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## Dissertations and Theses Notices

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Compiled by Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Each issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations and theses of interest to our readers. Particular attention is given to publications that present research on evangelism, church growth, church planting and multiplication, missional church, emerging/emergent church, communication theory, leadership theory, and other topics related to effective fulfillment of the Great Commission. Directors of doctoral programs, as well as graduating students, are encouraged to send notice of recent dissertations to Dr. Gary L. McIntosh, Dissertation Editor, at [gary.mcintosh@biola.edu](mailto:gary.mcintosh@biola.edu). Due to space limitations and the large number of dissertations published each year, only a few dissertations are featured.

This issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations that focus on some aspect of pastoral leadership (senior pastors) and church growth.

*"Examining the Relationship Between Leadership Behaviors of Senior Pastors and Church Growth."* Author: Burton, William H., III, Ph.D. dissertation, Northcentral University, 2010. 128 pages.

**abstract:**

Church attendance in the U.S. is declining. The growth of large mega church congregations gives the appearance that church attendance is increasing, when in actuality, attendance at 80 percent of churches in the U.S. is not increasing. Church leaders are not in agreement regarding the significance of pastoral leadership on the problem of declining church population; many seminaries do not teach leadership.

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The purpose of this quantitative, correlational study was to determine if a relationship existed between the leadership behaviors of senior pastors and the rate of church growth. The entire populations of churches within the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Missionary Church denominations located within the United States were surveyed, excluding church congregations that had a change in senior pastoral leadership during the survey period. In the two denominations, 376 pastors were eligible to be studied. Data were collected from 76 pastors using the Leadership Practices Inventory-Observer (LPI). Kendall's Correlation Coefficient was conducted to determine the relationship between the construct of leadership measured by the LPI and church population growth. None of the five leadership behaviors were found to be significantly related to church population growth. The highest regression coefficient scored 0.138 ( $p = .080$ ). Regression analyses were conducted by the researcher to attempt to predict which of the five leadership behaviors would influence church growth. None of the behaviors significantly predicted church population growth where the highest  $R^2$  scored 0.041 ( $SD = .004$ ,  $p = 0.081$ ). The regression analyses were moderated for church size, and the results found by the researcher did not show any significant relationship between leadership behaviors of senior pastors and church growth where the highest  $R^2$  scored 0.086 ( $SD = .004$ ,  $p = 0.075$ ).

Future researchers might consider studying denominations with more church congregations or denominations with larger congregations. Another suggestion for future research is a comparison of leadership behaviors between the pastors of growing church congregations and the leadership behaviors of pastors of declining church congregations.

*"Relationship Between Senior Pastors' Attitudes Toward Organizational Change and Church Growth Factors."* Author: Natale, Nicholas Alfred, Ed.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007. 170 pages.

**abstract:**

Discussion regarding the change process within the local church has become increasingly prominent over the last few years. A great deal of the literature discusses the process of organizational change by focusing on a macro- or system-oriented approach. Individual characteristics that are equally important to the success of change initiatives have been neglected. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to consider an alternative approach to the organizational change processes by focusing on individuals' cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendencies as constructs of attitudinal disposition. This micro- or dispositional-oriented study explores potential relationships between senior pastors' attitudinal disposition of organizational change and various church factors.

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The study consisted of 138 senior pastors who completed a self-report inventory assessing their attitude toward organizational change. The results were then utilized along with additional reported data concerning ministry tenure, church size, and church growth status to employ correlational statistical models in determining strength and direction of relationship. Correlation coefficients were compared among pastors of growing, plateaued, and declining churches. The results demonstrated a trend toward a strong, positive relationship between attitudes of pastors of growing churches toward change and church size. The study also revealed that the "attitude toward change" scores of pastors of plateaued churches were lower the longer they served in ministry. The practical implications of these findings are discussed in relation to the local church.

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*"The Relationship Between Pastoral Leadership Characteristics and Church Size and Growth."* Author: King, David S., Ph.D. dissertation, Capella University, 2007. 109 pages.

**abstract:**

This research study investigated the leadership practices of pastors. The pastors were all senior pastors of churches in North Carolina and Virginia that were

members of the Willow Creek Association. The study sought to determine if significant relationships existed between the pastors' leadership characteristics (the independent variables) and the size and growth of the churches (the dependent variables) under their leadership. Leadership practices were identified and quantified by use of Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Church size and church growth measures were gleaned from a three-item demographic questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed based on the LPI's five following leadership practices identified by Kouzes and Posner: Challenge the Process, Inspire a Shared Vision, Enable Others to Act, Model the Way, and Encourage the Heart. Correlational and multiple regression analysis of the 90 responses found significant relationships between Inspire a Shared Vision and 6-month proportional church growth, Model the Way and 4-year proportional church growth, Encourage the Heart and 6-month raw number church growth, and Encourage the Heart and 4-year raw number church growth. As such, this study has added to the bodies of knowledge of the complex issues of leadership and the local church as an organization.

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*"The Decision-Making Ethos of Large, Growing Congregations Located in Metropolitan Areas of More Than One Million."* Author: Stafford, Rodney K., D.Min. dissertation, Anderson University, 2011. 177 pages.

**abstract:**

This project focuses on the decision-making ethos of large, growing congregations located in metropolitan areas of over one million people. For the purpose of this project, the term ethos describes the atmosphere or culture in which decisions are made within an organization.

The current conversation concerning decision-making ethos in the church tends to juxtapose *hierarchical* and *collaborative* structures and prioritize one over the other. This project suggests that there exists a third way of organizational decision making that is best described by the term *collaborative hierarchy*. Collaborative hierarchy provides clarity concerning the ultimate ownership of a decision based on positional authority within the hierarchy but encourages the decision maker to invite others into the conversation, regardless of position in the hierarchy, for the purpose of making the best decision possible.

Surveys were given to the staff of six congregations that have experienced an average annual growth rate in weekend worship services of at least 10 percent a

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year over a period of ten years. The surveys measured the degree to which the decision-making ethos of each staff member's particular congregation is hierarchical and the degree to which it is collaborative. In addition, the senior pastor of each of the six churches surveyed, with the exception of the author, completed an interviewer-administered questionnaire.

The findings of the surveys revealed that all the congregations surveyed for this project possessed a decision-making ethos that reflected collaborative hierarchy. The results did not seem to be significantly impacted by the gender or age of the respondents. Additionally, a brief review of key biblical passages pertaining both to Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church offer examples of a decision-making ethos that are consistent with collaborative hierarchy.

This project concludes that a decision-making ethos that reflects collaborative hierarchy offers a worthy alternative to rigid hierarchical structures or purely collaborative systems. The results of the surveys and interviews utilized in the project reinforce this conclusion. The project recommends that congregations examine their own decision-making ethos in an effort to determine if the way they make decisions negatively impacts missional success.

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*"The Effect of Pastoral and Staff Leadership Training on the Growth of the Southern African-American Church."* Author: Pickett, Dwayne K., Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011. 142 pages.

### **abstract:**

The purpose of the dissertation was to determine the impact of pastoral and staff leadership development on the southern African-American church in the following areas: (1) church growth—worship attendance, Bible study attendance, and church membership census; (2) community development—ministries that reach into the community and the level of participation in such ministries; and (3) economic growth—income from tithes and offerings, special fundraising, and intra-church nonprofit organizations. The research was done using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Thirty-five leaders from seven African-American churches participated in the study by providing information regarding their educational and professional background and by completing MLQ surveys on themselves and their peers in order to identify leadership characteristics. Also, each of the seven churches provided data on its growth.

Analysis of the data obtained suggests that a connection exists between training and development, church growth, community development, and economic growth. Suggestions given included ways to improve current methods of development or to create new methods. Also, the researcher recommended ways to enhance this study.

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“Leadership of Growing Churches: The Role of the Senior Pastor’s Attributes and Leadership Practices.” Author: Steen, Paul W., Ph.D., Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 2008. 443 pages.

**abstract:**

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Through a review of relevant literature, theological examination, and quantitative analysis, this research project studied the role of a senior pastor’s personal attributes, leadership practices, and church demographics in order to investigate their relationship to a church’s decadal growth rate. The Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (LPI-Self, Kouzes and Posner, 2003) was used as the assessment instrument along with 15 questions of a demographic nature.

The study’s population included all 298 senior pastors serving in Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC) churches in the United States and Canada. The research project was completed in three phases: selection of senior pastors in the CCCC denomination, gathering data using the LPI-Self and selected demographic information, and analysis and interpretation of data. A total of 211 pastoral respondents (71%) returned surveys. Of these returned surveys, 188 were usable for data analysis. Data was compiled and analyzed in order to find the leadership best practice most correlated to church decadal growth rates. The study also explored which pastoral and church demographic characteristics are indicative of leadership best practices and church decadal growth rates.

Descriptive statistics for all variables were obtained using a frequency distribution. Results were presented as absolute frequencies and adjusted percentiles. Mean scores, modes, and standard deviation were also calculated. Analysis of variance, Pearson’s product-moment correlations, and Chi-Square statistical analyses were used to examine the relationship between variables.

The study concluded three significant findings. A statistically significant difference exists when comparing the ages of CCCC senior pastors with their

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related leadership best practice. Pastors' leadership best practice changes as they get older. Also, there was a statistically significant relationship between the CCCC senior pastors' leadership best practice and their churches' setting. Pastors serving in small towns are far more likely to demonstrate the leadership practice of enabling others than any other practice. Finally, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between the CCCC senior pastors' ages and the decadal growth rate of their churches. Younger pastors are more likely to be leading growing churches than older pastors are.

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*"The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Growth in Specialized Non-Profit Organizations: Churches."* Author: Knudsen, Donald N., Ph.D. dissertation, Touro University International, 2006. 144 pages.

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### **abstract:**

In all organizations, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, good leadership has been vital for the success, growth, and continuation of the organization. Intuitively, one might feel that leadership has much to do with the success of an organization, but do we apply a particular type of leadership to this intuitive application or merely use the term in a very broad sense?

Leadership has been written about extensively for many years, with researchers primarily covering its application in business and educational environments. The purpose of this study has been to determine the degree of Transformational Leadership in a sub-set of the not-for-profit organization, the individual church. More specifically, this study has attempted to determine whether there is a specific leadership style that can be identified on a continuum between transactional leadership and Transformational Leadership that most positively affects the growth of an individual church.

The instrument used for this determination was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X) (Bass, 1995). Once this study identified the leader as transformational, transactional, or somewhere in-between, historical records were examined to see whether the leaders who had been identified as transformational leaders made a difference in organizational growth.

This study was unable to show a relationship between Transformational Leadership and church growth. Other findings with regard to attendance included as available space decreased, attendance seemed to increase. Also, as

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congregational interest increased in having services to attract both the unchurched and non-members to the worship services, more growth was experienced. Findings regarding contributions showed a decrease as the number of senior pastors serving the congregation increased over a ten-year period. Finally, as a pastor aged, contributions appeared to decrease slightly.