to church performance; particularly when associated with an overall vision of expansion of Christian ministry capability and broader public influence by the senior pastor, as shared by the church leadership team.

A specific contribution of an XP is apparently owning the task of translating the senior pastor’s leadership vision into productive ministries and support activities. This theme of translating vision to ministry activity was echoed by many respondents. Taylor (2015) describes it this way:

If you boil it all down, my role as Executive Pastor (emphasis on pastor) is to oversee the effective implementation of the vision of the church. The vision and direction of a church are cast largely by the Lead Pastor. That’s his key role. He casts that vision from the pulpit, in key leadership development sessions, and in a thousand other ways. But if he gets bogged down in implementing that vision, it tends to kill the artistic creativity of the visionary leader - it burns him out. Additionally, many Lead Pastors tend to think in terms of “Step 1...step 100.” They often have little knowledge or passion for how you go about actually taking a vision from step 1 to step 100. Steps two through ninety-nine are

kind of boring to them. And for this reason, many great ideas fall to the ground unused, like fruit in an abandoned orchard. (p. 25)

If the vision of the senior pastor includes growth, by expanding existing programs, starting new programs, enlarging church membership through membership campaigns, or planning and executing the development of a new church campus, there is little question that the XP would be a vital instrument of supporting and sustaining that success. As one pastor wrote, “My focus is implementing that vision, and our executive pastor of operations makes sure we can pay for it.” Another noted the direct link between hiring an XP and freeing-up the senior pastor to focus on sermon content and elevated, strategic thinking. This suggests that the rising management tide lifts all boats. As church business begins to be accomplished more effectively, the pastor is free to expand his or her own horizons as the spiritual leader of the congregation, elevating the activity and direction of the church overall.

Other responses were oriented on the role of the XP in adapting the organization following periods of growth. One XP, whose church had enjoyed 18% growth annually over a six-year period, described the XP management role as one which put the proper systems and infrastructure in place to support healthy growth of, and the span of care for, the church family. Another respondent noted the challenge of scaling business models into ministry models, noting that the economic drivers are not the same. This respondent’s experience was that executive management created an opportunity for the “release” of ministry, rather than merely the control of it. This certainly conforms to the concepts of a healthy and growing church. One church mentioned the challenges of restructuring the leadership team, a necessary growing pain in any expanding organization, but that “getting the right people on the bus and in the right seat” yielded results that, one infers, far outweighed those challenges. Another mentioned the

importance of the XP in keeping staff members accountable for their work, a challenge for any organization that relies heavily on volunteers.

Finally, while the number of data points were too small to reach a statistically significant conclusion, it is noteworthy that among those responding the fastest growing churches invested the largest amount of time and money into strategy and planning. As this makes up one of the key roles identified for the XP, this trend would seem to argue for the XP's value in orienting the staff toward performance in terms of growth.

To summarize, this researcher sought to determine whether an XP could be crucial to the performance of large or fast-growing churches or was a necessary reaction in the interest of pastoral ministry. Tapping into the experiences of these XPs and reading about others in the precedence literature, the answer appears to be that the supposition of RQ2 is also largely true.

### **Summary of RQ3 Findings**

Is there a correlation between church growth and executive management investment? RQ3 was particularly aimed at investigating any statistically based quantitative relationships between executive pastors and church performance. The results, based on very few data points, were mixed.

This particular group of respondents appeared to show trends that favored financial and time investments for strategy and planning in fast growing churches. All churches invested heavily in personnel. Project management also appeared to be more of a time than a financial investment for fast growing churches. A relatively low amount of financial and manpower investment was noted in information technology across the board. Also of interest, faster growing churches indicated that they spent less on facilities management than slower growing

churches. Does this imply that “lighter” is better? Without more data points, this research question remains unanswered.

### **Outcome of the Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub> proposed that there is no statistical correlation between church growth and executive management investment. From a quantitative standpoint, there was not a high enough *n* value from the survey instrument data to decisively prove or disprove the null hypothesis. However, there are some potential conclusions that can be drawn.

Based on the analysis of relative church time and money investment across seven XP tasking areas provided by each church that responded to the survey, the available data showed that growth rate was normally associated with strategic planning activities – an XP-centric activity. This is somewhat offset by the results showing both positive and negative correlations between growth rate and XP activities, depending on the task area in question, suggesting mixed results here. An additional statistic collected by the researcher from a review of websites showed that 63% of churches in the study clearly stated that they had an XP or equivalent executive role on their staff. From a mixed methods data standpoint, 100% of respondents reported having some executive management investment.

This would all suggest that H<sub>01</sub> may be rejected, but further sampling to gain a higher *n* value is needed to decisively determine this.

H<sub>02</sub> proposed that the presence of executive management investment is not a useful predictor of church performance as characterized by church growth. As with H<sub>01</sub>, the *n* value is simply not sufficient to develop *R* values which would function as a predictive model. That said, there were no churches within the study population that did not report a substantial investment in

executive management. Qualitative analytical results, as well as the precedent literature, further substantiate the important role of sound management in sustaining organizational growth.

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, Applications, and Limitations**

In terms of conclusions and applications for this research, one could return to the original problem statement of this thesis, which described a notional executive pastor search committee. The challenge was that members of the committee had seen XPs work effectively in other churches and had gathered to consider whether to invest their finite resources into hiring an XP.

Is there enough information gathered here now to advise them on how to proceed? Based on this research, a recommendation may be made to hire an XP if these types of conditions are present:

- The senior pastor and congregation are already aligned to a strategic vision of growth and greater community influence by a variety of means. The new XP would be a key enabler for this vision. The XP would neither act nor be perceived solely as an instigator.
- The leadership team is aware of several critical church management areas which could or should be improved through the focused attention of a senior leader.
- The senior pastor is unable to focus on his or her essential vocation (pastor, preacher, teacher, priest, etc.) due to time taken up as an organizer and administrator.
- The candidates under consideration have a demonstrated capacity to serve faithfully in a “second chair” leadership role, while providing a vital role as the organizational conscience for the ministry.
- Denominational structures suggest a historical basis for having an administrative leader on the staff.
- Church operations and/or organization resemble the two thirds of the Fastest Growing cadre of LifeWay churches which have adopted some form of XP leadership model.
- The leadership team has invested some time in understanding the various XP task areas and believes it can select an individual suitable to fulfill these roles.

This study suggests that successful churches, where performance is measured by growth rate, invest in executive management to include hiring an XP, and churches hoping to

accomplish similar goals may find hiring an XP to be an optimal choice. If this committee has a desire to improve its strategy and planning, there appears to be a link between these activities, enabled by an XP, and church performance as ascertained by relative growth rate.

One interesting data point suggests that *where* executive management investment occurs in the organization is just as important as *whether* it occurs. Appendix D, Table 4 shows relatively slower churches making much more investment in infrastructure than faster growing ones. Do faster growing churches invest less in brick and mortar and more in online technology? How would these more traditional brick and mortar models compare to largely online churches with respect to growth and member population?

In other words, perhaps a predictor of the growth rate of a church is not investment in capital improvement projects, but in technology, strategic planning, leasing of temporary suitable facilities, and virtual team management. This would seem comparable to other recent business models where companies are replacing their physical stores with a largely or completely online presence. This viewpoint has significant implications. Is the purpose of a church to provide a central location for congregational fellowship or as a hub for both physical and virtual activity? Is such a model applicable across all denominations? What was the purpose for a particular congregation banding together in the first place, and can said purpose be achieved through online and mixed-media experiences? Is an Amazon™ digital services delivery model good for churches? What is “fellowship?”

These may be the larger questions a church committee might have to consider in its XP hiring discussion, including deciding what sorts of skills they will need to seek in their ideal candidate.

### **Research Limitations**

The most significant limitation on this research was the statistically insignificant number of survey respondents. One should consider any findings and recommendations in light of this limitation. With respect to the distance learning environment provided by the institution, the researcher being located in Europe during the study period did pose a few time zone and distance limitations with respect to scheduling phone calls and video-teleconferencing with church pastors.

### **Further Research**

Based on the precedence literature, including the primary sources used for this study, much solid work has already been done to describe XP roles and how they are performed in the context of a church leadership team. This study attempted build on this work by asking how they perform, and how much XPs influence their ministries. Once one is willing to consider the potential opportunities of qualitatively and statistically measuring the performance of churches and their leadership, including XPs particularly, opportunities for further research appear nearly unlimited.

In terms of this study and the study design, a few modifications might be useful in creating an outcome that would enhance its replication in the future. One area that stands out is the use of the LifeWay (2018) generated survey population. Research planning assumptions were that (1) the researcher would have ready access to the survey population and (2) that LifeWay's annual survey developers would be willing to share and discuss their work, even including some behind-the-scenes proprietary aspects, in the interest of supporting others doing church leader-based research. Both ended up being poor assumptions, one due to a virus impacting pastors who were extremely busy anyway, and the other due to a proprietary process (and perhaps a LifeWay staff workload). In hindsight, while little could be done to prepare for interviewing XPs during a

pandemic, more energy could have been expended early on in developing a relationship with LifeWay in order to gain better insights into its survey process. It is also possible that had either of these problems been apparent earlier in dissertation development, another survey population might have been used.

Initially the intent was to survey both of LifeWay's Top 100 populations, Fastest Growing and Largest Churches, and compare the two in some fashion. A decision was made during research planning to drop the latter group and focus on the former. This turned out to be an effective decision in the sense that as difficult as it was to gain access to the fast-growing church staffs, those XPs affiliated with the 100 largest churches in the U.S. would likely not have been interested in participating. It could have potentially doubled the survey population, however, and at least added the insights of some additional XPs to this mixed-method analysis.

The reader might recall that the genesis of this study was the challenge set forth by Costin (2008) when he asserted the need of researchers to "further explore executive management in ministry effectiveness as determined by objective measures of success" (p.4). This study took up that challenge in a modest way by using a ready-made survey population of leaders with high church growth as an objective success factor. Essentially this study group was assessed post-growth. A future study might invest in a fresh group of "average" churches both led by XPs and not, to see whether statistical investment vs. growth relationships exist there, and perhaps to follow their progress as they expand their ministries. Likewise there were not any "zero growth" churches in the study group which could have functioned as controls. Adding these might improve the survey data.

Other research could look past growth and toward a different set of objective measurements altogether. Fillinger (2009) recommends reaching beyond the "ABCs of ministry"

(i.e. attendance, baptisms, and cash), as well as church size, to get at the true heart of ministry performance from a spiritual perspective. Such objective success could be measured systematically by investigating how the XP leadership role drives changes in readiness inventories ([www.igniteus.net](http://www.igniteus.net)), 360-degree survey results, servant shepherd leadership inventories ([www.boothco.com](http://www.boothco.com)) or Likert-based statistical effectiveness criteria over time.

This study took snapshots of church management data in seven different XP functional areas. Each one of these—financial health, staff readiness and development, information technology, safety and security, infrastructure, special development projects, and strategic planning—could become its own study. For example, an investigator could learn whether more focused attention by an XP in church financial practices is reflected in the vitality of a church as a whole, or certain aspects of ministry in particular.

The rapidly growing influence of information technology on church performance is another area of further research. Campbell and Garner (2016) have developed the concept of a networked theology, discussing how to negotiate faith in a digital culture. Among their investigations of the relationship between theology and technology, they recommend reflection on the qualities, both positive and problematic, of aligning technology with church community beliefs and practices. If this analysis can be performed qualitatively here, a researcher with the proper tools and understanding of assessing technology impacts could very well approach this topic in mixed-method fashion.

Another area of exploration is church staffing investment. Rather than just focusing on the XP and senior leaders, church ministry performance could be assessed in terms of investments in the rest of the church staff, both voluntary and paid. For example, what is the

potential ROI of a dedicated training program for Christian education volunteers or small group leaders?

The precedent literature incorporated various qualitative studies of church performance from the vantage point of traditional nonprofit organizations. Perhaps these analytical tools could be employed in an XP performance study. White (2007) conducts empirical investigations of the link between market orientation and church performance. Likewise, Pearce et al. (2010) suggest that both empirically and anecdotally, religious congregations that act with an entrepreneurial orientation enjoy superior performance as predicted by rational choice theory. Perhaps methodology such as that proposed by these researchers could be used to capture quantitative measurements, to statistically support these compiled experiential phenomena.

Perkins's (2003) exploratory study of patterns of relationships within top management teams considers church performance generally in its thesis. Such patterns may also be available for mixed-method analysis. Likewise, Payer-Langthaler and Hiebl (2013) have done some interesting work in defining conventional employee performance criteria for leaders and workers within Benedictine abbeys. As high-performance human resources depend more and more on objective metrics of employee performance, could these not be applied similarly in church settings? It certainly would raise the attention—and probably the eyebrows—of those who automatically assume that the value of church staff, particularly volunteers, is immeasurable.

There is potential for assessing the management team at senior levels where the XP normally resides. Corporations, both for- and nonprofit, have little qualms with assessing leader performance in terms of organizational output. The challenge may simply be defining those outputs and the measures of merit to apply. Nonetheless, church leaders have significant responsibilities to parishioners and the surrounding community. Perhaps their leadership acumen

versus team performance improvements could be assessed within agent-based computational models (Dionne et al., 2010). Or perhaps church performance in terms of market growth can be assessed to determine whether a particular leadership team needs to be shaken up or even shuffled (Davis et al., 2010). General organizational theory has also developed excellent behavioral models for exploring leader capabilities and church performance (Boggs & Fields, 2010) that could be employed empirically within subject populations of churches.

Finally, one could simply repeat this study with a different cadre of LifeWay churches. Given that LifeWay Outreach performs their survey annually, one could re-send the survey to the 2020 Fastest-Growing group, for example, and assess these pastors using the methodology described in this study. Were one to do this under more normal (i.e. non-pandemic) circumstances, perhaps enough pastors would be available to respond to fill in the gaps left by this attempt.

One could also glean some lessons learned from a 2020 dataset. Now that these executives, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, have largely reoriented their ministries to support online worship, networked fellowship, and virtual Christian education, what is the next step? Do things return to normal, or have church leaders discovered transformational ways of outreach that will take their organization to new heights? Will next year's survey reflect a deeper commitment to investment in information technology? Will church growth rates flatten and descend, now that parishioners have been pushed out of their Sunday morning and Wednesday evening routines, or will church membership, and the vital-ness of corporate worship (i.e. physical presence together), be reinforced as a church community value? And what about their own management teams? Many mentioned in brief telephone interviews that their existing online presence and service streaming, along with social networking, had helped them be prepared for

the quarantine period. However, not all were prepared to carry out all of these challenging activities without having their staffs physically present with them. What are the lessons to be learned in running a church staff via telecommuting? And how different, really, is it from Rome laboring to manage Jesuits running schools in China in the seventeenth century, or the Southern Baptist Missions Board running global affairs from its home offices?

Finally, some of the XPs from larger churches mentioned the high level of activity driven by long-time associations with local officials. In one case, the church was the largest single civic entity in the town. This pastor knew that the church was in a position to be a force for calm and order, and a good deal of its collective energy was spent synchronizing activities of the town through the network of church members. As another pastor put it, the business end of his church was “learning to respond in a crisis with the proper mixture of grace, truth, and compassion for people.” All of these seem like tremendous opportunities to examine the role of the XP in not just a steady-state or even a high-activity context, but in a state of public crisis.

### **Summary of Conclusions**

It is reasonably established here that the XP is indeed associated with church performance generally, and church growth specifically, even if such a conclusion is drawn in a more qualitative than quantitative fashion by this research due to data collection limitations. Clearly the role of the executive pastor also continues to be defined. What remains fascinating is how this role is being defined differently than that of the senior pastor.

All pastoral duties are informed by the ancient traditional needs of the Church for order, efficiency, and proper administration in support of its calling in the world, along with the fundamental tasks of biblical interpretation and exposition, teaching, ministering, counseling, and leading Christian rites. For Christian churches, these roots are found in the first few chapters

of Acts, extending back into Jewish antiquity. Since the senior pastor is accountable for all of these activities in a church parish, his or her priorities are necessarily defined by the spiritual call placed on that particular congregation, and how that church family is properly equipped.

While the XP pursues this same call, the duties of an executive pastor are also defined by how that congregation interacts with its surroundings as it carries out the senior pastor's vision. The XP must lead teams of teams to tackle the challenges of alignment, the strategic and technical challenges of church communications, the often-frustrating issues of infrastructure and civic relationships, and the essential functions of finance and personnel. It seems possible that a senior pastor could be largely effective in his or her role by remaining fully focused on the spiritual needs of the flock. It seems just as *impossible* for the XP to not be out and about enabling all of its important activities in the greater community it seeks to influence.

Performance can ultimately be understood as achievement of the organization in relation with its set goals, including outcomes achieved or accomplished through contribution of individuals or teams to the organization's strategic goals (Kumar, 2014). High performance churches do make a substantial investment in executive management. Executive pastors do tend to lead these efforts in fast-growing churches. Whether assessed in terms of growth or other measures of effectiveness, it seems that the role of the XP is indeed defined in terms of performance, and that such a role is associated with the performance of fast-growing churches, to at least some extent. But most importantly, beyond mere management acumen, the XP stands at the intersection of faith and culture, with a heart on the Gospel, and a mind set on activity, adaptability, and resiliency.

This may be the executive pastor's most important contribution to church performance.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Survey Instrument

[SURVEY LOGIC: Default Question Block (26 Questions)]

[Narrative: Introduction, Background, and Consent Reminder]

Thank you for investing your valuable time in this doctoral dissertation research.

You were selected for this survey as one of LifeWay Outreach's Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America in 2018. We are interested in how your particular church's investment in executive management, including an executive pastor and/or other support staff, keeps your ministry growing and thriving.

We hope to have the senior pastor, XP, or other appointed representative who knows your church's operations complete this survey. It should take about 30 minutes but no more than 60.

There are two Sections:

First, the survey asks about how you organize and manage ministry teams using three open-ended questions. Make your answers as brief or expansive as you like. Please share any examples you think would benefit other churches.

Second, you are invited to estimate what percentage of your congregation's time and money is spent in seven key areas:

- Strategy and Planning
- Staff Management, including paid personnel and volunteers
- Financial Management
- Facilities and Environment
- Occupational and Public Safety
- Special Projects
- Technology

Your data will be compared with that of the other 99 churches in your 2018 LifeWay group to see how investments of time and money might compare with church growth. We have no pre-judgment as to how you manage your God-given resources. We do believe,

however, that your insights and feedback will be invaluable to other congregations and researchers.

Per the Consent Form you signed, your replies are voluntary and anonymous. Feel free to skip any question in this survey, but please do identify your church so we can keep track of responses. By law neither your church's name, nor those of individuals provided via the survey, can appear in the report unless permission is first obtained from you and Liberty University in writing.

Thank you again, and God bless you for contributing to this research.

In Christ,  
 Don Bosch  
 Doctoral Candidate (EdD, Leadership)

Ready to continue? (Click 'Yes' or 'No' and then the arrow...)

- Yes (1)  
 No (2)

[SURVEY LOGIC - Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = 2. This logic continues to the beginning of the survey if “yes” is selected or ends the survey with a “Thank you” message if “no” is selected.]

[SURVEY LOGIC - Page Break: Open next page]

Q: Please provide your church's name to help us keep track of survey responses:

Q: A survey point of contact helps if there are follow-up questions.

[SURVEY LOGIC - Page Break: Open to next page]

[SURVEY LOGIC - Qualitative data collection instructions to survey taker, solicits open-ended narrative response.]

[Narrative] This part of the survey seeks capture the different ways church leaders organize their teams to do the management effort that sustains all areas of church ministry.

Q: What have you and your church experienced in terms of the benefits, challenges, and other aspects of executive management to support ministry?

Q: What contexts or situations typically influenced or have directly affected your experiences of executive management in ministry?

Q: How would you describe the way executive management is incorporated into your church leadership team?

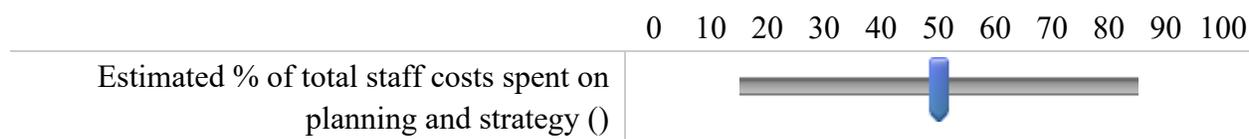
[SURVEY LOGIC - Page Break: Open to next page]

[SURVEY LOGIC - Quantitative data collection introduction and instructions to survey taker.]

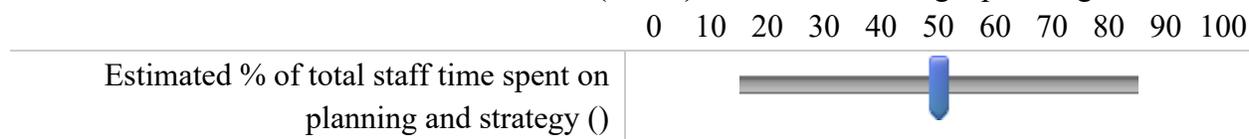
[Narrative] Along with excellence in traditional pastoral ministries such as preaching, teaching, discipleship and worship, day to day executive management by church leaders includes strategic planning, dealing personnel, managing financials and facilities, ensuring safety, doing special projects, and leveraging technology. These tasks are important to ministry today but can be particularly demanding in fast-growing churches.

[Narrative] For this data-focused section, drag the slider to the percentage of costs or workload that you wish to record. Inputs provided for each pair of questions will give important insights into how time and workload are invested in these seven key areas of church management.

Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, both paid and reimbursed volunteers, how would you characterize the **relative cost** (\$) dedicated to strategic planning?

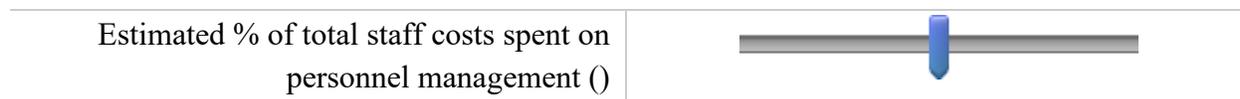


Q: As a proportion of all church **staff workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of **staff time (hours)** dedicated to strategic planning?



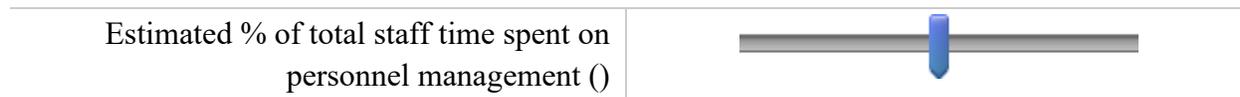
Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, how would you characterize the relative **cost** dedicated to supervising, managing, and handling personnel issues (including both paid staff and volunteers)?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



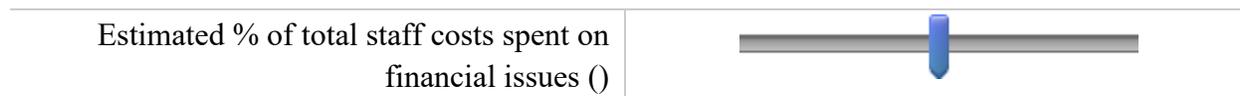
Q: As a proportion of all church staff **workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of **staff time** dedicated to supervising, managing, and handling personnel issues (including both paid staff and volunteers)?

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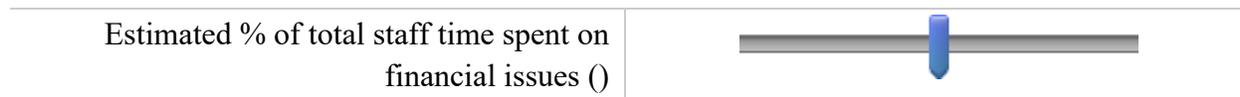
Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, how would you characterize the relative **cost** dedicated to financial issues (including budgets, expense tracking, payroll, taxes, and fund-raising)?

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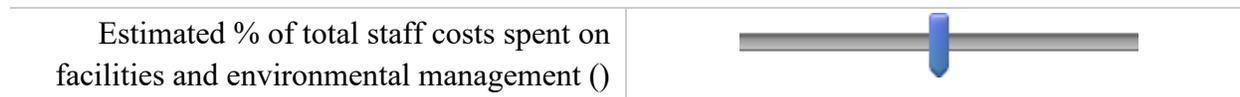
Q: As a proportion of all church staff **workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of **staff time** dedicated to financial issues (budgets, expenses, payroll, taxes, and fund-raising)?

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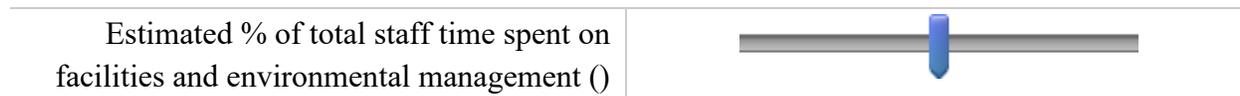
Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, how would you characterize the relative **cost** dedicated to addressing facilities and environmental issues (labor costs only; do NOT include utilities or infrastructure repairs)?

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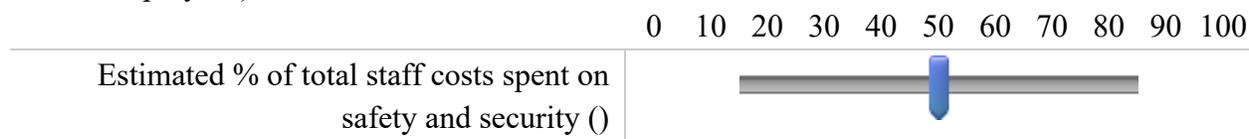


Q: As a proportion of all church staff **workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of staff **time** dedicated to addressing facilities and environmental issues (staff labor hours only; do NOT include contractor labor)?

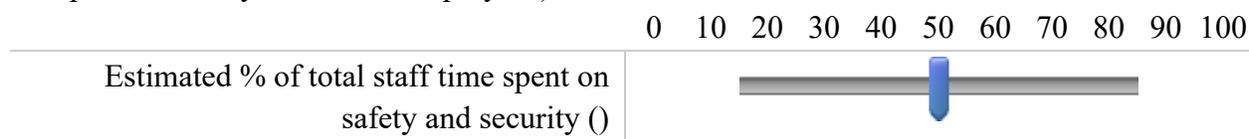
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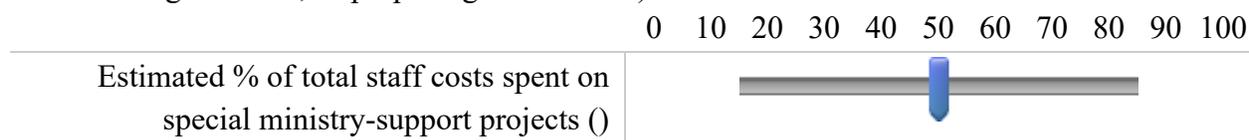
Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, how would you characterize the relative **cost** dedicated to church security and safety issues (including occupational safety for church employees)?



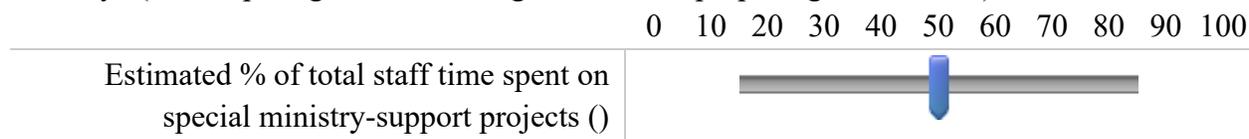
Q: As a proportion of all church staff **workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the amount of **staff time** dedicated to church security and safety issues (including occupational safety for church employees)?



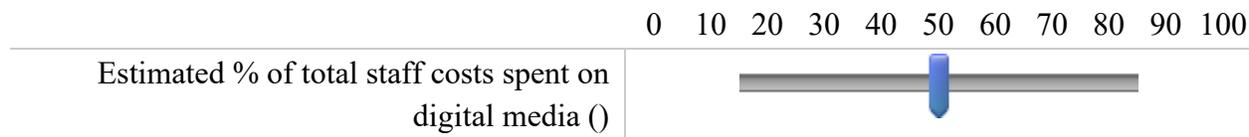
Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, how would you characterize the relative **cost** dedicated to managing special projects to support ministry? (Ex: Preparing a mass-mailing outreach; re-purposing a classroom)



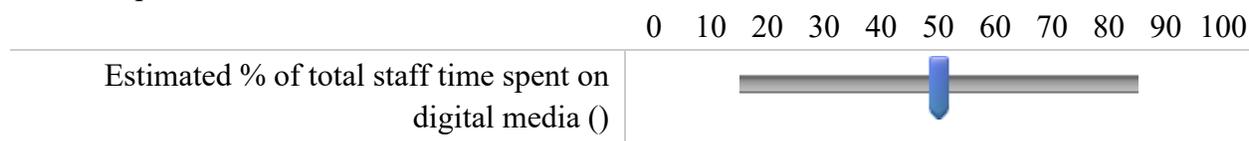
Q: As a proportion of all church staff **workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of **staff time** dedicated to managing special projects to support ministry? (Ex: Preparing a mass-mailing outreach; re-purposing a classroom)



Q: As a proportion of all church **resources** spent on your total staff, how would you characterize the relative **cost** dedicated to efforts supporting social media or an online presence?



Q: As a proportion of all church staff **workload**, both employees and volunteers, how would you characterize the relative amount of **staff time** dedicated to efforts supporting social media or an online presence?



Q: Is there another important area of church management in your ministry not listed here? If so, please briefly describe it and share how it impacts your church.

Q: This research seeks to compare your answers in this section with your LifeWay Survey ranking. If you recall what that ranking was, please indicate it here.

[SURVEY LOGIC - Drop-down menu for user to select #1 - #100]

[SURVEY LOGIC - Page Break: Open to next page]

[SURVEY LOGIC - Optional demographics questions]

Q: Demographic Question 1: The gross annual budget at your church today is about:

Q: Demographic Question 2: The total amount spent by the church on staff salaries and reimbursement for full-time volunteer expenses in 2018 was about:

Q: Demographic Question 3: The number of registered members at your church today is about:

[SURVEY LOGIC - Direct user to final survey review before submission.]

[SURVEY LOGIC - Display summary]

Q: Does all of this information appear correct and as you want it submitted? Remember that you can move backwards and forwards through this survey as needed to make changes.

Yes

[SURVEY LOGIC -A “Yes” reply performs Member Checking for data validity. Survey will not be submitted without a “Yes” answer.]

[SURVEY LOGIC - End of survey, directs user to pre-formatted “Thank you” message.]

End of Survey Instrument

## Appendix B - Approved IRB Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
2/25/2020 to --  
Protocol # 4188.022520

### Consent Form

A Mixed-Method Study: Executive Pastors and the Performance of Fast-Growing Churches  
Donald Wouter Bosch  
Liberty University  
Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of how investments in executive management, including the presence of executive pastors, impact church growth. You were selected as a possible participant because you are the senior pastor or duly appointed representative of a church that was among those listed on the LifeWay Outreach 2018 Fastest Growing Churches in America study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Donald W. Bosch, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to characterize church executive management models, best practices, and functions within the group of 100 churches identified in the 2018 LifeWay Fastest-Growing Churches in America survey, and to examine any correlations between executive management investment (labor cost + hours) and church performance (growth rate), within the LifeWay survey group.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an online survey. This should take approximately 1 hour.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include helping other church leaders in America who are seeking to achieve their ministry goals and objectives, including growth, and are weighing the important decision to hire additional executive or administrative staff to accomplish this.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Answers to survey questions will be consolidated, summarized or paraphrased, and published without attribution. Participant and church identities will be concealed by using a coding system.

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
2/25/2020 to --  
Protocol # 4188.022520

- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

*Voluntary Nature of the Study:* Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

*How to Withdraw from the Study:* If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

*Contacts and Questions:* The researcher conducting this study is Donald W. Bosch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [dbosch@liberty.edu](mailto:dbosch@liberty.edu) You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Gary Bredfeldt, at [gjbredfeldt@liberty.edu](mailto:gjbredfeldt@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

*Statement of Consent:* I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

*D. W. Bosch*

28 FEB 2020

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Signature of Investigator

Date

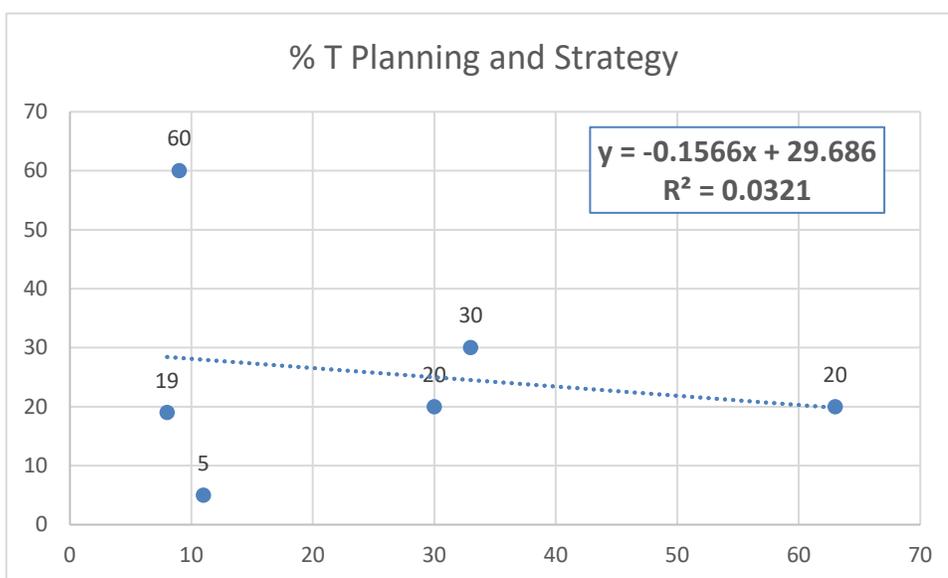
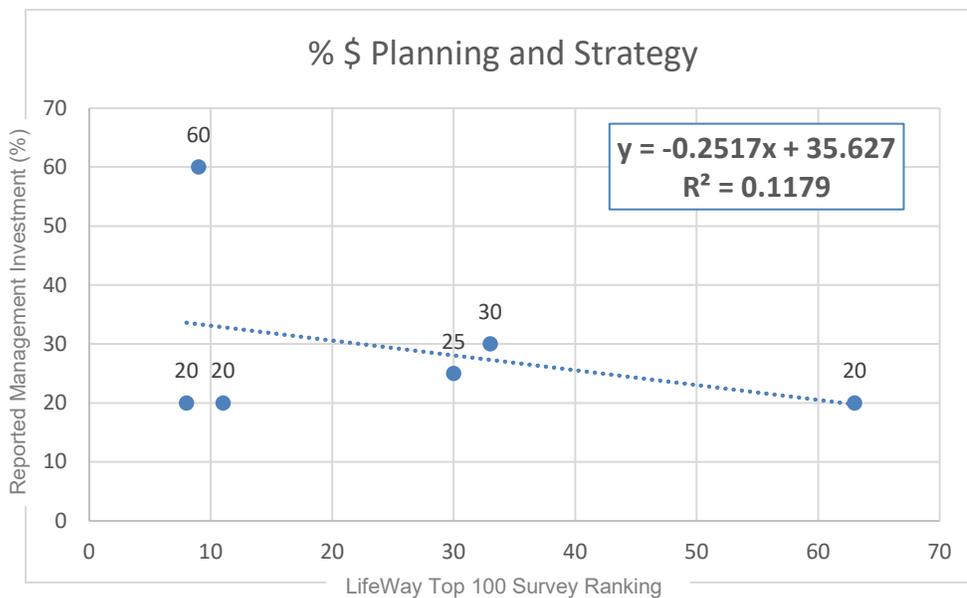
**Appendix C - IRB Application**

Provided as a separate document.

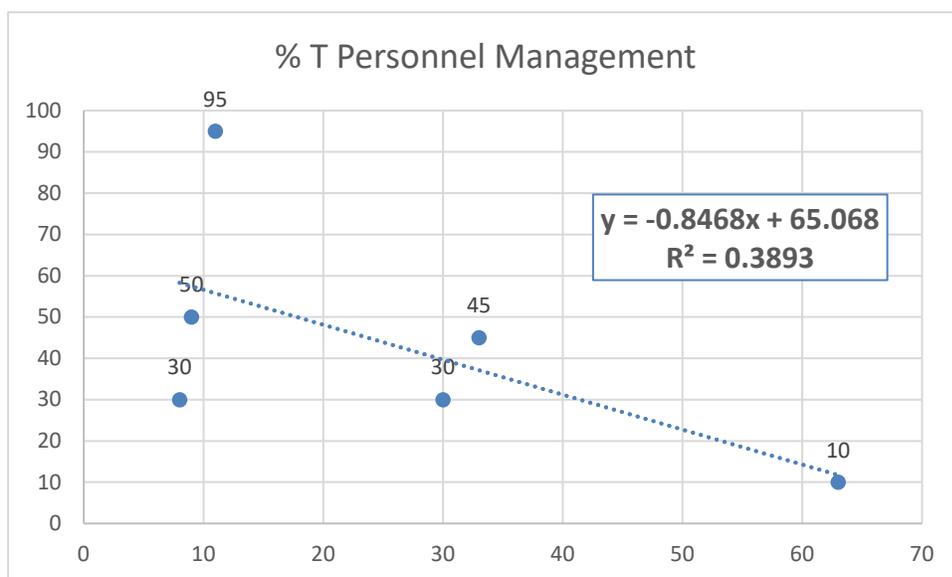
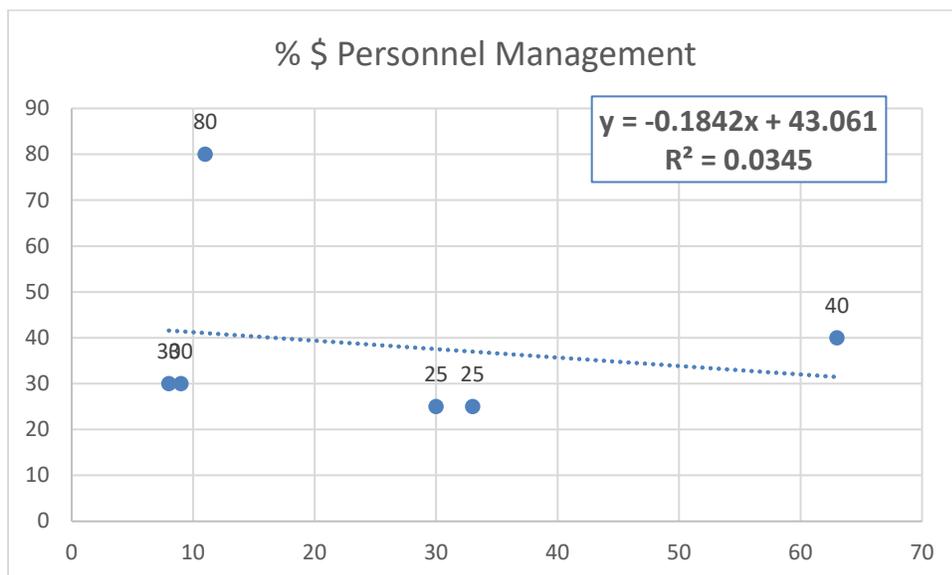
## Appendix D - Quantitative Data Plots

A summary of the statistical findings of church growth rate compared across the seven XP task areas in terms of cost (\$) and labor time (T) is as follows:

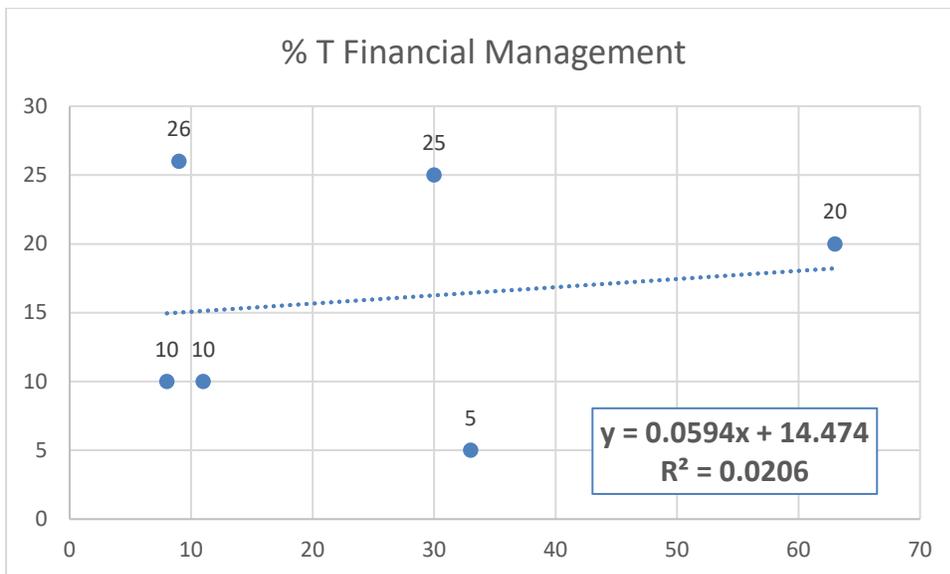
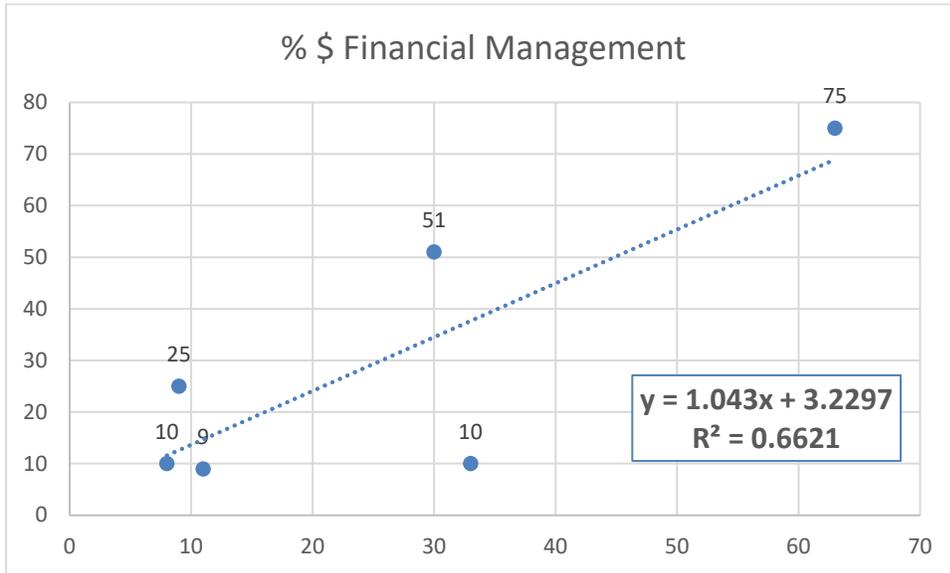
### 1) Planning and Strategy



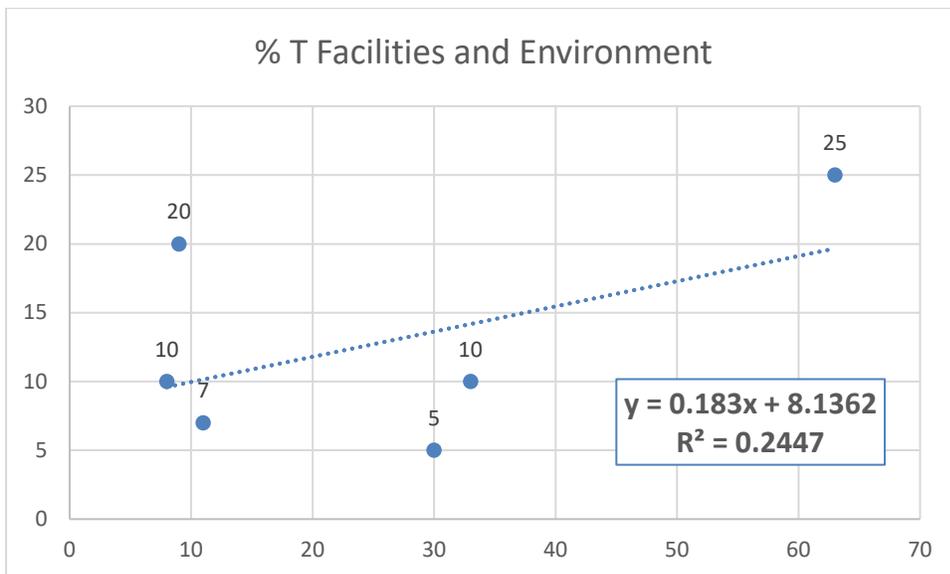
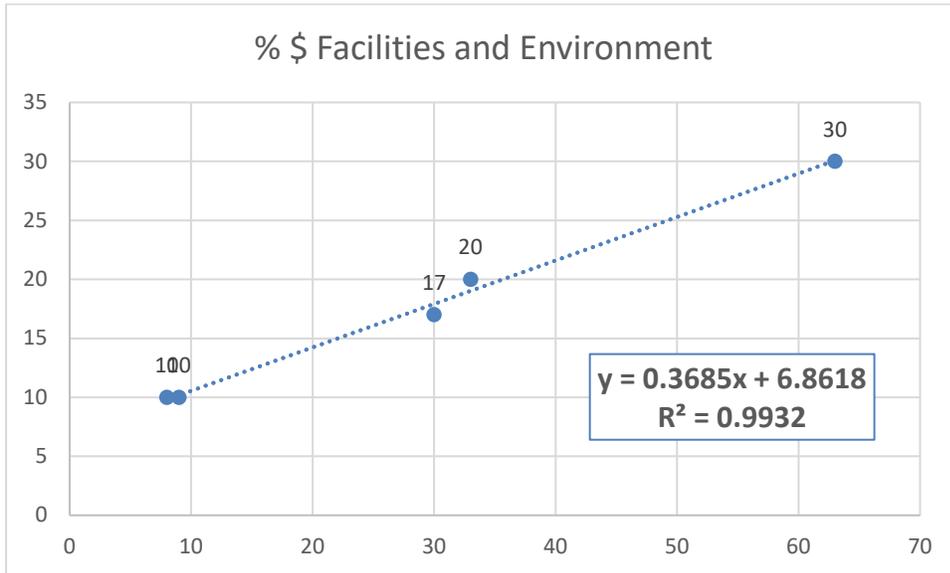
## 2) Personnel Management



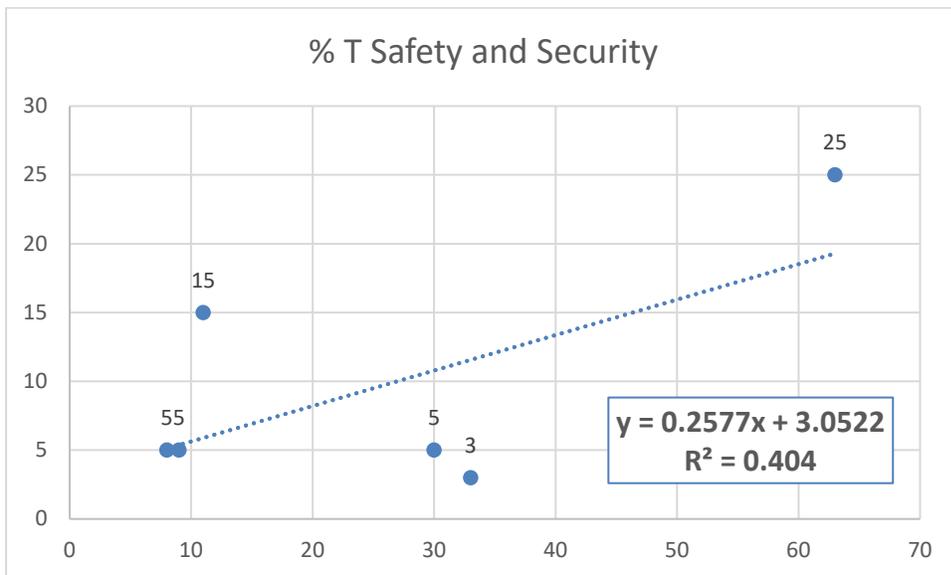
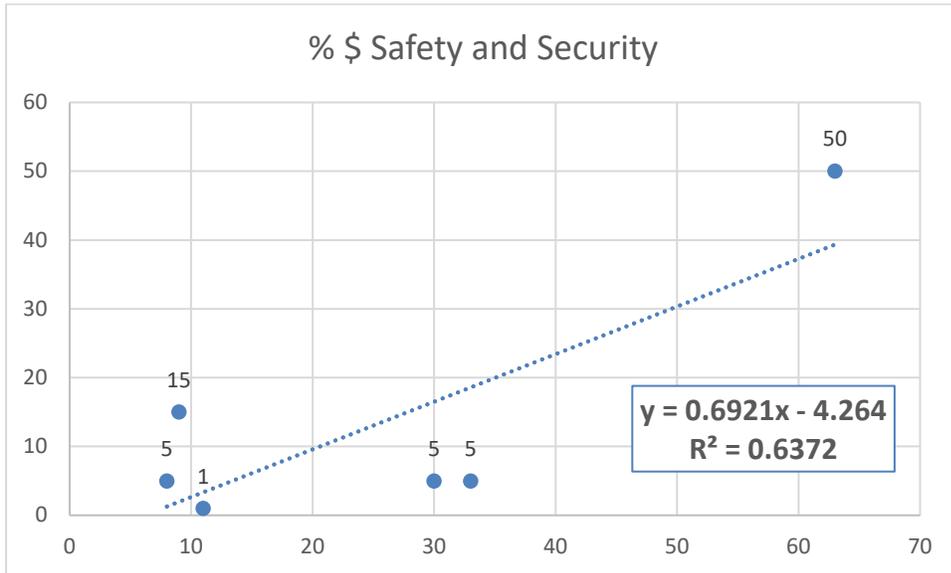
## 3) Financial Management



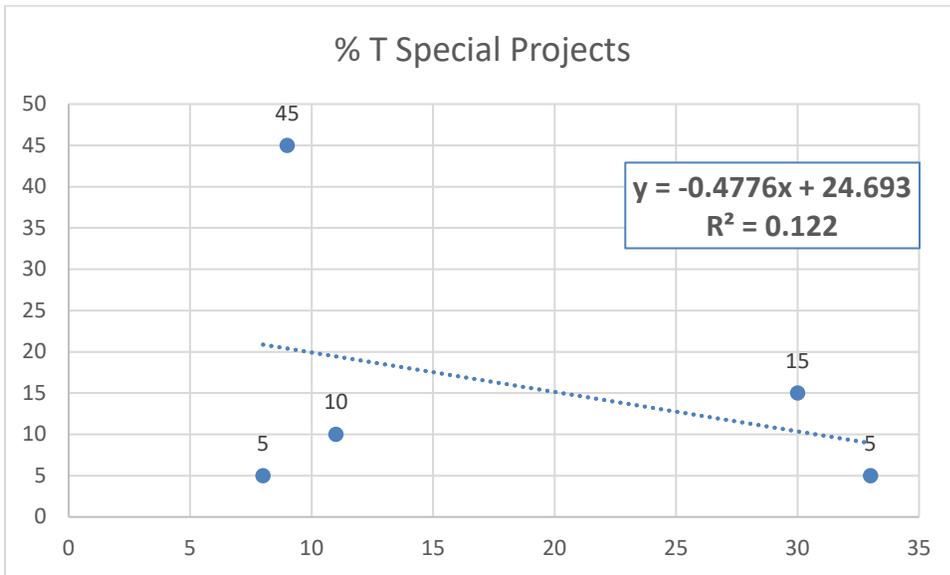
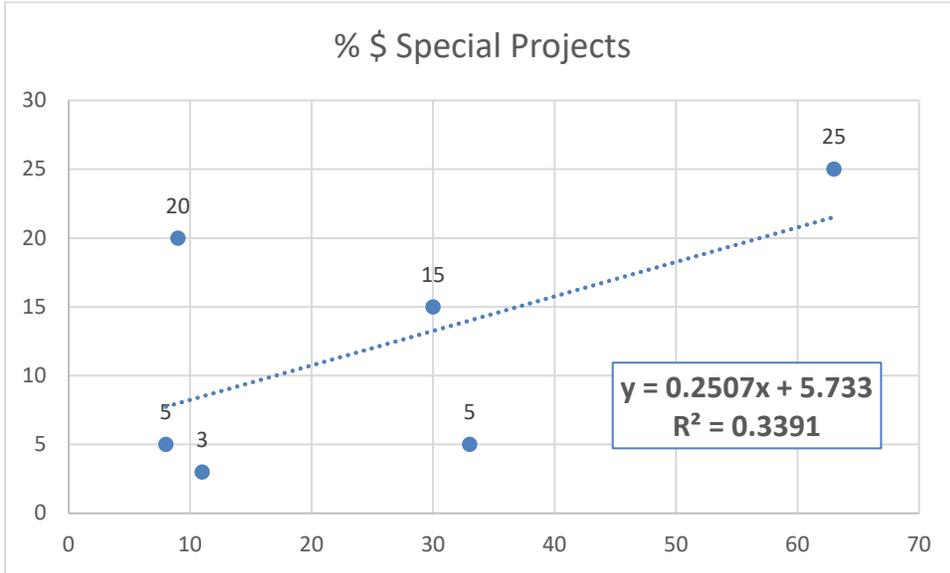
## 4) Facilities and Environment



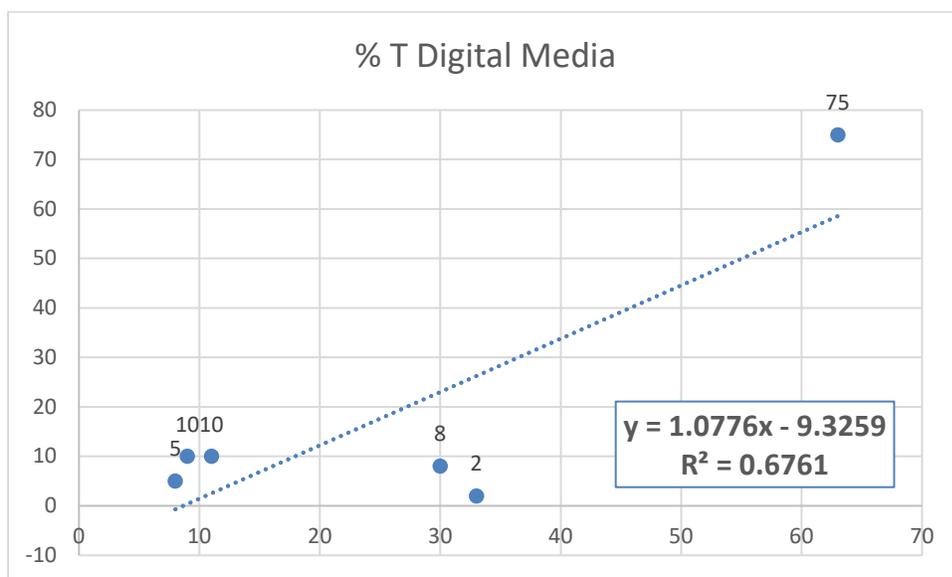
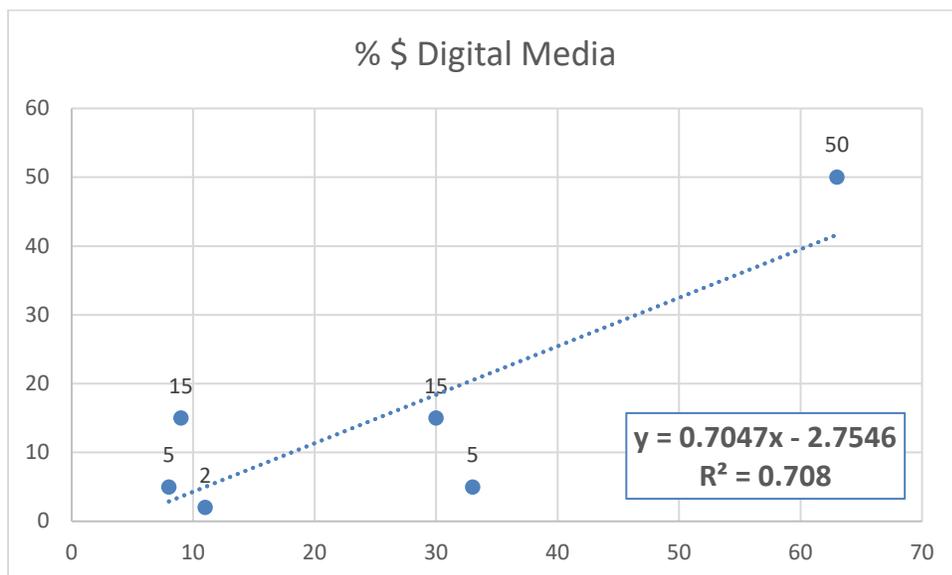
## 5) Safety and Security



6) Special Projects



## 7) Digital Media



### Appendix E -Taxonomy of XP Core Task Areas

Core Tasks of Clergy, per Blizzard (1956)	*	Core Tasks of the XP, per Boersma (1988), Costin (2008), and Welch (2011)	*	Emerging XP Tasks per the precedent literature	*	Additional Survey Responses	*
Pastor	1					Pastor	1
Preacher							
Priest (Baptizing Communion, etc)							
Teacher							
		Strategy and Planning	1				
		Managing and Developing Staff	2				
		Managing Finances	2				
		Supervising/ Making Decisions	1				
Organizer	1	Organizing/ Coordinating	1				
		Directing/ Controlling	1				
		Evaluating					
Administrator	2	Administrating	2				
				Facilities and Enviro	2		
				Safety and Security	1		
				Special Proj			
				Technology	3		
						Graphic Design	1
						Film Creation	1
						Interior Branding	1
						Respond to XP Spiritual Gifting	1
						Staff "Conscience"	1
						Communicate Risks	1