

**A Study of Why Some Inner-City,
African-American Churches in Chicago
Have Undergone Significant Membership
Declines, While Others Have Seen Large
Increases in Memberships in the
Post-Civil Rights Era**

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF WHY SOME INNER-CITY, AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCHES IN CHICAGO HAVE UNDERGONE SIGNIFICANT MEMBERSHIP DECLINES, WHILE OTHERS HAVE SEEN LARGE INCREASES IN MEMBERSHIPS IN THE POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

by

Norman Goodwin

The inner-city areas of Chicago have undergone significant changes in the post-civil rights era. Gentrification has helped turn areas, once the poster child of urban blight, into new neighborhoods that may still have some of these societal ills but also have brought in new housing and businesses. However, with this change, Chicago's inner-city, African-American church landscape has also undergone some dramatic changes. Many once thriving churches have seen their membership levels dramatically decline, while other churches have undergone significant increases in their membership bases, including the introduction of several megachurches.

This paper attempted to dissect the underlying reasons why some of Chicago's inner-city, African-American churches have succumbed to dramatic attendance declines, while others have become large or megachurches. The research utilized questionnaires and interviews of church members and senior pastors to reveal the reasons for the changing levels of membership.

The findings reveal a stronger feeling about their church and pastor for the members in churches with an increasing attendance and also their senior pastors being more adaptive to change, having a more defined future vision or plans for their church,

and having a stronger community presence than the churches with a decreasing attendance. However, the study also revealed that the members in each church group were content with their churches current status, although the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance were less likely to invite a friend or relative to their church.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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IN THE POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

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Norman Goodwin

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A Dissertation

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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DEDICATION

To Nina and James

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Many of the once thriving Chicago area African-American Baptist churches have seen their memberships decline dramatically over the past quarter century. Conversely, there has been a surge in megachurches or churches have undergone a rapid increase in membership within these same communities.

This phenomenon is of great concern for me as I lived in Chicago's inner city for most of my life, and even though I have moved fifty-five miles north of the city to Wisconsin, I still spend a considerable amount of time there through work and personal activities. As I drive through many of the inner-city sections of Chicago, I see dramatic changes from when I was a youngster. Urban blight has become the norm where previously strong economic areas are a shadow of their former times. However, evidence of gentrification exists as neighborhoods that were once gang dominated and drug infested are now havens to the urban yuppie sprawl. Streets that once had rows of old dilapidated homes now have new or remodeled residences selling for \$250,000 to over a million dollars.

In addition, as I drive through these areas, I see some of the older churches still looking structurally strong and well kept from the outside as well as some newer large church buildings dotting the urban landscape. With the older churches, while some may appear well-to-do from the outside, they have undergone significant declines in their membership base since my teenage years. The Chicagoland area had a noticeable increase in the number of large or megachurches during this same timeframe. For the

church with a declining attendance, a key underlying question is why this trend has occurred and whether this trend can or should be reversed.

Personally, the church in which I grew up and attended regularly for twenty-five years is one of the churches that has undergone a large decline in its membership. As a high school student, I joined the youth choir, which at the time had approximately ten members but was growing and eventually peaked at around twenty-five members by my senior year. Meanwhile, the church was nearly full each Sunday morning with new members joining almost weekly. Today the youth choir has joined with the adult choir as just one unit with a combined total of less than a dozen while the main sanctuary is less than a quarter full. Further evidence of this decline is that of the above-mentioned members in the youth choir, only one is still active in the church.

Much of this decline within some of the inner-city churches may be attributed to urban blight, young members moving out of the neighborhood or the general transient nature of the area. However, some of the areas that underwent this urban blight are now rebounding into vibrant growing communities. Andres Tapia notes the Black churches that have recaptured the traditional place of the church in the community are on the rise while using cutting-edge sophisticated methods of ministry and tackling inner-city social ills (30).

This phenomena of changing church attendance is on a national level; however, I concentrated my efforts for this study on Chicago because of my familiarity with the city and many of the African-American churches and because it is an excellent representative city due to its size.

A minimal number of studies have addressed the reasons for declines or growth of inner-city churches although some have studied recent changes in the mission or changes these churches have made to address modernity. Sandra Barnes, for example in her study of religion and rap music, analyzed the role of gospel rap music in the growth of Black churches. Cheryl Gilkes' study concludes that features such as a transformation of black consciousness, a rapid expansion of the black middle class, and the growth of women in ministry has help shape the Black church in the twenty-first century (147).

Purpose

The purpose of the research was to identify the characteristics that led to why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have undergone a significant decline or increase in membership since the early 1970s and evaluate the reasons for this phenomena.

Research Questions

Research questions were answered through the use of questionnaires and interviews with pastors and members of churches that have grown or declined in memberships. I received data from the questionnaires and interviews to evaluate and determine the reasons for the changes in church attendance and from this information, infer how current churches can avoid membership declines while not succumbing to non-biblical teachings in order to achieve growth.

Research Question #1

Why have the congregations of some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois, increased dramatically since the early 1970s?

Research Question #2

Why have the congregations of some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois, decreased since the early 1970s?

Research Question #3

What tactics or strategies did the leadership of those churches whose membership significantly increased during the post-civil rights era utilize?

Definition of Terms

The following words and terms are used as defined throughout this project.

Gentrification

John Betancur in his white paper on Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood provides the following definition of gentrification in general and specifically for Chicago:

Since the 1960's activists have used the term gentrification to describe and challenge the recent path of socio-economic and spatial restructuring in major U.S. cities. Whether we limit its definition to the displacement/replacement of lower-by higher income households or expand it to address the wholesale transformation of the city into a place of speculation and spectacle, gentrification has spread steadily up along the way real estate prices to unprecedented levels. In Chicago, gentrification has advanced in the last three decades to cover the ring of neighborhoods surrounding the central business district, the lakefront, selected train or station routes, and other areas particularly in the north side and is moving into many other locations of strategic importance to the public-private growth coalition presiding over the process. Along the way, it has contributed to a dramatic increase in property values leading to the deepest affordability crisis ever.

Betancur's description gives an example of how many of Chicago's inner-city, African-American communities economic and social base has changed in the post civil-rights era.

Inner City

Richard J. Tlapa describes the essence of Chicago's inner-city:

Any area within a large city which is no longer particularly beautiful, which no longer has decent parks (except for Chicago), which has run down buildings (usually two flats or more, built immediately next to one another), which probably has more than the average share of drugs, prostitution and crime, which has many frustrated people on welfare, older people with no one to turn to, and children who look for their entertainment in the streets and alleys. Garbage may be picked up only intermittently and rats may run through alleys. (10-11)

Jennifer L. Bubier supports this definition of Philadelphia's inner-city described as an area having a high crime rate and poverty and homogeneity in terms of ethnic minority status (94 percent African-American in her study; 35).

Tlapa's definition up until the recent gentrification may have held true, while Bubier's definition certainly is in effect today, but it does not accurately describe the inner-city area of Chicago that is the focus of this project. Therefore, I would like to offer a revised definition of inner city: an area within a large city that contains above both average rates of crime and impoverished residents but also contains a growing element of revitalization through improved housing, new businesses, and new residents in higher income levels.

African-American Church

Judith St. Clair Hull defines a church as African-American if at least 90 percent of the people attending on Sunday mornings are African-American and the pastor or other primary leadership person is African-American (7). In this paper, Hull's definition is used.

Large Church

Lyle E. Schaller describes a church as "large" if the congregational membership totals 351-750 and very large if the membership ranges between 751-800 (28). The

churches however described as large in this study each had memberships exceeding five hundred attending regularly on Sunday mornings.

Megachurch

Scott Thumma describes a megachurch as a Protestant church that averages at least two thousand total attendees in their weekend services (xviii), whereas the Hartford Institute for Religion Research goes a step further by adding a sustained weekly attendance of two thousand or more in its worship service. For this study, the latter definition was utilized.

With the current gentrification, some of the inner-city areas are now undergoing an economic revitalization and, thus, are not as plagued with some of the characteristics of drugs and gang activity. A prime example is the GAP. The GAP is a small neighborhood on the south side of Chicago southeast of US Cellular Field, the home field of the Chicago White Sox. This black middle-class neighborhood has expanded southward into some of these previously economically depressed areas, which still have some elements of crime but at the same time are seeing more buppie sprawl. In addition, few of the growing churches I have identified, while within the city limits of Chicago, are in so-called middle-class areas or those outside of the core or central part of the city.

Ministry Intervention

The goal of this paper was to identify the reasons why certain churches' memberships have either grown or declined significantly and to analyze these reasons and present a template for churches in the potential declining membership mode to review and perhaps adopt in some fashion to maintain their congregational levels.

This study was designed to benefit any inner-city church, however, although the focus was on such churches in Chicago. The study was made through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews designed to discover the reasons why the sample inner-city churches had the significant increases or decreases in their memberships. Participants in the study included the senior pastor of each of the six churches selected as well as members ranging from lay leaders to bench members who are not active in any church role.

Context

While the focus of this study was on the inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, the selected churches included a balance of similar denominations where a church had a significant decline or growth in their membership. The selected congregations were either all or greater than 98 percent African-American.

By limiting my study to similar denominations, the results are better measurable for a meaningful outcome. The inner-city, African-American community has a wide range of denominational churches as well as a cornucopia of nondenominational congregations.

Methodology

This research was a mixed-method exploratory study with a causal comparative model. The model utilized surveys and interviews for respondents in the growing church (RGP) and respondents in the declining church (RGD) and questionnaires for those in the growing church (RGI) and in the declining church (RDI). The results, provided in both qualitative and quantitative form, indicated reasons why the churches were undergoing the growth or decline, which were then used for further summary analysis.

Participants

The participants in the study included a combination of senior pastors and selected members from each church identified. Additionally, the church member sample included both new and long-standing members of each church across a broad age spectrum as well as from various lay positions.

I have spent most of my life in Chicago and still spend a considerable amount of time in the city. In this capacity, I have attended and observed many of the churches selected, and have personal relationships with many of the members and/or pastors of the selected churches. The study included three churches that have undergone significant membership growth over the past twenty-five years, with two being located within the core area of Chicago and one in a middle-class area of the city. Also included in the study are three churches whose memberships have dramatically declined during the post-civil rights era, all located within the inner-city area of Chicago.

Instrumentation

A researcher-designed questionnaire or interview was used for all participants. Some of the participants completed a closed-ended questionnaire while the interviews were performed using semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to have the respondents expound on their perceptions of the reasons for increase or decline in membership. This combined method had two beneficial outcomes: First, it provided quantitative data to measure the reasons for a particular church's growth or decline, and, second, it presented qualitative information that included personal perceptions that would be difficult to quantify.

Variables

This was an exploratory study designed to reveal selected variables present in the growing churches that were different from the variables in the churches with declining attendance. The dependent or criteria variable was whether the churches had a declining attendance or increasing attendance. In this study, the independent or predictor variables were the responses to the questionnaires given to the church members in each group and the semi-structured interviews conducted with the senior pastors of each church designed to ascertain the different feelings within the two groups, (i.e., those in a church with decreasing attendance and those in a church with increasing attendance). The intervening variables were the degree of openness and honesty in the responses from the participants.

Data Collection

After identifying the churches that were included in the study, I obtained the names of the senior pastors and key leaders through the churches' Web page, from direct telephone contacts, through contacts I knew at the church, or from personal knowledge. Prior to sending the surveys to the senior pastors, I first contacted them, requesting their participation in the study to ask how they would like to receive the survey via US postal service with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope, electronic mail, or delivery at the church. During the initial conversation, I also asked their permission to contact other preselected members of their churches. I contacted the lay members directly, and if they agreed to participate, they were asked how they would like to receive the survey. The senior pastor also selected most or all of the participants from his church if I did not know any members.

Data Analysis

Upon return of the completed surveys, I charted the responses to each question and further segmented them by each category in the closed-ended questionnaire while the data collected in the personal interviews was used as a qualitative assessment with the goal of revealing any true or underlying feelings from the members regarding their attendance at the churches. Both sets of data were synthesized for further analysis in determining the reasons why the churches had increased or decreased in membership.

Generalizability

The study focused on inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, and the sample size accounted for only a small percentage of these churches. Additionally, to have comparative and relevant results, the sample included three Baptist churches. I contend that any church, especially one undergoing membership decline, could use the findings to varying degrees.

Theological Foundation

The theological framework for this dissertation project was the biblical teachings on how the church was to be conducted compared to the reasons for the church's increase or decline as established by the data analysis. Individual church activities such as worship services were also compared against scriptural teachings from the survey and interview results to conclude if they were God centered. However, if the results of my research show some other disturbing non-scriptural characteristics from the respondents on how the church should function or conduct its worship services, I opined on how these particular shortcomings do not fit into a scriptural model.

In my review of data, one of the underlying factors on which I centered is how the congregation kept its focus on Scripture. Within the African-American community, many are falling prey to religions that emphasize an economic and/or social message to draw members. While this issue was not a direct part of my study, it does have a ripple effect through churches that treat self-help equal to or greater than salvation. Some of the teachings to which African-Americans are falling prey to include Christianity through the guise of prosperity ministries or unsound exegesis. I initially believed that prosperity ministry played a pivotal role in my research of the growth in some inner-city churches followed by churches that emphasize self-help, which is beneficial for many within the inner-city community; however, when this message is foundational for the church then the theological framework of the paper came into play.

From research done in other Doctor of Ministry classes taken at Asbury Theological Seminary, I came across some varied isogesis such as that from the United Church of Christ (UCC), many of whom openly endorse homosexuality. They support their isogesis through Scripture with the belief that the Sodom story was about hospitality or through psychological factors by stating that Paul did not know today's human sexuality; thus, his teachings on the subject are not applicable today. Other supporters of homosexuality take 1 Thessalonians 5:12 literally, thus saying a homosexual experience is according to the Bible. I am not providing this example to be critical of the UCC, but to bring out a viewpoint they espouse that is often used in other denominations within the inner-city.

Once I analyzed the results of my surveys and interviews, I commented as to the future of the inner-city, African-American church such as what factors will influence a

church's mission or vision. My comments included that some churches changed their focus to meet modernity demands while others did not consider their membership when thinking about their vision and keep to what they believe is their relevant calling even at the expense of a dwindling congregation. This analysis was only stated superficially as the in-depth reasoning for these factors are not part of the purpose of this study could be the ground work for future complementary studies.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews selected literature and pertinent research. The expectations of inner-city churchgoers and pastoral leadership and visionary principles are considered. I also considered current writings on the status and future outlook for the inner-city, African-American church in my assessment.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the project's design, the research methods, and the methods of data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 reports the major findings of the study and the practical applications that flow out of the research. It also offers suggestions for further inquiry and study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

In many ways, the inner-city, African-American church is not unlike its mainstream Protestant counterpart. Both are facing the challenges in today's postmodern society, and both, although in varying ways, offer a gospel they believe is relevant to their constituents. The senior pastors have to decide whether their sermons and/or church vision will only focus on Scripture and not include any stance on social issues or become active in addressing what they perceive as societal ills.

When choosing which social issues to address, a vast difference between the two churches exists. Within the inner-city, African-American church, the pastor when addressing such issues tends to focus more on poverty, racism, and one's general economic well-being. However, with mainline white Protestant churches, the focus tends to be more on abortion, homosexuality, America is a Christian nation, and the threats of illegal immigration or terrorism. I am not stating that either side considers issues outside of its core focus irrelevant but am describing how each side incorporates its operating agenda even though each group may share the same core Christian beliefs. Within the mainline Protestant churches, ministers such as the late Dr. D. James Kennedy and his Coral Ridge Ministries even after death continue to have a political ministry focus. The home page of Coral Ridge Ministries Web site includes banners such as "The Choice That Liberals Hate", "The Obama White House Radicals," or "Socialism, Is It Biblical." Interestingly the Web site uses the word "*God*" sparingly (Coral Ridge Ministries). Conversely, African-American pastors such as James Meeks of Salem Baptist Church, a

megachurch located in Chicago Web site's statement notes that the pastor "serves as a beacon of peace and hope for countless thousands in Chicago's Roseland community" (Salem Baptist Church). These samples provide evidence of how a church decides its primary focus and operating agenda.

However, whatever direction the church leadership takes, it will undoubtedly have an impact on the congregational membership levels. Church attendance can either grow or decline based upon how its members accept the pastor's vision and decisions to take on social issues or remain silent and focus only on the gospel.

The inner-city, African-American church role in this dilemma is highlighted with the changing character of the inner city generally being more pronounced, such as gentrification and the always changing urban sprawl and redevelopment projects. As neighborhoods change, the long-standing community church becomes faced with how to retain and/or attract members. Some churches see the decline of other churches as a great opportunity to achieve levels of growth probably not imagined by its members only a decade prior.

Few studies if any have focused on why certain African-American churches' membership base grow while others undergo declining church attendance. New York University researched factors influencing church attendance among African-American men. Barnes, through the Faith Factor 2000 Project, examined adult participatory trends within the contemporary Black church, while Darren E. Sherkat reviewed attendance differences across African-American denominations. Church-specific studies that analyzed the direction the head pastor had chosen for the churches vision are minimal (Williams; Hinton; Chapman; Patterson). Likewise, only a few studies exist concerning

the impact on churches located in an urban area undergoing a change in racial composition (McIntyre; Lewis and Trulear). Most studies look at a macro version of the role of the African-American Church (e.g., Lincoln and Mamiya; Pinn; Barnes, “Then and Now: A Comparative Analysis of the Urban Black Church in America”; Wilmore; Peppers) with little focus on any city or reasons for growth or declines. Cassandra D. Chaney analyzes the benefits derived by congregants, church staff, and pastor in the African-American church. Mary Hinton’s, M. Drewery, Jr.’s, and Charmayne Patterson’s studies also look at the specific Black megachurches and how they relate to the Prosperity Gospel movement.

Several studies and commentaries look at the plight of African-Americans and how Christianity, religion, or the church has played a role in alleviating societal ills (Cone, “A Black Theology of Liberation”; Lincoln and Mamiya; West; and Jr.; Paris) or how theology has impacted the Black church (Williams) and the emerging Black megachurch (Chaves). C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya’s 1990 study was considered a groundbreaking work on the overall history and condition of the Black church, with Anthony B. Pinn providing an updated version on the African-American church in the post-civil rights era.

For some African-American churches their leadership is faced with the decision of whether the African-American church should preach the gospel and tackle social issues, while weighting if this integral in their churches growth. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, a church needs to develop an outreach plan that is specific to its demographics, including social development, land use, community facilities housing, and economic development (674). This thought is supported by many who have criticized the

African-American church for its role or lack thereof in addressing homosexuality, AIDS/HIV, and even the resistance of female pastoral roles (Douglas and Hopson).

Problems such as racism, poverty, and discrimination have long existed and are among those historical struggles that past generations of black people have faced for centuries. Others matters, such as those related to the growing phenomenon of globalization, sex and gender bias, ecological issues, the impact of global warming and shrinking of natural resources, classism in the black community, and the struggle for justice in an ever-shrinking multicultural world, have emerged from today's more contemporary setting.

A theological dilemma facing today's African-American church and particularly the inner-city church is the balance between social issues and salvation. With the church being the focal point and voice of the community, the senior pastor may have to decide if the church should make its main priority the poverty, injustices, racism, and other such attributes as the centerpiece of the Sunday sermon. Alternatively, the senior pastor must determine if the church's message focus solely on salvation and address social ills secondarily or not at all. Nearly all inner-city pastors of African-American churches face this dilemma; however, my purpose is not to judge their decision but to ascertain how this chosen route affects the church's membership base, if at all.

Despite the differences between the mainline Protestant churches, the history of the African-American church mirrors that of America. Its constituents have called upon the church to address the issues facing the African-American community, in addition to being a place to spread the gospel. The role of the African-American church was instrumental in dealing with the blatant racism during slavery, the inequities of

segregation in the pre-civil rights era, and today's ongoing social ills. Lincoln and Mamiya note that the development of several secular institutions such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League were often founded with the help and support of Black church leaders and that their memberships often overlapped with Black church membership (9). As the following section highlights, the African-American church in addition to being a cornerstone of the community, must also deal with modern-day issues such as prosperity gospel, contemporary worship services, and liberation theology, all of which can have a profound impact on the very structure and role of the church.

With half of the churches participating in this study being Baptist, I offer a brief description of these attributes. This analysis takes an abbreviated look at the primary African-American Baptist conventions, the vital role Christian education plays in a church's vision, as well as a historical description of how the African-American church in Chicago came into being. These discussions provide a foundational backdrop for the analysis of the attributes of the churches used in this study, giving a degree of insight as to the specific actions a congregation and its senior pastor have taken that ultimately influenced its membership base.

Historical Development of the African-American Church

Historically, the African-American church has been a cornerstone in the blacks' fight against social injustices while at the same time providing God's message of salvation. These social injustices has forced the church to deal with pressures from a number of fronts including national, statewide, city, and even isolated community factors, with each of these fronts, wanting the African-American church to address the problems

they consider relevant. Robert L. Smith, Jr. in his study of black phronesis concludes, “One of the most pressing concerns facing the Black church and Black theology today is the need to create constructive and relevant responses to the myriad and polyvalent issues of twenty-first-century contemporary culture” (174). Cornel West and Eddie S. Jr. also reflect on the social ills facing African-Americans by stating, “Although some progress has been made, the problem of the twenty-first century remains the problem of the color line” (xiv). The role of the African-American church to be a cornerstone in the black community will continue in the future.

The history of the Black church is a history of America. The Black church has been instrumental in reaching not only its members on an individual basis but also corporately through taking the lead in social battles, much like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement of blacks in America. Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson note, “The black church signified black people’s resistance to an enslaving and dehumanizing white culture, even as it testified to God’s affirmation of freedom and blackness” (96). The Black church is a unique social institution as it not only survived slavery but remains virtually free from white control (98).

On a more positive note, blacks in America have made some progress including in the religious arena. Today the Black church and its leaders can enter into new avenues not seen or even imagined a few decades ago, such as prosperity and charismatic ministries and the resulting black megachurch. Commenting on the megachurch growth, noted scholar Peter J. Paris in his assessment of African-American religion and public life states that megachurch growth, for the most part, though not exclusively, has occurred under the leadership of young, professionally educated, charismatic clergymen, those

whose personality and ministerial style attract large numbers of followers (485). Paris goes on to state, “Charismatic leadership is alive and well throughout the African American religious community” (486). He also had reservations about King’s leadership. “Charismatic leadership has contributed much more to the expansion of democracy in the nation than it has within the boundaries of the leadership’s local congregation or denomination” (486). Lincoln and Mamiya describe how blacks felt about themselves and how those feelings changed under the *Black Consciousness* movement: The antecedents of the black consciousness movement were several. The first of these was the very process of urbanization and its by-products. With the concentration of large numbers of black people in the cities came a greater awareness of African-Americans as a distinct social group. Through the labor movement, urban black workers were exposed to the protest tactics and possibilities of organizing for social change. Black churches grew in size, establishing ministerial alliances (165).

Being the pillar of the community and a focal point for blacks historically, the church is often looked upon as a means of help and guidance. Chaney points out the importance of religious organizations in providing hope to the African-American community. She aptly reminds the reader that “even during times when the material possessions of African-Americans were meager, their ability to sing about things that they did not possess infused them with hope and made them confident in God’s ability to help them ‘get through anything’” (36). Her statement amplifies the historical role of the African-American church in America, as the church helped blacks cope with continual hardships that came with racism.

R. D. Smith reviews the historical trends of the Black church, including its adaptation to the post-civil rights era. He concludes that with the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1954 Voting Rights Act, a significantly different context of Black church civic involvement emerged, characterized by, among other things, unprecedented black access to the mechanisms and structures of American politics and heightened sense of empowerment and allegiance to procedural politics within black communities (3). Smith also points out that in post civil-rights politics black church contributions have been less welcomed (4). R. L. Smith brings out that there are new voices and different approaches that can benefit the Black theology project and enhance the work of Black scholars, church leaders and workers. He also explains the need to look to different areas and approaches to discover new and creative theological resources (176). In addressing how the Black church has adopted to socio/economic changes over time in America, Gayraud S. Wilmore made the following assessment:

If the period from the end of the First World War to the middle of the century saw growing disillusionment with the church because of a reactionary traditionalism, it must be said that it was the young Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr., who reversed that trend and gave new vitality and relevance to black Christianity in the United States. (174)

Today, the black community is more relevant in America as African-Americans have taken a more visible role in society. However, the African-American church and its leaders still as with their forefathers have to decide on how they will address issues relevant to the black community.

The Role of the African-American Church

The African-American church has always been the focal point of its community. From its beginning it was more of a strict place of worship; however, with blacks being

able to be more vocal, particularly in the post-civil rights era, the church has also taken on more of a social responsibility role. Today, as in the past, the Black church is often looked upon to take a forefront in social matters. The civil rights fight led by Dr. King, has been followed by post civil-rights leaders, such as the Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. As noted earlier, I live in the Chicago area, and when some sort of gang violence or child disappearance occurs a prayer vigil is held with many local pastors leading the gathering or participating in a news conference, outlining actions that need to be taken to stem the societal ill that recently occurred.

Providing Cultural Support

One of the key roles of the African-American church is providing its inhabitants cultural support. Lincoln and Mamiya succinctly summarized the role of the Black church in the community:

The Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development. (8)

The Black church operates as a kind of cultural training ground for African-Americans, extending its influence far beyond Sunday morning worship and penetrating black political discourse, ideas and practice at many levels according to Melissa Harris-Lacewell (188). Black church culture constitutes a common language that motivates social action (Pattillo-McCoy 767-84).

Congregational vitality is highly dependent on the diversity in social outreach programs according to researcher and consultant Christine D. Chapman who further states that Black churches have a unique history of being the single most important

institution to embody the goals and purposes that pertain primarily to the welfare of black people (132). Paris adds that in America no other enduring institution with such purposes exists (9).

Chaney, who specializes in the roles of the black family, writes that African-Americans have created church communities where their collective concerns can be freely expressed in ways that add meaning and vitality to their lives, a testimony to the power of the Black church (65).

Improved self-esteem and even increased local social status can often come from a leadership position within the Black church. When the local church is highly visible in its community, not only does the pastor have a strong presence but also many of his or her lay leaders are seen as holding high offices in this cornerstone institution. Being a member of the local Black church brings about a certain level of individual self-pride, where one's formal education is seldom a prerequisite in becoming a lay leader, such as the head of the deacon or trustee board, or the Sunday school superintendant or director of Christian education. Often this lay leader is called upon for Christian and leadership skills and experience, much like those with all the formal seminary training. Douglas and Hopson reviewed the laity role in the African-American church. They reason that the Black church essentially creates its own independence hierarchies and networks of power, which become avenues for people to garner ecclesiastical privilege and to realize vicariously the social and political privileges denied them (98-99). In his commentary on the Black church, J. Alfred Smith emphasizes the importance of recognizing and nurturing the aging as they are foundational in training younger members in what they have learned over their lifetimes (17). Harris-Lacewell also notes the importance of laity

in the African-American church. Organizationally, the church has often served as a place where African-Americans learn important civic skills. Black men and women who are active in the church learn about chairing meetings, passing motions, organizing groups, and mediating competing interests (183).

Moving forward into the twenty-first century with the changing inner-city landscape, the growing impact of megachurches, and new and changing social organizations, the role of the inner-city, African-American church is evolving. Barnes cautions that the urban Black church must adapt to new problems in its community such as new forms of racism, AIDS, jobs, and chronic poverty, despite concern from some on whether the Black Church should be involved in such arenas (Then and Now: A Comparative Analysis of the Urban Black Church in America 154).

Being a Social Provider

Howard University professors Charles Edward Lewis, Jr., and Harold Dean Trulear examine the role of the African-American church as social service providers. In their study they write that the needs plaguing African-American communities are being continually met by the African-American church through crisis intervention and other social support; however, much of the systematic effort to address these issues has become the purview of the social work profession in collaboration with various systems of care (345).

Robert Smith addresses the role of theology in meeting the needs of the black community in what he terms as Black church *phroneis* or practical wisdom as the means to meet the demands facing the black faith community today (174). This *phroneis* is

firmly grounded in theology, in the redemptive and liberative acts of God on behalf of marginalized, oppressed African-Americans (185).

Lora-Ellen McKinney also addresses the added dimension of the African-American church. She states that the church members are called to a ministry of liberation and reconciliation and a Christian education program that includes healthcare, reclamation of community, and reinstallation of African-centered values (xii).

Walter E. Fluker looks at leadership within the African-American church as it must be ethical, drawing upon their wisdom, practices, and traditions. Otherwise it may be more harmful than good. For black ethical leaders, who exhibit habits and practices that conspire against unjust institutional practices that promote an unhealthy and self-destructive existence these wisdom, practices, and traditions become paramount (9).

The modern African-American church understands that, despite the many advances made in achieving social equity, injustice remains real to its members. As a result, African-Americans empathize with the suffering of Jesus and his triumphs over enemies and the grave (McKinney 4).

Frederick C. Harris in his writing on the relationship between urban black ministers and their lay leaders notes that as the Black church has endured and met the challenges its members have sustained throughout the course of American history, its members and leaders have also grown and benefitted from their experiences. The laity has become more educated and economically stable. Their ranks include professionals from every major field of expertise (e.g., medicine, law, business, humanities, social science, and engineering). The constituents of the Black urban church have survived

many hardships and difficulties, and these experiences have contributed to their stamina and strength (3).

Francis M. Dubose in his study on urban church growth provided the following assessment:

As Blacks became urbanized, they became better educated. They produced outstanding leaders. Out of Black ghettos of America have come some of the leading citizens in education, politics, sports, and entertainment. The church has been prominent in developing these leaders. The Black pastor today enjoys a much higher community status than his White counterpart (5).

As the role of the Black church and black community has developed, their presence in society as a whole has become more visible.

Lewis V. Baldwin, however, has a somewhat different perspective of the leadership attributes in the modern African-American church. The pattern of young, vigorous, and activist Black church leadership, represented by King, Ralph Abernathy, and other prophetic personalities in the 1950s and 1960s, had largely faded by 1980, and, since that time, churches have increasingly turned to revivals, massive crusades, a gospel of prosperity positivism, and matters of personal salvation as a substitute for active involvement in social, political, and economic change (33).

J. Smith analyzes the Black church and the aging and concludes that the growing challenge of the African-American church related to the aging is to empower them by use of their wisdom for future generations. He further cites four theological presuppositions whereby the African-American church ministers to the aging:

1. God's goodness and humanity's social responsibility,
2. God's mercy and humanity's compassion,

3. God's image in humankind and their recognition of the intrinsic value of every person, and
4. God's gift of parenthood and individuals' reverential and responsible response to our elders (17).

Being a cornerstone within the African-American community, the Black church is continually adapting to socioeconomic changes. In her study of *A Comparative Analysis of the Urban Black Church in America*, Barnes addresses the future of the Black church. She stated that contrary to earlier scholars' concerns about the continual importance of the urban Black church, it will continue to respond to the varied needs of the congregates and members of the Black community. Increased integration, tolerance, and opportunities as well as secularism and changing migratory patterns have expanded the options and resources of many urbanites such that many of the needs met primarily by the urban Black church in the past are now being met by other civic organizations (138). Barnes acknowledges that some Black clergy question the role of the African-American church in these social venues, while others see this as a paramount need (154).

Meeting the Communal Needs of the Community

Currently as in the past, with the worldwide economic downturn, the African-American community feels the impact the hardest. As a result, the Black church may be called upon more to meet its communal needs of its inhabitants. In their 2008 study, Lewis and Trulear note that the African-American churches and community organizations were facing dwindling federal resources used to aid the inner city and rural communities (350).

Attempting a political analysis of American society means taking sides.

Resistance to this task may come from people who see no connection between the religious and political dimensions of life; it may also come from people who see no connection between the academic and political dimensions of scholarship. Curtis J. Evans notes that despite this resistance, scholars working in the area of Black church studies cannot be concerned about religious or academic propriety if it is not related to the historic African-American struggle for liberation cautions (29).

Ben C. Blackwell believes that social stratification has negatively affected black unity and individual thriving and that too often, advantaged black classes find fault in the lower classes themselves for their social isolation and inability to escape poverty or the treadmill of the working poor. He goes on to note that isolation is a two way street where an element of distrust by the disadvantaged black classes of the black middle and upper classes exists (9).

Politics and the African-American Church

In the 2008 presidential election, America saw church involvement as never seen before in the history of the country. For a church taking a political stance can be tricky because while being classified as a 501(c)(3) entity under the Internal Revenue Code, a church may not directly endorse a candidate or political party but may be involved in the political process. The unique characteristic of the 2008 election was the involvement of the African-American church, which had not taken such a role since the civil rights movement. With many inner-city pastors and churches backing the candidacy of Barack Obama, as a church they could not directly endorse him, but the pastor, could when acting as a citizen, according to the Internal Revenue Code. Most Sundays during the

campaign saw various local and/or statewide candidates making stops at the African-American church, seeking support.

The question arises as to whether a church and its pastor can sit idly and not be a voice in any election, whether local or national, and, from a biblical standpoint, if a church should be involved in anything outside of spreading the gospel. Whether a church decides to engage in activities that can be construed as being outside the spreading of the gospel is beyond the scope of this paper but mainly revolves around how a person views the role of the church and even a personal interpretation of the Great Commission.

Lincoln and Mamiya made the following assessment regarding the Black church and politics:

1. As the primary social and cultural institution, the Black church tradition is deeply embedded in black culture in general so that the sphere of politics in the African-American community cannot be easily separated from it.
2. The Black church heritage has contributed to both the survival and liberation traditions that have shaped black attitudes toward politics.
3. The major function of Black churches in electoral and protest politics is to act as mobilizing and communicative networks in local and national settings.
4. Politics must be broadly defined beyond electoral politics and protest politics to include the community-organizing and community-building activities that are part of the ministry of many black clergy and churches.
5. Economic independence of persons and institutions is a major prerequisite for effective political activity, especially in protest politics.

6. A deep religious faith can be the bedrock for sustaining a person in courageous political acts of liberation.

7. While the process of differentiation in professions and institution has continued over the past eight years so that the Black church no longer enjoys the near monopoly in black leadership that it once did, black clergy and the Black church will continue to be a significant force in leadership and sustenance in electoral and protest politics, Du Bois's vision of a supersession of clerical leadership in the black community notwithstanding.

8. Part of the misunderstanding of the role of black churches in politics is due to different assumptions in disciplinary boundaries and theoretical views (234-35).

Jeff Manza and Nathan Wright opine that Black churches tend to be more embedded in political life than their white counterparts. Church services more often feature political addresses from public officials, and civic political meetings more often feature prayers and hymns. African-American churches are dominated by the key themes of oppression and deliverance, expressed as collective properties that require collective efforts to provide increased opportunities (309).

Anyone remotely familiar with the African-American community knows that affiliation with the Democratic Party is held in high esteem, or at least as a lesser evil than the Republican Party. Harris-Lacewell observes that Sunday morning visits to large, influential Black churches have been a standard strategy of Democratic office seekers for more than fifty years and that the Black church consists of the partisan faithful (180).

Tasha S. Philpot notes how the Republican Party has recently instituted strategies to

target black Christian voters, hoping to chip away at the loyalty of African-American believers through moral wedge issues such as gay marriage and abortion.

The Core Beliefs of the African-American Church

Just as mainline Protestant churches have an array of denominations, so does the inner-city, African-American church. When looking at the church landscape today some church leaders are emphasizing their core beliefs from more of a social point of view, focusing on their perceived ills such as abortion, gay rights, and the size of government. Conversely, others are more focused on biblical teaching, although the former would say they base their teachings on the guidance of Scripture.

Within the African-American church is also a divergence among its churches as to the core teachings; however, they do have a common bond as previously noted. The history of the African-American church is a history of America. The African-American church has always had a dual function, addressing social inequalities of its members and providing a source for biblical teaching. While the post-civil rights era has seen less (as least to some) social inequalities, the core beliefs are still addressing modern-day issues while bringing people to Christ.

Paris provides this assessment of the post civil-rights Black church:

In the post-civil rights era, the primary public mission of African American churches may be classified in the following ways: (a) providing various kinds of membership services e.g., doing what they had always done in trying to meet the needs of their members by distributing food and clothing; comforting the sick, the elderly, and the dying; promoting mutual support programs); programs for all ages such as gospel singing, liturgical dance, religious drama; recreational events; local, regional, and national assemblies. (b) organizing various types of community service programs: i.e., credit unions, unemployment services, catering meals, day-care centers, church sponsored day schools, after-school programs, Saturday schools, health fairs; senior citizens' homes; allowing their properties to be used by community organizations such as Alcohol Anonymous

Twelve-Step Program; Ten-step Programs, organizations for the blind and the deaf; etc. (c) integrating African American religion with Afrocentric cultural esthetics to help African Americans develop a stronger sense of pride in their African identity by adapting selected African traditions for liturgical, cultural and psychological purposes: e.g., Kwanza celebration, wearing African apparel, adopting African names, African liturgical dance, rites of passage programs especially for youth, group visits to Africa, etc. (d) building political and para-political organizations: i.e., providing resources of space, programs, and volunteers for political campaigning, on-going support of traditional civil rights organizations, black colleges, black businesses, The Children's Defense Fund, and ad hoc responses to racially inspired civic outrages; (e) developing ecumenical and other types of coalitions: i.e., inter denominational ministers' alliances/fellowships, national and world councils of churches, forming independent not-for-profit subsidiaries for governmental funding purposes; and other community service projects. (481-82)

Paris highlights how the role of the African-American church is a guiding force in the black community, organizing not only religious activities but also social functions vital to the communities' well-being.

I am concerned when I see members in the African-American church but also any Christian church or especially in pagan religions and denominations worship the pastor or leader or not truly test against Scripture to what they are being taught. The basic principle Paul outlines for guidance in the early Church in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 should be the core for any church in the twenty-first century, no matter who makes up its congregation. Paul expands on this principle in 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15: "It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of *mouth* or by letter from us". (NASB). The apostle warned of false or ego-based teachers. In 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, he informs the church, "and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words or wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." In these

passages, Paul reminds his audience to build one's foundation on the gospel and not to be swayed by false teachings.

George D. Younger, in his article on the authority of Scripture for Baptists, thinks the key for all Baptist churches is remaining true to Scripture. The foundation of his thought was learning to have honest inquiry with open dialogue among those with differing views. Another key point Younger stresses is the need to reconfirm the core belief as Baptist Christians (153). The author was writing for the American Baptist reader primarily, but his message if properly applied, can reach across other Baptist sects, as well as any Christian denomination.

According to Paris, African-Americans cannot rest on the accomplishments of the past nor on their success in retraining members and raising budgets. He notes that African-American religious leaders have the capacity to initiate and sustain widespread public debate on the devastating social problems threatening the lives of one-third of the nation's citizens and countless millions overseas (493). James H. Harris states that the Black church has a responsibility to teach its constituents the value of economic interdependence, so blacks can launch an all-out effort to become producers and not simply consumers ("Pastoral Theology", 48).

Barnes' study "Enter into His Gates: An Analysis of Black Church Participation Patterns" evaluates adult participatory patterns along national denominational lines. Her findings support previous studies (Lincoln and Mamiya; Schaller; Thumma) regarding church growth and relationship with lively, creative worship, practical sermons, and exciting overall church programs. Her study concludes that many blacks continue to look to the Black church for varied needs and that future research should consider whether

these needs are being consistently met. Barnes' study also parallels prior research (Taylor; Chatters, and Levin; Lincoln and Mamiya; Sherkat) that many blacks affiliated with mainline religion still require priestly programs such as Bible studies, as well as more practical activities that meet familial, marital, and individual needs. According to Barnes, what a congregation does, in terms of worship and programs, appears to be more salient than what it is, in terms of denominational ties (194).

Barnes in "Enter into His Gates" concludes that adult participation in contemporary African-American churches that underwent growth was influenced by church activities such as Bible studies and religious education as well as more practical activities addressing marital, family and individual needs.

Robert Smith also does a historical review of black America. The Historical Black Thematic Universe or HBTU of blacks in early American history of racism, slavery, and white Christianity have helped shaped today's Black theology (182). Smith's thoughts are followed by the Contemporary Black Thematic Universe (CBTU), where capitalism, consumerism, and racism are the main themes (183).

Harris writes that ministry in urban areas cannot be confined to traditional ecclesiastical actions or expectations. Moreover, the realities of poverty, poor housing, and high unemployment among blacks are representative of problems that generally are not addressed by the traditional role of the clergy ("Black Ministers and Laity in the Urban Church", Harris 86).

Many church and civic leaders wonder if enough is being done by the African-American church to meet the needs of the Black community in the twenty-first century. According to Lewis and Trulear, evidence suggests that African-American churches have

been slow in responding to recent calls for greater faith-based involvement in the social services arena through seeking grants from federal and state governments although they continue their traditional patterns of providing social welfare services. As African-American churches move farther into the twenty-first century and many social problems facing families and communities remain protracted, new ways of thinking are needed to increase the power of African-American churches to influence services, policies and, ultimately, outcomes (343).

Harris laments that the time has come to pool the intellectual, spiritual, and economic power of the black community in a self-help effort to alleviate its problems (“Pastoral Theology”, 44). For some in the African-American community, they question whether the new social outreach programs are biblically based or if they are taking a forefront to salvation. In addition, they want also to know if the proper resources are in place to make the programs truly effective.

Barnes suggests that racial tensions (e.g., Jena 6 incident and the limited national attention) raises questions towards tolerance, acceptance, and receptivity of blacks in predominately white secular and sacred spaces, thus influencing the Black church’s role as a safe haven for blacks and future participation patterns (“Enter into His Gates”, 195).

In terms of social service programs, Lewis and Trulear believe that the African-American church has not realized their full power and potential to address many of the social problems facing African-Americans. The church needs to develop new ways of thinking in order to increase the power of African-American churches to influence services, utilizing more than its own traditional hands-on paradigm (362).

In an interview with Dr. Cheryl Sanders and Dr. Robert M. Franklin, conducted by Jacqueline J. Lewis-Tillman, when asked what she saw in the African-American church, Dr. Sanders had the following opinion:

Well, I see a mixed picture. I see signs of people being empowered—led by gifted and empowering leaders. Nevertheless, I also see people who are weary. There is a struggle to stay motivated, and there are so many challenges black leaders face. There are such high expectations of black church leaders—activisms, community work, et cetera. They have full plates. But I see breakthroughs. (8)

Frazier E. Franklin describes part of the challenge facing the Black church today as reconciling the unfinished agenda of the civil-rights movement, including helping people move from dependency and welfare to self-sufficiency (9).

African-American Church Attendance Characteristics

Few studies have explored the effects and reasoning of attendance within the African-American church. Mattis et al. did an in-depth analysis of the lack of attendance by African-American males. Their study showed attendance was lower among younger males, who placed less importance on religion and concerns regarding religion, and the dominant role of religion into other social areas. Bryon R. Johnson, David Larson, Spencer De Li and Sung Jang provide an in-depth study that focuses on church attendance and religious salience in the inner city with large crime areas. In their study, which included young black males in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, they found evidence that church attendance had an inverse effect on these youth's participation in crime. Yvette Alex-Assensoh's study of inner-city church attendance's relationship to political participation theorized that for blacks, the perception of social isolation and, to a lesser extent, family context undermined church attendance and political participation much more than the poverty rate of inner-city communities.

Sherkat, a sociology professor investigated attendance differences within African-American denominations as he believed that such differences have been largely ignored; therefore, scholars have not examined whether generational declines in religious participation are group specific, rather than a function of age where active constituents in the African-American mainline denominations are pushed to other organizations (222).

In addition to the changing membership levels in the inner-city church, some of which can be attributed to the black flight to the suburbs, other problems may result, such as dwindling resources left in the inner city when this happens. Lincoln and Mamiya notes that city centers are left with storefront churches and the occasional megachurch to meet the community needs, with the latter attracting suburban commuters (14).

Although not specific to any church or denomination, Schaller lists forty-four ways to increase church attendance. Interestingly, he starts with offering a note of hope, stating that “the most important single factor in increasing worship attendance is to present the Good News as good news” (23-24). However, the interpretation of this simplistic statement was beyond the scope of this writing as it can be altered to fit most pastoral visions, regardless of denomination.

Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III in his writings on the African Church stresses the role of the relationship between the local church and its community as a key not only for growth but for survival. The role of the African-American church within the community, according to Stewart, is to adopt a useful relational strategy for increasing growth in churches. The relational aspects of black life and culture are essential in building community and sharing material and human resources. Stewart thinks that Afrocentric

values must be considered in church growth and that, as a rule, blacks identification with a church is not denomination based but based on how the church meets personal needs.

The African-American church can provide both guidance and an outlet for those in the community. Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda M. Chatters and Jeffrey S. Levin identify three ways that the Black church supports African-Americans: being responsive to members of the community whose access to traditional social institutions has been restricted; providing material, emotional, and spiritual assistance; and, having a prominent role in the positive appraisal of self (193-203).

In addressing how to attract and retain a younger crowd, the senior pastor may have to consider the need to adapt to a more contemporary worship style, such as more upbeat or gospel rap music. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, music in the Black church is a dynamic phenomenon, always subject to the tension among religious traditions and customs and the musical styles of the day. However, the boundary line between sacred and secular black music is often a thin one (381). Barnes in “Religion and Rap Music” notes that gospel rap music was derived from hip-hop music, and while support among younger audiences is strong, its overall acceptance has been slow (322). Stacy Floyd-Thomas in a study done as part of the Black Religious Scholars Group, states that despite these differences, the hip hop generation in its Christian music recognizes the Bible as a source of enduring wisdom and critical insight about both the historic and contemporary black experience (57). Stewart also favors dancing in worship. To dance in worship is to put the whole body into praise activity. Emanating from Africa, black dance has always been a vital expression of black worship and part of the sacralizing activity of black spiritual beliefs (123).

The most successful endeavors pastors have found in reaching the youth is through music, whether by choirs or concert events to the training of young people in vocal and instrumental forms. Lincoln and Mamiya note that the musical heritage of the Black church has been one of the enduring gems of black culture that has enriched the cultures of the world (345). Today an increasing number of black churches are embracing praise dancing and hip hop-youth/teen events. However, few studies exist in the way of how these events help a church retain their memberships, and if the individual church is also developing these youth in a spiritually manner.

Melva W. Costen writes that the Black church glorifies God in a variety of ways, including the musical traditions brought from Africa and applied today, and that the minister is encouraged to immerse himself or herself into a theology that lifts up black liturgy as an authentic expression of the faith (402-03).

As the individual Black church grows in attendance and visibility in the community, it must keep its biblical calling. Outreach and helping those in need is a calling as well as a worthy endeavor, but Harris laments about the independence of the Black church:

It may account for the almost irrational and irreligious regard for the building fund. It has been a means for churchgoers to establish their autonomy and independence. The building fund, however, need not have precedence over missions and the goal of transforming the condition of life for blacks in America. ("Pastoral Theology", 17)

With the growth of the Black church, its members have to review their actions for the direction of the church in assessing how their actions may impact the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the community. With the increasing number of black megachurches, their impact on the local community is becoming more prevalent.

The Black MegaChurch

The megachurch phenomena has spread across America, including within its inner-city borders. Whatever one's thoughts of this type of church, given its rising status and acceptance, it likely will not fade away, at least in the near term. The focus of this project is not to debate the positive and negatives of Black megachurches but to recognize that they have created a strong force within the African-American inner-city church community and, therefore, have affected church attendance characteristics.

Patterson observes in her study of the megachurch in America that the appeal of megachurches transcends race, class, gender, and socioeconomic status. Corporate executives, minimum wage earners, school teachers, and college students are all willing to participate in the megachurch experience. Megachurches are here to stay (1). She correctly and importantly points out, however, that megachurches and prosperity gospel are not interchangeable.

Some may naturally assume that a large church or megachurch has few problems or operates much more smoothly than its small church counterpart. Pinn in his study of the African-American church in the post-civil rights era notes that "in order to service members, megachurches must creatively develop ministerial staffs that are able to function independent of the pastor while maintaining the pastor's vision for the church" (137). He brings out that the megachurch is not immune from some of the problems the smaller African-American church may face.

Pinn also addresses the challenges facing the African-American church in the new millennium. As the twenty-first century begins, even Black churches that have no interest in the megachurch phenomenon are likely to find themselves forced to respond. He notes

it may be possible that these megachurches, particularly the nondenominational ones, will challenge the vitality of more traditionally aligned denominational churches because of their doctrinal and structural flexibility (139). Paris writes that today's African-American megachurch is filled with the thirty and forty-something members thanking God for their success in corporate America (487). That thought is one aspect of this study, in reviewing the identified churches, if a decidedly skewed level of *professional white collar* are attending the megachurch at the expense of the small old-time community church.

Mark Chaves studied the growth of the number of megachurches from a macro viewpoint, focusing on mainstream denominations. He concludes that as a whole this growth may have come about through cost increase where running a church at a customary level has become more difficult due to increased costs, which have outpaced revenues. These increasing costs are pushing people out of smaller churches that are forced to cut programming and quality, forcing people to join a larger church that can provide programs that were eliminated in the smaller church due to cost-cutting measures (24).

Benjamin K. Watts in his study of African-American church growth made the following assessment:

Church growth in the African American community does not appear to be tied to social justice ministries. Most super-mega churches do not use social justice as their selling point, but for the most part appear to advertise and proselytize on the basis of their theological slant, offering a clear self help self improvement spiritual support based message. (97)

The self-help movement is becoming more prevalent America with the emergence of many pastors who teach a prosperity gospel. Given the overall lower economic status of

blacks when compared to whites, the prosperity message may sound like a way to better one's financial well-being.

In their comprehensive study of the Black church, Floyd-Thomas states how common for church leadership, both pastors and laity, to move beyond the local church and into local, regional, and in some cases national and international politics as a way to learn prophetic dimensions of ministry as means of liberation and hope building (167). Patterson concludes that when properly organized this church can be useful in helping the black community both socially and economically.

Modern-Day Challenges Facing the African-American Church

As the African-American church moves into the twenty-first century, it has new and different challenges. Its members do not battle the blatant racism of their ancestors but still has to deal with some form of racism. Pastors faced with dwindling memberships may face the need to reevaluate their worship services in order to attract a newer younger base. As outlined previously, the African-American church is a cornerstone of the community and looked upon as a guiding source in dealing with modern-day issues such as economic betterment. The African-American church is forced to address the challenges of spreading the gospel against the competitive backdrop of other churches emphasizing a prosperity message or a more afrocetric message. With the overall improved status of the black middle class, the additional threat of losing skilled leaders to secular institutions becomes prevalent. Lincoln and Mamiya note the existence of talented black men and women who have developed their leadership skill in black churches and used them as a launching pad for other careers in black society, such as education, music, and entertainment (383). Unless a particular church wants to remain

dormant, its leadership base has to be flexible and ready to meet ongoing changes in what its members want from their church.

Contemporary Church Services

I am often asked by churchgoers if modern services, which involve praise dancing, drums, or audio/visual aids, are anti-biblical. The function of this study was not to judge a worship service, but one should keep in mind Amos 5:21-23 when designing or deciphering if a service is based on Scripture. This passage shows God's disapproval of the Israelites' worship because of their disobedience to his laws. Bringing an Afrocentricity or any ethnicity into a worship service is not wrong, but when it is the primary focus or makes the gospel secondary or less, then that church has fallen away from its purpose and calling. Lincoln and Mamiya assess this issue: "However, the boundary line between sacred and secular black music is often a thin one" (381). The worship service within the African-American church is a reflection of its past and a means of its identity. Harold Dean Trulear notes that in the practice of African-Christian ritual the church regularly rehearses its basic self-understanding and ideal way of being in the world. That world is interpreted for the congregation in the ritual of black worship. The everyday life of African-Americans is characterized by "trouble" (25). Related to this thought is Lincoln and Mamiya's comment that African-Americans' freedom has always been communal in nature. In America, black people have seldom been perceived or or treated as individuals; they have usually been dealt with as representatives of their race, an external projection (5).

Michael Tillotson writes on the danger of the Black church losing its identity:

Contemporary Christianity has not been altered to provide utility for African renaissance and does not address the particular needs of African

Americans as oppressed people. In its current form, it seems incapable of promoting African values, culture, aesthetics, and historical texts. (1018)

He also warns against the *Word Church* (i.e., another name for prosperity gospel).

Tillotson concludes that this phenomenon and its resultant messages of consumption and materiality, if accepted uncritically by African-Americans, serve as a distraction from the ancestral responsibility to challenge injustice, fight for the collective interests of African-Americans, and pursue a climate of resistance against any form of human oppressions (1029).

In addressing how Black churches can reach youth, Barnes states that gospel rap music is effective and its inclusion shows a direct relation of increase in new members (Religion and Rap Music: An Analysis of Black Church Usage, 319). Mattis et al. state that religious institutions may be out of touch with the spiritual and worship needs of many African-American men. Religious institutions may find restructuring religious services useful in order to pique men's interest and increase their motivation to participate (400).

Within my current church situation, the head pastor realized the need to attract and retain younger members and has thus introduced such concepts as rap lock-ins and the use of praise dancers. The use of praise dances is of course, not widely accepted by some of the older longtime members who have not fully embraced these new concepts, feeling that such dancing in the church is not biblical.

I have also had many discussions with some of my fellow Christians regarding praise dancing or lively instrumental congregational participatory worship being against God's teachings. In terms of biblical support, I would refer the person to Psalms 149:1-5 where the Lord gladly welcomes worship to him through dancing, singing, and

instruments. In addition, support could be derived from 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 where the singing and instruments were so loud that the priest could not minister because the praising filled the Lord's house.

Two other significant factors are also becoming more commonplace within the African-American church and ultimately, how it deals with retaining and gaining members, liberation theology and prosperity gospel. With a seemingly growing distrust or lack of satisfaction with established traditional religion, avenues for non-Christian (e.g., Islam, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) or traditional denominations with skewed biblical interpretations (e.g., gay acceptance, charismatic) are left open to infiltrate the black community. Sherkat notes that only in newer sect religions such as Church of God and Christ and some Pentecostal denominations can one find what he terms as "old-time religion," those that stresses spiritual over material and salvation over political mobilization (230).

Williams examines different theologies of evangelism (conservative, liberal, and black), liberation theology, black Protestantism, Pentecostalism, and Islam against orthodox Christianity. He finds that black evangelicalism is the only one that meets the needs of the African-American community from a biblical foundation.

Liberation Theology

Again, while the focus of this paper is not to evaluate or provide a detailed analysis of liberation theology, it is summarized to show how it led to Black theology, which is part of the continuing factors and influences that are shaping the African-American religious community. However, I would opine that many of the more

politically or prosperity-based ministries in the black community are rooted in the liberation theology movement.

Although liberation theology today has an international appeal, its roots were planted in Latin America within the Roman Catholic Church in response to the many social injustices perceived by the masses in the 1950s and 1960s. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest, coined the term.

Even though liberation theology originated within the Roman Catholic Church, it faces criticism from the Catholic Church. Prior to becoming Pope, Ratzinger, who served as the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, called liberation theology “a fundamental threat to the faith of the Church,” and the body he heads accused the liberation theologians of using “concepts uncritically borrowed from Marxist ideology” (12). Not only has liberation theology infiltrated the inner-city, African-American church, but also mainline denominations.

Black Liberation Theology

Black liberation theology maintains that African-Americans must be liberated from multiple forms of bondage social, political, economic, and religious. This formulation views Christian theology as a theology of liberation. According to Cone, liberation theology is “a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ,” (“A Black Theology of Liberation”, 1).

Cone and Wilmore also provide the following as a definition of Black theology:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of

“blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression. (1:101).

Cone and Wilmore see Black theology as a religion to combat oppression through the power of God.

Harris-Lacewell, in discussing the role of the Black church in contemporary politics, writes that for African-Americans evil takes the very specific and identifiable form of white supremacy first through enslavement, then through Jim Crow and lynch mob rule, and continuing in seemingly intractable racial inequality. The evil of racism must be reconciled with the idea of a loving and powerful God (184).

Bruce L. Fields of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School addresses Black theology and came to the following conclusion:

Blackness is not just a reference to skin color; it is a symbol abounding in meaning and force. The reality of rejection, dehumanization, fear, and oppression is reflected in this word. As a symbol of oppression, the concept of blackness allows for fruitful theological reflection. (13)

From Harris-Lacewell's and Fields' comments, one can assess that liberation theology for the African-American community grew out of a necessity to address the blight of blacks in America.

Harris in his assessment of liberation theology in his *Pastoral Theology* book makes the following observations. He stated that black liberation theology enables the poor to possess a sense of dignity and hope by reminding them that God is on their side. Harris noted that the church has the responsibility for teaching blacks that poverty is a direct result of a greedy and oppressive society that puts personal gain ahead of community needs. The church has to be innovative and confront those who perpetuate the

myths, and teach black people how to help each others. Harris compares blacks plight to that of Job and concludes that helping the poor is a part of the justice and righteousness of God, and the Black church (79-79).

West and Glaude believe that Black theology and Marist thought share three characteristics. First, both adhere to a similar methodology, the same way of approaching their respective subject matter and arriving at conclusions. Second, both link some notion of liberation to the future socioeconomic conditions of the downtrodden. Third, both attempt to put forward trenchant critiques of liberal capitalist America (875). The last thought was the most important, according to West and Glaude, and mirrors Curtis J. Evans' thought that Black theology for racist America was what Marist philosophy was for capitalist Europe—not a way to understand the world but an attempt to change it (26-27). West and Glaude also compares the black American's experience with that of the Israelites, citing a quote from David Walker a freed slave in his 1829 "Appeal":

Though our cruel oppressors and murderers, may (if possible) treat us more cruel, as Pharaoh did the Children of Israel, yet the God of the Ethiopians, has been pleased to hear our moans in consequence of oppression, and the day of our redemption from abject wretchedness draweth near, when we shall be enabled, in the most extended sense of the word, to stretch forth our hand to the Lord our God. (313)

The plight of the Israelites is commonly compared to that of the African brought into slavery in America. The argument that Jesus was radical and fought for the poor and society's downtrodden gave further support for this movement. Biblical comfort and support of oppression is seen in Amos 5:24, and Luke 4:18 provides a message of freedom to the oppressed through Christ. D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, noted New Testament scholars, state that Luke's Gospel evinces a special interest in the

problems of the poor and the outcasts and that Jesus has more to say about the economic aspects of discipleship in Luke's Gospel than in any other (206).

James H. Cone was instrumental in showing how Scripture was the force behind Black theology or a theology of liberation. He ascertains that the subject or thought of a Black theology was insubstantial, because black theologians and scholars either shied away from this topic because of seminary training controlled by whites who did not consider Black theology or did not want to associate Black theology with the Christian experience (Wilmore 177-79).

As this new Black theology developed, it started to meld into the current black movement during the civil rights movement. According to Cone, King's nonviolent and turn-the-other-cheek thought process of northern ministers did not work until they realized that the North had serious racial problems like the South and this approach would not work (178-80). The development of Black Power by what Cone describes as un-Christian, black religious leaders had the task of showing how Christianity and the gospel, defined as "the white man's religion," could both focus on politics and religion (182). Cone's views, however, are not widely accepted by all of black academia. J. Deotis Roberts in her book "Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black theology takes a more passive account of the need of Black theology and stresses reconciliation among blacks and whites. Dr. William R. Jones also takes a somewhat different view of Black theology by questioning many of the then-leading black theologians in their approach to addressing Black theology in relation to God and the Bible by putting the situation of Blacks and places more of blacks and other underprivileged situation on humankind.

Cone also writes that black theology cannot just be a divine revelation but that this revelation needs to retain its biblical emphasis, while being relevant to the situation of oppressed blacks. (“A Black Theology of Liberation”, 45). He gives further support of Black theology by showing how God delivered the weak and defenseless people in Exodus and stating that God has the power and strength and is able to destroy the enslaving power of the mighty Pharaoh (“Black Theology vol.1”, 161-62). Taking the account of the Israelites exodus from Egypt, God shows he is compassionate for those undergoing oppression, such as the African-Americans plight of slavery in America.

Fields addresses the role of hermeneutics in the future of Black theology. If future study accomplishes both the construction of a sociocultural liberative theology and the faithful adherence to the basic doctrinal beliefs that make the Black church a church, then Black theology will have a future in the Black church, in academia, and in the broad spectrum of sociocultural communities (79).

Lincoln and Mamiya realize how the Black church is faced with new problems of addressing the needs of the poor within the urban areas, as some blacks migrate to more rural or suburban areas. The challenge for the future is whether black clergy and their churches will attempt to transcend class boundaries and reach out to the poor, as these class lines continue to solidify with demographic changes in black communities. If the traditional Black church fails in its attempt to include the urban poor, the possibility of a Black church of the poor may emerge, consisting largely of independent, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal storefront churches (384).

Robert A. Bennett thinks that the black person’s experience in America is not that of the Jewish-Christian experience in Palestine but an experience of its own: “Though not

of canonical status, the story of the Black man in America is a self-validating account of faith that when heard and heeded, helps Black and white respond more creatively to the divine word for our present situation” (130). Bennett in his assessment provides the unique struggle of black’s in America, and that it cannot be compared to other oppressed people.

In his study of the religion of Black Power, Vincent Harding writes that young people returning back to the ghettos from college or prison struggle against “principalities and powers,” which controls the life of their people. Often, they find returning to the Christian churches difficult because so often they have appeared irrelevant to the real needs of the community, which are generally controlled by older men and women (West and Glaude 737). Harris, while not directly analyzing liberation theology takes a slightly different approach, stating that Christian education when working with Black theology can dramatically change churches and communities (“Pastoral Theology”, 113). Harris also stresses the following:

In order for blacks to change the condition of life in the urban centers of America, serious and drastic changes need to be made in their own lives. This introspection cannot be made by an outside agency or organization, but needs to come from within the individual nurtured by the Word of God as it is interpreted and practiced by the black church. Otherwise, change will not root in the heart and soul. (116)

Increased involvement of churches in pressing political issues during the 1990s brought the work of the Black church to the attention of many who held no prior knowledge of the church. While the influx of these *first timers* bolstered the potential for the local church’s activism, it also forced an evaluation of inner workings of the Black church (Pinn 32).

Prosperity Gospel

One of the growing and non-biblical teachings infiltrating Christianity in America and especially the African-American community is the prosperity gospel. With the overall low economic status of the inner-city African-American community, prosperity messages provide a potential guiding light, saying that the Lord is anxiously waiting to grant success to all who want it. Pastors such as Creflo Dollar, T. D. Jakes, and Frederick Price often give messages that emphasize a prosperity theme. However, many blacks also fall prey to white ministers who embrace the same philosophy, such as Joel Osteen, have many African-American followers. Adding fuel to this phenomenon is the television media, namely the Trinity Broadcasting Network and Black Entertainment Television, each of which has an array of *prosperity teachers*, many asking for seed money to secure one's blessings.

Showing his support of prosperity gospel, Creflo Dollar's Web site has the following statement:

We have been given keys and strategies to demolish containment in our lives. It is up to us to take what belongs to us. Two of the most potent weapons Satan uses to keep Christians contained are deception and distraction. Deception causes you to believe a lie, and distraction is an intrusion of the mind, designed to cause confusion. Any time these two attacks come against you, be certain Satan is trying to keep you confined to your present circumstances. He doesn't want you to break out of the land of average and into the abundant life God has prepared for you. By keeping you contained, particularly in your finances, he limits your ability to help expand the Kingdom of God. Financial increase is something God has promised His people. The Bible is a book of covenants, and wealth is a topic that is discussed in detail throughout the Scriptures. When you discover a promise from God, it belongs to you, when you release your faith. Once you believe you receive it, you must go after it, in the spirit realm, with great intensity. Matthew 11:12 describes the stance a Christian must take when it comes to laying hold of the promises of God: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." When Jesus talks

about “taking it by force,” he means to seize the things that are rightfully yours by applying your faith consistently, refusing to let up, even when you don’t see anything happening or changing. This is what it means to release violent faith. I like to use the illustration of water dripping or running down a rocky surface or canyon. At first, the water doesn’t have a significant effect on the rock; however, if it continues to drip consistently, over time, it will begin to wear the rock down and cut a path through it. This is the same way we must apply the Word of God against our circumstances. If debt is staring us in the face, we must consistently apply the force of God’s Word against that situation by speaking and acting on it to such a point where it begins to change and rearrange the situation. The same applies to lack and insufficiency. The Bible contains specific scriptures which promise abundance and provision. Don’t let them just sit in your Bible.

This passage reveals how Scripture can be interpreted in various ways, often to fit a particular belief being championed.

The roots of prosperity ministry can perhaps be traced to blacks’ historical roots. Baldwin states that the pervasiveness of racism led Black church leaders to conclude that economic power was perhaps the most significant ingredient in their people’s efforts to establish themselves as a force in both their own communities and in the society as a whole (21). Calvin E. Bruce and William R. Jones describe cultural reawakening as the backbone of Black theology, and the black culture sees in theological demonstration of God’s love a source of pride in the re-creation of black humanity (15).

Lundstrom wrote on how using Biblical techniques, one can enjoy supernatural prosperity. Harris-Lacewell in addressing the prosperity gospel within many large congregations with fast growing populations of black preach the prosperity gospel. In its crudest form, prosperity gospel teaches that followers who tithe regularly and maintain positive, faithful attitudes and language will reap financial gains in the form of higher incomes and nicer homes and cars. In more subtle forms, prosperity gospel connects God’s mission for his people to financial freedom and security for individual Christians

(186-87). Patterson concludes that while the teachings of Dollar may be at odds with traditional Christian thinking prosperity theology may be useful in facilitating the goals of economic, social, and political empowerment historically advocated by the Black church.

Harris aptly comments, “The evangelical message of the African American church has been a message to enhance self-esteem and worth. The church historically has taught blacks that they had “worth” apart from socioeconomic status” (“Pastoral Theology”, 115). Paris notes how the black middle-class felt their rewards and success was from God:

Are the inner city inhabitants free of blame for the success of the prosperity movement or the trend of getting away from focusing on the gospel? Have we as a race, become complacent when we start to achieve a certain level of success? Do African American middle-class Christians not rejoice in their material success and view it as God’s compensation for their Christian devotion and moral integrity? Do they not view their church life as a protective measure for God’s continued material blessings? Do they not make every effort to synthesize Christian devotion with loyalty to their respective fraternities and sororities, the Boule, Jack and Jill, and similar organizations? In addition, are not the latter organizations fully exclusive both economically and racially in their membership policies? (489)

Harrison, in his study of the impact of social relevance in the prosperity gospel movement, states that religion and religious institutions of African slaves and their descendants in America have always had to be concerned with the material, social, political, and spiritual needs of their followers. To limit ministry to the spiritual realm was a luxury they could not afford, given the legacy of slavery and their post-Emancipation experience of discrimination. The role of Black churches and other religious institutions in their communities is to take up the slack and meet the needs of the people (132-33).

Christian Education

With the changing political landscape, inner-city problems of crime, poverty and joblessness, and infiltration of non-Christian religions, the church will continue to be called upon as a strong voice in the African-American community. A key step in any church should not just be limited to bringing the un-churched to Christ but include going the extra step of having those new to Christ continue the process and reciprocate and brings others to the Lord. The key to this rippling effect is nurturing those new to Christ, in how to teach the gospel to nonbelievers. Elonda Clay in her paper on technology trends and the Black church believes that the Black church is within the midst of a paradigm shift affecting its mission, the way we experience church, redesigns the global context for ministry, and challenges our spiritual beliefs (154). First, technological literacy must be raised, bringing about a need to recover the historical contributions to science and technology made by blacks. Next forums for public discourse between churches and professional associations, such as the National Society of Black Engineers, Black Data Processing Associates, or the National Medical Association, about the ethical and social issues of technology and race should be created. Finally, blacks need encouragement of adaptation and innovation of technology to empower people of color through ministry, Bible study, proclamation, and conversations with other theologies of technology. Clay also states that the scientists, technicians, and technology lawyers within congregations should encourage the youth to pursue these careers (177-78).

Adding to the role of the current African-American church is the part of the churches' Christian education that should be Afrocentric focused:

Departments of Christian education in the black church must address new attitudes and social realities and consider new approaches if our Christian

education programs are to become more relevant, vital, and successful in their contributions to the ministry of the church. Observing that Christ spent his life among those undervalued by society, the ministries in African American churches provide for the least, the last, and the lost” among us (and including us). (McKinney 41)

McKinney further states the understanding of African-centered Christian theology by giving her biblical support of Africans in the Bible, including Jesus (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Ellen-McKinney Chart of Blacks in the Bible

| Name | Text | Country of Origin | History |
|--------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Jesus | Revelation 1:10-19 Hebrews 12:1-2 | Bethlehem of Judea | Revelation 1:14-15 gives a physical description of Jesus: hair is wooly and his feet are (colored) like brass. Jesus was a descendent of Abraham on his mother's side. Abraham was from Ur of Chaldeas, an ancient African country (Matt.1:1) |
| Jethro | Exodus 2:1-22 Exodus 18:1-12 | African Midianite and Cushite* | A Midianite black man who was father to seven daughters, Jethro was part of a community that was run by a council of elders and was based on African values. The Midianites, a successful group that had trade relationships throughout the ancient world, were not under the control of city-states managed by the Hyksos. Jethro, who was also related to Moses (Exod. 2:11-21) was known in Hebrew as Raguel or Reuel, "the friend of God"; he played an important role in the founding of the lands that became ancient Israel (Exod. 18). |
| Paul | Acts 21-22 | Cilicia in Taursis | Paul, a Jewish disciple of Jesus was from the tribe of Benjamin. The ancestry of this tribe extends to the Garden of Eden (see "References to Africa in the Bible: Eden"). Because of his dark skin, Italian soldiers mistook Paul for an Egyptian (Acts 21:37-38) |
| Peter | Matthew 27:32 Acts 4 | Bethsaida of Galilee | A peasant fisherman, first known as Simon, Peter fervently believed in the message and teachings of Jesus Christ and became a foremost preacher of his Word. (Matt. 16:18). |
| Ham | Genesis 10:1, 6 | Cush | "Father" of the African peoples, whose name is listed in the Table of Nations (Gen.10). Ham's relationship with Egypt is noted in Psalm 78:51. Genesis 10:1 describes how the ancestors of Shem and Ham are related. |
| Simon | Genesis 9:19 Genesis 10:1-10 | Cyrenaica** | Simon was a descendent of Phut, the third son of Ham (Noah's youngest son). |

*Related to Ham and noted as Ethiopian in modern versions of the Bible.

**Now known as Libya

McKinney also provides the reader with ten tips for enhancing or establishing African-centered Christian education in the local church:

1. Correcting your theology-connect African-American Christians to their actual Christian history;
2. Viewing Christian education as a tool for liberation;
3. Considering Christian teaching to be a vocation and a craft;
4. Seeing opportunities for Christian education in all classes, programs, and activities of the church;
5. Using Christian religious education to create and support a community of believers;
6. Assessing the learning needs of the congregation;
7. Being honest about your teaching style, skills, and improvement needs;
8. Asking hard questions;
9. Encouraging African-American Christians to take personal responsibility for their circumstances; and,
10. Being prayerful about the tasks, goals and expected outcomes of Christian education (46).

While McKinney should be commended on her enthusiasm and for showing Africa's role in Scripture and early Christendom, she may have gone a bit overboard by looking at Scripture from a racial instead of theological viewpoint.

Cone and Wilmore, of course has much to say about Christ being black as well as the reasoning for this belief. The blackness of Jesus does not mean that he could not be described also as red, brown, yellow, or by some other characteristic defining materially

the condition of the poor in the United States and other parts of the globe. Cone wants to emphasize the theological significance of Jesus in the context of the Black liberation struggle in the United States. He also wants to expose the racism of white churches and also encourage Black churches to embrace the biblical Christ who looks much more like oppressed blacks than white oppressors (189).

Floyd-Thomas also weighs in on what the Christian education program of the Black church should encompass:

1. It should consider the historic context out of which Christian education was formed, that is compulsory mis-education.
2. It should understand the role and identity of the pastor as the primary teacher in the congregation, as well as the role of the laity as teachers.
3. It should understand the structure of the church.
4. It should consider the multidimensional and prophetic ministry of the Black church as an educational force for its people as well as the larger society (156).

Not only have most blacks, but probably most whites, been introduced to the theory that Black people are under the Hamitic or Noah curse, which assumes that God created the Black race as a curse people. Charles B. Copher addresses this issue by concluding that interpreting such a curse that does not appear in biblical text would be engaging in blasphemy when substituting interpretations. This conclusion comes from what he says are numerous Jewish scholars, many white Gentile Christians, and an increasing number of black biblical scholars. Thus, these legends and myths have been made to serve as actual historical fact (126). Floyd-Thomas, in reviewing this controversial claim, ascertains that despite the many interpretive traditions of the story,

all agree at best that Ham demonstrated immodesty and disrespect toward his father, and, at worst, Ham assaulted his father's honor and that the text makes no explicit claims about race (61).

McKinney reviews the Christian education and worship services of Trinity United Church of Christ, one of the growing inner-city churches in Chicago. She notes the church's twenty-six point recommendations for an African-centered program of Christian education: "We must shape situations and symbols that reflect our African heritage. We must be vigilant, aware of our identity and how it affects our world views. We cannot just celebrate history. We must be African-centered and self-aware" (171). Their mission statement concludes with the following paragraph:

W.E.B. DuBois indicated that the problem in the 20th century was going to be the problem of the color line. He was absolutely correct. Our job as servants of God is to address that problem and eradicate it in the name of Him who came for the whole world by calling all men, women, boys and girls to Christ. (174)

Trinity United Church of Christ has taken the stance that their church has been called upon to act upon social injustices it perceives in the black community which is God driven.

The African-American Family

The history of the African-American church is also a history of the African-American family. While the church was a source of external strength through the perils of slavery, segregation, and racial strife, the family structure was the internal cornerstone of the African-American community. However, according to McLoyd, Hill and Dodge to group African-American families as a homogeneous group is a mistake. Even though with a common bond and shared history, great diversity brought about by variations in

immigration experiences, resident local, political views, religious beliefs and social economic status must be weighted (24).

Going forward, as in the past, the African-American church must continually be a source of strength to the community. According to C. Anthony Hunt, “the future vitality and preservation of African-American family life depends largely upon how churches wholistically address the needs that exist within the family context.” (i). R. L. Smith noted that new demands are being placed on the Black church and Black theology and each must adapt to the new demands (175).

Hunt developed seven principles as a foundation for the church’s role in African-American family preservation:

1. Unity,
2. Holiness,
3. Catholicity (universality),
4. Apostolicity,
5. *Kerygma* (proclamation),
6. *Diakonia* (service), and
7. *Koinonia* (fellowship).

He states that by implementing these principles churches can better understand the critical importance and nature of the family of God, better comprehend connections between the church and African-American families, and better develop ministries that positively impact families in the context of vitality and growth of African-American congregations in the future (v). Hunt also cautions the church to identify and address the factors that have a positive and negative impact on Christian ministry, and, by doing so,

the local church can empower its congregations in meeting its and the community needs (65).

The postmodern African-American family, while having made great socioeconomic gains in the post-civil right era, still faces social ills, such as racism, poverty, and single parent homes. The very nature of the African-American family structure is brittle. According to the US Census, a single parent heads sixty seven percent of African-American families. Additionally, homes without fathers have the following attributes:

- 63 percent of youth suicides,
- 85 percent of all children who show behavioral disorders,
- 85 percent of youths in prison, and
- 90 percent of homeless and runaway children (Children-ourinvestment.org)

Despite gains made by the African-American family, the overall economic status as a class continues to be below that of their white counterparts. In addressing how the various social programs designed to aid the African-American family have been somewhat ineffective. Robert B. Hill suggests, “There is a need for policy researchers to concentrate on the complex interactions among structure, class, and culture in the functioning of low-income and middle-income black families today” (98). Black academia has a role to provide more studies examining the structure of the African-American family.

Belinda M. Tucker and Angela D. James cite several current trends in the African-American family structure. Among these changes are (1) more unwed couples, (2) increasing divorce rate, (3) single parent head of households, (4) a decline in teenage

births, and (5) more interracial families, especially involving black males (90-93). Their study shows how in addressing the nuclear black family, the core is changing and becoming more like mainstream American families.

The African-American family today is dealing with outside help, which, according to Mattis et al., may not always be beneficial. They note that child welfare organizations can prove counter-productive when removing a child from a parent for such reasons as corporal punishment, not having the financial means to support the child, or refusing to divorce mates who have been identified as abusive (207). Linwood G. Vereen reflects that the idea of the traditional nuclear family does not mirror many American families, including the African-American family, and this fact should be incorporated in any analysis or counseling with the black family (282).

Yolanda Powell and William Powell present the African-American family with their “Nehemiah Challenge”: The key to restoration in the African-American community lies with each family. Revival will be realized by respecting ourselves, understand and follow God’s direction, place trust in one another, and revive an old-fashioned, uncompromising faith in God. Blacks must be families united before being communities reclaimed (289).

Eugene Rivers, III warns that challenges facing the black family and Black church today have evolved, and while racism is still prevalent, the core threat to the black family structure is from negative cultural and spiritual attitudes and habits that have infiltrated the African-American community, particularly the accepted role of unmarried couples living together. He further states that the Black church has to take a leading role to restore

the family by vigorously promoting a clear and Biblical view of human sexuality, marriage, and the family (4).

The African-American Pastor

As worship leaders in any church or denomination the principle that the service is to be God centered and the purpose of the church is the *missio Dei*. The Black church is challenged to meet the changing needs of its congregation. However, as J. Smith points out, these challenges are pulled by its legacy and future, and in order for the Black church to address these issues constructively and in a relevant manner, sound wisdom or *phronesis* must be employed.

Increasing criticism in recent years within the African-American community of the lack of a true or at least consensus black leader may have put more pressure on the Black church and/or pastors to have a more prominent leadership role. During the post-civil rights era, two of the more prominent black leaders have been the Reverend Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. Although ministers, their focus has been decidedly more on social venues. In the meantime, there has been an emergence of black ministers of megachurches such as Creflo Dollar or T. D. Jakes, whose ministries have come under critical analysis (Hinton; Patterson).

Alistair Kee, a white theologian in the United Kingdom, criticizes black American theologians, saying that pastors and churches have become too set on capitalistic ways in the United States and are not properly addressing the problems of black poverty and perhaps should not focus on the terms “black theology or liberation.”

Barnes summarizes what she believes the role of black leaders in addressing social issues:

Baptist clergy in general, support clergy involvement in civil rights issues and protest marches. However, seminarians and those with doctoral degrees are more likely to approve of active involvement in political action. Church of God in Christ leaders are less supportive of such involvement. In contrast, the vast majority of respondents from the CME and United Methodist communities strongly support clergy involvement in protest action (“A Comparative Analysis of the Urban Black Church in America”, 146).

Her study shows the different level of support of church clergy in the involvement of social activities among denominations. However, the level of a church’s involvement in political and social issues may not be limited to a denominational stance but also to that of the senior pastor.

Not only has the Black church been influenced by its history, but the black preacher is forced or willingly takes on more social issues than his or her white counterpart. The church becomes a viable cornerstone of the community, and the pastor confronts these issues in the Sunday message. Cleophus James LaRue identified three crucial dynamics in the sermon preparation:

1. An understanding of what blacks believe about power and the sovereign God and how that belief has traditionally informed their sacred story,
2. An awareness of and sensitivity to the history and culture of black life in America, and
3. An insightful competence in describing and addressing the many and varied life situations (domains of experience) that blacks experience daily in America and an ability to wed the Scriptures to those experiences in a practical and relevant manner. (114)

Often the sermon will be one of the gospel sprinkled with a bit of social commentary.

Paris notes that the African-American pastors’ are thought to be divinely vested and thereby their authority is rarely questioned by the laity. Those who are disturbed by this action remain at a distance from the church’s internal decision-making process (487-88). Interestingly, Paris speaks of the good of these churches in terms of helping those in

need economically and spiritually, as well as being a political platform for the power elite within their respective communities (488). Similarly, even health care officials have done studies stressing the importance of the African-American church taking a leading role in getting better health care in its community (Giger et al).

Trulear discusses the relationship between pastoral theology and the African-American church:

Although one cannot deny the social and political leadership roles occupied by Black preachers, their role in leading the local church (i.e., their function in institutional ecclesiastical structures and their relationship to their congregations) looms just as large in defining their everyday work. (19)

He goes on further to state, “In fact, one suspects that the preacher’s work in the local church is the deciding element to his or her pastoral identity in the eyes of the congregation” (19). Social relevance for the pastor is also stressed by Trulear, who believes that black pastoral theology is not only necessary but also more intellectually honest than many white versions that masquerade as insights for the practice of ministry from their white traditions (24). African-American worship is the ritual performance that communicates the meaning of life to the black community. The role of the pastor in the worship service is central to that drama (25). Evidence also exists that black pastors feel the pressure to provide their congregations with both spiritual and social satisfaction. Michael I. N. Dash notes that while African-American pastors think that their congregations are spiritually sound, they are actually concerned with social justice issues and community outreach (161).

Dash also outlines the leadership qualities of an effective pastor. Effectual pastoral leadership seeks to empower the congregation to be faithful to their identity as

the people of God and to be obedient witnesses through their lives in congregation and community. They must also be competent and committed to empowering others to effect transformation, through the Spirit, in their own lives and the lives of others (171-72). He also quotes Ammerman: “A pastor who exhibits religious authenticity is one who is trusted—and granted personal authority—because he or she has ‘head and heart’ together, that is he or she is trusted as both being competent and having spiritual depth” (172). This statement would be hard to dispute; however, a pastor who exhibits religious authenticity may be doing so without undergoing a sound theological test of his or hers teaching by the members.

Congregational vitality is further addressed by Dash, noting that vital congregations have a clear sense of purpose and explicit member expectations are strictly enforced (174). Pastor, leaders and members must operate in unison, and not in silos or as rogue rebels. As Dash concludes, ongoing congregational self-assessments are a necessary component for church vitality (175).

Through open and honest communications with all members and leaders, a church may greatly avoid potential conflicts. However, in order for open and honest communication to be an effective tool, all involved must first learn to be critical of others in a nonconfrontational manner and not let their egos interfere with the progress of the church or, as seen with many pastors, with their self-prescribed goals.

L. S. Bond, a white homiletics professor, provides an insightful view of the various factors that go into African-American preaching and believes that it cannot be viewed commonly as different only in style and delivery but even in how the gospel is presented.

Richard Curtis Chapple, Jr., a homiletics professor, in assessing the role of the black preacher, writes that the black preacher must represent the cultural suffering and sociopolitical realities of black Americans as part of his or her own lived experience (36). He also concludes that the African-American church discourse is shaped in a manner that intends for the congregation to impact the shaping of sermonic discourse (i.e., preaching; (37).

In *Pastoral Theology*, Harris writes the following about the black preacher's sermon:

The sermon is the heart of the worship experience. Most have heard it said that "if the minister can't preach, he is doomed in the black church." Although there is a growing perception of preaching today as tantamount to "whooping, squawling, and hollering," the black minister must be a responsible herald of the gospel. This responsibility means merging good, authentic homiletic form and substance into a powerful sermon. It is simply not enough for preachers or parishioners to shout and sing. While emotion is very important and preaching style critical to the overall message, the black preacher has a moral and theological responsibility to develop a sound hermeneutical approach to the gospel. (98)

This thought is emerging more today, as African-Americans are challenging their pastors to bring a vital and relevant message and not be over-concerned with sermon presentation.

Laurie Green, writing about urban ministry in Britain, reasons that due to his construction skills, Jesus was above the very poor on a financial scale, thereby making a conscious decision to work with the poor, downtrodden, and disaffected. Green admits that while the gospel provides no hint that poverty is in itself good, it may be embraced as a means to an end (85).

Trulear identifies four standards of black pastoral theology: the black pastor as interpreter and order-giver, parent and nurturer, mentor in ministry, and colleague in

mutual support. He also is in favor of the African-American pastor being in a dual role, the preacher and the political leader, and challenging the black academia to improve service to the church and its ministry, using a biblically based approach.

The African-American Baptist Church

Half of the churches selected in this study identify themselves as Baptist.

However, within the Black Baptist church four mainline conventions exist. Quinton Hosford Dixie is a professor at Indiana University who has studied African-American religion from both historical and contemporary standpoints. He thinks that studies on institutions, including Black Baptist organizations, through neo-institutional theory will not only aid in a better understanding of the Black Baptist movement but will also discover how similar they are to their white counterparts (17).

During the early 1960s when the pastor and choir director of the Baptist church where my family attended made the decision to add a set of drums to the worship service, near chaos ensued. To the older members, the action to add the drums was nearly equal to or as outrageous as bringing in worldly or the devil's music into the church, while the younger crowd was much more receptive and thought the drums could complement the piano and organ and provide a wider acceptance to the sparingly used tambourine. Interestingly, some of the older church members stated this adaptation by the church was an attempt to accommodate the changing society and recalled how the same feelings were expressed when they were young as churches started to bring organs into the worship service.

In addition, as a child growing up on the south side of Chicago, everyone put on their *Sunday best* clothes for church, which for me included a suit and tie and shoes that

were polished the night before to be ready for Sunday morning. Any male not in a suit was looked upon negatively unless he did not have the means to own one. No one thought of wearing jeans or tee shirts to any service.

Today, the Black Baptist church is generally affiliated with one of four conventions, which basically formed due to different visions, in-fighting, questionable managerial moves, and power struggles. However, the stories behind these actions are not relevant for this paper, but a brief overall description of each convention's history and core values is in order. Table 2.2 provides a summary of the membership of the four major African-American Baptist Conventions.

Table 2.2. Membership of Major African-American Baptist Conventions

| Convention | Year Formed | Estimated Membership |
|---|-------------|----------------------|
| The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. | 1886 | 7,500,000 |
| National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. | 1988 | 1,700,000 |
| National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, Inc. | 1988 | 1,000,000 |
| The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. | 1961 | 2,500,000 |

Source: National Baptist Convention USA; National Baptist Convention of American, Inc.; Wikipedia; Progressive National Baptist Convention.

The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBCUSA) is the oldest of the of the Baptist convention's. However, due to in-fighting, the convention split in 1988 and the National Baptist Convention of American was formed. The NBCUSA addresses the 1988 split within the organization as follows: Unfortunately, because of alleged and self-confessed fiscal and moral improprieties, Dr. Lyons, the convention's president from 1994-1999, was forced to resign from office, leaving the convention's spirit and

reputation bruised. Dr. Shaw, who served as president from 1999-2009, also established an agenda of working together with other Baptist conventions in the United States.

Toward this end, significant achievements during his administration included the historic convening of the four major black Baptist conventions (NBCUSA, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America) in 2004 and 2008(National Baptist Convention, USA) .

The NBCUSA in-fighting is also addressed on The National Baptist Convention of America Web site:

Controversy over the ownership and control of the National Congress prevailed and caused division among the Convention messengers. The heart of the controversy was whether the National Convention would operate its own Congress with the status of an auxiliary like all of the other auxiliaries, or whether the Convention would continue to relate to a National Congress charter.

From reading each convention's differing viewpoints of the split the one common element appears to be control and/or power.

The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., takes a somewhat different approach in giving its side of the controversy within the conventions. Even though the seeds of the convention were sown by discontent with the lack of democratic process within the NBC,USA, Inc., the roots of its development went far beyond issues of tenure of office and leadership (Progressive National Baptist Convention). The National Missionary Baptist Convention of America's Web site does not address the split nor provide any historical information.

African-American churches are also unique when compared to their white counterparts in terms of denominational/convention memberships. Many Black churches

may be labeled as Baptist, but much if not all of the decision making is performed by the church leaders and often the head pastor. Lincoln and Mamiya note that because Baptist *denominations* are so loosely knit and local churches largely autonomous, an examination of the denominations alone is misleading insofar as a survey of Baptist activity is concerned. While the president of the convention can exercise a certain degree of control over individual pastors through the patronage system of prestigious appointment to various board and committees, however, at the same time, individual pastors have the option of not participating in that arena (43). An interesting study would be to sample a large number of Baptist church members to ascertain if they not only knew to which convention their church belonged but if they could recite any of its views or policies.

Theological Framework

The African-American, inner-city church is most importantly a church and as such, charged with adhering to the Great Commission. From some of the previous references, the interpretation of how to spread the gospel may take varied forms, such as liberation theology, prosperity messages, and tackling social issues. Timothy provides the following guidance, which, depending on one's exegesis, can provide support for any particular ministry:

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. However, you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim. 4:2-5)

Timothy's advice can be applied to Christian churches of all denominations.

Since the first century, the church continues to evolve. The early Church evolved into the Catholic church, and eventually discontent brought about the Reformation. However, the Reformation has led to a number of new denominations but also to the further sects within many denominations. On a positive note, some churches have a plethora of outreach programs, but sadly, many churches have their focus on materialism in lieu of God's message such as the prosperity gospel. Recent times has also produced an array of specialized versions of the Bible, like the Women's Bible, the Catholic Bible, the Amplified Bible, the Common English Bible, or the recently introduced Green Bible.

The next section covers some common and important areas of how theology impacts and is viewed within the African-American church context as well as how theology leads pastors in guiding their flocks.

Theology and the African-American Church

Combating racism has long been pivotal in the African-American church message. Harris-Lacewell notes that for African-Americans, evil takes the very specific and identifiable form of white people first through enslavement, then through Jim Crow and lynch mob rule, and continuing in seemingly intractable racial inequality. The evil of racism must be reconciled with the idea of a loving and powerful God (184).

To begin, any study of Scripture will reveal definite delineations of specific races or classes. In the early Church development, no such distinction existed except for the believer and nonbeliever or Jew and Gentile. Any liberation theology should be grounded in John 8:31-32: "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (original emphasis). John's passage may be applied to any branch of theology.

Teaching economic betterment is not bad in itself but is, in fact, a worthy focus; however, when it is the primarily focus of ministry, it becomes unbiblical. When strictly adhering to a black prosperity message or to the teachings of white counterparts such as Joel Olsten the teachings should be carefully scrutinized by their followers. Paul taught his followers about discernment and testing in Romans 12:2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” This passage is vital for any Christian so that they do not fall prey to the many false teachings penetrating the black community. Matthew 6:25-34 sets a different standard where Christ teaches on achieving the basic necessities in life with no mention of accumulating luxuries.

Expanding on the Nelsen’s Black church model, Lincoln and Mamiya formed the “dialectical model,” where the Black church has constantly been involved in a polar opposition tension, whether it be priestly and prophetic, heavenly versus worldly communal or selfish, charismatic or bureaucratic, or resistant versus accommodating (10-16). Cone and Wilmore cite Acts 2:7-11 as biblical support of being both Black and Christian: “To be black means to imagine, thin, and create out of an Afrocentricity accepted by God as the vehicle of revelation and redemption” (167). The meshing of Afrocentricity and Christianity can be viewed as intermingling parts within the role of the African-American church.

Fields addresses the needed intermingling of Black theology with traditional Christian values. The continuing role of Black theology has to be evaluated to measure its viability as an advancement force within the African-American community, namely, its

relationship to Christian tradition, the question of hermeneutics, its relationship to the larger theological populous, and the danger of losing its Christian identity (74-75).

Theology and the Pastor

The pastor and leaders of any church, especially the pastors, are called upon to provide basic elementary guidance to the congregation, no matter what the church vision. Following a Christ like model, first of all, is a key assumption. The pastor as the leader of his or her flock is, as Jesus instructs Peter in John 21:17, “to tend My sheep.” Naturally, the head pastor should tend to the flock in a biblical way. The problem is how one interprets a biblical way or decides how the sheep are to be tended. However, Peter later expands upon this command:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the suffering of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according *to the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. (original emphasis, 1 Pet. 5:1-6)

Knowing one’s role in the church is highlighted in Ephesians 4:11-12, where Paul outlines the leadership roles in the early church. In order for the apostles’ teachings to be effectively followed, pastors, leaders, and all member in any volunteer or paid church positions must perform honest self-assessments of their God-given gifts and talents. Personal egos cannot stand in the way of serving the Lord and bringing others to Christ, which is the primary purpose in life.

A common verse used among more traditional pastors and those expousing a more prosperity or, at least, a type of hope ministry is Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” Luke’s passage can be interpreted that if Christians help people, God will in turn provide overflow blessings.

Some of the contemporary gurus of prophecy (i.e., all who have erroneously predicted Christ’s second coming and even the so-called ministers who have the gift of prophecy) have varying interpretations of end-time prediction. Romans 12:2 warns of blindly submitting to the normality’s of today. I find interesting that all of them (at least those I have seen or heard) when prophesying to individuals always tell those they are prophesying to that the Lord is going to bless them materially, generally by owning a very successful business or coming into a large sum of money. I will not go into whether or not they are hearing the Lord speak to them, but only that they never receive a prophesy of warning or hard times or even of repenting, which is a common theme, especially in the Old Testament. An interesting study would be to research some of these pastoral prophecies given during a church service over a specified period of time and ascertain whether any had been fulfilled. Discernment is important for any Christian and should be constantly applied following Christ’s directive in Luke 12:54-57.

A pastoral calling and subsequent teachings should adhere to the teachings in Philippians 2, especially the fourth verse: “Do not *merely* look out for you own personal interest, but also for the interests of others” (original emphasis). Any church bringing in one or one hundred members should practice this concept. The goal is not to increase in

numbers but to bring the lost to Christ and train them to do likewise. In 2 Timothy 2:1-14, Christ gives instructions on being a strong Christian and trusting the Lord for guidance.

Pastors and leaders should evaluate whether their churches look to the Spirit for guidance as outlined throughout the New Testament, including Acts 10:19-21, 11:12, and 13:2-4. These instances show acts of obedience and selflessness, not acts of rogue activity. Seeking God's guidance for leadership was also prevalent in the Old Testament. In Psalms 25:4-5, David sought the Lord's guidance: "Make me know Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your Paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; For You I wait all the day." In Psalms 48:12, the writer reminds the believer that God's guidance is everlasting until death. The preacher warns against listening to outside falsehoods in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2:

Guard you steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools: for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

All Christian's should carefully listen to any message given to them by ministers or any church leader and test the message against scripture.

Paul lets believers know some are blessed with spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and that some are given a diversity of gifts and that these are to be used to foster unity in Christ. In other words, when so-called prophet today only speaks of individual gains and material accumulation not for the common good of the church, their message can be or borders on anti-biblical rhetoric.

Theology and the African-American Experience

Earlier in this chapter, liberation theology and prosperity gospel were discussed, including how followers of these venues believe Scripture supports their beliefs. As with any message under the guise of Christianity, believers should ensure its soundness. I am not claiming those following the prosperity gospel are non-Christians, but only a warning not only to their message but to any message from a person of Christ. First John 4:1-2 tells readers not to believe every spirit but to test them as to whether they are from God, as many false prophets have gone into the world, including a warning concerning the future spirit of the anti-Christ. John additionally adds that all have to submit to the Lord's will and not act in a maverick manner, in 5:19, that Jesus can do nothing of himself, unless he sees the Father doing it. William H. Willimon emphasizes that while theological training is important for the pastor, gained experience is equally important.

Certainly, ministers need to be schooled for what they do, yet the nature of the ministry requires schooling unknown in some other vocations because of the requisite character required to do the job faithfully. This is why pastors often testify that the best theological education they receive tends to be apprenticeship looking over the shoulders of a master, someone who has mastered the craft of biblical interpretation, or homiletics, or pastoral care, or church history, and, perhaps even more so, the art of self-mastery. (303)

A pastor should have a sound theological base, but at the same time have the interpersonal skills to be an effective leader.

Also discussed earlier in this chapter was how some in the African-American community have historically looked to the Bible as a means of escaping from oppression. Christ is proclaimed as a liberator in Luke 4:18 where he quotes Isaiah:

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY

OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE
DOWNTRODDEN, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF
THE LORD (original emphasis).

From the Beatitudes, Christ provides hope for the poor and oppressed:

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. (Luke 6:20-22)

The Bible is full of examples of the Lord aiding the oppressed and also instructions of how to spread the gospel. Students of Scripture, however, should read it context and not from a verse or passage-specific only analysis. Ecclesiastes 5:10 warns of the folly of riches.

Pastor Lavonia McIntyre, emphasizes the importance of evangelism for African-American church growth. She states that it must continually evolve to meet the church and community needs through training members but seek guidance from God through prayer (678). Evangelist of mainline Protestant faiths can also follow her thoughts as well.

A common trend in most Protestant churches today is the increasing presence of female pastors and leaders, leading to the complementarian verses egalitarian in-house debates among Christian leaders. At the center of this debate is 1 Timothy 2:11-14, which the complementarian interprets literally and the egalitarian translates as an isolated incident within the church at Ephesus, citing that Deborah was one of the first Judges in Israel. The merits of whether or not women should be in pastoral or lay leadership roles is not debated in this project, but I will bring up the fact that only a few decades ago

African-American women rarely served in the pulpit, and nowadays African-American women pastors have become more commonplace.

In Olson's study of the American church emphasizes how the church should apply the gospel and allow it to be more fully integrated into a person's life and the life of the church, through five historic messages that are applicable today:

1. Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, (Luke 1:77-79);
2. Destruction of Satan's power and delivery of people from bondage (Luke 4; Isa. 61), closely aligned with the African-American plight;
3. Changed hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (Matt. 13:1-9; Isa. 6:9-10);
4. Treatment of people with compassion and justice as God's loved creation (Matt. 5:45); and,
5. Invitation and summons of followers to become the new people of God (Mark 1:15, 17; John 13:35; 194-99).

Based on these historic messages, Olson outlines five key elements for the message and mission of the church that are also applicable to the inner-city African-American church: (1) proclaiming the message of forgiveness in Christ, which produces reconciliation with God; (2) helping people break the bonds that hold and oppress them; (3) helping people live a new, resurrected life in Christ through the filling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit; (4) becoming a compassionate countercultural force in the community, nation, and world, and; (5) being God's community of broken yet healing people who provide love, support, and accountability for each other (210-18).

Although different denominations may have so called *in-house* theological debates, most affirm that Scriptures teach that salvation is a gift from God's grace and not

earned by one's actions as Paul instructed the church in Ephesus (Eph.2:8-9). Paul further explained to those in the Philippi church in Philippians 1:6 that God would continually work with them.

With the onslaught of prophetic ministries, including those who confidently predict Christ's second coming, Christians are reminded to heed Jesus outline of predicting end times in the Olivet discourse. In Matthew 7:15 Jesus told his listeners, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Paul also warns against false teachings in his letter to the churches of Galatia in 1:6-9:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Christ even stated in Matthew 24:16 that the Lord is comings is unknown and provides clear guidance earlier in verse 36 the not even the angels or the Son knows, but the only Father.

Paul's sentiment was even commonplace centuries earlier when Jeremiah warned against false teachings in 23:16: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility.' They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the Lord." Paul's words are just as important today, as in the first century.

In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul instructs his protégé, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and

doctrines of demons.” As Scripture points out, false teachers are not a modern-age phenomena. Finally, today with the break-off sects and new theologies and insights from newly anointed prophets, Ephesians 4:4-5 reminds the believer that those called have been done so in just one Lord and one faith. As Christians, evangelicals and defenders of the faith must discern false teachings and be ready to help others who may be lost in these false teachings.

The African-American Church in Chicago

Few if any studies exist on the historical role and trend of the Black church in the city of Chicago, although many studies of the social aspects of the city abound. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton touch on the demographics of Chicago church members and how they become less church centered as they move up the social class status.

Having worked in the banking industry for some thirty years, I know firsthand that Chicago is a major worldwide financial center, housing the corporate headquarters of firms such as Boeing, Sears, and United Airlines. Chicago is also the home of two of the world’s largest and integral exchanges, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board Options Exchange, and one of the world’s tallest buildings, the Willis Tower (originally the Sears Tower).

Its downtown financial district has Harris Bank, J. P. Morgan Chase N. A. which once was the home of the former First National Bank of Chicago, and the Northern Trust Company. Chicago’s footprint is not limited to financial services. Any shopper who has been to the *windy city* can attest to the stores on the *magnificent mile*, including the shops in the Hancock Center, which is also one of the world’s tallest buildings and the Macy’s on State Street, which was once the flagship Marshall Field’s store.

On the darker side, Chicago is infamous for its role in depression-era criminal activity, which included the rise of Al Capone and his bootlegging empire. The city also underwent a major race riot in the early part of the twentieth century. The race riot of 1919 started when seventeen-year-old Eugene Williams drowned after accidentally floating across the unmarked barrier on Lake Michigan that separated the white and Negro sections of the beach. Robert G. Spinney theorizes that the 1919 riot was largely attributed to post-World War I racial tension, which was commonplace across the country that year, as later in June 1920 two white men were shot and killed in a black area of Chicago during a parade without any subsequent rioting (172-73).

Then, of course, anyone remotely familiar with historical politics knows of Chicago's *machine* orchestrated by the late Mayor Richard J. Daley, whose political shadow still lingers in city hall today. The former mayor was also the subject of national headlines as he was suspected of ballot-box stuffing to secure the election of John Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election.

Chicago also played a vital role in the civil rights movement. Emmitt Teal, the teenager who was brutally beaten by a mob of angry men in Mississippi in 1954 for supposedly whistling at a white woman, was on vacation from his Chicago home. Some, including his mother, have theorized that because he had a speech impediment he was taught to whistle to get others attention, which was the basis for his action. This incident is considered the main precursor of the Montgomery bus boycott and the civil rights movement led by King.

Interestingly, Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey, two African-Americans are not only Chicago's most famous citizens today but are also among the most famous

worldwide, with the former arguably the most powerful human on earth. The founder of Chicago, (discounting the Native American settlers) Jean Baptist DuSable was a Black man. Despite the overall agreement of DuSable being the first non-Native American settler, the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois did not officially declare him as the city's founder until 1968.

Alan H. Spear performed a detailed study of the history of Chicago from the Negro perspective. Escaped slaves started arriving in Chicago during the 1840s. By 1847 the first Negro church, Quinn Chapel A.M.E., was established and by the end of the century, Chicago had over a dozen Negro churches (91). Olivet Baptist Church, which is still in existence today, was the first Negro Baptist church in Chicago. Both Quinn and Olivet, along with other newly formed churches, not only provided a spiritual message but also expanded into other socially relevant functions, including a literary society, unemployment relief, schools, libraries, and banking services (92). Olivet saw the largest growth, going from an estimated four thousand members in 1915 to almost nine-thousand in 1920 (177). Between 1916 and 1919, several Baptist storefront churches such as Pilgrim, Progressive, Provident, Liberty, and Monumental were founded, and within a decade all had acquired their own buildings and boasted memberships of over five hundred (178).

By 1860, the Negro population in Chicago was nearly one thousand. Spear notes all was not well as downstate Illinois residents referred to Chicago as a sinkhole of abolition and a “nigger-loving town. Segregation was the rule and abolitionists regarded this as side issues and concentrated very little efforts to change” (6). Between 1900 and 1915, the means of segregation and northern discrimination led to Chicago's Negro

leaders building a city within a city, which included new economic and political leadership and dealt with discrimination through self-help rather than militant protest (91).

Chicago also was one of the key northern cities that benefitted from the great migration of blacks escaping the racial pressures of the south, including both of my parents. During the 1940s Chicago's black population grew from 278,000 to 492,000. The following decade saw the black population increase by 321,000.

As a youth, I remember when talking to those who migrated from the south that individuals could tell the exact date they came north, often with more enthusiasm than reciting their own birthdays. These newly arrived citizens brought with them their deep spiritual beliefs and established churches. They were also often the founding members of churches. The lure to the north was appealing. As Spinney points out, southern black sharecroppers commonly earned \$2 to \$3 per week, whereas working men in 1916 earned \$2 to \$2.50 per day (169). The *Chicago Defender*, the city's black newspaper, campaigned for blacks to move north noting, they would face obstacles but none they could not surmount (Spear 169).

The Great Migration also included a migration to racial hatred. The Ku Klux Klan established a presence in Chicago, which drew 25,000 members and sympathizers in an Oak Park, Illinois (first tier western suburb of Chicago), rally in 1922. The move north did not solve all the racial and social injustices faced by blacks. They may have found employment but were often limited in advancement.

Between 1900 and 1915, white Chicagoans, alarmed at the influx of Negroes from the South, intensified discriminatory practices, particularly in housing. At the same time,

the Booker T. Washington philosophy of self-help and economic advancement began to find favor with Negro leaders, and a self-defensive system evolved in business civic, welfare, and political organizations run by and for Negroes (Spear inside flap)

The migration, however, brought into the city thousands of Negroes accustomed to the informal, demonstrative, preacher-oriented churches of the rural South. Alienated by the formality of the middle-class churches, many of the newcomers organized small congregations that met in stores and houses and that maintained the old-time shouting religions (Spear 175). Despite the rise of the storefront, the old-line Baptist and Methodist churches grew rapidly during the migration years. The Baptist churches in general outpaced the Methodists during this period and secured a preeminent position in Chicago, which they never lost. In 1916, Chicago had thirty-six Baptist churches and twenty-two Methodist. By 1920, the number of Methodist churches had increased to only thirty-four, with eighty-six Baptist churches in the city (178).

One of the greatest credits to the Black church in Chicago was Thomas Dorsey, who is readily referred to as the father of gospel music. His song “Precious Lord Take My Hand” is and was often graced by gospel greats such as Mahalia Jackson, who also made Chicago her home.

Chicago’s black population continued to grow in the post-depression era increasing from 250,000 to 500,000 in the decade beginning in 1940. According to the 2000 United States Census, Chicago had a population of 2,896,016, with African-Americans comprising 36.8 percent, which translates to approximately 1,065,734 residents.

As noted in Table 2.3, Chicago's African-American population must be recognized, comprising over one-third of the city's population. With over a million African-American inhabitants, inner-city churches as well other churches in Chicago have a large population to target for potential members. This data is further highlighted as, according to the Pew Forum, 87 percent of African-Americans identify themselves with a particular religion, with 79 percent of African-Americans feeling religion is an important component of their lives, compared to 53 percent of all American adults. The Pew Forum also listed 78 percent of African-Americans being Protestant with 59 percent belonging to one of the mainline historical black denominations such as Baptist and African American-Methodist, but with 40 percent of African-Americans being Baptist.

Table 2.3. Black Population in the City of Chicago from United States Census

| Decade | Total Population (000) | % Increase | Black Population (000) | % Increase |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1900 | 1,699 | | 30 | |
| 1910 | 2,185 | 28.60 | 44 | 46.60 |
| 1920 | 2,702 | 23.70 | 109 | 147.80 |
| 1930 | 3,376 | 24.90 | 234 | 114.70 |
| 1940 | 3,397 | .06 | 278 | 18.80 |
| 1950 | 3,621 | 6.60 | 492 | 77.00 |
| 1960 | 3,550 | -2.00 | 813 | 65.20 |
| 1970 | 3,367 | -5.20 | 1,103 | 33.70 |
| 1980 | 3,005 | -10.80 | 1,197 | .08 |
| 1990 | 2,784 | -7.40 | 1,088 | -.09 |
| 2000 | 2,896 | 4.00 | 1,065 | Nil |

Source: United States Census

Research Design

An effective tool for gathering interpersonal data to supplement a formalized questionnaire is a semi-structured research design. Because the semi-structured interview process is more informal, the conversation can include more give and take among participants allowing both parties a chance to provide feedback but also possibly to learn from each other. This format has the added value of open-ended questions rather than using closed-response questionnaires. Herbert J. and Irene Rubin describe that in a semi-structured format the interviewer introduces the topic and then guides the discussion by asking specific questions (5).

In order to provide consistency in the sample, each participant received the same questionnaire as well as open-ended questions during the interview process. Peter Banister, Erica Burman, Ian Parker, Maye Taylor, and Carol Tindall note that one of the advantages of the semi-structured interview may be to explore precisely those areas where the interviewer perceives gaps, contradictions, and difficulties. Hence, another advantage of using a less structured approach is that the researcher can tailor questions to the position and comments of the interviewee and is not bound by the codes of standardization and replicability irrespective of how appropriate they are for the interviewee (51).

Each participant was given a standard set of questions with some also having personal one-on-one interviews. This process was beneficial in two ways. First, using a standard set of questions allowed for easy measurement and comparability among the participants. Second, with many of the participants well within their golden years, a very formalized or multi-response questionnaire may have proved difficult for them; thus, the

results would have been hard to quantify and could be very misleading or less informative due to the respondents' inability to answer properly. I found formalized and multi-response questionnaires hard for the elderly to complete from previous projects I have performed that utilized these types of data gathering tools. The most difficult challenge for the interviewer is to keep the open-ended questions comparatively homogenous if and when a respondent starts to veer away from the prepared questions.

By employing a semi-structured approach, the interviewer allows a greater degree of openness about the inner feelings of the participant. Floyd-Thomas notes that a research approach that takes into consideration an individual subject's position in relation to the Black church and black community life is not only insightful but a necessary part of the research, teaching, and learning process about the Black church (102).

The interviewees should have been as comfortable as possible and not be concerned by any threats of retaliatory action due to their answers. In addition in order to assure confidentiality, I did not use any recording devices in any of the interviews. Also, two of the pastors interviewed asked me what other churches had participated in my study, to which I explained that I could not disclose due to confidentiality.

One major drawback of the semi-structured process is the nonessential information or even gossip gathered when either or both parties stray off track during the interview. Bell cautions interviewers using any unstructured interview, saying they will be challenged in recording responses compared to those using a structured process. Interviewers can alleviate the challenge of not having a structured set of questions, by having a list of items to discuss and a few prompts or probes to remind themselves about the particular issues to cover during the interview (159).

Summary

Every few months I take a drive through my old neighborhood or other areas on the south and west sides of Chicago and reflect about how the particular communities have changed over the past few decades. My stroll down memory lane also takes a hard look at the church landscape. When I pass a large church building and note how its membership base has dwindled, I ponder the underlying reason for this decline. Then I come across the large or megachurch that is new to the city and again reflect on how it has grown. I ponder on whether the growth came through a truly biblically based church model or by just being a seeker church or if the growth came through the personality of the pastor or because it has young members who were tired of their older or former church and were looking for a new direction in their worship service. The reasons for the changes in the respective churches' attendance is the focal point of this study.

A church must be willing to move beyond conventional wisdom and take the time to apply kingdom wisdom. For many African-Americans, moving forward may mean abandoning a victim mentality. It may mean extending more grace to whites and people of other races. It may mean searching a person's heart for those pockets of prejudice, hatred, and unforgiveness. It may mean seeing beyond color. Jesus did not operate using labels or stereotypes or broad generalizations. He took the time to see people for who they really were (Gilbreath 34).

Ruth Anne Reese and Stephen Ybarrola address racial reconciliation and ethnic identity by stating the following:

And for their part, ethnic and racial minority Christians will have to forgive past injustices at the hands of the dominate group, and develop a level of trust that will free them to interact with their white brethren in the unity and love of Christ. (80)

Any follower of Christ must learn forgiveness and adopt the ability to move forward despite any past injustices.

The purpose of the paper is not an endeavor to criticize the megachurch but only to recognize its growth and role today. Any church regardless of size should be judged by its adherence to Scripture and not by its popularity or uniqueness. The megachurch has come under increased scrutiny as to whether its central role fits the early Church model. Thumma while noting that megachurches, their practices, and their leaders are the most influential contemporary dynamic in American religion, also believes that much of the criticism of megachurches comes from a lack of understanding their dynamics and place in America. He warns that judging the entire megachurch pastoral leadership by a few nationally known pastors is unfair as the megachurch often provides help to the local church and community and, in many ways, is not unlike its community church counterpart.

Although not writing from a Black church perspective, Reese and Ybarrola provide a compelling challenge to any denomination, sect, or ministry that strays from biblical teachings. Ultimately, true reconciliation will take place only when all Christians in the United States take on the markers of their identity in Christ-love, joy, peace, patience, godliness, self-control, goodness, mercy, justice, obedience, and burden sharing-and, with humility, strive to understand and serve one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God (80).

Over the past three decades, many inner-city African-American churches in Chicago have seen dramatic declines in their attendance. This study tried to ascertain why this decrease has occurred. On the surface, the first thought would be the changing

demographics of the inner city as gentrification has sent many inhabitants to other locales, including suburbia. However, conversely, a rise in large and megachurches within this same community has occurred. Again, this study attempted to ascertain the reasoning why some of these churches have seen a surge in attendance in the post-civil rights era, while others have seen dramatic declines in their congregational levels.

Chapter 3 brings out some possible factors that may be the root cause of a church's change in attendance, such as the preaching style of the minister, the role the church takes concerning social and political stances, and whether the worship service is contemporary enough for younger members or too progressive for the older members.

Chapter 4 provides the results of the information gathered from this research. In Chapter 5, I provide some final thoughts on the study, what I learned, limitations of the study, and some suggestions for future studies related to attendance in the inner-city, African-American church.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The inner-city sections of Chicago have undergone some significant changes in the post-civil rights era. Although gang activity and its related evils such as drugs and drive-by shootings remain, the positive effects of gentrification have helped somewhat to negate these societal ills. Homes that were previously abandoned or drug havens have been rehabilitated and turned into condominiums for middle-class African-Americans and whites, while new businesses have helped energize some areas.

However, as more African-Americans within the inner city achieve a higher level of economic status, many move to the promise of a better life in the suburbs, thus rescinding their inner-city church membership. The move to the suburbs, however, cannot be the sole reason for churches' declining memberships, as Chicago's inner-city areas also have a number of churches with growing membership levels, including several megachurches, such as Salem Baptist Church, Trinity United Church, and Apostolic Church of God. Many areas such as Bronzesville, Hyde Park, Chatham, and the Near West Side, have seen revitalization as young African-American professionals have decided to become residents of these areas, thereby helping to alleviate urban blight.

With the inner-city, African-American church and its pastor historically being a pivotal source of leadership and guidance for the community, any declines in membership of a thriving church or the growth of another church is noticeable. The underlying reasons for these changes were of concern and the purpose of this study. Whether the older once-thriving church declined at the expense of the large or

megachurch is not the primary concern, but the issue is if the growing church is keeping with a true biblical church model. Church growth should not be the sole measure of success but, the manner in which a church functions scripturally. This study did not presuppose that all large inner-city, African-American churches are biblically unsound and that the older declining churches are true to Scripture, nor did it place the blame for the decline on the churches being unbiblical. Instead, this study sought the reasons why the churches have undergone attendance changes, while also analyzing the worship service and pastoral visions of each church to identify any patterns of commonalities within each church category.

The purpose of the research was to identify the characteristics that led to why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have undergone a significant decline or increase in membership since the early 1970s and evaluate the reasons for this phenomena. I hope that the results may provide some insight and guidance to churches, not only Chicago but also in other inner-city areas of America when addressing changing membership levels.

Research Questions

This study centered on three research questions seeking to discover and analyze the reasons why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have undergone strong growth while others have seen significant declines in their membership base in the post-civil rights era.

To accomplish this goal, a series of standardized questionnaires and one-on-one interviews guided the focus of this study. The instruments addressed a member's reasons for joining one of the churches with increasing attendance, a member's reason for leaving

a church with a declining attendance, as well as the reasons why members in a church with a loss in its membership have remained. In addition, the senior pastors of each church underwent an interview to ascertain their actions for addressing the rise or decline in their churches' attendance as well as to uncover any future plans for their churches.

Research Question #1

Why have the congregations of some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois, increased dramatically since the early 1970s?

This question sought to assess why persons are attracted to their current churches and second, why they have remained. A congregant will join a church can be for various reasons. These reasons can be as simple as being a member where one's parents were members, responding to a personal invitation from a friend, finding a convenient location, or just searching for a new church home. However, after joining a church, new members have reasons why they remain. One of the purposes of this question was to probe the participants' decision-making process for remaining as members.

After establishing the primary reason for attending the church, the instruments addressed reasons for remaining members, such as the participants' opinions on church matters, including the worship service, the pastor, the sermon message, church outreach programs, the church's stance or lack thereof on social issues, and the overall ministerial programs. Additionally, several questions concerned the participants' level of involvement in church activities, which provided a further insight as to why the individuals remained members or, in the case of the lay leaders, decided to take on a more prominent role within the church.

Furthermore, the senior pastor of each church undergoing an increase in attendance had a one-on-one interview. The format of the interview included open-ended questions seeking the pastors' viewpoints of why their churches had undergone an increase in attendance as well as several questions geared toward their visions for their churches. The interviews also had questions regarding the implementation of the churches' operating methods and if they underwent any change in worship service or other programs that led to the increase in attendance.

In order to get a well-rounded perspective of the growth of the church, the participants included the senior pastor, lay leaders, and members not involved in any leadership role at their churches.

Research Question #2

Why have the congregations of some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois, decreased since the early 1970s?

The focus of this question was to ascertain the primary reasons why some members have remained at their church during the attendance decline. This question sought to probe the participants' reasoning for joining and their overall feelings about the church and its senior pastor. The primary goal of this question was to ascertain the underlying reasons for the decline in attendance and also to determine any possible common themes.

The closed-ended questionnaire related to Research Question #2 included a series of questions aimed at determining the underlying reasons for members remaining at their churches, and the level of any dissatisfaction if any existed. Members were asked to opine on their feelings about the pastors on a personal level, with the worship service,

with the organizational structure of the church, and the likelihood they would eventually leave to join another church.

With this question I am tried to determine if the senior pastors and church members of the three churches with a decreasing attendance were content with their churches' current membership level, which declined dramatically. For those who were not content, it asked if they were trying or adopting a new church vision, marketing campaign, or even a physical move in order to attract new members and retain current congregants. Another sub-area of this question was to determine if the pastors and/or the church members of the churches with a decreasing attendance have accepted the erosion, knowing that the churches may eventually close, or, if they plan to remain open, to work with the small faithful of the church. This question also brought out the type of worship services, programs, and community involvement of the churches to compare them with the growing churches in order to find any differences.

Loyalty can be an important factor. The business world appreciates the dedicated employee. Churches members who decide to retain their membership through good and bad times, should they occur, are valuable. In the churches with declining attendances, a core group of people who were members when the church was strong had decided to remain along with those who joined during the decline but also retained their memberships. Another purpose of this question was to probe these members' feelings about the direction the churches were taking currently and in prior years when the attendance started to decline. These questions also probed how new members felt about the current and past direction of the churches in relation to the direction under the

previous pastors. Participants included both lay members and members not in leadership roles in order to gain a fuller perspective of the members' feelings about their church.

Research Question #3

What tactics or strategies did the leadership of those churches whose membership significantly increased during the post-civil rights era utilize?

Prior to the start of this study, I assumed that the senior pastor of each of the growing or megachurches used had some vision or strategic plan to grow their churches, which was validated through my research. This question provided a better insight of the pastors' reasoning and vision for their churches. It also sought to find out if the pastors' visions for their churches' growth was proactive or reactive. I wanted to decipher whether their visions changed over time based upon attendance factors or even a sought-after change by the congregation, or if the pastors remained steadfast in their visions and operational models for the churches over the course of time. Information gathered to address this question was done primarily through one-on-one interviews with each of the six pastors participating in this study. The interviews were completed either through face-to-face meetings or via telephone when the pastors' and my schedule precluded a face-to-face meeting.

The subsets of this question first dealt with the pastors' short and long-term visions and goals for their churches followed by the initial programs and visions they had compared to the current churches' direction. In terms of the worship service, the interview dissected the type of service and the level of adaptability if they saw either a drop or stagnation in attendance levels or if they were satisfied with the current attendance. Naturally, the question tried to explore the ways pastors sought to attract new

members, whether through a progressive worship service, relevant sermons, or community involvement.

Another discovery concept of this question was to detect what programs or strategies any of the churches adopted but also whether they were biblically sound. This question was designed to bring out to what degree, if any, the churches had implemented some of the contemporary factors inundating all churches in America, such as prosperity teaching, or issues affecting the African-American church, such as liberation theology.

Population and Participants

This study centered on inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois. The sample sizes included a preselected set of churches from which the participants for the study were identified.

Population

Being a city with nearly three million residents, Chicago is home to numerous churches, encompassing a wide array of denominations. The African-American population totals over one million, many of whom reside in what could be described as the inner-city portion, again with numerous churches ranging from storefront houses of worship to several megachurches. However, the presence of a large or dominant church or active pastor is hard to hide given that a church's overall role in the community including its attendance is highly visible within the African-American community.

Traditionally, most African-Americans would label themselves as Protestant, evidenced by the noticeable lack of Catholic institutions within most African-American neighborhoods. According to an ABC News/Beliefnet poll, 48 percent of blacks identify themselves as Baptist, followed by nondenominational at 15 percent and Methodists

comprising 8 percent of black Christians. Extrapolating these figures to Chicago's inner-city, African-American population of 1,065,000 the population base to draw the sample for this study included 511,200 Baptists, 159,750 nondenominational Christians, and 85,200 Methodists as the primary groups.

The six churches selected for this study were African-American institutions all located within the inner-city area of Chicago. This selection included four Baptist churches and two nondenominational churches in order to give a somewhat representative sample of the Black religious makeup.

Sample

Through several discussions with my dissertation research team I decided that a sample of three churches that had an increasing attendance in the post-civil rights era and three churches that had seen a decline in their attendance in the post-civil rights era would suffice. Within the churches with an increasing attendance, two were Baptist and one was nondenominational, which was also the case for the churches that had decreasing attendance.

I selected each church through a combination of my personal knowledge of several inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago and also through discussions with several pastors and church members within Chicago as well as with several people who once attended an inner-city, African-American church there. These discussions commenced approximately a year prior to the start of this study to first ascertain if the study was viable and to begin the process of identifying churches that would fall into the parameters of this study.

After each church had been identified for this study, I contacted the senior pastors to see if they would be interested in participating. However, I first explained the purpose of my project as well as gave them a brief personal background of myself.

Once a pastor agreed to participate in the study, I met with them personally or via a telephone conversation to explain what I was trying to accomplish. In these conversations I conveyed the desired sample base, which included lay leaders and other members from each church. The pastor and I mutually chose these participants. I explained to the pastor that having a mix of members would provide useful results due to the mix of roles of the participants.

The sample for this study included senior pastors, lay leaders, and general members from each of the three churches with an increasing attendance as well as three churches that have a decline in their attendance. Within the sample base were members whose attendance at their respective church ranged from a few years to over fifty years.

I included the senior pastor of each church as the primary visionary of the institution and its directional operation, which is the main contributing factor to how the church has been operating and what principals were its basic focus. Having a wide variety of members that encompasses high level lay leaders as well as less prominent members gave a more complete picture of how the congregation views its pastor and church but revealed the level of agreement between the two as well as any discontent between the pastor and the members.

As noted previously, the selection of members was a combination of suggestions from the pastor and my input. The criteria I wanted for the members in each church group was to include both new members who had been in the church for one year or less, and

longer-term members who have been with the church for at least five years. Including the longer-term members provided greater insight as to why members have remained at the church, while input from the new members could give insight and a trend of what factors are important in selecting a new church home. For the church with the increasing attendance trend, these members gave me information to analyze the underlying reasons why individuals joined the church and what they are looking for in their church. With the church having a decline in attendance, the use of longer-term members allowed me to decipher the reasons why they have remained, and for the newer members, I was able to review what they looked for in a church despite the decline in attendance. Inclusion of newer members brought their perspective of joining the church, which could be compared with the longer-term members for any similarities and dissimilarities.

The selection of non-pastors included higher profile lay leaders such as chairpersons of the deacon or trustee boards and members in a lower profile positions, such as kitchen workers, ushers, or choir members. By including a wide array of members, I was provided a more rounded participant pool to help ensure multiple viewpoints of the membership base of each church. However, the degree of loyalty of members, especially lay leaders, could lead to tainted results, especially if I have selected lay leaders who are not supportive of their senior pastors. Hopefully, the mutual selection process by the pastors and me helped alleviate any biased answers on behalf of the participants.

The sample of the forty-two participants used in this study can be divided into four distinct groups: (1) pastors from large or growing churches, (2) pastors from churches with a declining membership base, (3) lay leaders and other members from the

large or growing church, and (4) lay leaders and other members from the church with a declining attendance (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Sample Subgroup Identification and Number of Participants

| Sample Size Group | Total |
|--|--------------|
| Senior pastor from 3 churches with declining attendance | 3 |
| Senior pastor from 3 churches with increasing attendance | 3 |
| 6 current members from each of 3 churches with increasing attendance | 18 |
| 6 current members from churches with decreasing attendance | 18 |
| Total number of participants in sample | 42 |

Anecdotal Observation

In addition to the data collection for this study, I also observed the Sunday morning worship service of several of the participating churches. While no measurable or scientific analysis came from these observations, seeing firsthand at least one worship service did allow me a better understanding of the participants' responses and also helped frame some of the open-ended questions during the one-on-one interviews. Further insight of some of the churches came through reviewing their Web sites, including pastor sermons, vision statements, and core beliefs.

Sample Process Caution

Mildred L. Patten warns of avoiding the use of samples of convenience (74). I did take caution in my use of some of the churches in this study, in that I am familiar with some to varying degrees because I attended them while a resident of Chicago. With the intimate relationship I had with some of the participants, part of the sample base included a purposive sample as I had spoken to them approximately a year prior to this study and

then wanted to include them, to which they agreed. In addition, two of the participants were much like a motherly or fatherly figure to me due to the closeness of our families. I used this relationship as a positive factor because I received open and honest feedback from them as they were glad to help me achieve a doctoral degree.

Church Attendance Validation

As noted previously, I selected the churches used in this study because of my personal observation and knowledge, having at one time lived within the inner-city on the south side of Chicago. However, to validate the attendance records of each church, prior to submitting the questionnaires formally and setting up the personal interviews, I had each church send their attendance records from 1970 to date. Naturally, some of the records were more formalized and exact than others with some being best-guess estimates for the older churches. With the churches established since 1970, I requested the attendance records from their date of inception to present.

If a church had seen a decline in active members of 50 percent or more, it was classified in this study as one of the churches that had significant declines in attendance in the post-civil rights era. Conversely, if a church has undergone an increase of 50 percent or more, it was used as one of the growing churches. If the church attendance was less than two-thousand in 1970 but currently had an average Sunday worship of at least two thousand, it was deemed a megachurch.

Design of the Study

This was an exploratory mixed-method design study centering on qualitative research with the intent of providing in-depth reasons for why the participants either joined or have remained at a church utilizing closed-ended questionnaires and a semi-

structured interview approach. Since this was an exploratory study, the focus was to discover the reasons why the participants were members of their churches and to ascertain how the senior pastors of the churches viewed their roles within the churches, and not to analyze the underlying reasons for the viewpoints brought out through the questionnaires and interviews. Current members from each church received a closed-ended questionnaire centering on their feelings about their churches and pastors. The senior pastor of each church underwent a one-on-one, semi-structured interview focusing on their core scriptural beliefs, church vision, and role within the church.

Because I grew up in the inner-city section of Chicago, I designed the questionnaires and interviews with more direct questions and did not have to use exploratory-type questions to increase my understanding of the population sample.

The instruments used included one-on-one semi-structured interviews that included open-ended questions along with closed-ended questionnaires. Interviews provide more in-depth insights from members and pastors regarding their churches. According to John W. Creswell, one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, who can share ideas comfortably (226). Creswell also describes that one of the advantages of open-ended questions is that they can explore reasons for the closed-ended responses and identify any comments people might have that are beyond the responses to the closed-ended questions (228).

Data collection came through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and one anecdotal observation. I mailed the questionnaires or, in some cases, they were given to the participants with the interviews having the same basic questions, with allowance for personalization based upon the direction the interview was taking.

I transcribed the data from the questionnaires into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, while several Microsoft Word documents recorded the information from the interviews. Both the Excel and Word files were segregated by the main category of churches in either the increasing or decreasing attendance category and then further isolated by each church and each member. By segregating this specific category, more in-depth analysis and trends or themes could be identified and measured.

During the interview process, I did not use any recording device as I thought its presence might inhibit some from making true responses. I recorded information from the interviews through my note-taking, also ensuring confidentiality of the responses.

To complement closed-ended questionnaires, I performed a one-on-one interview with the senior pastor of each church in both the increasing and declining church attendance groups. The interviews each contained nine common questions for each pastor in each group but allowed the pastors to expound upon them. The senior pastors opined on themselves, their preaching, church vision, changes they made to address the change in attendance levels, and their short-term and long-term outlooks for the church. Each pastor also reflected on what the church's and pastor's role should be in terms of community outreach programs and political stances.

Instrumentation

This was an exploratory study utilizing four semi-structured one-on-one interviews and two closed-ended questionnaires. I conducted semi-structured interviews with (1) current members of a church with a declining attendance, (2) the senior pastor of a church with a declining attendance, (3) current members in a church with an increasing attendance, and (4) the senior pastor of a church with an increasing attendance. Longer-

term members in both a church with a declining attendance and members in a church with an increasing church attendance received closed-end questionnaires. I decided to use this combination of instruments after consultation with my dissertation research team and my dissertation review committee. My dissertation research team and I also decided to use semi-structured interviews for the four groups above as we believed their answers would differ, thus leading to more varied probing questions. The use of questionnaires for the longer-term members was utilized in both sets of churches as it was thought their responses would not differ as much as those having the interviews, thus a closed-ended questionnaire was better for this group.

Table 3.2. Identification and Number of Participants Administered Semi-Structured Interviews

| Participants Administered Semi-Structured Interviews | Total |
|--|--------------|
| Senior pastor from each church with a declining attendance | 3 |
| Senior pastor from each church with an increasing attendance | 3 |
| Total participants interviewed | 6 |

Table 3.3. Identification and Number of Participants Administered Closed-Ended Questionnaires

| Participants Administered Questionnaires | Total |
|---|--------------|
| 6 current members from each of the 3 churches with an increasing attendance | 18 |
| 6 current members from each of the 3 churches with a decreasing trend | 18 |
| Total participants completing a questionnaire | 36 |

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were given to (1) senior pastors of each church with declining attendance, (2) senior pastors of a church with increasing attendance (see Appendixes A and B). Semi-structured interviews were used with these individuals in order to bring out personal feelings and thoughts that a closed-ended questionnaire may not be detect. I also included a set number of questions for each participant, the interviews were not restricted to these questions only but aided by additional probing questions, which were dependent upon the responses received and the direction in which the interviews were going.

Newer members of a growing or megachurch. Three current members from each of the three growing or megachurches interviewed as well for this study. Each participant received a semi-structured interview; however, these participants differed from the other members in the growing churches because they were newer members, having been members of their churches for one year or less. The purpose of this group was to gain an assessment of what initially drew them to the church, which complemented the interviews of the long-standing members. I hoped to gauge any external factors that may have led them to the church.

Senior pastors in a growing or megachurch. Senior pastors of a large or megachurch interviewed in a one-on-one setting with me. The goal of the interviews was to bring out any feelings the pastors had not covered by the questionnaires. The semi-structured interview had ten set questions, with one allowing the pastor to expound on any other matters not covered in the interview. However, I also had follow-up questions guided by the pastors' responses to the set questions. Additionally, the purpose of these

interviews was to determine what, if any, programs or church direction the pastor implemented to address the change in his or hers church attendance levels.

The interviews basically built upon the formal questions but were designed for the pastors to add any additional input about their directions for the churches or personal theological outlooks. While the set questions provided a more measureable and comparable analysis of each church in this category, the interviews were designed to gain personal insight, which, although not quantitative, were used in a comparative basis of the thoughts of each pastor in both the growing and declining churches.

Senior pastors in a church with declining attendance. As with the senior pastor of the growing or megachurches, one-on-one interviews were performed for each senior pastor of a churches that had undergone a decline in attendance in the post-civil rights era. The interviews also gained additional insight into the pastors' vision of their churches and their personal feelings of seeing their churches undergo a decline in membership.

By providing open-ended questions, I was able to determine additional insight as to whether the pastor was satisfied with the direction of their churches or if they had personal ill feelings seeing the membership decline. The questions were the same as the ones used for the pastors in the growing churches, except for one question geared toward addressing the reasons for the declining attendance. As with the interviews with the pastors of the growing churches, the results from the interviews were not easily quantifiable but were a valuable tool in gathering information from pastors' inner feelings, at least to the level they were willing to share. Because the questions used in the interviews were basically the same as with the pastors in the churches with increasing

attendance the interview also sought to gain personal insight from the senior pastors, such as how they addressed the decline in attendance, if at all, and how the pastors perceived the change in membership.

Closed-Ended Questionnaire

Each person in both the increasing and decreasing church attendance groups received a questionnaire (see Appendix C). Each questionnaire consisted of forty questions with four responses: strongly agree, moderately agree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaires for both groups were nearly homogenous in order to provide more consistent and comparable results and also to note any noticeable differences within each church used in this study.

To gauge the participants' feelings about the churches and their pastors, the questionnaire contained the following seven sections: (1) reason for joining the church, (2) feelings about the church, (3) senior pastors' sermons, (4) feelings about the senior pastors, (5) church outreach programs, (6) Christian education, and (7) worship service.

Members in churches with increasing attendance. Within each of the three churches with the increasing membership, three longer-standing members in each of the three churches received a questionnaire. The participants in this category included a mix of lay leaders and general members, these members being done by the senior pastor and myself. Having a mix of different types of members provided well-rounded analysis of the membership base and hopefully brought out true feelings from each participant. It also allowed a comparative analysis of their answers to the responses from lay members during the semi-structured interviews.

Members in churches with decreasing attendance. In each of the three churches coming under the category of having a declining membership base was a core group of members that had decided to retain their memberships. I included these members to find their reasons for staying, how they felt about their pastors and churches and if they thought any changes were necessary or if they were content with the current status of the church.

The members chosen from the churches with an increasing attendance, consisted of both lay leaders and general members. They provided a well-rounded analysis of their views of the churches and the senior pastors. In addition, the selection of these participants occurred through a discussion between the senior pastor and me.

Instrumentation Validity Assessment

Prior to disseminating the closed-ended questionnaires, I distributed copies to several members of my current church, which was not part of this study, and members of other churches also not affiliated with this study. I performed this task to validate how each person felt about completing the questionnaire and if every individual thought it was too complicated or repetitive or if they found any other factors that might contribute to taint the results. Recommendations from these reviewers were incorporated in the final version of the closed-ended questionnaire.

Three pastors, not participating in this study received semi-structured interview questions to comment on how they thought the questions would aid in the goal of this study. Comments received from each participant in the review were used in preparation of the final revised copy of each instrument.

Variables

Within this study, the dependent or criterion variable was the increase or decrease in church attendance in each church identified in the post-civil rights era within Chicago's inner city. The independent or predictor variables were the various reasons for the increase or decrease in attendance for each church as reported and analyzed by the participants in this study through the questionnaires and interviews. Intervening variables such as the selection of the participants were included. The selection process was a combination of choosing members I knew or those I found through personal resources and the inclusion of members selected by the senior pastor after agreeing to participate in this study. Naturally this process precludes each church member completing a questionnaire having exact demographic characteristics. However, the sample size was large enough to ensure that a reasonable representative sample was selected from each church.

Discovering the independent or predictor variables and any underlying themes or trends was the focus of this study. As anticipated with this type of qualitative design, it incorporated flexibility for changes within to provide for adjustment with information acquired while allowing for new directions to be developed.

Instrumental Validity

Within the face-to-face interviews, I was careful not to ask any biased or leading questions that reflect my personal viewpoints; therefore, all questionnaires used in this study were validated by two people familiar with the inner-city an African-American church and/or church studies. The people used for the validation of the instrumentation included the dean of Chicago Bible Institute who also pastors an inner-city, African-

American church in Chicago and, another pastor and professor at a seminary in the Chicago-land area. Having these people validate my questions was important in that I have attended some of the churches in this study, with one being my home church for three decades. Personally, I have my reasons for leaving this church and have known some of the respondents since I was a child. I did not want to create a bias on my part by inflicting personal views and asking leading questions. Conversely, with the churches that have seen growth, I did not bias them by asking leading questions if I was in agreement with the focus or leadership of the senior pastor. Derek Swetnam warns that an interview is not a conversation but a structured way of obtaining information on a focused content (58).

Data Collection

Churches selected for this study occurred through two avenues, the first being through my personal observation and knowledge of the inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago. These observations came from me having lived in Chicago for several decades and also attending many of its inner-city churches, including some used in this study. In addition, I have personal friendships with many members and pastors of some of the churches and, therefore, am somewhat familiar with their attendance patterns.

After selecting churches for this study, I personally contacted the senior pastors by telephone, mailings, and face-to-face meetings either through attending a worship service or through a prearranged meeting through a mutual contact. In this contact, I explained the purpose of my study and the participants that I wanted to include.

Most participants received the questionnaires through the mail which included a self-addressed stamped envelopes to return to me; however, I gave some questionnaires personally to the respondents. I contacted each person prior to me sending the questionnaire. The selection of the lay leaders and members was made after a discussion with the senior pastors and subsequent agreement of the selected participants.

Recording of the one-on-one interviews was initially done through note-taking during the process. These notes were transcribed into a data collection folder with the findings recorded in a Microsoft Word folder. This Word folder contained sub-folders of (1) members of churches with declining attendance, (2) senior pastors of churches with a declining attendance, (3) members in a church with increasing attendance, and (4) senior pastors of churches with increasing attendance. I conducted the interviews either at the churches, after the Sunday morning service, or, in a few instances, at a predetermined off-site location from the church. Also, the questionnaire used for each church had a different form letter (A-F) located at the bottom left of each page, with each church having its own letter for better identification and recording.

In terms of observations, after visiting some of the churches used in the study, I kept a file with notes of my observations in my sub-folder within my dissertation research folder on my computer. The notes included the type of worship service (i.e., the level of liturgy, use of visual aids, youth participation, musical content, and sermon message, and preaching style).

After receipt of the questionnaires in the self-addressed stamped envelopes I provided, the results were recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which was used for statistical comparisons of the answers. I used Excel folders to record the results from the

questionnaires. The Excel spreadsheets contained sub-folders, namely, questionnaires from each member from a church with increasing attendance and questionnaires from each member of a church with a decreasing attendance. Participant names were not recorded on any of the instruments although a separate folder for each church was utilized, which aided in the data analysis process.

Included on each mailed questionnaire was my telephone number and e-mail address for participants to contact me should they have any questions regarding the process or regarding further explanation for any question. Each questionnaire also included an attached letter explaining the purpose of the study and instructions for completing the questionnaire (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The results from the questionnaires were tracked through a standard Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the results reviewed for any common patterns or themes as well as outliers. I performed tabulation and initial data interpretation. For each questionnaire the responses of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree were inputted to provide an overall statistical analysis with measurable results. Coding for the responses was 1 for strongly agree, 2 for agree, 3 for disagree, and 4 for strongly disagree. The responses were further dissected by age, marital status, and gender and then charted to reveal any parallel patterns or commonalities.

Because of the absence of recording devices in the interviews in order to provide a layer of confidentiality and to ensure that the participants' responses could not be shared, all of the notes taken were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and saved under separate folders for each church. I carefully read the interview results and

examined them for common themes within the questions. Once I identified a series of similar themes, I tracked them through another Microsoft Word table, which listed each theme and the matching responses. From this analysis, I was able to reduce the voluminous data received from the open-ended questions into manageable and recordable findings.

Upon initial input and analysis of the findings, I consulted with a friend who is also a senior pastor of an inner-city church in Chicago for his comments concerning my findings. This pastor also served on my Research Dissertation Team in the development of this project and was thus very familiar with my study. To get a better rounded viewpoint of my analysis, I presented my findings to a deacon of an inner-city, African-American church in Chicago.

Ethical Procedures

Naturally, given the limited number of megachurches within the inner city of Chicago and the somewhat common knowledge of which churches have undergone dramatic growth or decline in their attendance, anonymity was a key in this study. For this reason, I was careful not to reveal any demographic or other unique characteristics of the churches used in this study that could lead to their identities. The amount of questionnaires and interviews were not voluminous, so having the results analyzed by a third party was not necessary; thus, I was the only one to see the responses.

The results of the study did not name the respondents nor give any other personal characteristics that could lead to their identities. Finally, upon completion of the study, I maintained all research material in my personal possession within secure computer files. The computer used was password and token protected against unauthorized entry.

Additionally, data recordation included the last four digits of each person's social security number and a church identity code known only by myself.

With any study, validity is a key as others may not only rely on results but use them for future studies or best practices takeaways. According to Joseph Gibaldi, during the interview the information gathered should include the interviewee's credentials and the interviewer should accurately record the information and ask for help with spelling unfamiliar names or terminology (33).

Summary

This chapter outlined the procedures and process used in this study to gain an understanding of the changes in membership levels within certain inner-city, Chicago, African-American churches in the post-civil rights era. To assess the reasons for the changes, the population sample included senior pastors, lay leaders, and general members from churches that have undergone significant variances in their attendance levels. Chapter 4 provides the results of the procedures and processes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

In the post civil-rights era, the city of Chicago has seen a change in its urban landscape. The construction of the Sears Tower, remodeling of the Grant Park downtown area, and the building of more middle-class and upper-class residents in and around the immediate downtown area is part of the changing landscape. On a socioeconomic level, we see more integration of neighborhoods and opportunities for minorities, including African-Americans. As the inner-city portion of Chicago has also undergone changes both good and bad, many once thriving churches have seen their membership levels decline, while other smaller or newer churches have experienced significant growth in the post civil-rights era. The purpose of this study is to discover reasons why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have experienced growth or decline in membership levels in the post civil-rights era. Additionally, the purpose of this project is not to imply that a church with an increasing attendance trend is better or more relevant than a church having a decline in its membership base but only to bring out some of the reasons for the changing attendance trends.

Participants

The participants in this study included one-on-one interviews with three senior pastors from churches that have undergone an increase in membership in the post civil-rights era (see Appendix B) and three senior pastors from churches that have seen an overall decline in membership during this era (see Appendix A). Also included in the study were six members from each of the six churches participating, who completed a

questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the senior pastors and their churches (see Appendix C).

During the research stage of this project, I solicited sixteen churches through either cold-calling or direct contact until three senior pastors from churches with an increasing attendance and three pastors from churches with a decreasing attendance agreed to participate in my study, resulting in a 37.5 percent acceptance rate. The cold-calling was performed by directly calling the church and either speaking directly to the senior pastor or church official or by leaving a voicemail. I directly contacted a church official for three of the churches, having been given the official's contact information through a friend or relative. After selection of the six churches six members from each church were given a copy of the questionnaire to complete. All thirty-six members returned a completed questionnaire, thus my percentage of useable questionnaires was 100 percent.

Once the senior pastor agreed to participate in the study, I mailed or left six questionnaires for the members of his or her church to complete. I also knew some of the members of the churches used in the study so I directly gave them the questionnaires. For some of the churches I had to do follow-up calls in order to receive all six questionnaires. They were successful; and therefore the church member's participation was 100 percent.

The pastors listed as pastor A, pastor B, and pastor C are from churches with an increasing attendance, and those listed as pastor D, pastor E, and pastor F are from churches with a decreasing attendance.

Table 4.1 provides a demographic and personal characteristic breakdown of the thirty six church members and the six senior pastors participating in this study.

Table 4.1. Demographics of Participants (N=42)

| Attributes of People Completing the Questionnaires and Interviews | |
|--|-------|
| Average age of participant in church with increasing attendance | 45.28 |
| Average age of participant in church with decreasing attendance | 46.11 |
| Average age of senior pastor in church with increasing attendance | 43.00 |
| Average age of senior pastor in church with decreasing attendance | 55.33 |
| Number of female participants in church with increasing attendance | 11 |
| Number of female participants in church with decreasing attendance | 7 |
| Number of male participants in church with increasing attendance | 12 |
| Number of male participants in church with decreasing attendance | 6 |
| Average years as member in church with increasing attendance | 19.50 |
| Average years as member in church with decreasing attendance | 25.89 |
| Positions with the churches with increasing attendance | |
| Deacon/trustee | 2 |
| Lay leader | 3 |
| Group/organization member | 9 |
| Volunteer or bench member | 4 |
| Positions with the churches with decreasing attendance | |
| Deacon/trustee | 1 |
| Lay leader | 3 |
| Group/organization member | 10 |
| Volunteer or bench member | 4 |

Although the average age of the participants in the churches with a decreasing attendance trend was nearly a year more than those in the churches with an increasing attendance, the average age of the senior pastor in the churches with a decrease in attendance was more than eight years of the pastors of the churches with an increasing attendance trend. The average ages of the pastors may not be a representative sample of all of the inner-city, African-American churches in the city of Chicago undergoing a drop in attendance, nor is it intended to be, it does present some interesting unproven

assumptions. On the surface, the disparity could suggest that churches with the increasing attendance are attracting newer, younger members or that these churches have younger more contemporary pastors able to reach a younger audience. (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3, p. 135).

The average length of membership of the participants in the churches with a decreasing attendance is more than six years of those completing a questionnaire in a church with an increase in attendance. One may construed that the churches with an increasing attendance are attracting newer members. However, this study did not incorporate any kind of migration analysis, thus this assumption is not proven but is further highlighted in Tables 4.14 and Table 4.15 (p. 144).

One of the major problems of dissertation research is that the author is at the mercy of the participants. During the information-gathering stage, after each senior pastor agreed to participate in the study, I stated to each that when he or she selected the church members to participate ideally the sample needed to include an array of long-term and newer members along with a variety of church leaders. The demographics as outlined Table 4.1 indicate that these instructions were not exactly followed however the information gathered was useful in my research.

The senior pastors of the six churches participating in this study granted me one-on-one interviews, which centered on their ministry outlook both personally and for their churches. The interview questions were the same for the pastors in the churches with an increasing attendance and the ones with a decrease in attendance, except for question number six. In this question, I asked the senior pastor of a church with increasing attendance why he thought his church had grown. However, with the senior pastors in the

churches with a decreasing attendance, a slightly different wording was used, noting not that their churches had undergone a decline in attendance but asking the senior pastors to comment on the changes in attendance patterns within their churches. The questions were worded so as not to offend the pastors, or to suggest that the decline in attendance was a failing trait of the churches or their leadership.

Five of the churches used in this study are located on the south side of Chicago and one is located on the west side of the city. The exact location and attendance numbers are not provided in this study in order to retain their confidentiality. Using Schaller's definition of a megachurch as described in Chapter 2, the churches with an increasing attendance included two such churches. Each of these two churches had a congregation of less than one hundred in 1970 and now have a membership base well over the two thousand threshold for a megachurch set by Thumma. The other church with an increasing attendance is located on the west side of Chicago and had membership of approximately 150 in 1970 and now has nearly one thousand members, with most of this growth occurring within the past decade.

All three of the churches undergoing a decrease in attendance are located on the south side of Chicago. One of the churches membership approximated three hundred in 1970 and totals less than seventy-five. The second church in this group put its membership role in 1970 at one thousand and is now at 375. The final church used in the decreasing attendance group has a current membership of one thousand, but has seen its membership decline 50 percent over the past quarter-century.

Research Question #1

Why have the congregations of some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois, increased dramatically since the early 1970s?

From the interview questions and questionnaires, the primary reasons why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have grown in terms of membership dramatically in the post civil-rights era revolves largely around the actions of the senior pastor and, to a lesser extent the actions of the membership.

Each senior pastor had a long-term vision for his or her church and was also willing to make changes he or she believes are necessary to maintain and/or grow attendance levels. Another factor brought out in the questionnaires was that the members in the churches with an increasing attendance when compared to the members in the churches with the declining attendance are more apt to invite others to their churches. The data did not reveal if extending an invitation to others was due to the fact that members in the churches with an increasing attendance were more proud of their churches and thusly wanted to share their church experiences with others.

Research Question #2

Why have the congregations of some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago, Illinois, decreased since the early 1970s?

From the senior pastor interviews and the questionnaires completed by current members of the churches selected for this study, the reasons why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have undergone dramatic decreases in their attendance are twofold.

Outside of a decline in the neighborhood, which was not a consideration in this study, since some churches grew in this scenario, the following reasons were drawn from the data collected. The senior pastors have not made a willingly strong effort to reverse the decreasing attendance. Despite changing neighborhood patterns having played a role, the senior pastors in the churches with a decreasing attendance did less to address the decline. Also, the senior pastors of the churches with the decreasing attendance were somewhat content with the membership levels of their churches and did not see the declining attendance as a major problem or simply accepted the fact.

Research Question #3

What tactics or strategies did the leadership of those churches whose membership significantly increased during the post-civil rights era utilize?

Because the senior pastor provides or establishes the leadership of his or her church, the growth of the three churches with an increasing attendance can be directly attributed to him or her. From the interviews with the senior pastors, each one was not content with keeping the worship service stagnant but was ready to make necessary changes to address the congregational needs better, and to keep the churches viable.

The one notable common trait was that with two of the churches, the senior pastors had taken over from their fathers but were not afraid or unwilling to make changes from things their father's had implemented in the churches. Also, the senior pastors, while cautious, believed they should have a strong role in the community with one stating that as the senior pastor in an inner-city, African-American church, doing so was part of a biblical calling.

Summary of Semi-Structured Interviews with Senior Pastors of Churches with an Increasing Attendance

The three senior pastors of churches with an increasing attendance granted me interviews centering on ten questions (see Appendix B). Due to schedules, travel, and other commitments, I conducted two of the interviews over the telephone as was mutually convenient. The purpose of the interviews was to dwell into each senior pastor's overall ministry outlook, vision for the church, and what role the church should play, if any in the community and politics.

The following ten open-ended interview questions were designed to get an overall perception about how the senior pastor sees his or her role and how the church should function. From the responses, each pastor was proactive in ministry and church vision and was willing to make any necessary changes for the betterment of the church.

1. Is there a particular biblical principle or principles that you adhere to or tend to focus on more than any other to guide your ministry?

Pastor A stated the primary principle of ministry is to be Christ centered and to focus on grace as opposed to works and stresses, to the members the importance of walking in grace. Pastor B revealed that an emphasis is on loving one's neighbor and how Jesus emphasized the importance of loving others. Pastor B also tries to listen to the pain of people in the community. Pastor C believed strongly in relaying the principle of love and excellence and to live according to Christ.

2. Is there a particular theme or purpose you try to convey in your sermons? How do you go about your sermon preparations? Do you prefer to concentrate on any

particular biblical topic or writer? Do you try to emphasize how Scripture meets modern-day problems or situations?

Pastor A focused on the main theme of perseverance and courage and uplifts people in times of social pressure. Pastor B is concerned with the pain of the people in his church and community and that pastoral care and counseling go hand-in-hand in preaching as does becoming involved in the lifestyle of the people. Pastor C's primary theme is to love always, and to preach liberation and African-American history.

3. Do you feel you have altered your worship service or church vision to meet the increasing attendance trend? If so, how? If not, why not?

Pastor A admitted in making some changes after taking over from his or her father, which included adding to the order of service a quiet time, when the members come in to reflect, and praise singing. Pastor B also took over as senior pastor succeeding his or her father. He too stated that the father was more old-fashioned and has thus put forth a vision and structure and bylaws to address the church's growth. Pastor C is constantly making changes, both short and long-term to meet observed changes in the church or if a certain area needs a change such as expanding Christian education or missions.

4. Where do you see your church in the next five years and beyond?

Pastor A envisions a church growing in spiritual foundation and responding as a body and with less individualism. Pastor B hopes to have a satellite location in a different area within Chicago's inner city and/or a suburban location. Pastor C would like for the church to be a premier institution for developing Christian education, employing more

digital technology, and establishing an intergenerational ministry that would reach people of all races and economic status.

5. What should be the role of the senior pastor in the community?

Pastor A thought the church pastor is a vital necessity in the community with the pastor's actions being missionary orientated. Pastor A added that the senior pastor must deal with community problems in addition to the needs and problems within the church. Pastor B believes that the primary role of the senior pastor in the community should be listening to the pain of the people and also be true to one's power, and to not compromise on biblical teachings. The senior pastor must also energize and empower the membership to become involved. Pastor C strongly emphasized that every pastor should be a community leader with the caveat that the senior pastor should only take on the role of a community leader if he or she has the necessary talents or gifts to complete the task. Otherwise, he or she would be better served taking the role of a follower.

6. What do you see as the main contributing factor of the increase in the church's attendance? What other factors do you feel led to the increase in the church's attendance?

Pastor A plainly stated that the success the church has undergone was through the work of the Holy Spirit and that one cannot measure any model or performance. Pastor B provided a similar response by stating that the church's growth was the result of God and the Holy Spirit allowing the church the ability to adapt to what the community needs. Pastor C provided a different reasoning for the growth of the church, believing it was due to having a niche of being African-American centered, being very clear about choosing modern technology, addressing present-day challenges and spreading the gospel.

7. What does your church do well?

Pastor A thought the church's teachings are the primary keys that draw people and that a church's success largely depends on the shepherding role of the senior pastor. Pastor B believed strongly that the church meets the needs of the community. Pastor C provided that the church has a good worship service and outreach programs and has been successful in merging how the Bible relates to modern problems.

8. Do you feel that there are any areas your church could improve, such as Christian education, worship, music ministry, or church administration? If so, what improvement would you like to see and why?

Pastor A did not think the church has much to improve on but to continue to pray and adjust to address the problems of young people, and so must have constant change. Pastor B thought that the church could improve on meeting the needs of the community and also, internally, the church administration as it grows. Pastor C believed strongly that the church could improve on evangelism and spreading gospel to others outside of the church.

9. Do you feel as pastor you should take political stances or be seen as a leader in the African-American community? If so, how? If not, why not?

Pastor A was in favor of taking political stances but added consideration should be on how the pastor's personal actions will affect the community and what would be the legal implications for the church. The pastor added that the pastor needs to be careful in leaning toward a candidate and would be better served by focusing on issues and not a person. Pastor B stated that the utmost platform is to preach the gospel, adding that a pastor can become involved in political and social interpretation based on Jesus'

teachings but must be careful of the possible impact on the church. Pastor B concluded that the pastor's message and activities must be gospel centered, not Democratic or Republican centered. Pastor C was also in favor of taking political stances and that taking a stance while preaching the gospel flows out of the Bible, and the pastor should be hitting practical issues of today. The pastor further added that taking on political issues and being seen as a leader in the African-American community is an inherent right to so, and if any pastor is not taking such actions is missing his or her calling.

10. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

Pastor A was the only one to add a response to the final question. This leader emphasized that the senior pastor should have a vision he or she believes the church should go into the future and that the local church must look at the community as the cornerstone for its vision.

Several common themes were shared by each of the three pastors: (1) a genuine concern not only for their churches but for the community; (2) senior pastor's should be seen as leaders in the community and taking on political issues, although to what degree and the amount of caution to be taken varied slightly; (3) a well-defined vision both short and long-term for their churches; and, (4) pastors having made or is willing to make changes to improve their churches.

Summary of Semi-Structured Interviews with Senior Pastors of Churches with a Decreasing Attendance

The three senior pastors of the churches with a decreasing attendance also granted me interviews centering around the following ten questions (see Appendix A). Two of the interviews were conducted in person at the church where the senior pastor presides, while

one interview was conducted over the telephone as mutually convenient due to schedules, travel, and other commitments. The purpose of the interviews was to delve into each senior pastor's overall ministry outlook, vision for the church, and what role if any he or she and the church should play in the community and politics.

The following ten open-ended interview questions were designed to get an overall perception about how the senior pastor sees his or her role and how he or she would like the church to function. From the responses, each pastor was not as proactive in ministry as the pastors in the churches with an increasing attendance, and each pastor did not have a well-defined future vision for the church. Also, the pastors, when compared to the pastors in the churches with an increasing attendance, were not as proactive in making changes to church operations but were not entirely content with the current attendance trend of their churches.

1. Is there a particular biblical principle or principles that you adhere to or tend to focus on more than any other to guide your ministry?

Pastor D does not adhere to any particular principle but focuses on nurturing believers in terms of self-evaluation, teaching them to bear fruit in their lives by building up each other. Pastor E centers most sermons and ministry with Romans 8:28 as a guide ("And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose"). Pastor F ministry and sermons focus on the belief that Christ is the redeemer for all and all can be blessed through Him.

2. Is there a particular theme or purpose you try to convey in your sermons? How do you go about your sermon preparations? Do you prefer to concentrate on any

particular biblical topic or writer? Do you try to emphasize how Scripture meets modern-day problems or situations?

Pastor D often quotes Proverbs 3:5, (“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding”) but at the same time absolutely tries to address modern-day problems in sermons, particularly those problems that impact the congregation. Pastor E plainly stated, “My mind is my mind and Christ mind, and no material force can control it.” This pastor also addresses modern-day problems in sermons, having just preached on the role of the armed forces. Pastor F likes to center teachings on heeding the Word and not submitting to unbiblical teachings.

3. Do you feel you have altered your worship service or church vision to meet any changing attendance trends? If so, how? If not, why not?

Pastor D stated that growth is part of the church’s plan but that they have to focus on what they have. One of their goals is to invite others to the church and be an example of Christian living in order to draw others to the church. Pastor E added praise dancers and a children’s church to be more attractive to current and potential members after seeing membership levels declining. This pastor also allowed relaxed standards of women wearing pants and tried harder to meet needs of younger people attending the church. Pastor F firmly stated that no alterations had been made, wanting only to follow as the Spirit leads. This pastor did add that the church and senior pastor should be highly visible in the community.

4. Where do you see your church in the next five years and beyond?

Pastor D admitted not really thinking the future and took several seconds to ponder an answer, which did not materialize. Pastor E stated that the church’s current

focus was on building a new church because the current building is old and is always in need of some sort of repair work. He was also aware that the neighborhood where the church is located is undergoing a change of becoming stronger economically. Pastor F's goal was to have a larger community presence by adding more outreach ministries.

5. What should be the role of the senior pastor in the community?

Pastor D believed the role of the senior pastor in the community is to be available to meet community needs and to help develop others with God's guidance. This pastor also thought the church and pastor should be active and visible in the community. Pastor E similarly believed that the senior pastor should reach out to the community and be aware of its philosophy, providing children and teen services on their levels. Pastor F also thought that the senior pastor needs to be highly visible and a source of strength and leadership, being able to help those in need.

6. What do you see as the main contributing factor of the change in the church's attendance? What other factors do you feel led to the change in the church's attendance?

Pastor D admitted that the decline in the church's attendance in recent years could be largely attributed to the death of the prior pastor, which led to many members leaving. This pastor also admitted to some other reasons, but declined to state what those reasons were. Pastor E stated that the church lost a large amount of members who joined a new church started by one of the assistant pastors after the death of a previous senior pastor. Pastor E also believed the changing demographics of the area led to the decline. Pastor F answered that no matter how membership levels change, the church and senior pastor must be available and teach the true Word and continue to serve as a cornerstone of the community.

7. What does your church do well?

Pastor D stated that the members make people feel at home, welcome, loved, and cared for. Pastor E thought the church's strong point was reaching out to others, embracing others in worship, reaching out to other denominations. Pastor F said the church's overall outreach ministry and activity in the community was their strong point.

8. Do you feel that there are any areas your church could improve, such as Christian education, worship, music ministry, or church administration? If so, what improvement would you like to see and why?

Pastor D saw the main concern is to improve attendance and the church's outreach ministry, including being more available to community. Pastor E boldly stated that the church had no areas to improve, outside of continuing to work hard. Pastor F commented that the church is constantly trying to improve, especially in the areas of more teaching, and they continually pray for guidance.

9. Do you feel as pastor you should take political stances or be seen as a leader in the African-American community? If so, how? If not, why not?

Pastor D thought the senior pastor should take political stances to some degree but not tell members how to vote or what political party to support. Pastor E admitted that taking political stances can be a sticky situation. This pastor does not turn away anyone wanting to come and speak at the church, which is open to all, but will not take any stances, wanting to keep tax exempt status. Pastor F said political stances and being seen as a community leader is a definite responsibility of the senior pastor. This pastor believed everyone is called upon to lead and be active in the community because Scripture tells us to do so. Pastor F added the importance of taking political stances and

that as the senior pastor he or she cannot waiver or worry about being politically correct. This pastor cautioned that in order to keep IRS status the pastor may be limited in making political comments but that does not prevent taking on issues through other personal avenues.

10. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

Pastor E thought that the church benefits from a philosophy that no one is better than anyone is highlighted in the Sunday worship where all members are asked to wear white, showing that all are equal.

The pastors in the churches with a decreasing attendance also presented some common themes: (1) They too had a genuine concern not only for their churches but for the community, however, as the questionnaire results bring out, the pastors and/or the churches are less active in community outreach than those in the churches with an increasing attendance; (2) the senior pastors did not have well-defined goals for their churches; and, (3) they were not as adamant about taking political stances as the pastors in the churches with a increasing attendance.

Overall, the senior pastors of the churches with an increasing attendance were more open to make changes in order to keep their services vibrant or contemporary than the pastors of the churches with decreasing attendance. In addition, the pastors in the churches with increasing attendance made changes or adjustments to their worship service or other church activities as they saw fit, whereas the pastors in the churches with decreasing attendance were less aggressive in making changes and stated they would rely on guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Results of the Questionnaires Completed by Church Members

Six members from each of the six churches participating in this study completed a forty-question survey about their attitudes of their churches and senior pastor (see Appendix C). The baseline response values were on a Likert-type scale as follows: 1—Strongly Disagree; 2—Disagree; 3—Disagree; 4—Strongly Agree.

Summary of findings concerning reasons for joining the church. The reputation of the senior pastor was the dominant reason for the participants joining their respective churches in both the increasing and decreasing churches. However, with the churches with an increasing attendance, the pastor's reputation was a more dominant factor than with the participants in churches with a decreasing attendance. Members in the churches with the decreasing attendance also equally cited a close friend or relative attending the church or their church being close to their home as a reason for joining their church which could be reflective of the longer length of membership of the participants in the churches with a decreasing attendance, (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Complacency may be a dominant reason for joining a church as ease of convenience is more of a contributing factor for joining one of the churches with a decreasing attendance. Members belonging to one of the churches with an increase in attendance are more inclined to invite a friend, evidenced by the higher score, suggesting they are more proud of their church and want to share it with others. When the members were asked if they would invite a friend or relative to their church, the members in the churches with an increasing attendance stated yes by more than a two-to-one margin over the members in a church with decreasing attendance, (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Another point of interest was that the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance cited ease of getting to their church as a more dominant reason for joining, and given the average length of membership, appears to remain a dominant factor of them remaining at their church, (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Table 4.2. Mean Scores for Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Reasons for Joining the Church | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. I joined this church because it was recommended by a friend. | 2.44 |
| 2. I joined this church because my parents or close relative goes here. | 2.13 |
| 3. I joined this church because of its presence in the community. | 2.38 |
| 4. I joined this church because of the reputation of the pastor. | 2.69 |
| 5. I joined this church because it is easy to get to or close to my home. | 2.00 |

Table 4.3. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Reasons for Joining the Church | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. I joined this church because it was recommended by a friend. | 2.32 |
| 2. I joined this church because my parents or close relative goes here. | 2.44 |
| 3. I joined this church because of its presence in the community. | 2.13 |
| 4. I joined this church because of the reputation of the pastor. | 2.44 |
| 5. I joined this church because it is easy to get to or close to my home. | 2.43 |

Summary of findings concerning perceptions about the church. On the whole, all of the churches scored well with the participants in terms of being biblically sound, although the churches with an increasing attendance scored much higher. Evidence of the churches having a more established community presence was seen in the churches with an increasing attendance as they scored consistently higher on how the members not only

view their role in the community, but how they do a better job of reaching both younger and older people. In the following discussion of how the members view their churches' Christian education, the churches with the increasing attendance scored more favorably in training its members, (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

In the churches with the increasing attendance senior pastors who are active in local politics, were viewed more positively. As noted in the interviews with the senior pastors, those in the churches with increasing attendance on average had a more defined vision for their church, a trait reflected in the member's perception when comparing the two groups of churches, (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

Table 4.4. Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Perceptions About the Church | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. I consider this church to be biblically sound. | 3.88 |
| 2. The church is a vital part of the community. | 3.63 |
| 3. The church does a good job of reaching young people. | 3.69 |
| 4. The church does a good job of reaching older members. | 3.63 |
| 5. The church should not be so active politically. | 2.06 |
| 6. The church does not have a well-defined vision. | 1.38 |

Table 4.5. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Perceptions About the Church | Baseline (Scale 1-4) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. I consider this church to be biblically sound. | 3.27 |
| 2. The church is a vital part of the community. | 3.02 |
| 3. The church does a good job of reaching young people. | 2.69 |
| 4. The church does a good job of reaching older members. | 2.68 |
| 5. The church should not be so active politically. | 1.89 |
| 6. The church does not have a well-defined vision. | 1.69 |

Summary of findings concerning senior pastor's sermons. Interestingly the members of the church with a declining attendance while believing that their pastors sermons were more relevant for today when compared to those in the churches with an increasing attendance thought that they learned less from the sermons. However, the members in the churches with increasing attendance were in stronger agreement that their pastors' sermons were more biblically based. Supporting these feelings, the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance felt less positive in the sermon preparation time of the senior pastor, (see Tables 4.6 and 4.7).

Another interesting factor from this set of questions is that despite the stronger feelings about the pastors' sermons being biblically based and learning something from each sermon, the members in the churches with an increasing attendance did not think the sermons were as relevant for today as those in the churches with a decrease in attendance. However, those in the churches with an increasing attendance felt better about the amount of time the senior pastor spends in sermon preparation, which would give credence to why they think the sermons are more biblically based, (see Tables 4.6 and 4.7).

Table 4.6. Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Senior Pastor's Sermons | Baseline (Scale 1-4) |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. The pastor's sermons are biblically based. | 3.73 |
| 2. I feel that I learn something after each sermon. | 3.56 |
| 3. The pastor's sermons are not relevant for today. | 1.60 |
| 4. The pastor does not seem to spend the proper amount of time preparing for his sermons. | 1.27 |

Table 4.7. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Senior Pastor’s Sermons | Baseline (Scale 1-4) |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. The pastor’s sermons are biblically based. | 3.35 |
| 2. I feel that I learn something after each sermon. | 2.95 |
| 3. The pastor’s sermons are not relevant for today. | 1.19 |
| 4. The pastor does not seem to spend the proper amount of time preparing for his sermons. | 1.76 |

Summary of findings concerning perceptions about the senior pastor.

Overall, the participants’ feelings about the senior pastor mirrored each other, though those in the churches with the decreasing attendance felt slightly less favorable toward their pastors in terms of spirituality and concern for the members, (see Tables 4.8 and 4.9).

Despite the larger congregations, the members of the churches with an increasing attendance thought their pastors were more accessible than those in the churches with a decreasing attendance. Also with the growing churches on average having more community outreach programs or being more visible, translated into their members feeling stronger about their pastor caring for the local community. Those in the churches with a decreasing attendance feel slightly more inclined that their pastors will eventually leave their church, (see Tables 4.8 and 4.9).

A sign that the senior pastors of a churches with an increasing attendance are busy in many endeavors, some of which may cause them to be away from the church, is shown in a slightly higher view that they spend too much time away from the church. (see Tables 4.8 and 4.9)

Table 4.8. Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Perceptions About the Senior Pastor | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. The pastor is very strong spiritually. | 3.67 |
| 2. The pastor is genuinely concerned about the members. | 3.63 |
| 3. The pastor is easily accessible to all members. | 3.38 |
| 4. The pastor cares about the local community. | 3.75 |
| 5. The pastor will eventually leave this church for another church. | 1.13 |
| 6. I feel the pastor spends too much time away from the church. | 1.64 |

Table 4.9. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Perceptions About the Senior Pastor | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. The pastor is very strong spiritually. | 3.33 |
| 2. The pastor is genuinely concerned about the members. | 3.30 |
| 3. The pastor is easily accessible to all members. | 3.11 |
| 4. The pastor cares about the local community. | 2.95 |
| 5. The pastor will eventually leave this church for another church. | 1.31 |
| 6. I feel the pastor spends too much time away from the church. | 1.40 |

Summary of findings concerning church outreach programs. The disparity of how the participants feel about their churches' role in the community and beyond is very pronounced. Those in the churches with an increasing attendance believed very strongly about their churches' role in providing outreach programs both within and outside of their community, when compared to the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance. Adding to this disparity was the fact that members in the churches with an increasing attendance felt stronger about the church providing community outreach programs, (see Tables 4.10 and 4.11).

Despite the larger size, the members of the churches with increasing attendance thought that their church make visitors feel more welcomed. This welcoming may be due to these churches having more formal meet and greet settings, whereas in the small churches visitors are generally recognized through standing up and being greeted by a pastor during the morning service. Although both sets of participants believed their churches should be concerned about outreach programs, those in the congregations with an increasing attendance felt stronger, indicating the stronger overall feelings about their churches outreach program, (see Tables 4.10 and 4.11).

These results support the outreach programs of the senior pastor and its members and that both the church and community at large should be part of the churches' mission, though to a stronger degree with the churches with an increasing attendance. The reason for these feelings may be due to lack of resources at the smaller churches including members and finances, although these factors were not included as part o this study, (see Tables 4.10 and 4.11).

Table 4.10. Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Church Outreach Programs | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. The church does a good job of providing outreach programs for the local community. | 3.38 |
| 2. The church does a good job of providing outreach programs for communities outside its local community. | 3.06 |
| 3. Part of providing community outreach programs should not be part of the church. | 1.38 |
| 4. The members make visitors feel welcome. | 3.69 |
| 5. The church should be more concerned with its current members rather than outreach programs for the community. | 1.38 |

Table 4.11. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Church Outreach Programs | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. The church does a good job of providing outreach programs for the local community. | 2.29 |
| 2. The church does a good job of providing outreach programs for communities outside its local community. | 2.35 |
| 3. Part of providing community outreach programs should not be part of the church. | 1.56 |
| 4. The members make visitors feel welcome. | 2.84 |
| 5. The church should be more concerned with its current members rather than outreach programs for the community. | 1.31 |

Summary of findings concerning Christian education. The participants in the churches with increasing attendance viewed Christian education more positively. One notable fact was that the members in the churches with the declining attendance were also less satisfied with the midweek worship services. However, it was not clear if the dissatisfaction was due to the quality of the service or a lack of such services, (see Tables 4.12 and 4.13).

Despite the overall less favorable opinion of Christian education in their respective churches, the members in the churches with a declining attendance felt more satisfied with the training material used in Sunday school. In summary while the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance felt less favorable about the overall Christian education program of their churches, by rating the Sunday school material sufficient, they appear to be content with the situation. Finally, the members in both sets of churches basically disagreed that their church leaders are more concerned about themselves than helping other church members, (see Tables 4.12 and 4.13).

Table 4.12. Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Christian Education | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. The church does an effective job of training its members. | 3.38 |
| 2. The church does an effective job of teaching the younger members. | 3.56 |
| 3. The church does an effective job of teaching the older members. | 3.56 |
| 4. I enjoy Sunday school and often learn something from each class. | 3.17 |
| 5. The church has an effective midweek Bible study or worship service. | 3.63 |
| 6. Some of the training materials used in Sunday school are too old. | 1.69 |
| 7. I feel some of the leaders in the church are more concerned about themselves, rather than helping others or the church. | 2.06 |

Table 4.13. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Christian Education | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. The church does an effective job of training its members. | 2.73 |
| 2. The church does an effective job of teaching the younger members. | 2.86 |
| 3. The church does an effective job of teaching the older members. | 2.90 |
| 4. I enjoy Sunday school and often learn something from each class. | 2.85 |
| 5. The church has an effective midweek Bible study or worship service. | 2.48 |
| 6. Some of the training materials used in Sunday School are too old. | 1.20 |
| 7. I feel some of the leaders in the church are more concerned about themselves, rather than helping others or the church. | 2.02 |

Summary of findings concerning the worship service. The questions relating to how the members feel about their worship service show how established or longtime members may be unwilling to leave their churches, even in the midst of a certain degree of dissatisfaction. From the survey questions regarding the worship service, the members in the churches with the increasing attendance were far more satisfied with the worship service being relevant and enjoyable. Having the participants in the churches with increasing attendance feeling so strongly about the relevance of the worship service

supports the findings of how they feel stronger about the pastors, sermons, and training others. Complementing the members' feelings in the churches with increasing attendance was how they overwhelmingly felt stronger about their enjoyment of the worship service compared to the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance, (see Tables 4.14 and 4.15).

While the members in the churches with an increasing attendance scored the relevance and enjoyment of their churches' worship service higher, the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance thought the worship services were not too contemporary. However, the members in the churches with an increasing attendance did not think their worship services were too old-fashioned, (see Tables 4.14 and 4.15).

Even the start and length of the worship service was viewed in a more negative light in the churches with a decreasing attendance. Given the overall less favorable view of the worship service, some members remain. A strong possible reason behind their staying could be drawn from the fact that closeness to home was a strong reason this group joined their churches. A hint that the churches with an increasing attendance trend are adapting to a more contemporary service and drawing younger people is evidenced by members in the churches with a declining attendance appear to be more satisfied with the Sunday structure as they were content in not adding another morning service. With the churches with an increasing attendance, two had at least two Sunday morning services, while among the churches with the decreasing attendance, only one had multiple Sunday morning services, (see Tables 4.14 and 4.15).

Table 4.14. Participants in a Church with Increasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Worship Service | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. The worship service is relevant. | 4.00 |
| 2. I enjoy the worship service. | 3.88 |
| 3. The worship service is too contemporary. | 1.88 |
| 4. The worship service is too old-fashioned. | 1.31 |
| 5. I like the start time of the Sunday morning service. | 3.67 |
| 6. The length of the Sunday morning service is satisfactory. | 3.50 |
| 7. We should add another Sunday morning service. | 1.81 |

Table 4.15. Participants in a Church with Decreasing Attendance (N=36)

| Survey Questions—Worship Service | Baseline Scale (1-4) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. The worship service is relevant. | 3.15 |
| 2. I enjoy the worship service. | 2.50 |
| 3. The worship service is too contemporary. | 1.10 |
| 4. The worship service is too old-fashioned. | 1.64 |
| 5. I like the start time of the Sunday morning service. | 2.48 |
| 6. The length of the Sunday morning service is satisfactory. | 2.65 |
| 7. We should add another Sunday morning service. | 1.34 |

One final take-away from the questionnaires completed by the church members was that eleven of the eighteen members from the churches with a decreasing attendance stated they would not invite a friend or relative to their church. By contrast, sixteen of the eighteen members from the churches with an increasing attendance stated they would invite a friend or relative to their church. Table 4.11 brought out that the members in the churches with an increasing attendance felt by a significant margin that visitors were made to feel welcomed at their church over the churches with a decreasing attendance. It may also be inferred that the members of the churches with a decreasing attendance,

while generally satisfied with their church, would not feel comfortable inviting non-members, which if not reversed may lead to a further decline in attendance and threaten the viability of the churches as older members leave and are not replaced by new members.

Summary of Major Findings

The study produced the following major findings:

1. The senior pastors of the churches that have undergone increased attendance have implemented a well-defined vision for their churches, including future plans of where they would like to see their churches in the next five years.
2. The senior pastors of the churches having a decline in attendance did not have a well-defined vision for their churches nor any long-term goals or plans for the churches, or simply felt any changes in their churches' attendance was due to the work of God.
3. The senior pastors of the growing churches were more adamant that their churches as well as they personally should take on political stances and be more visible in the community than the senior pastors of the churches with a decreasing attendance.
4. The senior pastors of the churches with increasing attendance are more apt to implement change to meet changing attendance patterns, while pastors in the churches with a decreasing attendance are more content with the current status quo.
5. Overall, the membership base of each church with an increasing attendance and each church with a decreasing attendance was relatively satisfied with the direction their churches and pastors are taking.
6. The underlying reason of why those belonging to one of the increasing in-attendance churches was based upon the pastors' reputation or the churches' presence in

the community, while those in the churches with declining attendance joined more because of convenience or by being introduced by a family member.

7. Members from the churches with declining attendance were far less likely to invite a friend or relative to their churches than the members of churches with increasing attendance.

8. Members in the churches with an increasing attendance felt their church made visitors feel more welcomed than the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance.

Chapter 5 provides a further analysis and discussion of the major findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

This project originated out of the idea of identifying the underlying reasons behind the changing landscape of inner-city, African-American churches in the city of Chicago. The purpose of the research was to identify the characteristics that led to why some inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have undergone a significant decline or increase in membership since the early 1970s and evaluate the reasons for this phenomena. Being a former longtime resident of Chicago's inner-city area, this project had a strong personal impact for me and was a driving force throughout the process.

Chapter 2 revealed how the African-American church has adapted to the changing economic and social climate in America throughout its history. Today, the inner-city, African-American community, while seeing much progress in terms of racism and societal ills, still has not seen these evils completely eradicated. However, while the purpose of this study was not to suggest that the church and/or its pastor openly or actively address social issues, it aimed to determine how the members' and senior pastor's actions can be a factor in the church's increase or decline in membership.

The instruments used to assess the changing membership levels were a mix of closed-ended questionnaires given to each church member in the study and a semi-structured interview with the senior pastor of each church.

Senior Pastors' Church Vision in Churches with Increasing Attendance

Although the direct impact of having a well-defined vision statement was not a measurable attribute in this study, it does show that the senior pastor of the churches with

an increasing attendance have established more formal future planning. The exact relationship of how this translated to an increasing attendance was beyond the scope of this paper, but it does highlight that this set of pastors was willing and able to make the changes they thought necessary to keep their churches vital.

Senior Pastors' Church Vision in Churches with Decreasing Attendance

The pastors in the churches with a decreasing attendance either lacked a formal plan or thought that a formalized plan was not necessary; instead, they stated that they would rather trust in God to guide them in future endeavors.

The pastors in the churches with a declining attendance are not forward looking in their vision for their churches. This lack of vision may be an underlying reason of why some members have left or why the churches are having trouble attracting new members. However, if the senior pastors and/or the membership base of the churches are content with their current attendance level, that decision is their prerogative and is not considered a negative in this study.

Senior Pastors' Viewpoint on Taking Political Stances

The members in the growing churches had far larger support for their pastor's and churches being visible in the community and politically active and also considered this activity as a reason for joining the church. I am not stating that community activity and politics should be ahead of preaching the gospel but to bring out the difference and importance of politics among the two church groups.

Political activity by a church is not just limited to the inner-city, African-American church as brought out in Chapter 2. The National Association of Evangelicals

in addressing evangelical's civic responsibility, cites Colossians 1:16-17 and Romans 8:19-21 as Scriptural approval for civic engagement.

To restrict our stewardship to the private sphere would be to deny an important part of his dominion and to functionally abandon it to the Evil One. To restrict our political concerns to matters that touch only on the private and the domestic spheres is to deny the all-encompassing Lordship of Jesus (Revelation 19:16).

Today, congregants of churches located in varying economic areas often look to their church leaders to be a voice in social matters, in addition to being a source spiritual guidance.

Members' Perceptions about the Senior Pastors and Churches

Each of the six pastors participating in this study was viewed as spiritually strong by his or her members. However, the members of churches with a decreasing attendance did not feel as strong about their churches external activities, nor were the members as likely to invite others to their churches. The findings also discovered a disconnect between the pastor and the overall feelings about the church for the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance. While having a positive outlook about their pastor, the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance had a less favorable view of church activities. This assessment is noted as the members in the churches with a decreasing attendance were less likely to invite a friend to their church, which could help attribute to the declining attendance trend not reversing.

Senior Pastors Implementing Change

In chapter 2, Olson outlines how a church should use the gospel to become more integrated in a person's life and for the betterment of the church (194-99). In the discussions with the senior pastors of all the churches in this study, each expressed a

concern not only for their churches but also for the community, although some expressed a stronger concern. The pastors' action followed one of Olson's keys, which was to treat people with compassion and justice.

Olson also outlines five key elements for the message and mission of the church, four of which were followed to different levels by each of the pastors interviewed (210-18). The principles used were (1) helping people break the bonds that hold and oppress them; (2) helping people live a new, resurrected life in Christ through the filling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit; (3) becoming a compassionate countercultural force in the community, nation, and world; and (4) being God's community of broken-yet healing people that provide love, support, and accountability for each other. With each pastor having a church in an economically depressed area and/or having a number of members suffering from some sort of societal or economic ills, each thought he or she had a duty to address their concerns. As noted previously pastor B (from a church with increasing attendance) centered much of the church's vision around being aware of the needs of the people in the church's community and acting on those needs. Pastor D (from a church with decreasing attendance) had much of the ministry revolve around not only helping people break the bonds that hold and oppress them but also being a compassionate countercultural force in the community.

Reasons for Joining the Church

In the churches with a decreasing attendance, a strong factor of why the members joined the church was having a close relative attended or for the convenience of attending the church. In addition the members in the churches with a declining attendance were less likely to invite a friend to their churches. As the membership ages, with less newer

members attending partly due to the current members not inviting friends and family, the church could be challenged to maintain its current membership levels.

Implications of the Findings

This study provided some valuable insights as to why certain inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago have seen dramatic changes in their attendance in the post civil-rights era. Pastors and church leaders from most denominations or locales may benefit from the results.

For the churches that are undergoing an increase in attendance, the three senior pastors were not only concerned about the future direction of their churches, but also acted on how they thought their churches' viability would continue in the near and long-term future. The actions implemented by the pastors included such measures as adding the quiet reflection time at the start of service, taking a more visible role in the community by tackling social and economic issues, and not being afraid of changing worship services, even if it contradicted worship services of a father, who was their predecessor. With the members of the churches with a decreasing attendance being less likely to invite a friend or relative to their churches, reversing the attendance trend of the particular churches might be hard, especially in light of the senior pastors lacking a clear or well-defined future plan for their churches.

However, for a church undergoing a decreasing attendance trend, the pastors and leaders must first decide if they want to reverse this trend and second must ask themselves are they willing to make the necessary changes or actions to restore or maintain church growth. Only one of the pastors in this group was willing to be seen as a social/economic voice in the community. One of the senior pastors in a church with a

decreasing attendance not used in this study (because none of the solicited members would complete a questionnaire, although the pastor underwent an interview) stated the issues outside of the church are of no concern to the church and the pastor does not do any type of planning or strategy because God will the church in the direction he wants it to go.

The key for any church regardless of size should be the spreading of the gospel. Helping others in the community is also an important church attribute but should not be ahead of teaching the Word.

Limitations of the Study

With this being an exploratory study, my goal was to discover the reasons why the participants were members of their churches and also to detect how each senior pastor viewed his or her role within the church and community. The underlying reasons supporting the participants' actions were not analyzed, which could be done in an explanatory study. As noted in Chapter 3, the participants used in this study were a combination of those selected by the senior pastor, people that I personally, or was referred by a friend or relative of mine. From the results discussed in Chapter 4, the percentage of the participants who have a very favorable feeling about their pastor and church was very high, as it makes sense that one attends a church that they have positive feelings about their church and pastor. However, with the pastor selecting most of the participants, whether intentionally or not, the chances of the questionnaires being distributed only to members close to the pastor or his office assistant are great. The results from the questionnaires may have been different if they were randomly passed out or given to those who may have felt as positively about the senior pastor or the church.

Transferability

This study was limited in that it included only inner-city, African-American churches in Chicago. However, the data gathered could be transferable to most larger inner-city, African-American churches in America. In Chapter 1, I noted that I used Chicago because I grew up there and have a personal knowledge of many of the inner-city churches and also knowledge of Chicago, having lived there for most of my life. However, Chicago's inner-city is not unlike many inner-city areas in some of the larger cities in America, which are undergoing a changing landscape both economically and politically.

Also, the results from this study could be used by any church to address its membership changes. Senior pastors of other denominations in other cities may reflect on the results of this study to determine if any findings mirror their current situation.

Unexpected Observations

Each church member completing the questionnaire answered a series of demographic questions including whether or not they tithed. All thirty-six respondents indicated that they tithed. I am not questioning whether that this was true, but considering that a tither is generally a person who is happy with his or her church and pastor translates that it can be assumed that most if not all of the participants receiving the questionnaires were generally happy with their churches and thus, their answers may not be as critical as those of a non-tither member. If this statement is true, then the inclusion of non-tithers could have produced somewhat different results in this study.

At some point during the interview process with the pastors of the churches with an increasing attendance, a pastor invited me to attend a service sometime in the future.

However, none of the pastors in the churches with a decreasing attendance extended such an invitation. I am not suggesting that the pastors in the former group are less sociable or cold to outsiders but this point brings out the inherent marketing ploy of each. As stated in Chapter 4, the pastors of the churches with a decreasing attendance are generally satisfied with the status of their churches, although they are aware of the decline in membership.

Recommendations

Many churches, pastors, and leaders may benefit from the results of this study. While the population was limited to inner-city, African-American churches in the city of Chicago, church leaders in other cities and denominations needing to measure the impact of their individual churches' membership levels may use these findings.

As this study centered on the inner-city, African-American church, the question remains of how do my findings fit into other larger inner-city African-American churches. Future studies could focus on cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Philadelphia, or Dallas to name a few. Conversely, a study could only focus on one denomination within one of the aforementioned cities.

Another recommendation for future studies would be for a particular synod or district within a denomination to conduct a widespread study of its churches within to ascertain why attendance patterns are changing for some of its member churches. The results could prove favorable in keeping members within its sect who may be leaving to join other denominations, by identifying any underlying problems, as well as recognizing any positive maneuvers used by the growing churches, which could be applied to those who membership levels are diminishing.

Postscript

It was a great joy in doing this project, being a product of the inner-city of Chicago and attending an African-American church. One of the more frustrating things in doing a research project is getting the desired responses. While rejection is generally an expected part of the process, the level of my frustration comes because there have been very few studies done such as this one and as an African-American pastor or church member, one should be glad to participate in a study which could help provide a better understanding of the inner-city, African-American church dynamics. My frustration became heightened in that I, of course, had several pastors stating they did not want to participate or I made this assumption after repeated telephone calls, letters, and e-mails failed to illicit any response. I was particularly upset because in other studies and surveys I have conducted using predominantly white suburban churches, I received nearly 100 percent participation.

All three of the senior pastors interviewed with the increasing church attendance after the interview asked me to send them a copy of my project, once it is completed. Conversely, only one of the pastors from the churches with a decreasing attendance made such a request. A point of interest is that I have known this pastor for several years, while the other pastors I had never formally met. In Chapter 4, the senior pastors of the churches with an increasing attendance had more defined visions for their church and were more apt to make changes in the worship service or church operations for the betterment of their church. I am not suggesting that the receipt of this project will provide valuable insight that if adopted by senior pastors would lead to the betterment of their churches, but only to bring out the difference in the management styles of the two groups

of pastors. The pastors in the churches with the increasing attendance are looking for ideas to bring to their churches while the pastors in the churches with the decreasing attendance are generally less receptive to new ideas or changes.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR PASTOR IN A CHURCH WITH DECREASING ATTENDANCE

1. Do you have a particular biblical principle or principles that you adhere to or tend to focus on more than any other to guide your ministry?

2. Do you have a particular theme or purpose you try to convey in your sermons? How do you go about your sermon preparations? Do you prefer to concentrate on any particular biblical topic or writer? Do you try to emphasize how Scripture meets modern-day problems or situations?

3. Have you altered your worship service or church vision to reverse the declining attendance trend? If so, how? If not, why not?

4. Where do you see your church in the next five years and beyond?

5. What should be the role of the senior pastor in the community?

6. What do you see as the main contributing factor of the decline in the church's attendance? What other factors do you think led to the decline in the church's attendance?
7. What does your church do well?
8. Do you believe your church could improve in any areas, such as Christian education, worship, music ministry, or church administration? If so, what improvement would you like to see and why?
9. Do you think as pastor that you should take political stances or be seen as a leader in the African-American community? If so, how? If not, why not?
10. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR PASTOR IN A CHURCH WITH INCREASING ATTENDANCE

1. Do you have a particular biblical principle or principles that you adhere to or tend to focus on more than any other to guide your ministry?

2. Do you have a particular theme or purpose you try to convey in your sermons? How do you go about your sermon preparations? Do you prefer to concentrate on any particular biblical topic or writer? Do you try to emphasize how Scripture meets modern-day problems or situations?

3. Have you altered your worship service or church vision to reverse the declining attendance trend? If so, how? If not, why not?

4. Where do you see your church in the next five years and beyond?

5. What should be the role of the senior pastor in the community?

6. What do you see as the main contributing factor of the increase in the church's attendance? What other factors do you think led to the increase in the church's attendance?
7. What does your church do well?
8. Do you believe your church could improve in any areas, such as Christian education, worship, music ministry, or church administration? If so, what improvement would you like to see and why?
9. Do you think as pastor that you should take political stances or be seen as a leader in the African-American community? If so, how? If not, why not?
10. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

CHURCH ATTRIBUTE STUDY

MEMBER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please read each question carefully and honestly respond by circling the number to the right of each question that best describes your view. *All answers are treated with strict confidentiality and your answers will not be shared with any other person, church or institution.*

| | Opinion | Rating |
|--|-------------------|--------|
| Share your opinion in these areas based on the following scale: | Strongly Disagree | 1 |
| | Disagree | 2 |
| | Agree | 3 |
| | Strongly Agree | 4 |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Example: | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| I am very appreciative of your response to this questionnaire | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| Opinion Areas | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Reason for Joining the Church

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I joined this church because it was recommended by a friend. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I joined this church because my parents or close relative went or goes here. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I joined this church because of its presence in the community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I joined this church because of the reputation of the pastor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I joined this church because it is easy to get to or close to my home. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Feelings about the Church

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 6. I consider this church to be biblically sound. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. The church is a vital part of the community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. The church does a good job of reaching young people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. The church does a good job or reaching older members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. The church should not be so active politically. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. The church does not have a well-defined vision. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Senior Pastor's Sermons

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. The pastor's sermons are biblically based. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. I feel I have learned something after each sermon. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. The pastor's sermons are not relevant for today. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. The pastor does not seem to spend the proper amount of time preparing his or her sermons. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Feelings about the Senior Pastor

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 16. The pastor is very strong Spiritually. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. The pastor is genuinely concerned about the members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. The pastor is easily accessible to all members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. The pastor cares about the local community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. The pastor will eventually leave this church for another church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. I feel the pastor spends too much time away from the church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Church Outreach Programs

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 22. The church does a good job of providing outreach programs for the local community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. The church does a good job of providing outreach programs for communities outside its local community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. Part of providing community outreach programs should not be part of the church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. The members make visitors feel welcome. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 26. The church should be more concerned with its members rather than outreach programs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Christian Education

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 27. The church does an effective job of training its members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 28. The church does an effective job of teaching the younger members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 29. The church does an effective job of teaching the older members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 30. I enjoy Sunday school and often learn something from each class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 31. The church has an effective midweek Bible study or worship service. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 32. Some of the training materials used in Sunday school are too old. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 33. I feel some of the leaders in the church are more concerned about themselves, rather than helping others or the church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Worship Service

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 34. The worship service is relevant. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 35. I enjoy the worship service. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 36. The worship service is too contemporary. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 37. The worship service is too old-fashioned. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 38. I like the start time of the Sunday morning service. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 39. The length of the Sunday morning service is satisfactory. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 40. We should add another Sunday morning service. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Personal Characteristics (Please answer the following as Yes or No)

1. I am a Tither ____
2. I often invite friends or relatives to my church ____
3. I enjoy my role at the church ____
4. I feel my role in the church is important ____
5. I have remained at this church because it is close to my home ____
6. I have remained at this church because I would not feel comfortable going to another church ____
7. I would remain at this church until I am no longer able to attend ____

Personal Information

8. Male ____ Female ____
9. Age ____
10. I have attended this church for ____ years
11. My current role in the church is (List all committees, activities, positions you are a member of or participate)
12. Marital Status:
Married ____
Single ____
Widowed ____

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Please return this completed questionnaire in the enclosed envelope. If you have misplaced the envelope or need assistance, you may contact me at ###.###.####.

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER INCLUDED WITH QUESTIONNAIRES

DATE

Dear Church Member:

Enclosed is a copy of the questionnaire I discussed with you regarding church attendance. As I discussed with you, I am working on a Doctor of Ministry at Asbury Theological Seminary. My dissertation is on the study of growth characteristics of inner-city African-American churches in Chicago in the post civil-rights era. Your completion of this questionnaire is a vital part of this study.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire, which should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Place the completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Place the envelope in the mail by DATE

By following the above guidelines, all results from the questionnaires will be returned anonymously and I will not try to match any of the completed questionnaires with any participant in this study.

All returns are vital to my research and will be included in this study.

Thank you again for you willingness to participate in this study.

Blessings

Norman Goodwin

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