

GROWING LEADERS: ENGAGING YOUNG ADULTS IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

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It is no secret that the North American church has seen a decline over the last twenty years. This is especially pronounced in the younger generations. Significantly fewer people walk through the doors of a church each week. There are a myriad of factors that are driving this decline. One area needs to be explored is the disengagement of young adults in church leadership.

Engaging young adults in leadership is a proven way to engage them in the church. By listening to the voices of Canadian young adults, this dissertation offers a starting point for leaders. Making space for young adults to serve in leadership will both strengthen the church and reengage a lost generation.

DEDICATION

To my wife, Christiane, who both shares my passion for raising up the next generation of leaders, and who is the reason why I got to the finish line.

And to my children, Isaiah, Cian, Kianna, and Emerson who are part of the next generation of leaders. May you find your place within the church.

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Thank you to Dr. Michael Knowles for refining this work. I sincerely appreciate your heart for the church and your willingness to engage with me and this project. Thank you for challenging me and making this work that much better. Thank you to Dr. Mark Boda and Dr. John Senior for being part of the final step in shaping this project. I look forward to your continued work in this area and appreciate your time and effort you put into this with only a lunch as a thank you.

This project could not have been completed without the support of the denominations that spread the survey link online. Thank you to each denominational leader that is passionately developing a new generation of church leaders. As well, thank you to the young adults that took time out of their week to participate in the Focus Group. I thoroughly enjoyed our time together and would love to do that again one day. It is difficult to adequately thank the young adults that agreed to be part of the case study. Thank you for your willingness to take time to fill out the journals. Thank you for your willingness to be vulnerable in your answers. I pray that your experience will help pave the way for the leaders coming behind you.

Finally, thank you to the leaders who invested in me when I was young. Pastor Cal Trudgeon who noticed me back in Bramalea. Pastor Ken Miles, who took a big risk in hiring me as a youth director. Thank you for modeling mentorship.

Gavin Wark, another incredible leader who took a risk and let a freshman lead denominational events. Thank you for your patience when I messed up. Thank you for always being there for me. Craig (Coach) Hynes, who would sit in my office and simply make me a better leader through your presence (and your willingness to be blunt when I did something dumb). Derrick Mueller, who shaped me when I was young and needed someone to refine me. Tim McCoy, who cared for me as a person and made me better every time we talked. Doug (DJ Kubiks) Ross, who challenged me to chase down my dreams of writing. What may have seemed a small thing at the time is a big reason why I even had the courage to pursue a dissertation. Pastor Bill Markham, who has already invested nearly a decade in me and has continuously challenged me to be a better man, husband, pastor, and friend. Thank you for your leadership of Central Community Church and for championing this project within our congregation.

Thank you to my dad and my grandpa. Two people that I got to watch lead large corporate entities up close. Thank you for pouring into me and being a big part of who I am today. To the many other leaders who have inspired me. There are too many to list here but none are any less important.

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INTRODUCTION

North American Protestant churches are struggling to engage young adults. Surveys repeatedly show that those aged 18 to 30 are leaving the church in higher numbers than previous generations. Much is being written about this shift but more needs to be done to reengage those walking out the door. This is especially urgent in the realm of church leadership where there is a growing age gap between young adults and those in positions of leadership.

To better understand what is keeping young adults from engaging in leadership in their local church this dissertation utilizes primary research to listen to their voices. This will help churches understand what young adults need and what they want in order for them to stay engaged. The research includes a broad online survey of young adults from across Canada, a focus group of young adults from across the Niagara Region, as well as five case studies of young adults who either are or have served in some form of leadership at the author's home church of Central Community Church, located in St. Catharines. Reflecting on their voices gives us a starting point for engaging young adults and potentially stemming their flow out of the church.

This dissertation is grounded in practical theology. Practical theology is a diverse field of study that encompasses all areas of the Christian experience. It “locates itself within the diversity of human spiritual and mundane experience, making its home in the complex web of relationships and experiences that form the fabric of all that we know.”¹ Practical theology encompasses a wide range of methodologies and approaches that

¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 3.

“reflect a variety of attempts to capture this diversity and complexity.”² It is a study of the church that draws on the experience of humans alongside the interpretation of Scripture. To that end, this dissertation is an exploration of the lived experience of young adults with the chief aim of understanding why they are leaving the church and what they need to draw them back.

The Problem of Aging Leadership

First, to properly frame the question that this dissertation will explore, Schoeman writes that “as faith communities, congregations are social realities and should be described and analysed through an analytical lens, or to answer the question attached to the first empirical-descriptive task of practical theology: What is going on?”³ To answer that question we will explore the fact that existing church leadership is aging.

While in-depth statistics are not readily available to study how Millennials are engaging on a volunteer level, it is clear from a pastoral level that Millennials are underrepresented in church leadership.⁴ To illustrate this lack of engagement it is important to first examine Canadian census data as it pertains to generational representation. This will help put into context the size of the Millennial population and the impact they are having on our country.

² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 3.

³ Schoeman, “Congregations,” 77.

⁴ A variety of sources use differing age ranges to classify the millennial generation. For the purposes of this dissertation the age range of those 18 to 30 was used to define millennial (thus capturing those born between 1991 and 2003 based upon the writing of this project in 2021).

At the time of writing, the most recent Canadian Census (2016) showed the following breakdown by age:

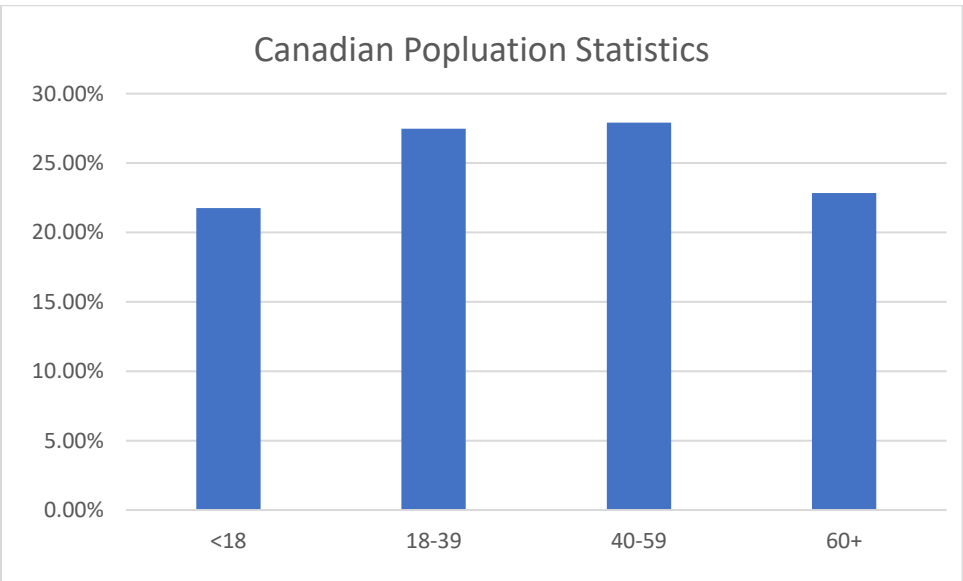


Table 1: Canadian population statistics. More recent statistics have been released in 2021 but these are the numbers that were used for this dissertation.

While this chart does not accurately reflect the generally accepted age ranges for the generations, it does illustrate that Millennials are rapidly becoming the largest group engaged in the workforce.⁵ As the baby boomers continue to retire, they will comprise a smaller portion of the workforce. In turn that will increase the percentage of Millennials in the workforce.⁶ However, it is clear from the data that Millennials currently comprise roughly 28 percent of the Canadian population.

To bring this conversation into the context of church leadership is not easy as there is a lack of readily available data on church leadership demographics. The clearest

⁵ There is a wide range of dates suggested for the Millennial generation. MetLife and Nielsen Rating have suggested dates as early as 1977. McCrindle, PriceWaterhouseCooper, Gallup, and Dale Carnegie all agree on 1980 as a start but differ on the end date. It should also be noted that, due to how Statistics Canada reports demographic data, their age categories do not necessarily line up with the various generations. As such, the Baby Boomers are split between two bar charts as the upper end of the generation as over 60 but the lower end is still in their 50s.

⁶ Dale Carnegie Training noted that by 2015, in the US, Millennials were projected to eclipse the Baby Boomers in size. See Training, "Engagement," 1.

and easiest data available comes from denominational offices who track the demographics of their credential holders. A survey of the Western District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada's (WD-PAOC) recently released report on their credentialed members revealed that their average age is 55.⁷ When removing the retired population from those statistics the average age drops to 51. A total of 62% of credential holders are over the age of 50.

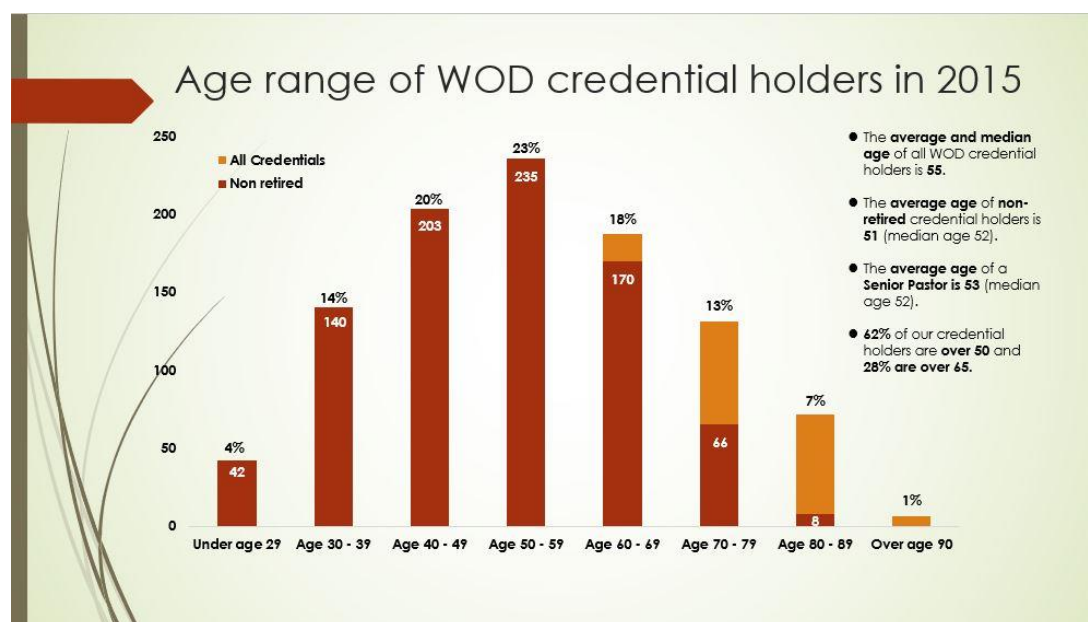


Table 2: Couch, "Snapshot of the Western Ontario District: Demographic Overview 2015," slide 2.⁸

Central Community Church in St. Catharines, ON, which is the focus of this study, is part of the PAOC. These statistics confirm that, at the pastoral level, our denomination is under-represented by Millennials relative to their proportionately larger representation in the general population. As evidenced in Table 2 above, while

⁷ See Couch, "Snapshot of the Western Ontario District: Demographic Overview 2015," slide 2. Presentation released to the Western Ontario District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 2016. This presentation is no longer available online but is available upon request. See also Daniel Silliman who notes that, in the Vineyard denomination specifically, more than one third of their senior ministers are over the age of 60.

⁸ Presentation released to the Western Ontario District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 2016. This presentation is no longer available online but is available upon request.

Millennials represent roughly 28% of Canadians, only 18% of the pastors in the WD-PAOC fall under that age category. It is of further interest to note that, between 2010 and 2014, the district reported that the average age of a new credential holder was 39 with 44% of new credentials being given to pastors over the age of 40. This is significant because it indicates that the population of pastoral leaders in the WD-PAOC is aging. Furthermore, there is not yet a significant number of young pastors, especially Millennials, entering the ministry.

Examining a local context of ministry yields similar conclusions. Central Community Church (hereafter Central), a church located in St. Catharines, Ontario, and the place of ministry for the author, we can see the trend illustrated in the WD-PAOC statistics above is repeated at Central. This further illustrates the present reality of the aging population of church leadership in a local setting.

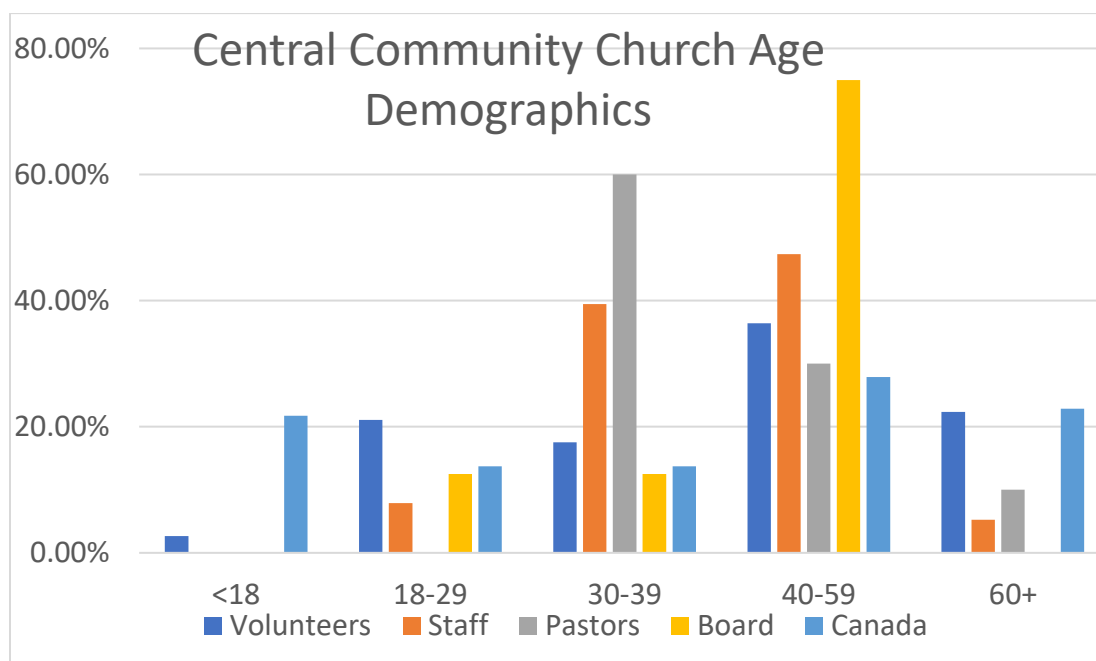


Table 3: Central Community Church Demographics⁹

⁹ This graph illustrates the age demographics of various leadership roles at the Church. This table was formulated using available data as maintained by Central Community Church but, to protect the

These roles were selected as a general snapshot as they represent increasing levels of leadership within the context of leadership at Central. The church is congregational in polity in that the voting membership of the congregation are the highest level of authority as represented by the Church Board. Pastors are then empowered to lead ministries under the direction of the Lead Pastor. Staff report to pastors and our volunteers would be the final level of authority. While not a comprehensive analysis of the myriad of leadership roles within Central this list was generated using available data and is suitable as an analysis of how the various age demographics are being engaged in leadership at the church.

Canadian population statistics show that Millennials represent roughly 28% of the population. This is important because, as was previously noted, they will soon comprise the largest segment of the Canadian workforce. As such, they are the generation that we look to as our established leaders retire. It is imperative that we engage Millennials in leadership to enable a smooth transition between the generations and the continued operation of businesses and churches alike. As the Globe and Mail noted, there are presently not enough people ready to take over the leadership duties.¹⁰

The WD-PAOC data confirms that church leadership at the pastoral level is aging, and that Millennials are not yet engaging in numbers large enough to sustain those churches that are currently in operation. The PAOC was among the surveyed respondents of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's (herein EFC) Church Vitality report and is one of the denominations that expressed the concern that we could be facing a leadership

security and privacy of the database, it is not accessible externally. All personal data and information was removed to protect the individual volunteers.

¹⁰ Somers, "Succession," para. 2.

crisis in the future. It is also of interest to note that their report also shows that the average age of a new credential holder is 39 years. This is a promising statistic as it also shows that 31% of all new credential holders are under the age of 29. However, 31% is hardly enough to replace those who are leaving. Interestingly the average age of credential holders leaving the denomination is 44 years of age.

Analysing Central's statistics shows the same trend as the WD-PAOC. It is evident that the higher up in leadership people are at the church, the higher the age of the leader. While Central has a healthy percentage of Millennials engaged in volunteering (39% of the volunteer population) those Millennials are not engaged in leadership at higher levels.

The Problem of Church Decline

The North American church is in a state of decline. Douglas Coupland wrote several books about Generation X. In his work *Life after God*, he remarks that Gen Xers were the first generation raised without religion. Gen X was being raised in a charmed life "but without politics or religion."¹¹ In his view, Generation X had traded off belief in God for the golden life.¹² This was the first generation to begin to engage in an exodus from the church en masse.

In 2006, Barna Research released a report that was among the first to raise the alarm of millennial disengagement in the Christian church in America. Their findings showed that, of young adults who were raised in the church as teens, 61% of them were,

¹¹ Coupland, *Life*, 273.

¹² Coupland, *Life*, 273.

at the time of the research, spiritually disengaged.¹³ Only 20% of young adults reported that they had “maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences.”¹⁴ The full impact of this is best represented in the response of those young adults that only one third of those in their twenties who were parents were regularly bringing their children to church.¹⁵

This represented a stark decline from respondents in their thirties and forties and is a warning to the church that the current decline in young adult attendance will only increase in the coming years. While the research was not clear on whether these trends were simply related to stages of development or indicative of a situation unique to this age group, David Kinnaman, the research director of the Barna report, reminds us to not miss the larger point that “the current state of ministry to twentysomethings is woefully inadequate to address the spiritual needs of millions of young adults.”¹⁶

Fast forward 5 years and the Hemorrhaging Faith report, produced by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and designed to specifically look at the loss of Millennials in the Canadian church, further highlighted the exodus of young adults from North American mainline denominations. At the time of the report (2011) fewer than half of young adults raised Catholic still maintained their affiliation with the Catholic

¹³ Barna, “Shelf,” para. 5.

¹⁴ Barna, “Shelf,” para. 5.

¹⁵ Barna, “Shelf,” para. 6.

¹⁶ Barna, “Shelf,” para. 8. It is of note that, when it comes to theology, young adults are flocking to conservative churches. Young adults are almost 4 times more likely to attend a conservative church over a liberal church (see Lizardy-Hajbi, “Engaging,” 4). This vast disparity is worth noting. Young Adults are seeking answers to some of the most profound questions of life. They are drawn to churches that have clear theological convictions as they do not want to live in a grey area where there appears to be a lack of clear answers. Liberal churches are at a disadvantage when it comes to reengaging young adults.

church.¹⁷ In the same way only one-third of Mainline Protestants and roughly two-thirds of evangelicals still identify with the affiliations of their childhoods.¹⁸

This was reaffirmed in 2015 when Lizardy-Hajbi reported that, while young adults made up 23% of the United States population, only 10% of churches reflected that number.¹⁹ That report went on to reference the Faith Communities Today national survey. It noted a sharp increase in church reporting that they did not have a young adult presence in their church. Their 2010 survey had less than 8% of churches reporting no young adult presence. By 2015 that number had risen to 18% (nearly 1 in 5 US churches).²⁰

However, it needs to be noted that the 2018 Renegotiating Faith report, an update to the Hemorrhaging Faith report, showed a reversal of part of this trend in the Canadian context.²¹ In 2018 higher numbers of Catholics and mainline Protestants were maintaining their religious affiliation into their young adult years. Where the 2011 report showed only 47% of Catholics maintaining their affiliation past high school the number jumped to 55% in 2018.²² Mainline Protestants reported an even higher increase, from 36% in 2011 to 53% in 2018.²³

This upward swing in religious affiliation has not translated into a similar upward swing in attendance at religious services. A little under half of young adults report

¹⁷ Penner et al., “Hemorrhaging,” 25.

¹⁸ Penner et al., “Hemorrhaging,” 25.

¹⁹ Lizardy-Hajbi, “Engaging,” 1.

²⁰ Lizardy-Hajbi, “Engaging,” 2.

²¹ The Renegotiating Faith Report was conducted in partnership with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada along with several partner organizations. Their research was focused on young adults ages 18 to 28. Specifically, those who have a religious affiliation. As they note in their foreword, they “intentionally chose a young adult population whose teenage religious engagement was more than nominal.” See Heimstra, “Renegotiating,” 10.

²² Heimstra et al., “Renegotiating,” 102.

²³ Heimstra et al., “Renegotiating,” 102.

attending church at the same frequency that they did when they were teens.²⁴ Over 60% of teens report attending church between two and four times a month. This number falls to about 41% of young adults. The greatest change is in those who never attend church. Only 3.7% of teens report never attending church. Nearly 20% of young adults say they never attend church. Despite an increase in religious affiliation, young adults are still fleeing the church.

David Sawler draws a distinction between young adults leaving church and leaving God. In conversation with young adults around the world he has discovered that there is “no truth to the thought that all who leave traditional churches are walking away from God.”²⁵ He hears stories of many who “have left in pursuit of God and a real faith community.”²⁶ As one person said to him, “for now I want to *be* the church, not attend one.”²⁷ For church leaders, the sobering reality is that young adults are leaving the church but they are not leaving God. They are not finding a place within the church, so they are searching for it outside church walls.

Most recently, a Gallup survey highlights what is fast becoming a crisis of church attendance. Gallup’s report entitled “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time”, released in March of 2021, highlights this crisis.²⁸ In the over 80 years since Gallup began monitoring church membership in the U.S. this report was the first time that a majority of Americans are no longer attending church regularly. This decline is not isolated to any one age group. Membership numbers are sinking across all age brackets.

²⁴ Heimstra et al., “Renegotiating,” 103.

²⁵ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 3.

²⁶ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 3.

²⁷ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 3.

²⁸ Jones, “Majority.”

Gallup's study identified two primary reasons why fewer people are attending church. The first is that there are now "more adults with no religious preference" and the second is "falling rates of church membership among people who do have a religion."²⁹ Of greatest concern is that the largest decline in attendance is among the millennial generation (which Gallup classifies as those born between 1981 and 1996). Gallup also notes anecdotally that, while they have not done a thorough survey of Generation Z, it appears that their attendance is about the same as Millennials.³⁰

It needs to be noted that the decline in Millennial attendance is not confined to those who do not claim an affiliation to a specific religion. The decline is also significant among those who do hold a religious affiliation. In the ten years from their previous report, Gallup noted that attendance among Millennials who claim a religious affiliation has dropped from 63% to 50%. This startling number demands that the contemporary North American church take stock of why so many young adults who already claim religious affiliation do not attend church. The decrease in attendance is not just an American phenomenon. It is a part of the experience of the Canadian church as well. Statistics Canada (hereafter StatsCan) released data that showed "only 68 per cent of Canadians 15 or older now report having a religious affiliation."³¹ Since StatsCan started tracking religious affiliation in 1985 they have not reported religious affiliation below 70%.

²⁹ Jones, "Majority," para. 11.

³⁰ Gallup defines Generation Z as those born between 1997 and 2002. While the generation is larger than that, those born in that range are now adults. As such, that is the slice of Generation Z that Gallup studied for this survey.

³¹ Stewart, "2040," para. 5.

However, StatsCan's data shows that this decline is limited to Christianity. "The number of Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Hindus is increasing. . . [and] could double by the year 2036."³² A little over 67 percent of Canadians reported an affiliation to a Christian religion in 2001. By 2019 that number had fallen to 63 per cent.³³ This is partially due to immigration, but the caution is that churches are continuing to close. For example, "the United Church loses one church per week across Canada."³⁴ Furthermore, it is projected that "the Anglican Church would run out of members completely by 2040."³⁵

The *Hemorrhaging Faith Report* revealed that "by young adulthood only 1 in 10 respondents raised in Catholic and Mainline traditions reported attending religious services at least weekly-compared to 4 in 10 raised in Evangelical traditions."³⁶ In the words of the authors of the report, the Canadian church is "hemorrhaging faith" among young adults. They note that "for every five Catholic and Mainline Protestant kids who attended church at least weekly in the 1980s and '90s only one still attends at least weekly now as an adult; for those raised in Evangelical traditions it is one in two."³⁷ This data is confirmed by StatsCan who found "that religious affiliation was at 85 per cent among older Canadians born between 1940 and 1959, compared with 32 per cent for those born between 1980 and 1999."³⁸ The *Hemorrhaging Faith Report* identified several key areas in which the contemporary Canadian church is contributing to the departure of Millennials from the church. However, two areas are key to reengaging them.

³² Stewart, "2040," para. 7.

³³ Stewart, "2040," para. 7.

³⁴ Stewart, "2040," para. 14.

³⁵ Stewart, "2040," para. 30.

³⁶ Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging," 22.

³⁷ Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging," 5.

³⁸ Stewart, "2040," para. 22.

The first is that Millennials are seeking a church that is inclusive. “To the emerging generation, being an inclusive faith community means offering a place of belonging to all people regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, education, etc.”³⁹ This is a very large topic that could not reasonably be considered in a single work. One area of church life that is perceived to be exclusive is within the realm of senior church leadership. This is a very large topic that could not reasonably be considered in a single work. One area of church life that is perceived to be exclusive is within the realm of senior church leadership. One area of church life that is perceived to be exclusive is within the realm of senior church leadership. This perception is understandable as a cursory review of Protestant Canadian churches demonstrates that there is a significant age gap at higher levels of leadership, and this is the focus of this dissertation.

The WD-PAOC’s average age is on par with a recent study of megachurches in the U.S. This report, issued by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, found that the average age of a lead pastor in a megachurch is 53.⁴⁰ In the WD-PAOC a total of 62 percent of credential holders are over the age of 50. These statistics confirm that, at the pastoral level, our denomination, and the larger North American church, is under-represented by Millennials despite their large numbers in the general population.

This is creating an environment of exclusivity. Church leadership is being reserved for older generations and not Millennials. This exclusivity is, and will continue to, drive Millennials out of the church. “Inclusive church practices send the message that

³⁹ Penner et al., “Hemorrhaging,” 60.

⁴⁰ Bird and Thumma, *Megachurch* 2020, 3.

all people are valued and cared for.”⁴¹ Exclusive church practices send the message that only certain people are valued. This creates a conundrum. As fewer young people choose to enter ministry, the average age of ministers will increase. This increases the feeling of exclusivity and is a key issue this dissertation aims to address.

The second key area affecting the church’s ability to engage the millennial generation is authenticity. “Young adults want to belong to a church community that is kind, friendly or welcoming.”⁴² But, what drives young adults more is authenticity. “If congregations engage in [the above] practices but they are done for the sake of show, instead of authentically, they do more harm than good. Young adults call this hypocrisy.”⁴³ As the survey bluntly states, “young adults are tired of church members professing to believe in something they do not or pretending to be something they are not.”⁴⁴ As such, it comes across as inauthentic to speak of everyone being part of the body of the church and yet reserving senior leadership for a certain age demographic.

The Leadership Gap

To begin, a basic definition of leadership is the exercise of authority over a group of people. In the context of the church, leadership is exercised as both spiritual authority and in a practical sense through the day-to-day operation of the church. Using flat leadership as a paradigm means that this authority is not bestowed upon a single leader. It is shared based upon giftings and calling in a team setting. However, as leadership is often exercised by an individual leader, the church is experiencing an age gap as there is a

⁴¹ Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 60.

⁴² Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 58.

⁴³ Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 58.

⁴⁴ Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 60.

shortage of younger leaders emerging. The age gap in leadership is a growing problem both inside and outside the walls of the church. As noted earlier, a report released by the EFC, as they conducted their research on church vitality, noted that:

all five of the denominational leaders we spoke to were concerned about future leadership. Pastors were aging and there are not enough new candidates to replace them. Leadership development is, or should be, the priority of congregations and denominations. Retaining present clergy is also crucial. Future congregational vitality depends on it.⁴⁵

The Globe and Mail noted the same trend in the secular Canadian workplace. “For every two retiring senior executives, there is only one suitable successor waiting in the wings.”⁴⁶ We must explore how the church is to respond to this pattern and raise up the next generation of leaders.⁴⁷ As Millennials grow “in the workforce and baby boomers retire, managers and human resources professionals will need to develop new engagement models [that] take into account the generational differences between baby boomers and Millennials.”⁴⁸

Among these generational differences is the way in which Millennials engage with each other. They interact with each other in a flat world, a world where titles and hierarchies are becoming ever more meaningless.⁴⁹ Millennials “are creating a change in how work gets done, as they work more in teams and use more technology.”⁵⁰ And, it is important to note that “their social mindset. . . is also a significant factor.”⁵¹ “As Leigh Buchanan writes in *Meet the Millennials*, ‘one of the characteristics of Millennials,

⁴⁵ Reimer, “Vitality,” 17.

⁴⁶ Somers, “Succession,” para. 2.

⁴⁷ This comparison raises the issue that it is not just the church that has this problem. Rather, it is a societal issue. Yet, the church should be concerned with this trend as it is playing out in church leadership as well. The future church will rely on those successors who are presently waiting in the wings.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, “Engagement,” para. 2.

⁴⁹ For a deeper look at the flattened world see Friedman, *The World Is*.

⁵⁰ Gilbert, “Engagement,” para. 6.

⁵¹ Gilbert, “Engagement,” para.6.

besides the fact that they are masters of digital communication, is that they are primed to do well by doing good. Almost 70 percent say that giving back and being civically engaged are their highest priorities.”⁵² It is of profound importance that the church understand this changed reality since it directly impacts the appeal of working in a church.

However, David Burkus opened his article recognizing how Millennials have been misunderstood by writing that “Millennials have been perceived by their coworkers as blunt, self-entitled and naïve.”⁵³ Kathy Caprino writes that “complaining about Millennials is in vogue and business leaders are supposedly struggling to ‘engage’ Generation Y and make them productive. Corporate recruiters and business leaders claim that 20-somethings are unprepared and difficult to manage. Again and again, commentators say they’re just too narcissistic, solipsistic and entitled for the working world.”⁵⁴ Despite the changed reality outlined above, Millennials are generally misunderstood by those currently in leadership. This is the leadership gap that the church must close.

Research Question

The core practice of this dissertation is the leadership development of young leaders within the North American Protestant church. Specifically, this dissertation will be focused on the leadership development system of my church. To that end, we seek to answer the question “how can current practices of church leadership be enhanced to

⁵² Gilbert, “Engagement,” para. 6.

⁵³ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 1.

⁵⁴ Caprino, “Quit,” para. 3.

engage a wider age demographic?” Answering this question will strengthen church leaders and the congregations they serve.

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Millennials, and Generation Z who are now starting to reach adulthood and enter the workforce, view leadership from a flattened perspective. Whereas leadership of the last fifty years was based on position and power, contemporary leadership no longer elevates an individual to a pinnacle role overseeing the entire structure. Instead, they are flattening leadership structures so that people lead out of gifting, skill and calling. Accepting that “the world is flat” means that we must recognize that the church must adapt its leadership systems to match this flattened reality.¹ This is not because we want the church to look like culture. Rather, it is the recognition that “culture has been informing church practices for centuries.”² Culture can also alert us to biblical principles. Flat leadership has been replacing hierarchical leadership in business for the last few decades. Companies such as Gore Industries, Zappos, Medium, and Buffer, have employed some form of flat leadership as they sought to gain and maintain a competitive edge in their respective industries. As William Craig points out in *Forbes*, “many hierarchical structures lose their entrepreneurial spirit, and to inspire its return, organizations increasingly turn to the flat structure that characterizes many startups.”³ Flat leadership, as it is being used in secular business, though not by design, is very much a biblical approach to leadership.

Throughout this dissertation we use the terms flat and shared leadership interchangeably. This is because flat leadership as a model provides space for power and

¹ Friedman, *World Is Flat*, 5.

² Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 35.

³ Craig, “Leadership,” para. 5.

authority to be shared among a group of people. It is important for existing church leaders to adhere to the basic standards of the church to be involved in leadership today. That is to say that, while we can have culture influence how the church is led, there are limits to how far leaders should allow that influence to spread. The church must still hold to its convictions and theology. Those cannot be sacrificed for the sake of making the church relevant. Flat, or shared, leadership is a response to our shifting culture and is a theological approach to leading the church.

Scripture points us to a model of shared leadership as Jesus is the head of the church. It is because he is ultimately Lord and leader that we embrace the idea that the church is to function as a community that is led by the entire body, not as a community where a singular person or small group of people hold all the power. When we acknowledge that Jesus is the head then there is no need for an individual to assume the leadership of the entire church. Instead, all believers can find the space to serve within their own giftings.

In a world where authority is no longer given based on position and title, the very nature of leadership is in flux, and we are seeing “profound transformations” in the Western world.⁴ Leadership is no longer defined by titles or any perceived notion of power. Today’s North American culture is increasingly moving away from power vested in a few people at the top of some organizational structure and towards power and authority that is shared among the many. This transformation is largely a response to the past abuse of power. The church is not exempt from this abuse.

⁴ Keel, *Intuitive*, 188.

Mark Birchall reminds us that “all power tends to corrupt, and Christians are not exempt from that corruption. Most leaders are tempted to be authoritarian, not least because there are so many who want ‘a strong leader.’”⁵ For the last few decades, Canadian society has been rejecting leadership in its modern form. In general, adults of all ages have lost trust in a wide range of institutions. Gallup released the results of a 2019 survey that showed a dramatic drop in confidence in institutions across the United States. Institutions such as the medical system saw a drop in confidence from 80% in 1970 to just 36% in 2019.⁶ People have lost confidence in Congress, big business, the presidency, newspapers and public schools. Confidence in organized religion has dropped from 65% in 1970 to just 36% in 2019.⁷ A great mistrust of leaders has caused seismic shifts in how people lead the church, which has generally been slow to adopt change in any format, has been slow in shifting its leadership structures to respond to these changes.

However, Dorothy Butler Bass, reflecting on the discouraging statistics on church decline reminds us that “the plethora of new survey data does not indicate either apocalypse or secularization.”⁸ Rather, the decline in the church can lead to a new awakening as people shed the “old norms [that] cease to make sense.”⁹ Quick decline can be a blessing to the church as it is easier to spot than a slow decline. Thom Rainer warns that “slow erosion is the worst type of decline for churches, because the members have no sense of urgency to change.”¹⁰ In the current context this is hardly a danger.

⁵ Birchall, “Abuse,” 40.

⁶ Packard, “Young People,” 28.

⁷ Packard, “Young People,” 28.

⁸ Bass, *Religion*, 63.

⁹ Bass, *Religion*, 62–63.

¹⁰ Rainer, *Autopsy*, 13.

We are in a time of rapid decline. However, instead of seeing the current upheaval of the church as a negative, the rapid pace of the current decline is a positive because we have been alerted to it at a time when we can still do something about it. In what will seem a contradictory thought, this time of upheaval means the church will need strong leaders to navigate the changes that have happened and navigate the changes of the twenty-first century. While current leadership is part of the problem, it will take leaders who are willing to shift their leadership structures for the church to move towards a flat leadership approach. Flat leadership does not mean no leadership, and it does not eliminate the need for strong leaders. Rather, it calls for leaders to function and behave in different ways than in more traditional leadership models.

The answer to these changes is flattened structures in leadership. Achieving flattened structures will be largely dependent on the church's ability to raise up a new generation of leaders.¹¹ Leaders who are raised in a flat world will naturally tend towards flat leadership themselves. As Gray-Reeves and Perham summarized after evaluating emerging churches, "it only makes sense that emergent churches, made up of leaders impacted by this historical shift, and living at the church's power edge because of their age, would work collaboratively in ministry with a variety of people and perspectives, seeking to welcome and include all."¹² Yet, therein lies the problem. Millennials are not

¹¹ Some in the business world are already suggesting that we look beyond the Millennials to Generation Z. Goldman Sachs released a report in 2015 outlining their reasons for targeting this new generation. Myles Udland reports that "in Goldman's view, the *reason* it's time to move on from Millennials is that Gen-Z simply represents a bigger, more important change in the US than Millennials ever did." Udland, "Goldman Sachs," para. 7. However, with so few Millennials engaged in church leadership, it is not yet time to turn our attention away from them.

¹² Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 31. At the time this book was written the authors used the term emergent to "reflect churches inclusive in character of all sorts and conditions of people" and emerging to be "representative of churches that are evangelical and conservative in nature" Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 3–4.

engaging in church leadership. In many cases, it seems that Millennials are stuck in churches where the same leaders fill the same positions year after year. With virtually no movement in higher level positions there is simply nowhere for Millennials to get involved in senior leadership. This is not to say that churches do not have turnover in leadership. Most churches have some form of term limits on elders or deacons leading to turnover. What is lacking is a mindset and a vision for creating space on those leadership boards for younger people to be included and developed.

Burkus, in quoting Tulgan, notes that “Millennials do not define success by climbing the corporate ladder, and as a result, they are not satisfied by repetitive tasks under the guise of ‘paying dues’ with the promise of promotion.”¹³ Waiting to break the stalemate will not engage Millennials.¹⁴ As Tim Keel writes, “the posture of suspicion that post moderns assume toward modernity illustrates how disempowered people have felt because of the real ways they have struggled to be acknowledged and heard as something other than a cog in the machinery over which they have no control. Sadly, this happens in the church.”¹⁵ Millennials are not interested in being cogs simply carrying out tasks for the hope of one day moving up a ladder. They want to be doing meaningful work now. “Millennials are looking for more immediate rewards.”¹⁶

Pastor Bill Markham of Central Community Church observes that Millennials, “don’t want to be cogs, they want a cause.”¹⁷ Kimberley Bell makes the same case in recognizing that “individuals today are wanting more out of their work because work has

¹³ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 1.

¹⁴ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 1. Burkus notes that “Millennials want to work on projects that provide learning and growth opportunities right away.”

¹⁵ Keel, *Intuitive*, 115.

¹⁶ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 1.

¹⁷ Bill Markham, interview by Andrew Rutledge, transcript, St. Catharines, Ontario.

become an integral part of individual's lives."¹⁸ It is not enough for people to simply get something done. They want to participate in a movement. Paul Bates, in his research on the ethos of a leader, discovered through interviewing leaders that "virtually all respondents expressed a need for a work environment that provides a means of achieving some level of self-actualization and identity."¹⁹ Whether it is volunteer or paid, work can no longer be about simply getting a task done. As Chap Clark stated, "ministry is important, but people matter more than any task."²⁰ Churches need to provide opportunities for people of all ages to be engaged in something that makes a difference while still getting the small, unnoticed jobs done. "If a seventeen-year-old knows that he is more important than the duty to pick up the coffee for the parent meeting, he can survive setbacks and continue on with his growth and service."²¹

McLagan and Nel recognized this shift nearly 30 years ago and, in 1995, labelled it the "age of participation."²² Reflecting on the shift, Leonard Sweet notes that "postmoderns are thinking and living within an interdependent, interactive ethos. They perceive, comprehend, and interact with the world as much as participants as observers."²³

One of the implications of this shift is that leadership is no longer about "administering guidance and regulation" but about "emboldening and empowering others to lead."²⁴ This is not simply a response to a sociological shift. It is a return to the church of the New Testament. "The body of Christ is a participative community" and Millennials

¹⁸ Bell, *Spirituality*, 12.

¹⁹ Bates, *Ethos*, 50.

²⁰ Clark, *Adoptive*, 153.

²¹ Clark, *Adoptive*, 153.

²² See McLagan and Nel, *Participation*, 1995.

²³ Sweet, *Pilgrims*, 54.

²⁴ Sweet, *Pilgrims*, 60.

want to be participants in that community, not just cogs.²⁵ While the apostles did have significant authority within the body, the councils are just one example where they surrendered their individual power to the group. In part, their authority was given to them because of their personal connection to Christ and not simply because of their office. The modern Canadian church needs to recognize this if we are to create space for Millennials to be involved in church leadership. A potential response to this would be to question exactly what we would be asking of young adults who would be serving in leadership. It would be primarily to give a voice to their generation. However, we cannot discount that young adults can have the spiritual maturity to speak into the church as a whole. As will be discussed in greater detail throughout this work, churches cannot discount the contributions of any member of the church.

A second issue to note is that our current hierarchical models of church leadership are counter to the culture of Millennials. They are by nature driven to work in teams and share power and authority across the board.²⁶ Tod Bolsinger sums this up by writing that “Christian leaders in a post-Christendom world need to engage, encourage and even *insist* that discernment and decision making begin with making a broader number of voices heard.”²⁷ This is not about replacing any one group in leadership. It is about bringing every group into it. “Those in the center and those outside of the center must be truly engaged and valued in decision-making processes.”²⁸ It is important to recognize that

²⁵ Sweet, *Pilgrims*, 72.

²⁶ For further analysis of the shifting culture of leadership see Gilbert, “Engagement,” no pages, and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 2015.

²⁷ Bolsinger, *Canoeing*, 196 (italics in original).

²⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing*, 199.

churches will need to shift their leadership models to better engage Millennials as our aging models are losing their relevance to younger generations.

Gray-Reeves and Perham, upon surveying emerging church congregations within the Anglican church, summarized part of their findings by noting that “when asked where authority lies, emergent Christians will finally relent and say that it is found in the mix between Scripture and the community—not as handed down by the institution of the church, but rather as it is locally discerned by those in the body.”²⁹ This is part of the reason why they are not engaged in church leadership. Many churches have structures that do not appeal to them. The result is that it is difficult to ask them to join structures they reject.

To push the previously mentioned metaphor of the leadership stalemate, the other metaphor is that modern leadership structures are created like a game of chess. In chess a single piece, the king, is the most important piece in the game. All the other pieces work to protect the king. Yet, contemporary approaches to leadership are more akin to a game of checkers where multiple pieces can be the king. Power and authority are shared in a way that enables many pieces to be engaged. It is a fluid structure that more closely aligns with the nature of Millennials. Implementing fluid leadership structures will enable churches to engage younger leaders.

A result of engaging Millennials is that our church leadership structures will naturally shift. Gray-Reeves and Perham pointed out that “it only makes sense that emergent churches, made up of leaders impacted by this historical shift, and living at the church’s power edge because of their age, would work collaboratively in ministry with a

²⁹ Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 31.

variety of people and perspectives, seeking to welcome and include all.”³⁰ Engaging Millennials will result in them impacting our leadership structures which will, in turn, lead to more Millennials getting engaged in leadership.

To engage Millennials, it is important that churches re-evaluate their leadership development practices. As noted above, with so few Millennials engaged in church leadership it is likely that the church will enter a leadership crisis in the coming decades. To reverse this trend the church needs to reconsider how it is preparing Millennials, and the subsequent generations, to step into leadership roles before they disengage from the church.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the existing leadership development systems being utilized at Central Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, with the aim of improving them to engage Millennials, with a view also to helping to resource other congregations that are interested in doing the same in their own contexts. Through a case study of Millennials in the church we sought to understand if this supposed unpreparedness among Millennials to take on leadership is a fair assessment of this generation or if it is indicative of a lack of quality preparation and training being given to Millennials by the local church. Discovering the answer to this will help Central Community Church (as well as other churches) better develop the leadership potential of Millennials. This can lead to higher levels of engagement in leadership and, through this increased engagement, ultimately help retain them as active members of the church.

³⁰ Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 31.

The Problems We Face That Demanded Further Research

The topic of leadership has been explored at length in the last few decades. Yet there is one glaring gap in this field of research. As John Senior notes, “a cursory Google search for the phrase ‘leadership books’ calls up myriad texts by CEOs, generals, presidents and senators, and business consultants – but not many by ministers or theologians.”³¹

Specifically, he sees a gap in the research based on the kind of work done by leaders that is the focus of this research. In his view, most leadership studies have focused on the “instrumental” frame of leadership.³² The problem with this gap is that Christian leadership is unique and, therefore, deserves specific research and exploration of that uniqueness.

There is a greater issue at play in the gap in the study of religious leadership. Senior goes on to point out that, “as many Christian faith communities find themselves in a season of momentous change, ministry leaders—even veteran ministry leaders—can’t help but feel disoriented in their vocations.”³³ His explanation for this disorientation is rooted in the seismic changes affecting the practice of Christian leadership. Johnson and Van Dooren further explain this shift by explaining the rising trend of burnout in pastors. They see the rise of burnout as a result of church leaders beginning to measure their success by “external religious standards” instead of the Cross.³⁴ Pastors are now being asked to fill the role of a CEO rather than the traditional role of a shepherd.³⁵

³¹ Senior, “Wisdom,” 50.

³² Senior, “Wisdom,” 49.

³³ Senior, “Wisdom,” 51.

³⁴ Johnson and VanVonderen, *Abuse*, 34.

³⁵ Scalise, “Christian Leadership,” 33.

It is worth pausing and noting here that there are elements of church leadership that are driven by the necessity of the church's existence in today's world. Churches are institutions that "depend on (fallible) human actors to maintain their buildings, pay their budgets, run their programs, and define their goals."³⁶ We do have to proceed with caution and ensure that we do not blur the lines between the secular and the divine aspects of leadership. The church has aspects to it that are like other societal institutions (legal, financial, employment, and others). We cannot fall into a trap of thinking along secular lines when it comes to how we lead and evaluate the ministry of the church. Allert and Boersma, as cited in Reimer, caution that, when we evaluate the health of our churches, we need to be wary that "theological categories not be taken over by (neutral) empirical measurements. These measurements lead us away from theological concerns and assume that we can find some other, neutral ground" for measuring and leading the church.³⁷ The purpose of this dissertation is not to move us away from those realities. Rather, it is to reorient church leaders back to the core of Christian leadership.

While not intentional, church leaders have adopted leadership paradigms and practices informed by the research done on secular leadership (this will be explored in Chapter Two). To navigate the coming change and to preserve the church, it is necessary that church leaders rediscover the uniqueness of spiritual leadership. What differentiates leadership of faith communities from the myriad of texts Senior found in his search is the telos of Christian leadership. That telos is Jesus Christ.³⁸ It is Jesus that is at the centre of our leadership. Senior summarizes this telos in that "our end is to cultivate thriving

³⁶ Reimer, "Vitality," 1.

³⁷ Reimer, "Vitality," 1.

³⁸ Senior, "Wisdom," 52.

communities that bear witness to the inbreaking reign of God that Jesus announces and embodies in all that we do and are.”³⁹ This does not mean that we should disregard the quality of research being done outside the context of the Church. It does mean that we need to filter that research through the lens of the Gospel.

David Ford illustrates the uniqueness of Christian leadership by illustrating how Paul would interpret the relationship between leaders and followers. In Paul’s view of leadership, our primary relationship is between us and Jesus. “That outflanks the factional divisions of the church by offering a God-oriented ‘ecology’ of belonging, embracing oppositional confrontation in a higher inclusiveness.”⁴⁰ The uniqueness of our telos means that the church must develop leadership training that is distinct from the world. It is a point that is highlighted by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. In their research on the vitality of the Canadian church they quote David Horrox who writes that “the church should stop mimicking the surrounding culture and become an alternative community, with a different set of beliefs, values, and behaviors.”⁴¹ The church cannot rely solely on the wealth of secular leadership training available today. Training must be based upon our telos.

Waalkes agrees with this unique telos and the need for specific training and, in examining the current state of the church, cautions that “at times the practices of globalization may be healthy for us and even orient us in the right direction, toward loving God and our neighbours... at other times, perhaps more often, they may be unhealthy for us.”⁴² He explains this by demonstrating how Christians interact on a global

³⁹ Senior, “Wisdom,” 52.

⁴⁰ Ford, *Wisdom*, 186.

⁴¹ Reimer, “Vitality,” 3.

⁴² Waalkes, *Fullness*, 10.

level any time they bank, purchase goods, or engage in any number of daily activities. Many of these activities raise questions about “cultural imperialism, the global homogenization of cultures, a violent backlash against such imperialism, or some kind of increased common identity and shared cultural understanding.”⁴³ These are an issue because, as he writes, “our worship and discipleship should be directed toward forming and directing our desire to find its *telos* [destiny] in God, countering the malformations of desire effected by the state and the market.”⁴⁴ The issue here is that, while engaging culture, the church can lose sight of its *telos* and become too much like the culture it seeks to serve.

Waalkes does find room for the church engaging in culture. However, he encourages us to ask ourselves “how do we engage (or disengage from) cultural, political, ecological, and economic globalizations so that our imaginations are formed in healthy ways that bring us into the fullness of God?”⁴⁵ This is the gap in religious leadership study. It is a gap that, if left unaddressed, can rob the church of its unique place in society and lose our unique *telos* as Christian leaders. This dissertation will address this gap in study in two ways. First, it will establish a biblically based theology of leadership that is distinctly Christian. Second, it will seek to engage young adults in a culturally relevant way by demonstrating how culture is enhancing Christian ideals of leadership.

When we look at how the church is engaging our culture, the greatest problem facing church leaders is the lack of recognition for the change that is happening in the North American world. Webber urges church leaders “to recognize that we live in a time

⁴³ Waalkes, *Fullness*, 10.

⁴⁴ Waalkes, *Fullness*, 10.

⁴⁵ Waalkes, *Fullness*, 10.

of transition, where the old Christendom is dying and the new postmodern world is emerging.”⁴⁶ This postmodern world brings with it a “changing spiritual narrative” that is reflected in a discontinuity from previous eras.⁴⁷ The changing narrative has brought with it sweeping change to how people lead in a postmodern context because it has led to the rise of scepticism toward authority. People now challenge who they should believe and why they should believe them. In evaluating churches, it has been noted that there is a growing disdain for preaching. The root cause of this has been identified as “an uneasiness about authority and control.”⁴⁸ As such, leaders in any context can no longer lead as they have for the last several decades.

There was a time when a position within a church brought with it a certain amount of authority, respect, and power. In today’s world obtaining a certain position no longer entitles a person to the traditional status that would accompany that position. Pastors are no longer in a place where their community will automatically respect their decisions or trust them as leaders. McLaren puts it this way:

We are living at an important and fruitful moment right now, for it is clear to church leaders that the images of Christian leadership given by the religious subculture are worn out; a minister can no longer depend on them. By the time a person in professional ministry reaches thirty-five, he or she knows that images of the knowledgeable, doctrinally sound, politically correct, and above all successful pastor that were learned in seminary (and at the Christian bookstore or leadership conference) simply do not work in life.⁴⁹

The issue is that “leadership in Christian churches in the West has for centuries been deeply shaped by Christendom assumptions. Ministry was reserved primarily for the

⁴⁶ Webber, “Emerging,” 198.

⁴⁷ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 50.

⁴⁸ Deyoung and Kluck, *Emergent*, 159.

⁴⁹ McLaren, *Side*, 113.

clergy who taught, cared for, and administered settled flocks, often as a hierarchical class set apart from or above the rest of the congregation.”⁵⁰ These models were “shaped largely by the assumptions of very different eras. A great many local congregations... are still organized for functional Christendom.”⁵¹ This is the model of church leadership that must shift.

Van Gelder and Zscheile offer that church leaders must “recognize that [leadership] is understood best not as a fixed set of individual roles or attributes but as a process of relational influence.”⁵² This is the part of the shift that requires the most attention from a research perspective. Safian notes that, in the complexifying world in which we now live, leaders are recognizing that “traditional organizational structures no longer seem sufficient.”⁵³ “Postmoderns now approach the world with a posture of skepticism and suspicion that must be understood if we are to lead effectively.”⁵⁴ Beach notes that “the evidence of this is all around us, whether it is found in grassroots political movements like those that motivated the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011 or those that drive the Tea Party movement in the United States we can see that challenges to traditional power structures are on the rise.”⁵⁵ All around us it is clear that society no longer embraces the very leadership styles and structures that continue to lead a great many churches in North America. To affirm this, Marty writes that:

the consistent witness of Holy Scripture is that God cherishes the idea of forming a visible body. It is not the spiritual state of

⁵⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

⁵¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 157.

⁵² Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

⁵³ Safian, “Flux Leader,” 23. Van Gelder and Zscheile agree with Safian. They note that “the erosion of functional Christendom and the advent of postmodernity have revealed the limitations of these approaches in the face of an increasingly complex and differentiated cultural situation.” Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 158.

⁵⁴ Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 20.

⁵⁵ Beach, “Flat World,” para. 1.

individual souls or personal salvation that preoccupies God throughout the Bible. It isn't even the achievement of a personal state of holiness. God's intention is to form a people, an *ekklesia*, a community.⁵⁶

God never intended the leadership of his church to fall into the hands of a select few that did not allow for the use of multiple gifts within the body. Nor does this model still make sense in contemporary society. Yet, the church is plagued by selfishness. "Some theologians argue that modernity has brought on a rampant individualism never seen before in church history."⁵⁷ Marty elaborates on this and suggests that "it would be more helpful to say that contemporary consumerism and a market ideology have merely exacerbated the longstanding impulse among believers for a privatized faith."⁵⁸ This presents a unique contradiction for those researching the changes in leadership. On the one hand society is moving towards a model of shared leadership. On the other, society continues to have a deeply entrenched propensity for individualism that permeates all facets of life, work, and church.

It is likely that this contradiction will wane as the shift back to community takes root. Marty points out that, "as people discover some of the limitations of this approach, they do show signs of hankering for community."⁵⁹ This "hankering" will continue to reshape society and drive out individualism.

While this may seem contradictory to the above, a key player in the transition will be the pastors of local congregations. It is, after all, "the pastor [that] serves as the primary agent for interpreting the beliefs and forming the practices that make for a

⁵⁶ Marty, "Shaping," 307.

⁵⁷ Marty, "Shaping," 309.

⁵⁸ Marty, "Shaping," 309.

⁵⁹ Marty, "Shaping," 309.

congregation's character."⁶⁰ Stanley continues this narrative and warns that "the primary reason churches cling to outdated models and programs is that they lack leadership. For an organization to remain vision-centric, it must be led by a vision-centric leader or leaders."⁶¹ John Maxwell "found that it's not easy to change leaders. In fact, I've discovered that leaders resist change as much as followers do. The result? Unchanged leaders equal unchanged organizations. People do what people see."⁶²

This resistance to change will be among the greatest difficulties in the search for a way forward as we research. The work of doing practical theology will be pointless if we cannot find ways of changing leaders before we can expect to change churches. The very people we are studying will be the greatest roadblock to change and to the usefulness of our study. This begs the question of how you ask for critical feedback on the state of church leadership from a group of leaders who are likely either resistant to change or unaware that change is necessary. The mere act of asking the questions can create unwelcome responses as people confront their own limited view of change.

Theological Framework

To begin, this work is driven by a pragmatic approach to ministry rather than simply a theological reflection. This dissertation is founded on Christian theology but is primarily a contextual response to millennials leaving the church. Our primary goal is to respond to the present relationship between millennials and the church. This will enable us to develop churches that include the participation of young people, not at the expense

⁶⁰ Marty, "Shaping," 312.

⁶¹ Stanley, *Deep*, 294.

⁶² Maxwell, *Leader*, 49.

of those who are presently attending church. Rather, this is to include millennials in the church body.

A key theology that came out of the Protestant Reformation is the priesthood of all believers. Luther believed that all baptised Christians were priests. While Luther fought against a wide variety of issues with the church, one area that needed to be purged, and which became a hallmark of his theology, was the Catholic church's hold on who had access to God. Whereas the church elevated the clergy above the rest of the congregation, Luther held to the priesthood of all believers.

Luther believed in the equality of all people before God. He sought to bring order back to the church and wrestle leadership away from the tyrannical few that he believed to be outside God's order. Kaufmann notes that, "at the disputation held at the University of Leipzig from June 27 to July 15, 1519, Luther came to argue from the Bible and history against the papacy's claim of power from divine right."⁶³ To that end, "he denied the hierarchical placement of bishops over pastors and disavowed the infallible authority of church councils. The Bible alone was infallible, he insisted, and no church authority could promulgate doctrines or decisions that were not based on it."⁶⁴

The church had elevated pastors over the rest of the congregation as early as 100 AD. In some of the earliest writings about church leadership (not including the canonical books), Ignatius of Antioch warned churches to "let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, as also the bishop who is a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and as the band of the apostles. Nothing can be called a church without

⁶³ Kaufmann, *Short Life*, 46.

⁶⁴ Kaufmann, *Short Life*, 46.

these.”⁶⁵ In Ignatius’s thought it was wrong to conduct church without the deacons or bishops present. While his views were based on the conviction that the church of the second century was facing growing heretical beliefs, Ignatius did contribute to the rise of the separation of clergy from the rest of the church body.

The contemporary North American church continues to suffer under organizational structures that elevate a few key leaders above the rest of the church. Often churches are led by a pastor and a small group of people who make all the decisions within the church.

Yet churches that are led by a small group of individuals is not in keeping with Luther’s theology. Luther believed that the role of pastors and leaders within the church did not and should not denote some sort of special power or position within the church. In Luther’s ecclesiology, leaders serve a function within the church. They are not bestowed special powers unavailable to the others in the congregation. Paul Avis summarizes Luther’s views of the priesthood as being the exercising of ministry and not a special power:

Obviously no indelible character is bestowed; public ministry is merely a function that the designated individual exercises for the time being. He may give up his office or be deposed, becoming a layman again. ‘Should it happen that a person chosen for such office were deposed for lack of trust, he would then be exactly what he was before.’⁶⁶

While this dissertation is not focused on debating Luther’s ecclesiology, it is interesting to note that, in this instance, he is embracing an approach to church hierarchies that is fluid.⁶⁷ This allows all parts of the body of Christ to engage in leadership as their skills

⁶⁵ Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 140.

⁶⁶ Avis, “Luther,” 110. Avis notes Luther’s belief that authority was common to all.

⁶⁷ For more on fluid hierarchies see Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 37.

and giftings allow needs to be met, recognizing that, once those needs are met, they will no longer be needed in certain forms of leadership. Perhaps it is because the Protestant church has not fully embraced or understood Luther. As Rogers wrote, “[Martin] Luther’s greatest contribution to Protestant ecclesiology was his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Yet no element in his teaching is more misunderstood.”⁶⁸

Gerrish expands on Rogers’s point and writes that “the priesthood of all believers has come to be regarded, along with Biblical authority and salvation by faith, as one of the three main points of evangelical theology. Like the other two, however, it has not always been interpreted in the same way, nor taken as seriously in practice as in theory.”⁶⁹ In Gerrish’s view “all too often it has become a dead letter in a clergy-dominated institution. And where it has come alive again, it has been used to support a bewildering variety of practices, such as congregational polity, the Quaker meeting, pietistic *ecclesiolae*, and the Methodist commissioning of lay preachers.”⁷⁰ When it has been practiced, it has often been abused.

It has been said that Luther’s doctrine of the priesthood of all believers “is one of the most revolutionary doctrines in the history of Christianity.”⁷¹ Luther sought to break down three barriers that existed in the church, one of which was the authority of the Pope. In 1520, Luther wrote *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. “In the book, Luther attacked the three walls the medieval Catholic church had built to protect its authority. All three walls related to the unique status, position, and authority of the pope:

⁶⁸ Rogers, “Dangerous Idea,” 119.

⁶⁹ Gerrish, “Priesthood,” 404.

⁷⁰ Gerrish, “Priesthood,” 404.

⁷¹ Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 60.

his power was above the temporal estate, only he could interpret the Scriptures, and only he could call a council.”⁷²

The primary importance of the priesthood of all believers was the redistribution of power within the church. Van Gelder and Zscheile note that the long-held model of the pastor as the head of the church led Christians to a place where “clergy were often understood to represent Christ to the congregation, rather than the whole congregation representing Christ to the world in the power of the Spirit.”⁷³ As we noted above, many people in the contemporary church have grown suspicious of those in authority. It is important that the contemporary church rediscover the priesthood of all believers if we are to acknowledge the whole laity, including younger members, and give them a place within the leadership of the church.

Throughout the rest of 1520, Luther sought to “demolish the barriers of the church, priesthood, and sacrament.”⁷⁴ In *To the Christian Nobility*, Luther argued “that all Christians are priests... there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular.”⁷⁵ He continually pointed to 1 Pet 2:9 as his main evidence for the common priesthood of believers. Peter wrote that “you are a royal priesthood, a priestly realm.” Luther argued that the princes of Germany were priests just as much as the pope. Therefore, if the pope departed from orthodoxy, his fellow priests, the nobility of the German nation, could and should call a council for the reform of the church.

⁷² Baudler, “Common Priesthood,” 48.

⁷³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

⁷⁴ Rogers, “Dangerous Idea,” 121.

⁷⁵ Rogers, “Dangerous Idea,” 121.

Luther's theology redefined two other areas of church life. The first was that the laity no longer needed a specific person to offer sacrifices in their name. Instead, in pointing to Rom 12, Luther points out that all believers can now offer themselves as sacrifices. We no longer needed that intermediary to give us access to God.

Perhaps the biggest implication of the priesthood of all was that Luther believed that everyone had a right to read the Bible. We no longer needed specific people with a special gift to interpret Scripture. As such, "in 1521 Luther translated the New Testament into vernacular German so that all Christians could carry out their priestly function of knowing and ministering the word of God to each other."⁷⁶ The contemporary church would be hard pressed to imagine a day when only a select few could read the Bible. Today we have access to the Bible in a couple of thousand languages. It is available on our electronic devices where, at the click of a button, we can read it in any number of languages and even a variety of versions of English. It was Luther that paved the way for this easy access to the Bible.

A further implication of Luther's theology is his view of headship within the church and the way in which we use titles to separate us. Spitz notes that Luther wanted to make it "come to pass that this little word 'priests' becomes as common as the little word 'Christians.' Therefore, when Peter here says: 'Ye are the royal priesthood,' it is as much as if he said: Ye are Christians."⁷⁷ In Luther's view "if now you would know what kind of title and what power and price Christians have, you see it here, that they are kings

⁷⁶ Rogers, "Dangerous Idea," 122.

⁷⁷ Spitz, "Luther's Comments," 10.

and priests and the chosen nation.”⁷⁸ Luther is clearly not in favour of titles that separate Christians from each other.

He presses the point that there should only be one priest in the church. Luther’s view is that “the church is founded on Christ’s priesthood. Its inner structure is the priesthood of Christians for each other. The priesthood of Christians flows from the priesthood of Christ.”⁷⁹ Yet, as Van Gelder and Zscheile note, for centuries in the church, “clergy were often understood to represent Christ to the congregation, rather than the whole congregation representing Christ to the world in the power of the Spirit.”⁸⁰

Barna notes that this view of the pastor as the head of the church is still the norm for much of Western church leaders. He relates the story of a pastor named Steve whom Barna met once. Steve “was hindered by the crippling misconception—one shared by most leaders in America—that because he is the central leader in his organization, everything depends on him.”⁸¹ However, Barna does not lay all the blame for this on Steve. Barna points out that “Steve saw the senior pastorate the same way his father, his seminary professors, and his supervising pastors had seen it. It was an outlet for his gifts and talents, with little thought or energy devoted to working with others to build on his strengths and compensate for his weaknesses. As long as he was doing what he did best, and doing it to the best of his ability, he saw no problems with his ministry.”⁸² Steve was crippled by the very system that trained him, a system that would espouse the ideals of the priesthood of all believers. But, instead of living out that ideal, the system is raising

⁷⁸ Spitz, “Luther’s Comments,” 10.

⁷⁹ Rogers, “Dangerous Idea,” 122.

⁸⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

⁸¹ Barna, *Fish*, 39.

⁸² Barna, *Fish*, 38.

up leaders who, through their actions, deny the priesthood of all believers by training pastors to be the sole person in charge of their congregation. Perhaps the example of the Generation X'ers can help guide the church. Menking reminds us that “the Xer's life experience drives us back to the basic message of grace. If there is grace for me from God, can I encounter grace from another follower of Jesus who accepts me as I am?”⁸³

Luther would be furious with the contemporary church for operating in any manner that was short of the inclusion of all who proclaimed faith in Christ. Luther was adamant that “in the New Testament there is only one priest. All other talk of priests is in the secondary sense but is never separated from the one and only priest.”⁸⁴ To Luther this was what the church had forgotten. “It is only from him—in connection with him—that there are those who are priests in the secondary sense. Jesus Christ is the priest before God, he offers up the sacrifice of himself for our sake, in our place.”⁸⁵ One would wonder whether Luther would level the same condemnation against us.

The Implications of the Priesthood of all Believers

We have already hinted at the implication for churches if they were to embrace and practice the priesthood of all believers. The greatest impact would be in who is able to serve within the church. In practice, many churches operate on the assumption that a person must have some special ordination to serve. Yet, Luther points out that ordination does not make people priests. “In his Commentary on Psalm 110, first preached in 1535, Luther summarized this point succinctly: ‘every baptized Christian is a priest already, not

⁸³ Menking, *Generation X*, 160–61.

⁸⁴ Nagel, “Luther and Priesthood,” 280.

⁸⁵ Nagel, “Luther and Priesthood,” 280.

by appointment or ordination... but because Christ Himself has begotten him as a priest and has given birth to him in Baptism.”⁸⁶

Luther taught that “the Holy Ghost teaches us that not oil, consecrations, tonsures, chasubles, alms, chalice, mass, sermon, etc., make priests and give power, but the priesthood and power must be there first, brought along out of Baptism, common to all Christians through faith, which builds them upon Christ, the true High Priest, as St. Peter here says.”⁸⁷ One of the people that Luther pointed to in order to make this point was Abraham, a man that the church considers the Father of Israel and set aside by God to be the high priest to his people. Yet, Abraham did not have a special ordination from anyone other than God himself.

To Luther anyone that is a Christian is part of the priesthood and eligible to serve in the church. Luther points out that “all Christians are priests, and that without any difference in station, sex, or age.”⁸⁸ Luther goes on to write that “in brief, he that is a Christian is also a royal priest: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28).”⁸⁹

Therefore, in his charge to Timothy, the Apostle Paul encouraged him to not let anyone look down on him because he was young (1 Tim 4:12). Paul recognized that young people have a profound impact on the life of a church and are an important part of church leadership. His charge included the encouragement that they could set an example for all believers in the way they lived their lives and led the church.

⁸⁶ Sweeney, “Faithful Practice,” 5.

⁸⁷ Spitz, “Luther’s Comments,” 11-12.

⁸⁸ Spitz, “Luther’s Comments,” 13.

⁸⁹ Spitz, “Luther’s Comments,” 13.

Added to that is a large divide between males and females in leadership. Han notes that “leadership has historically been defined on male, not female, terms. Whether in politics, business or military circles within the United States, strong leadership is defined as an attempt to exert one’s will over a particular situation.”⁹⁰ It is a point that Becker agrees with and she points out that “effective leadership in the white male paradigm requires credibility, competence, and power.”⁹¹ Becker goes on to write that “Clergywomen... may prove repeatedly that they are competent, but at this time in our society and within the church, they are perceived to be less powerful.”⁹² Furthermore, “the unique power of women in leadership comes from many things, most of which are absent from the list of ‘most desired traits’ in the patriarchy.”⁹³

The gender divide in the church is having a profound impact on the Millennial generation. As noted earlier, one of the summaries of the Hemorrhaging Faith Report was that, for the church to be inclusive, it must be a place for everyone, regardless of gender.⁹⁴ Yet, it is clear that, at least in the realm of church leadership, the North American church is not inclusive of men and women.

While the Protestant church of today would say it believes in the priesthood of all believers, it is not living it out in practice. Young adults want to be involved. Kinnaman notes that “it should come as no surprise that the majority of young people hate to be out of the loop. They dread being excluded.”⁹⁵ He goes on to write that “young people start with the basic assumption that everyone belongs, and they have a hard time

⁹⁰ Han, “Leadership,” 169.

⁹¹ Becker, *Women*, 105.

⁹² Becker, *Women*, 105.

⁹³ Becker, *Women*, 166.

⁹⁴ Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 60.

⁹⁵ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 174.

understanding spiritual communities that feel like insider-only clubs.”⁹⁶ Yet the contemporary church often feels like an insider-only club where you must be male, and sometimes over 50, before you can be involved in senior leadership.

Millennials perceive the gap in the church’s practice and belief as a sign of inauthenticity. As noted earlier, the Hemorrhaging Faith report goes on to highlight young adult attitudes towards churches that are inauthentic in their beliefs and behaviours.⁹⁷ To a millennial that is called to lead, if everyone is a priest, why does it seem that, to be on most senior leadership teams, it appears that only a certain demographic gets to exercise their calling as leaders? To their friends observing the church, this drives them away even if they are not called to lead. Inauthenticity and exclusivity are barriers for all young adults, not just those directly impacted. The church needs to reembrace the biblical imagery of the church being one body where all the members serve a function. If we are all priests then people with the same calling cannot be excluded simply based on something out of their control, in this example their age.

Leonard Sweet explains that, in today’s flattened world where everyone wants to be a participant, “there are no more ‘professional clergy’ and pew-sitting laity. There are only ministers who look to leaders to mobilize and release ministry through them.”⁹⁸ In a truly flat church, all would share in the leadership as their gifts dictate. Leadership would not be the domain of a select few.

It deserves to be noted that this is not a suggestion that anyone can lead at any position. This distinction is made clear in Rom 12:6. God equips certain people for

⁹⁶ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 174.

⁹⁷ Penner, "Hemorrhaging," 60.

⁹⁸ Sweet, *Pilgrims*, 72.

certain tasks within the church. This is a call to embrace all members of the church in leadership according to their gifts. As Charles Scalise writes, “future attempts to offer leadership to Christian communities could be significantly strengthened by careful attention to the historical context and theological models of Christian leadership.”⁹⁹ As mentioned earlier, the church is a body of believers who all share in the leadership of the church under the headship of Jesus Christ. Including young leaders enhances the church and is a truer reflection of Christ as the head, not a select group of people who have reached a certain age.

The North American church needs to redefine leadership with the goal of recapturing the unique essence of Christian leadership. This will be an essential step in ensuring that the church understands who is qualified to lead and not simply adopt leadership models from society that are not congruent with Scripture. Changing this will require a new model of raising young leaders to train them for a new ministry landscape. We will return to this need in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

As McLaren wrote, “in times of change, in times between sequential paradigms or among many coexisting paradigms, strong and innovative leadership is air, water, sight, intelligence.”¹⁰⁰ This is the only way the church will be able to overcome “the crises of mediocrity and stagnation in today’s churches.” Strong leaders will enable the church to find ways to change its culture and remain an important facet of their communities.

⁹⁹ Scalise, “Christian Leadership,” 44–5.

¹⁰⁰ McLaren, *Side*, 118.

In reflecting on unchanged churches, Sweet writes that “the Old World Church refuses to change its culture to become more accessible. It either refuses to believe that anything much has changed in the culture or wants to live a separated lifestyle.”¹⁰¹ However, Keel points out that “churches that continue to do what has always been done die a slow death caused by aging, atrophy, and irrelevance.”¹⁰² Minatrea agrees with Keel and reminds us that “aging church structures are often rigid, brittle, and inflexible, unable to adapt to their changing environments.”¹⁰³ Unchanged churches that are rigid, brittle, and inflexible are generally led by unchanged leaders. Leaders who either refuse to acknowledge the change that has happened in society, or who are unaware of the changes are, in turn, holding back their churches from changing and adapting.

This brings us full circle. It is imperative that we change the leaders of our churches, either through bettering the leaders currently serving, and, in some situations, replacing them with leaders who are prepared to lead the church for the next generation. There can be no greater cause for alarm than the continued, and rapid, decline in church engagement in North America. This brings us to one logical conclusion, as Maxwell wrote, “change the leader, change the organization. Everything rises and falls on leadership!”¹⁰⁴ The next generation of “pastors serving in the congregational setting are uniquely positioned to help individuals relinquish their grip on personal preference. They get to help shape a community that breathes around the inspiration of Jesus.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Sweet, *Pilgrims*, 141.

¹⁰² Keel, *Intuitive*, 90.

¹⁰³ Minatrea, *Shaped*, 144.

¹⁰⁴ Maxwell, *Leader*, 49.

¹⁰⁵ Marty, “Shaping,” 326.

Reshaping our leaders will reshape our churches and stem the flow of people away from church.

CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP

Introduction

Before we can begin to discuss how we need to reshape our leaders, we need to first review how our churches are currently structured. This literature review will look at the most common leadership paradigms used in both the church and secular society. Our review will demonstrate that current paradigms share a common weakness. This weakness demands a new paradigm that best reflects a Biblical approach to leadership. It is the aim of this chapter to outline why flat leadership is the best approach to organizing the church in a way that allows for a greater diversity of people to lead.

A Brief History of Leadership Paradigms

The creation account found in Genesis chapter one tells us that God brings order to a world that was in chaos (Gen 1:1–3). Subsequently God, as creator, sits in power over all creation. As the creation narrative unfolds humanity is placed in leadership over the rest of creation to rule it as stewards (Gen 1:28). “The understanding that God is king lies at the heart of the biblical tradition.”¹ This was the created order, a system where God reigned over humanity and humans, male and female, were given responsibility to steward God’s good creation. This call to stewardship implied that the original couple functioned in co-operation with God. There also appears to be no hierarchy in the responsibilities of the original couple.

However, it was not long before humans began to employ a hierarchical model of leadership over each other in which God was replaced as the ultimate authority. By the

¹ Provan et al., *Israel*, 208.

time Abram was called by God to be the father of the Hebrew nation, Gen 12 gives an account of a Pharaoh in power over the Egyptian empire. The Pharaohs led as a God and carried ultimate power over their people.²

The Israelites were not immune to this desire for an earthly ruler and eventually sought their own King (1 Sam 8:5). This was anticipated as early as Moses. He gave instructions in Deut 17 outlining the form of a future kingship.³ It is of note that their desire for a king was directly attributed to their rejection of God as their leader (1 Sam 8:7). Left to their own desires, humans reject God's created leadership paradigm whereby God is the sole authority over a nation and a people. While some of Israel's kings were godly leaders, others succumbed to the human desire for power and abused their position. Despite Moses' instruction that a king must "not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites" (Deut 17:20, NIV), they elevated themselves (or were elevated by others) to positions of ultimate authority over the nation.

Thus, for thousands of years, hierarchies where an individual is placed in authority over others has been the predominant leadership paradigm. Hierarchy is, essentially, a transactional leadership style. Transactional leadership is a style that uses rewards and punishments as a method of leading. Followers do things for the leader in exchange for something else. Often this was security, protection, food, and money. Transactional leadership is limited in that leaders only remain leaders if their followers are happy with what they are receiving from them. Inversely, followers can be eliminated if the leader is not happy with what they are getting. A person's usefulness is limited to

² Longman and Dillard note that, in the book of Exodus, "chapters 5 through 12 narrate Moses' struggle with Pharaoh that is also a fight between deities, since Moses represents Yahweh and Pharaoh is himself thought to be one of the Egyptian gods" (*Old Testament*, 70).

³ Provan et al., *Israel*, 208.

what they contribute to the system that keeps the leader in power and the company, institution, political party, and the like, thriving. As was discussed in Chapter 1, transactional leadership paradigms are being abandoned by a generation that no longer want to be cogs in a system. Nor do they want to continue to serve a leader simply because of their position or title. Leadership is being redefined. So too are the paradigms in which leaders serve.

The twentieth century saw a rise in different leadership paradigms as post-modernity took root. As society grows tired of hierarchies that place single people (often males) in leadership over others, philosophies of leadership have arisen that have given more people a voice and a place to serve as leaders. Among these paradigms are a few that we will briefly review. This is not an exhaustive review. It will, however, illustrate why these leadership forms do not represent the best way to lead Millennials in the present context in which today's leaders work.

Hierarchies

As mentioned above, hierarchies as a paradigm for human leadership have been used since nearly as long as people have populated the earth. This has been as true in the church as in any other sector of human society. In looking back on the history of the church we find that hierarchies were used very early on. Pseudo-Dionysius (fifth century) is one of the earliest writers to argue for the use of hierarchies in the church as a reflection of the hierarchies he observed in the "Heavenly Minds," being the trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴

⁴ Parker, *Dionysius*, 2. It is outside the scope of this paper to argue the identity of the authors of the pseudo-Dionysius works. For this paper we are using the works merely to illustrate the use of hierarchies in the church throughout its history.

Dionysius saw a hierarchy of the Godhead in that the Father was supreme over the others. He saw a further hierarchy in the angels, which he saw as supported by the biblical record where it appears that angels do have a hierarchical order to them. His conclusion of this was that “it is not possible that the supremely Divine Ray should otherwise illuminate us, except so far as it is enveloped, for the purpose of instruction, in variegated sacred veils, and arranged naturally and appropriately, for such as we are, by paternal forethought.”⁵ This example, he wrote, is designed to be replicated on earth.

In summary, he wrote that “hierarchy is, in my judgment, a sacred order and science and operation, assimilated, as far as attainable, to the likeness of God, and conducted to the illuminations granted to it from God, according to capacity, with a view to the Divine imitation.”⁶ While it would take far too much room in this project to detail all of Dionysius’s beliefs and reasons why he believed hierarchies were the only way to lead the church, he explains in detail that, through this leadership structure, some are purified and others are the purifiers. He believed that “the purpose, then, of Hierarchy is the assimilation and union, as far as attainable, with God.”⁷ “He, then, who mentions Hierarchy, denotes a certain altogether Holy Order, an image of the supremely Divine freshness, ministering the mysteries of its own illumination in hierarchical ranks.”⁸

For Dionysius, hierarchies were the very reflection of the Godhead and were to be emulated on earth. He believed “it is not lawful for the Mystic Rites of sacred things, or for things religiously done, to practise anything whatever beyond the sacred regulations

⁵ Parker, *Dionysius*, 2.

⁶ Parker, *Dionysius*, 13.

⁷ Parker, *Dionysius*, 14.

⁸ Parker, *Dionysius*, 14.

of their own proper function.”⁹ It was our duty to organize humans under hierarchies as well to follow God’s established order.

He goes on to then elevate some people over others. This is because, through “Hierarchical regulation... some are perfected and others perfect.”¹⁰ It was the purpose of those who serve at the top of a hierarchy to purify those at lower levels. It is necessary that “that those who purify should impart, from their own abundance of purity.”¹¹ He plainly notes that we need to “view our Hierarchy... by which, in proportion to our capacity, we are conducted, hierarchically according to our measure, to the uniform deification.”¹²

Ultimately, Dionysius viewed the purpose of Hierarchy to be “our assimilation and union with God, as far as attainable.”¹³ His writings go into greater detail about the nature of human hierarchies. At the top of his pyramid were the clergy. These are those who were most illuminated and only those who were able to gaze upon God. No others were permitted to attain this level. He reminds that “the inferior Ranks cannot cross to the superior functions, and, besides this, it is not permitted to them to take in hand such quackery as that.”¹⁴ His writings outline in detail how priests are to lead the church and its sacraments and make it abundantly clear that hierarchies are the God-given method of leading the church.

Ignatius of Antioch continued writing on hierarchies as the only acceptable form of church leadership just one generation after Dionysius. Two key phrases from

⁹ Parker, *Dionysius*, 14.

¹⁰ Parker, *Dionysius*, 15.

¹¹ Parker, *Dionysius*, 15.

¹² Parker, *Dionysius*, 70.

¹³ Parker, *Dionysius*, 72. While this seems a repeat of a previous quote, it was Dionysius who repeated this conclusion.

¹⁴ Parker, *Dionysius*, 130.

Ignatius's writings give insight into his view that the priest is at the top of the hierarchy and the most important person in the church. He wrote to the Trallians that "when you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living not in human fashion but in the fashion of Jesus Christ who died for us."¹⁵ He also wrote to the Smyrnaeans a warning to "let no man perform anything pertaining to the church without the bishop."¹⁶ Clergy were elevated to a place of privilege early in the history of the church. In Chapter 1 we quoted Van Gelder and Zscheile in noting that a hierarchical paradigm of church leadership has been used for centuries and continues to our present day.

Van Gelder and Zscheile give a brief overview of this hierarchical leadership paradigm. In their overview, they outline three distinct paradigms of church leadership. These are priest (the medieval era), pedagogue (the time of the Reformation), and professional (the modern era of church leaders).¹⁷ They explain that "in the previous paradigms of priest, pedagogue, or professional, authority was understood to be concentrated in individuals who held office or who possessed certain professional skills and certifications."¹⁸ Yet, in their assessment, "with the collapse of functional Christendom, the role and nature of leadership in Christian communities are being fundamentally re-evaluated."¹⁹ "A new paradigm is emerging to replace the professional model: that of the participatory leader."²⁰ They refer to this paradigm as missional

¹⁵ Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 140.

¹⁶ Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents*, 67.

¹⁷ For a deeper understanding of these three eras and paradigms, see Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*.

¹⁸ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

¹⁹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

²⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

leadership. It is a model that puts the Holy Spirit back at the top of church leadership. It is a paradigm that we refer to as flat leadership.

Hierarchical leadership models have prevailed throughout most of human history. However, in the last century different approaches to leadership have begun to emerge. These models tend to be more centered on individual flourishing as opposed to exclusively meeting the needs of the organization. Some significant models that reflect this shift in leadership need to be explored.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is an ancient approach to leading, even if the term itself is rather new. Writing several hundred years before the birth of Christ, Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (also known as Laozi) wrote that “the Sage, in order to be above the people, must in words keep below them. In order to be ahead of the people, he must in person keep behind them.”²¹ In short this is the basic principle of servant leadership. To truly lead, a leader must serve the people below them. It is through serving that “the people do not feel his burden” and “the people do not feel his hindrance.”²²

The term servant leadership entered the modern vernacular in 1970. Robert Greenleaf is credited with coining the phrase servant leadership in his work *The Servant as Leader*. In part, Greenleaf was taking a “fresh critical look... at the issues of power and authority” as “people [begin] to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways.”²³ His response to the shifting nature

²¹ Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents*, 67.

²² Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents*, 67.

²³ Greenleaf, *Servant*, 3.

of leadership was to outline his view of the servant-leader. To Greenleaf a person is a servant-leader when they begin “with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*.”²⁴ This leads to the “conscious choice” to “aspire to lead.”²⁵ The end result of this was that “the natural servant, the person who is *servant first*, is more likely to persevere and refine a particular hypothesis on what serves another’s highest priority needs than is the person who is *leader first* and who later serves out of promptings of conscience or in conformity with normative expectations.”²⁶

Greenleaf’s work lacked depth in explaining how one was to lead as a servant. However, the nature of servant leadership has been expanded continuously throughout the last fifty years. A concise definition of servant leadership is that it is “a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions... such that they are empowered to grow into what they are capable of becoming.”²⁷ This is in contrast to performance-oriented leadership, such as hierarchical leadership described above, in that servant leaders are more concerned with sustainable performance and not primarily with profit and growth.²⁸

Servant leadership is a paradigm that is being used in a number of contemporary businesses with success. Some of them include Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Ritz-Carlton, Zappos.com, Intel, and Marriott.²⁹ The success of these companies continues to drive interest and research on servant leadership.

²⁴ Greenleaf, *Servant*, 6.

²⁵ Greenleaf, *Servant*, 6.

²⁶ Greenleaf, *Servant*, 6.

²⁷ Greenleaf, *Servant*, 6.

²⁸ Eva, “Servant,” 111.

²⁹ Eva, “Servant,” 111.

Transformational Leadership

Another leadership paradigm that rose to prominence in the 1970s is transformational leadership. The term originated in the works of James Downton in 1973 and rose to prominence when James Burns published *Leadership* in 1978. Burns, drawing on the example of Mao, noted that he exhibited a “kind of leadership [that] is transforming leadership.”³⁰ While not ignoring the horrors of his reign, Mao’s leadership strength was that he could “comprehend not only the existing needs of followers but to mobilize within them newer motivations and aspirations that would in the future furnish a popular foundation for the kind of leadership Mao hoped to supply.”³¹

Perhaps Burns’s greatest contribution to the emerging paradigm of transformational leadership was his extensive discussions on transactional leadership paradigms. Many traditional leadership paradigms are, at their core, transactional. A leader and their followers work through transactions. Each serving the other to keep all sides happy. This is true of hierarchies, and, to a degree, servant leadership as described above. However, Burns saw potential in transformational leadership to move beyond transactions.

Transformational leaders move beyond “dramatic decision-making” that only leads “to cosmetic change, or temporary change, or to the kind of change in symbols and myths that will preserve the existing order rather than transform or undermine it.”³² Real change only comes about through transformation “in the attitudes, norms, institutions, and behaviors that structure our daily lives.”³³

³⁰ Burns, *Leadership*, 254.

³¹ Burns, *Leadership*, 254.

³² Burns, *Leadership*, 254.

³³ Burns, *Leadership*, 414.

Ultimately, Burns draws the comparison between transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership “is the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers.”³⁴ Transformational leadership is done by leaders who “shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers.”³⁵ His premise is that “whatever the separate interests persons might hold, they are presently or potentially united in the pursuit of ‘higher’ goals.”³⁶

Bernard Bass expanded the understanding of transformational leadership in his work *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (1985). He discusses the limits of cost-benefit exchanges (transactional leadership) and noted that, in the first half of the twentieth century, leadership was primarily about “how and when to give directions and orders to obedient subordinates.”³⁷ This gives leaders a focus “on the task to be done and/or the human relations to be maintained.”³⁸ In short, “the transactional leader pursues a cost-benefit, economic exchange to meet subordinates’ current material and psychic needs in return for ‘contracted’ services rendered by the subordinate.”³⁹ A transformational leader works “themselves out of a job to the extent that they elevate their subordinates into becoming self-actualizers, self-regulators, and self-controllers.”⁴⁰ The true mark of a transformational leader is seen in the change of their followers and not simply their productivity.

³⁴ Burns, *Leadership*, 425.

³⁵ Burns, *Leadership*, 425.

³⁶ Burns, *Leadership*, 425.

³⁷ Bass, *Leadership*, 5.

³⁸ Bass, *Leadership*, 5.

³⁹ Bass, *Leadership*, 14.

⁴⁰ Bass, *Leadership*, 16.

One of the defining characteristics of a transformational leader is charisma. “Charismatic leaders have great power and influence.”⁴¹ A leader’s personality “goes a long way in explaining whether leaders will or will not be transformational.”⁴² This term shows up several times throughout Bass’ work. Charisma is a sought-after trait by companies looking to hire a leader. Charisma is the driving factor in bringing about change. While Bass cautions that charisma cannot be the only ingredient in a transformational leader, it is the primary driver of transformation.⁴³

In evaluating the strength of transformational leadership over transactional leadership, Niphadka and Kuhil remind us that transformational leaders mobilize their “followers toward reform by an appeal to values and emotions.”⁴⁴ It is leadership that is focused on “building a better tomorrow” rather than focused on what is being accomplished today.⁴⁵ To summarize, “transformational leadership is based on the assumption that people will ‘follow’ or work for or do great things for a person who inspires them.”⁴⁶

Authentic Leadership

Another key leadership paradigm that has become prominent in the last one hundred years is authentic leadership. Like servant leadership, authentic leadership is rooted in ancient philosophy. It has been traced back to ancient Greece and the Stoics.⁴⁷ It draws

⁴¹ Bass, *Leadership*, xiv.

⁴² Bass, *Leadership*, xiv.

⁴³ It is worth reading Burns’ book as he delves deep into the nature of transformational leaders, the abilities required to bring about transformation, and insight into how transformational leaders bring about change.

⁴⁴ Niphadka and Kuhil, “Transformational,” 547.

⁴⁵ Niphadka and Kuhil, “Transformational,” 547.

⁴⁶ Niphadka and Kuhil, “Transformational,” 552.

⁴⁷ See Novicevic et al., “Authentic,” 66.

“on classic explanations of leadership (e.g., Socrates and Aristotle) and informed by modern science.”⁴⁸ Authentic Leadership theory “grew out of transformational theory” and “advances that social structures work best when a leader prioritizes sincerity over superiority.”⁴⁹

It is a philosophy based on ethics and how people should live. In his writings, Soren Kierkegaard wrote of authentic living stemming from ethics and people knowing themselves. Knowing yourself produces “the authentic individual.”⁵⁰ While not specific to leadership, Kierkegaard gives us a foundation for authentic leadership through ethical choices and knowing oneself. This leads to authentic emotional responses to the people around us.⁵¹

In the early days of the twentiethth century, Martin Heidegger brought authenticity into the realm of leadership. His book *Being and Time* introduced the “idea of ‘winning oneself’ by making authentic, self-motivated choices.”⁵² Bill George writes that “leadership begins and ends with authenticity.”⁵³ Inauthenticity leads to people who are “incapable of being truly responsible because they are unaware of their moral situation.”⁵⁴ Ultimately, “the lack of emotional authenticity places a limit to their capacity to become authentic leaders.”⁵⁵ Instead, leaders develop “the image or *persona* of a leader.”⁵⁶ Rather than truly being leaders, they are simply trying to replicate another person.

⁴⁸ Aust, “Authentic,” 66.

⁴⁹ Aust, “Authentic,” 66.

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 259.

⁵¹ Novicevic et al., “Authentic,” 67.

⁵² Novicevic et al., “Authentic,” 67.

⁵³ George, *Authentic*, 11.

⁵⁴ Novicevic et al., “Authentic,” 67.

⁵⁵ Novicevic et al., “Authentic,” 67.

⁵⁶ George, *Authentic*, 11.

The “philosophical meanings of authenticity were explored in leadership studies during the 1960’s, when an organization’s authenticity was viewed as a manifestation of its leader’s individual authenticity.”⁵⁷ As George goes on to highlight, authenticity is not something that is being taught in corporate America. Rather, leadership experts “develop lists of leadership characteristics one is supposed to emulate. They describe the styles of leaders and suggest that you adopt them.”⁵⁸

George defines authentic leadership in simple terms. “It’s being yourself; being the person you were created to be.”⁵⁹ Building on the works of Robert Terry, Bill George, Peter Sims and others, Philip Aust outlines five elements of authentic leadership. These are (a) leaders with a marked purpose, (b) distinct values, (c) close relationships with their followers, (d) self-discipline, and (e) a caring heart.⁶⁰ These five areas are developed throughout a leader’s life.

A leader must discover these on their own. It cannot simply be borrowed from someone else. “You cannot borrow someone else’s eyes. It must be authentic, and if it is, it will be original, because you are an original.”⁶¹ Authentic leadership is, quite simply, about leaders being authentic.

A Brief Critique

Each of the leadership paradigms outlined above has strengths and weaknesses.

Hierarchies can function to get things done. Transformational leadership moves leaders

⁵⁷ Novicevic et al., “Authentic,” 68.

⁵⁸ George, *Authentic*, 11.

⁵⁹ George, *Authentic*, 11.

⁶⁰ Aust, “Authentic,” 67. George dives into each of these elements. See George, *Authentic*, 18–25.

⁶¹ Bennis, *Leader*, 122.

away from treating workers as cogs and caring for them as people. Servant leadership helps to level the playing field as leaders serve their followers. Authentic leadership ensures that leaders know who they are and avoid the temptation to emulate someone else.

However, they all suffer from one fatal flaw which is that they place a single leader as the head of an organization. As was introduced in Chapter 1, society is moving away from singular leadership, that is, organizations led by one person. This creates limits both on the leader as they cannot possibly be gifted in leading in all areas, and on those who are capable of leading but cannot because they are not at the top. From a theological perspective, neither is this a reflection of Jesus' call for church leadership. Hierarchical leadership is preventing a wider demographic from engaging as church leaders.

As we will now explore, the local church was created to be led by more than one person. Perhaps one of the newest paradigms for leadership, flat leadership does offer a way forward. Employing flat leadership is one of the ways that the North American church can begin to reengage young adults in their churches.

The Case for Flat Leadership

As society grows weary of contemporary models of leadership a growing number of businesses are looking for new leadership structures to engage the Millennials in the workforce. The groundwork for this change was laid out in Chapter 1. This is leading society into a realm where power has become a fluid term and is no longer entrenched in a select few. As a result of this movement, hierarchies have lost their usefulness. Thomas

Friedman, in reflecting on the decline of hierarchies, simply concluded that “the world is flat.”⁶² That is to say, “that old social, communication, and economic structures that once ruled the world and kept some people in power, while marginalizing others, are dying.”⁶³

In this flattened world where globalization has taken root, power is now shared by many. Global communications, travel, shared intellect, and mass experience have levelled the playing field. Moving away from hierarchies, society is now moving towards a shared power and authority. This is having a profound impact in how companies are organizing. We are now in a world where “old hierarchies and power arrangements have been swept aside and the playing field has been leveled in ways that enable many more people to benefit from advances in productivity.”⁶⁴

In the same way, it is having a profound impact on church leadership and organization. Morgenthauer reminds us that “if we really can’t accept the reality of the flattened, antihierarchical world described in Thomas Friedman’s *The World Is Flat*, then perhaps we should take a look at Scripture and see what God had in mind.”⁶⁵ The argument is being made that the church, which for centuries has been governed by hierarchies, was formed to be led in a flat context which is a context where power is not vested in a select few. Rather, the church is a place where power and authority are understood to be shared equally amongst God’s people.⁶⁶

⁶² Friedman, *Flat*, 5.

⁶³ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat,” 5-6.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, “World Is Flat,” 39.

⁶⁵ Morgenthauer, “Flattened World,” 182.

⁶⁶ For a deeper look at flat leadership in the church see Rutledge, Andrew. “Flat Leadership and the Church: Embracing Change in Leadership Structures.” McMaster University, 2015.

Shared leadership is important within the context of ministry and flat leadership structures can be an enabler of the sharing of power and authority. Griffiths summarized this in writing that:

For a ministry to both have longevity and efficiency, one person cannot be the sole point of responsibility. If the leader tries to accomplish everything, burnout waits in the wings, others will not have the opportunity to exercise their gift in service for the Lord, and the ministry will die with the leader.⁶⁷

Davis Olds, in her case study on a growing church in the U.S., concluded that one driver of church change occurs when “‘church leaders,’ whether clergy or laypersons, should recognize that they are not the only persons who provide leadership within a congregation.”⁶⁸ It is only when leaders recognize that they do not lead alone that change is possible. Without sharing the responsibility for church leadership, we leave the church in a place where it is dependent on that sole leader to be there indefinitely, and it leaves all others unable to serve in their own gifts and strengths.

Flat Leadership Philosophy

The question now is, even though society is embracing flat leadership structures, should the church adopt them? Should the church allow culture to speak into its leadership structures, or even into how the church functions at all? Both Waalkes and Jones offer suggestions on how we must move forward as church leaders in response to the flattening of the world. Chapter 1 offered an overview of Waalkes’s reflections on the effects of globalization and the church. He goes on to write that globalization means four things for

⁶⁷ Griffiths, “Theology,” 7.

⁶⁸ Davis Olds, “Growing,” 44.

people: a sense of powerlessness from being disconnected from healthy communities, disenchantment, and a feeling of the bleakness of life, a sense of the scarcity of time, and a sense of the lost moral identity.⁶⁹ The church can counteract those effects.

Waalkes begins by offering “that the forces of rootless globalization must be balanced by local ‘olive tree’ cultures that root humans in local places.”⁷⁰ It is important that we pause and define globalization. This term originated in the business world. As companies expanded their reach around the globe it had a profound impact on the societies where business was now being done. This globalization caused a sharing of culture, values, philosophy, and leadership styles, to name a few. This has led to businesses adopting shared cultures. In the same way, as we see churches spread (Hillsong and Life.Church are two large examples) throughout the world, they bump into other cultures. This is having a profound impact on how churches are also being led. Globalization is a key to Waalkes’ work. Globalization is also a key to understanding flat leadership. Power stored in just a few loses its relevance as the many connect and find the beauty in their collective power. We have already seen examples where countries that were accustomed to autocratic leadership have risen up against those structures (Egypt being one recent example).

This is good news for the local church. Church leaders must accept that globalization and the flattening of our world will make the local church a more important part of the daily lives of those who live in our communities. Globalization has brought about a rapid pace of change that is leaving people searching for places where they can put down roots. In an ever-changing landscape people still want to find places of

⁶⁹ Waalkes, *Fullness of Time*, 10-11.

⁷⁰ Waalkes, *Fullness of Time*, 11.

constancy. The church must become that local community that allows people to put down roots. While this may not sound like a spiritual reason, it is a way that the church can meet the needs of our shifting world. It is a reminder that, if we want people to be rooted in our congregations, we must allow our polity to morph into one that allows everyone to be actively engaged in the work of the church. Flat leadership as a structure invites participation and rootedness that directly relates to the need for locality. To build rooted communities we can begin by engaging everyone in the church in the work of leadership.

This is one of the core beliefs of flat leadership. The contemporary world has shifted away from hierarchies. Moisés Naím states that “power is spreading, and long-established, big players are increasingly challenged by newer and smaller ones.”⁷¹ The shift in power means that people of all ages no longer must function within hierarchies. “In a flat world, people are empowered; what we need in Christian organizations is a model of leadership that understands and respects this reality.”⁷²

Further to that, the world is increasingly interconnected. This “means that leadership structures that reflect these emerging realities are needed. Leadership that reflects the kind of interconnection that marks contemporary culture will be rooted in a relational ecclesiology.”⁷³ This relational approach to leadership leads to the acknowledgement of “the need for leaders” in groups where leaders are chosen “based upon their personal suitability for leadership within the group” and the expectation that “leaders will function in a way that shares power and gives room for everyone in the group to exercise their own power appropriately.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 13.

⁷² Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 8.

⁷³ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 10.

⁷⁴ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 13.

In quoting Moltmann, Jones restates the key element of the leadership of the church that “Christ alone is head of the church, and ‘fellowship with Christ makes the church a brotherly and sisterly community of equals... All are priests and kings equally.’”⁷⁵ As such, this “paradigm should serve to equalize everyone in the congregation.”⁷⁶ He does note Moltmann’s caution that “the distinction between trained theologians and people without any theological training has taken the place of the priestly hierarchy.”⁷⁷ There is still a place for pastors to exercise authority over congregations. Flat leadership does not mean no leadership. The distinction within flat leadership is that this is not an all-encompassing authority. Pastors are not equipped to lead all facets of our complex churches that require leaders to not only shepherd a congregation, but also lead finances, facilities, staff teams, policy, and legal aspects of contemporary organizations. This means that the pastor’s authority is something bequeathed to them by the congregation with the intent that it will be shared with others when someone more qualified for a particular task is present. Ideally this is not just an act of delegation but a philosophical and cultural ideal that deeply affects the actual practice of the congregation on a day-to-day level.

While flat leadership can offer equality in the church, we still fight against human nature to elevate one over another. We also acknowledge that some leadership positions within the church demand specific skills and giftings for leading. However, that does not mean we can exclude people from those positions based on any parameters other than the presence of those giftings.

⁷⁵ Jones, *Church Is Flat*, 143.

⁷⁶ Jones, *Church Is Flat*, 143.

⁷⁷ Jones, *Church Is Flat*, 143.

Two other significant beliefs of flat leadership are the significance of the individual and the collective intelligence of groups of people. The first belief acknowledges the presence of sin in the world and the need for humility in the life of a leader. It also acknowledges the dependence on community. “A theology that values other centeredness, love for one another, and respect for the other can grow only if we are convinced that each individual matters because people are created in God’s image.”⁷⁸ Flat leadership creates “a place that nurtures and empowers individuals to grow into their God-given identity and contribute to the community and indeed the world.”⁷⁹

In Chapter 1 we set the foundation for a theology of flat leadership and the church. This is not to say that there is only one exclusive leadership paradigm modeled in Scripture. However, “there are a few passages that offer a vision for how a more flattened style of leadership was at play in the early church.”⁸⁰ The book of Acts recounts several stories of the early church sharing leadership in discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. The early church was clearly not led by a single person. It was a communal authority where every member of the church had the opportunity to use their gifts.

Church leadership must be rooted in gifting. No other factor should be used to determine one’s suitability for leadership (aside from an unrepentant heart or a person living outside of God’s law). That is to say that age, gender, and other previously used factors, must not play a role in keeping someone from leading within their gifts. Paul makes it clear in 1 Cor 12 that everyone has received a gift of the Spirit (v. 7). Therefore,

⁷⁸ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 15.

⁷⁹ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 15.

⁸⁰ Beach and Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 15.

we must acknowledge that everyone has a role to play in leading the church. However, this does not mean that everyone should lead wherever they wish. Paul goes on to explain that our gifts are not all the same (v. 8–10). It is important that people follow their gifts when they lead. The church will only function at its best when everyone is utilizing their gifts. That must be understood as a unifier for the church. Allowing everyone to exercise their spiritual gifts both brings the church together and makes it function at its best.

However, this has not always been the case. It seems that humanity has a trend to bring hierarchies into every aspect of life. In the same way, the church has inadvertently elevated some spiritual gifts over others. In my own experience, the preacher and the musicians have been elevated above others as they have the most high-profile roles in a congregation. As a result, church members are drawn to those gifts and have been hesitant to engage in other areas of the church. It is worth noting that this is not new.

A historical example of this is the rise of the Quakers in the 17th century. They intentionally shrugged off leadership titles in the context of their ministry as well. It has been said that Quakers would not call an official by a formal title because they did not want to designate a class distinction or say anything that could be perceived as flattery.⁸¹ Part of their reason for pursuing this equality was that “the first Friends designed a minimal structure for the maintenance of community and the effective presentation of their message; and that this structure provided for a face-to-face encounter between men

⁸¹ Brinton, *Quaker Journals*, 49.

who had something to bring in the excitement of their meeting with the light.”⁸² They held that “only the infallible Spirit gave Friends authority.”⁸³

Yet, despite their theology and intentionality in bringing equality, the Quakers inevitably slipped into an unintended hierarchical model. The very nature of their meetings “naturally tended to limit ministry to one peculiar type of person, the psychic, prophetic type, i.e. to persons possessed of peculiar subconscious traits and capacities who felt themselves swept by impulses which they could not trace to their own conscious thoughts or contrivings.”⁸⁴ While Quakers believed that all people were equal, the way they practiced this in their meetings meant that only a select few people would actually be comfortable speaking within the church. Their desire to provide a church without limits ended up imposing limits due to the very fact that humans have a wide variety of personalities and giftings in the public forum. In their desire to create a space where everyone could lead, they ended up creating a space where only a few felt comfortable to lead.

In practice, “when some gifts are valued over others, then the church is divided by the very gifts intended to bear witness to Christ’s unifying presence. As a result, the church chases after an elusive unity or claims a charismatic unity that is little more than the glorification of individual spirituality on a communal level.”⁸⁵

⁸² Loukes, *The Quaker Contribution*, 58. Quakers referred to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as the light because they “based their theology on the Gospel of John.” Brinton, *The Religious Philosophy of Quakerism*, 10. Yet, curiously, “the nature of the ‘Light’ itself is never discussed. It was, Friends might have said, ‘beyond’, and out of reach of our minds; and to argue about it was not only futile but dangerous, for the argument would divert our attention from the much more urgent demands of ‘the beyond in the midst’.” Loukes, *Quaker Contribution*, 31.

⁸³ Barbour, *The Quakers*, 43.

⁸⁴ Jones, *Quakers*, 55.

⁸⁵ Charles, *Corinthians*, 67.

Building upon that, Eph 4 is a call for church unity. Paul explains that this unity is achieved through the diversity of gifts that Christ gives the church. These gifts are intended to build up the body of Christ “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12–13, NIV). Paul lists five areas of ministry in this passage as an example that no singular person can lead the church. It has to be through the exercising of a diversity of gifts through a group of people. Therefore, the church will not attain that unity until everyone exercises their unique gifts.

This needs to include young people. Paul’s charge to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:12 is a clear indication that age cannot be a determinate in a person’s suitability for leadership. Paul charges Timothy to not “let anyone look down” on him because he was young. Timothy was a capable leader of the church and Paul did not hesitate to entrust the church to Timothy. On a personal level, this was the passage that my grandmother gave to me when I was baptized and was a personal motivator for my growth.

There are a few ways in which embracing the flat nature of societal authority can help return the church to a place where Christ is truly the head of the church and all people, regardless of any perceived power, can fully participate in its work. As previously noted, this will allow the church to continue to serve a key role in communities that are being globalized. The church can be a root for a world that is losing its roots. The church can be a place of unity where we seek to live in community. Finally, the church can be a place of equality in a world straining to find that balance. In many ways the church can get ahead of society in offering equality.

In theory flat leadership offers a way for all forms of leadership to flourish in the church. It is true that churches take on the character of their leaders. When leadership is confined to just a few, the church only operates in the limited nature of those who lead. However, when a wide variety of leaders serve the church, it adopts a wider nature that engages a greater number of people. Flat leadership allows for the servant leader to serve the people. It allows a transformational leader to lead the work of transforming a congregation. Transactional leaders are important in ensuring the work of the church is carried out. Flat leadership provides a place for them as well. Flat leadership allows for theological leaders to lead. It is a paradigm that allows for pastors and priests to serve alongside each other. Flat leadership avoids the trap of believing that any single leader can possess all these qualities and lead well.

Yet, despite the benefits of flat leadership, we would do well to remember Luther's caution that there is no perfect church. Luther notes that "you must not look for a church in which there are no blemishes and flagrant faults, but for one where there are people who love the word and confess it before me. Where you discover these earmarks, there you may be sure the church exists."⁸⁶ At the very least, let us seek to reform church leadership structures so that we would build that kind of church.

Conclusion

It is abundantly clear that Millennials are leaving the church in greater numbers than any previous generation. The pattern is that this will only worsen as Generation Z moves into young adulthood. This review of some key leadership concepts also makes it clear that

⁸⁶ Avis, "Luther," 107.

engaging young adults in leadership is one of the keys the church can employ to help stem the flow and begin to keep Millennials engaged in the church. As will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 5, churches need to start engaging teens in leadership to be effective at keeping them once they leave high school.

The purpose of this project is to identify best practices churches can employ to create environments that engage teens in leadership. This was done by surveying young adults across Canada as well as conducting case studies of young adults who have served in leadership at Central Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario. Listening to the experience of young adults gives us insight into where existing church practices of leadership development are failing and what can be done to enhance those practices to engage the next generation. It is to this research that we now turn.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter is an overview of the research methodology that was used to conduct the data collection. It further outlines the design of the project and how each phase was conducted. We begin with an overview of practical theology as a method of evaluating the practices of the church. Our methodology will allow us to employ David A. Kolb's action-reflection model in reflecting on the collected data and learning from that experience.

Practical Theology

This dissertation is located within the field of practical theology (PT). "Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."¹ To explain this definition, Swinton and Mowat offer four key points. The first is that PT is critical in that "it assumes that the various practices that are performed by the Christian community are deeply meaningful and require honest critical reflection if they are to remain faithful to the 'script' of revelation."² "Practical Theology takes human experience seriously."³ This makes practical theology distinct from other theological disciplines because it finds its beginning in "human experience."⁴

Secondly, PT is theological reflection. "Theology is (or at least should be) the primary source of knowledge that guides and provides the hermeneutical framework

¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 7.

² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 7.

³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 6.

⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 6.

within which Practical Theology carries out its task.”⁵ Third, PT embraces both the practices of the church and the practices of secular culture. This is necessary because “the practices of the Church cannot be understood as ontologically separate or different from the practices of the world. Both occur within God’s creation, and both are caught up in God’s redemptive movement towards the world.”⁶ Fourth, PT must “ensure and enable faithful practices.”⁷ Practical Theology “has a particular goal: to enable faithful living and authentic Christian practice.”⁸

Practical Theology begins in the practices of the church. Specifically, for this dissertation we are concerned with the church’s practice of raising up new, young leaders. In keeping with the definition above, the aim of this work is to do critical, theological reflection on church leadership practices. We will evaluate this practice within the unique telos of Christianity as we compare it to the practices of the world. Finally, our aim is to ensure that our leadership development is done with authentic Christian practice.

To expand on Swinton and Mowat’s definition of PT, Browning observes that practical theology is “critical reflection on the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation.”⁹ That is the chief goal of this project. This work is intended to add to the conversation of engaging young adults in leadership in the

⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 7.

⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 8.

⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 9.

⁸ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 9.

⁹ Browning, “Practical,” 36.

North American Protestant church to see social and individual transformation in our churches and those who serve.

Practical theology is a diverse field of study that encompasses all areas of the Christian experience. It “locates itself within the diversity of the complex web of relationships and experiences that form the fabric of all that we know.”¹⁰ Added to the purpose of practical theology is its responsibility to the Bible. Ballard reminds us that “practical theology has a responsibility to the theological enterprise and to biblical studies in particular to inquire into how the Bible is received and regarded in the church and the world.”¹¹ Keeping the Bible at the centre of practical theology is what keeps practical theology genuinely Christian. Robert Webber notes that this is a key movement among emerging Christians. In his words, emergents “are saying theology and practice must be brought back together again... it must seek to answer the questions being asked in today’s culture... it must speak to the mission of the church, it must form worship and spirituality and all the ministries of the church.”¹² Charles Winquist agrees with Webber and concludes that:

no matter what other responsibilities are accepted into a contemporary definition of ministry, ministry ceases to be itself unless it attends to the possibilities that are discerned at the heart of religious experience. Theology seeks an understanding of these possibilities and ministry is bound to theology as it implements this vision.¹³

This leads to an understanding that “leaders of congregations carry out the tasks of practical theological interpretation to guide their community in participating in the

¹⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 3.

¹¹ Ballard, “Scripture,” 163.

¹² Webber, “Emerging,” 198.

¹³ Winquist, “Reflections,” 35.

priestly, royal, and prophetic office of Christ.”¹⁴ Through utilizing practical theology to study youth ministry, Root and Bertrand contend that this is what has been missing from practical theology. Root writes that “in all the constructive work in youth ministry and practical theology, there has been little systematic attention given to how divine action and human action (or divine praxis and human praxis) relate one to another, to how and where they actually associate.”¹⁵

A careful analysis of church ministry as a meta-practice, and church leadership as a subdomain of that practice, will be an important part of the church’s next few decades. It is even more important when we consider how church leadership relates to the broader field of Practical Theology. Nieman highlights that, “if faithful people assemble” in congregations, “then practical theologians naturally have great interest in the field that attends directly to such gatherings.”¹⁶ Therefore, studying congregations is a fulcrum of practical theology. It determines how the rest of practical theology is interpreted. As well, if leaders are the key agents within the congregation, then the study of a congregation hinges on the strength of its leaders.

As the world around the church shifts its approach to leadership so too must the church embrace change in how it is led. Rainer notes that, among fourteen churches he studied that had closed, there was a common element that was found among them. The signs of their demise emerged upwards of ten years before they formally closed their doors. This slow decline went virtually unnoticed by the members of the church. Rainer’s analysis of their decline led him to conclude that a second common element of these

¹⁴ Osmer, *Theology*, 29.

¹⁵ Root and Bertrand, “Reflecting,” 219.

¹⁶ Nieman, “Congregational,” 135.

churches was that the members “held onto everything, at least everything that made them comfortable and happy.”¹⁷ Yet, as communities changed around these churches, the churches did not adjust to that change.

This postmodern world brings with it a “changing spiritual narrative” that is reflected in a discontinuity from previous eras.¹⁸ A changed spiritual narrative will require that the Church raise up a new generation of leaders who are able to dispense wisdom and authority in a way that is both culturally relevant in the postmodern world, as well as biblically sound to preserve the sanctity of the Church.

It is of interest that Senior outlines some of the key areas of church ministry that will not, or at least should not, change. His list includes preaching, soul care, discipleship, and prophetic witness.¹⁹ He affirms the value of practical theology in the exploration of these practices within the church and explains that the need for this research is due to the fact that “what leadership as a meta-practice will look like, is still a (very interesting) mystery.”²⁰ There is a wide range of ways that practical theology can contribute to the future development of the church.

As stated above, the focus of this dissertation is how existing church leaders can build leadership development practices that engage young adults and stem the flow of those who are leaving the church. In part, this will involve an exploration of effective methods leaders can employ to pass on their wisdom. Essentially, this is to answer the question of how leaders train the next generation in wisdom. To that end, practical theology does offer a way for leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of their current

¹⁷ Rainer, *Autopsy*, 22.

¹⁸ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 50.

¹⁹ Senior, “Practical Wisdom,” 50.

²⁰ Senior, “Practical Wisdom,” 51.

practices. With so much change around us, we cannot assume that the next generation of leaders will simply attain the wisdom they require to lead the church long after its current leaders have gone.

Nieman, in evaluating the usefulness of practical theology as it has been understood over its history, concludes that “one very important change in practical theology in recent decades has been the shift away from ministerial activity alone toward greater interest in the range of faithful practices found in ordinary settings.”²¹ Practical Theology now embraces the diversity of church practice and, through that, “the field is not committed to any single tool or approach for field research.”²² Therefore, practical theology is an appropriate approach to the question of how leaders can pass on their wisdom to the next generation. This approach will allow us to study the practice of passing on wisdom in a “detailed, fine-grained way” that other research approaches, especially empirical approaches that rely on hard data for change, would be unsuited.²³

Practical Theology is not philosophical research in that philosophical discourses may not have a direct impact on how we practice church ministry. Rather, the focus of PT is based upon our experiences in ministry with its first aim being the discovery of ways to improve upon our practice of ministry through our research. As Miller-McLemore succinctly writes, “practical theology either has relevance for everyday faith and life or it has little meaning at all.”²⁴ If our theological musings do not have an impact on our daily lives as Christians then, perhaps, they do lack meaning.

²¹ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 135.

²² Kinnaman, *Lost*, 137.

²³ Nieman, “Congregational,” 140.

²⁴ Miller-McLemore, *Practical Theology*, 7.

A second aim of PT is to move away from the limits of classical research. “It is productive to explore creative possibilities that are informed by, but not captive to, existing frameworks of knowledge. Utilizing practice as a starting point for research can help avoid the trap of relying on existing knowledge and research. As Nelson summarizes, “theory... is not prior to practice, functioning to inform it, but theory and practice are rather ‘imbricated within each other’ in praxis.”²⁵

This leads to another key feature of PT. “The Bible is not only a resource in and for practical theology. Practical theology itself is a resource for understanding the Bible.”²⁶ Ballard reminds us that “practical theology has a responsibility to the theological enterprise and to biblical studies in particular to inquire into how the Bible is received and regarded in the church and the world.”²⁷ Failing to incorporate PT into the biblical text is to do a great disservice to research.

Practice-Led Research

This dissertation also utilizes the distinct research methodology known as practice-led research (hereafter PLR). We begin with the recognition that “practice-led research may find its research problems in the practice of the individual (tacit/embodied) or in the stated problems and issues of a discipline (explicit/propositional). Further, the research is conducted from this dual base.”²⁸ PLR is similar to all research in that it shares “the goal that research involves the quest to create new knowledge.”²⁹ The difference is that PLR

²⁵ Nelson, *Arts*, 62.

²⁶ Ballard, “Scripture,” 170.

²⁷ Ballard, “Scripture,” 170.

²⁸ Ferguson, “Theology,” 157.

²⁹ Smith and Dean, *Practice-led*, 61.

does so “by making use of a series of inquiry practices that are theoretically rich, conceptually robust and provoke individuals and communities into seeing and understanding things in new ways.”³⁰ PLR accepts that “traditional systems for knowledge that rely on probable outcomes or plausible interpretations cannot fully respond to the challenge of new interpretive possibilities.”³¹

Farley reminds us that “all human beings exist and act in situations and engage in interpretations of situations.”³² Humans, by nature, continually interpret the world around us based on our experiences. In bringing PLR into the realm of theology (Practical Theology), we are working to interpret the lived experiences of the congregation.

Practice-led research (PLR) is a research methodology that is rooted in practice and involves critical reflection on the practices being studied to allow for new learning to happen. Starting with what has been done before limits the creative possibilities of overcoming the challenges we face in our practice. As Graeme Sullivan concludes, “practice-led research that is supported by critical reflection and reflexive action can be seen to invert the research process because it encourages working from the ‘unknown to the known’ and it is purposeful yet open-ended, clear-sighted yet exploratory.”³³ This is echoed by Ferguson who writes that the “work of academic artists is the equivalent of scientific and scholarly research and of equal value to it in the advancement of knowledge.”³⁴ Ferguson notes that “a significant aim in developing practice-led research

³⁰ Smith and Dean, *Practice-led*, 61.

³¹ Smith and Dean, *Practice-led*, 61.

³² Farley, “Interpreting,” 11.

³³ Sullivan, “Making Space,” 48-49.

³⁴ Ferguson, “Theology,” 118.

as a theological method is to establish a working relationship between the triumvirate of faith, intellect, and practice.”³⁵

Gray identifies four primary types of PLR research: scholarly, pure, developmental, and applied.³⁶ McNamara warns, though, that we must not “slip into a type of argument that assumes that a particular method, theory or philosophical approach *explains* the practice (as if a theory were formulated with the particular practice in mind).”³⁷ It is important that good PLR research not be confined to any one methodology. McNamara explains this in his fifth rule where he notes that “good PLR will freely acknowledge other research paradigms.”³⁸ Ballard raises a similar point when he writes that “the fragmentation of modern academic theology into a series of separate disciplines, each with its own methodologies, expertise, and literature, has created a (sometimes yawning) gap between biblical studies and practical theology.”³⁹ It is a key feature of PLR that we bridge methodologies and borrow from whatever paradigm can best help us explore our area of research.

It should also be noted that a key feature of PLR is that the researcher is also the practitioner. This is unique to PLR in that many other types of research separate these two entities. One group is concerned with the research while another is concerned with putting that research into practice. Instead, PLR merges these two entities. Some would argue that this leads to “subjectivity versus objectivity, internal versus external, doing versus thinking and writing, intuition versus logic.”⁴⁰ Gray argues that “the practitioner-

³⁵ Ferguson, “Theology,” 108.

³⁶ Gray, “Inquiry,” 4. Gray breaks down each of these approaches.

³⁷ McNamara, “Six Rules,” 7.

³⁸ McNamara, “Six Rules,” 9.

³⁹ Ballard, “Scripture,” 163.

⁴⁰ Gray, “Inquiry,” 7.

researcher does not wear two alternate hats, but one hat which integrates or at least allows difference to co-exist.”⁴¹ Gray also writes that “theory should be rooted in the discipline, pointing out the relationship between the two sides of the practitioner-researcher.”⁴² This is where this unique feature of PLR becomes evident.

In this dissertation, I am both the researcher and the practitioner. One aspect of my role at Central is overseeing our ministry to the next generation. That includes working with our Young Adult pastor to engage young adults in the church. Over the last ten years we have run into roadblocks when it comes to engaging and keeping young adults in the congregation. This is especially pronounced when it comes to preparing them for leadership. As noted earlier, Central has a gap when it comes to young adults serving in senior leadership positions. My research will directly impact how I structure our leadership development system.

Our failure to engage young adults is evident in the relatively small percentage of them who are engaged in leadership. We also have a relatively small number of young adults regularly engaged in our young adult ministry compared to the size of our congregation. We noted in the introduction that young adults make up about twenty-eight percent of the Canadian population. However, our young adult ministry represents under ten percent of our church population. Young adults are underrepresented at Central. A number of factors likely play a role in this. It is in part due to a lack of focus on young adult ministry. In part we have had a lack of consistent leadership for that ministry (this will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 5). We have also lacked a consistent leadership development plan and pathway for young adults to engage. Therefore, it is my

⁴¹ Gray, “Inquiry,” 7.

⁴² Gray, “Ground,” 14.

desire as a researcher to seek ways to reengage young adults in our church. As a practitioner I will be able to implement the research findings in my context.

Practice-led research is an approach to research that seeks to put practice as the focus of the work. If research does not impact practice, then we must reconsider why we are doing it. This is likely why PLR is becoming more attractive in academia. The results of PLR can and should have a direct impact on our daily practice of ministry. This is attractive to students seeking to make a difference in their field of study. As noted above, compared to other methodologies, PLR is still relatively young. However, much has been learned in the last few decades that has positioned PLR to begin to make a significant contribution to both the practice of ministry and to academics in general.

Design and Methodology

For this study a case study methodology was employed to conduct “critical and constructive reflection” on the ministry practice of leadership development as it pertains to the faith experience of young adults (those ages 18 to 30).⁴³ Daniel Schipani offers several reasons for using case study methods in practical theology.⁴⁴ Of his reasons, “study, analysis, and evaluation of different forms of faith experience” is most relevant to this study.⁴⁵

Creswell and Poth note that “a hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case.”⁴⁶ As such, they offer that this is accomplished through the researcher collecting and integrating a variety of forms of

⁴³ Schipani, “Case Study,” 91.

⁴⁴ Schipani, “Case Study,” 91.

⁴⁵ Schipani, “Case Study,” 91.

⁴⁶ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 98.

qualitative data collection.”⁴⁷ To that end, a variety of data collection methods was utilized in this dissertation to seek that kind of in-depth understanding.

A qualitative case study methodology was employed to gather and interpret data on a group of young adults and their lived experience with leadership development in their local church, Central Community Church in St. Catharines. The researcher is also a pastor at the church. Thus, a qualitative study was conducted because the researcher is personally connected to the study.⁴⁸ Case studies are a qualitative method of research that is appropriate in this context because “qualitative research adds breadth” to our understanding of young adult engagement in the church.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Schipani notes that case studies are widely used within practical theology.⁵⁰

Combining the case studies with the online survey and the focus group responses gave us enough responses to “saturate” the data. As Osmer notes, this saturation point was arrived at when we stopped receiving new, relevant information.⁵¹ We were then able to draw some conclusions about what young adults want and need from the church if they are to be reengaged in leadership.

Qualitative methods of research have not always been embraced in the research field. As Sandelowski pointed out in 1986, qualitative research “continue[s] to be criticized for failing to pass tests of methodological rigor.”⁵² To overcome this criticism, Swinton and Mowat offer that a rigorous process to validate the data is a critical piece of qualitative research.⁵³ They explain that, since “the object of qualitative research is to

⁴⁷ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 98. See also Osmer, *Practical*, 51.

⁴⁸ Tomal, *Action*, 3.

⁴⁹ Woods, *Research*, 73.

⁵⁰ Schipani, “Case Study,” 91.

⁵¹ Osmer, *Practical*, 52.

⁵² Sandelowski, “Rigor,” 27.

⁵³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 116.

gain *understanding* of the experience of research participants, rather than to *explain* it,” then “any form of validation process will need to reflect this perspective.”⁵⁴ It is through the validation process that qualitative studies build trustworthiness.

Swinton and Mowat, building on the work of Lincoln and Guba, identify three dimensions of trustworthiness in validating qualitative studies. Studies must meet the “criterion of validity, reliability and generalizability.”⁵⁵ Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin offer further insight into research validity. They sought to bring together professional researchers with the local stakeholders who would be the prime drivers behind any lasting change.⁵⁶ They identified these criteria because they are a measure of the willingness of those who are directly impacted by the research to act on the research conclusions.⁵⁷ Therefore, their willingness to risk themselves by acting on the data is evidence of the validity of their conclusions.⁵⁸ It is only through validity that research achieves trustworthiness. Validity is a measure of whether the generated knowledge creates a warrant for action.⁵⁹ Swinton and Mowat explain that credibility comes from the possibility of “an external person to audit the progress of the work and it must have a sense of fit or resonance with the experiences of the participants or others experiencing similar phenomena.”⁶⁰

The Focus Group was used to validate the information collected in the online survey. This gave credibility and trustworthiness to the data. Finally, credibility and trustworthiness led us to a “thick, rich” description that captured the essence of why

⁵⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 116.

⁵⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 116.

⁵⁶ Greenwood and Levin, “Reform,” 54.

⁵⁷ Greenwood and Levin, “Reform,” 54.

⁵⁸ Greenwood and Levin, “Reform,” 54.

⁵⁹ Greenwood and Levin, “Reform,” 54.

⁶⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 116-117.

young adults are not engaging in church leadership.⁶¹ Osmer refers to this as a “richly textured picture of the case.”⁶² In Chapter 5 we offer a thick, rich description of the young adult experience of leadership development in the Canadian church. We then offer ways in which churches can reengage young adults and draw them back into the church.

The Four Tasks of Practical Theology

Richard Osmer outlines four tasks of practical theology that were used as a framework for conducting this study. These tasks “constitute the basic structure of practical theological interpretation.”⁶³ Each task serves a critical part in helping church leaders to “facilitate the congregation’s participation in Christ’s priestly, royal, and prophetic mediation of salvation.”⁶⁴ As Osmer concludes, “leaders of congregations carry out the tasks of practical theological interpretation to guide their community in participating in the priestly, royal, and prophetic office of Christ.” We carry out these tasks to move our churches closer to Christ.

The first, the descriptive-empirical task, is a process of “gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics.”⁶⁵ An online survey was used to gather a baseline understanding of young adult engagement in church leadership across Canada (see Appendix A for the survey questions). This survey was conducted anonymously to provide young adults the opportunity to respond without fear of reprisal. The survey was open to respondents from across three denominations: the Pentecostal Assemblies of

⁶¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical*, 117.

⁶² Osmer, *Practical*, 51.

⁶³ Osmer, *Practical*, 4.

⁶⁴ Osmer, *Practical*, 28.

⁶⁵ Osmer, *Practical*, 4.

Canada, the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, and the Evangelical Missionary Youth, and was made available to people ages 18 to 30. The purpose of this survey was to listen to the experiences those in this age category have with leadership development in their home church. The survey explored the lived experiences of young adults as they pertain to what leadership development opportunities are offered in their local church. Respondents self-identified with one of two groups: those currently involved in leadership in their church, and those who were not involved in leadership.

By listening to their experiences, we were able to discern patterns of how churches are currently developing young people for ministry. This was an important step in the analysis stage of the study as we sought to compare Central Community Church's existing processes with what young adults feel should be happening. The online survey was also helpful in listening to what young adults perceived as the barriers to them serving in leadership that exist within their churches.

The second step in the listening process was a focus group of young adults. This focus group was used for the validation of the data that had been collected during the online survey (see Appendix B for the Focus Group guide that was used to manage the conversation). The purpose of the group was to allow young adults to respond to the results of the survey and add further insight into their experiences. This survey was conducted via online video conferencing software which allowed participants to maintain their anonymity or choose to reveal their identity to the group.

Finally, a collective case study was conducted to get a deep, personalized understanding of the young adult experience of leadership development in the church. A collective case study is one where "the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate

the issue.”⁶⁶ The collective case study method was chosen to avoid “the potential to draw otherwise inaccessible conclusions.”⁶⁷ By choosing multiple participants we are better able to make more accurate generalizations about those lived experiences. This allowed for the generalization of the case studies once (as described above) we hit a saturation point allowing for those generalizations to be made. The goal was to generate knowledge about why young adults were leaving the church and how churches can use leadership development to reengage that lost generation. Participants were selected from young adults who are attending Central Community Church in St. Catharines, the home church of the student researcher. Each participant was asked to reflect on their experience with leadership development through journaling responses to four questions (see Appendix C).

The case studies were followed by interviews with each case study participant. These interviews were conducted using the Zoom online video conferencing platform. All interviews were recorded to enable the researcher to transcribe them. Interviews bring several challenges including “unexpected participant behaviors and students’ ability to create good instructions, phrase and negotiate questions, deal with sensitive issues, and develop transcriptions.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 99.

⁶⁷ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 99.

⁶⁸ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 172.

Data Encoding

Our first step was to utilize open coding to “develop themes” that emerge from the data.⁶⁹ These themes then enabled us to make “carefully considered judgments about what is meaningful in the patterns” that emerge.⁷⁰ Finally, we generalized the lived experience of the participants to generate a rich, thick description of the state of leadership development in the Canadian church. Chapter 4 is a summary of the data that was gathered during this study.

Interpreting the Data

Osmer’s second task of practical theology is interpretation. This is defined as “the ability to draw on theories of the arts and sciences to understand and respond to particular episodes, situations, or contexts.”⁷¹ In this stage we conducted a holistic analysis of the data. This analysis allowed us to develop a “detailed description of the case.”⁷² Moving into Osmer’s third task, the normative task, we used this description of the state of leadership development and conducted a literature review of established leadership development systems, seeking an understanding of the best practices represented by them that align with the findings from the survey and case studies. The literature review also sought a theological understanding of a biblical view of leadership in the church. Our chief objective was to uncover any existing leadership development programs that are effectively raising up young adults and meeting their needs that were identified in the listening phase.

⁶⁹ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 189.

⁷⁰ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 195.

⁷¹ Osmer, *Practical*, 83.

⁷² Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 100.

Finally, Osmer's fourth task, the pragmatic task, sought to answer the question of how our existing leadership structures can be enhanced to best develop young people for leadership. This is the core purpose of the study. By comparing what is currently happening in the church to what should be happening we will be able to offer suggestions for improving leadership development systems both at Central Community Church and, possibly more broadly, across the greater Canadian church. Chapter 4 is a summary of the findings of this study. In Chapter 5 we offer recommendations for how churches can move forward and build leadership development systems that engage young adults, ultimately helping them stay in the church.

Theoretical Perspective

The overarching metatheoretical perspective of this proposed work is interpretive social science. Richard Osmer explains that this perspective is rooted in the works of Max Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey. Interpretive social science has a "commitment to understanding the interpretive perspective and meanings of social actors, which cannot be gained by statistical data."⁷³ Borrowing from Weber and Dilthey, Osmer explains that "research must enter into social actors' worlds and understand them from their perspective, as well as the context in which their actions are meaningful."⁷⁴

The core task of practical theology is to answer the questions of "what is going on, why is this going on, what ought to be going on, and how might we respond?"⁷⁵ To that end, this dissertation seeks to explore how Millennials are experiencing church

⁷³ Osmer, *Theology*, 76.

⁷⁴ Osmer, *Theology*, 76.

⁷⁵ Osmer, *Theology*, 4.

leadership across Canada to determine if there are commonalities in experience that explain why so few Millennials are engaged. To do this the research that was undertaken for this project was based on my generative research question of “How might our practices related to personal experience of church leadership be enhanced?”

While the future of the church is ultimately in God’s hands and is dependent upon the work of Christ and his Spirit, the fate of many church congregations will be deeply influenced by the strength of its leaders. We need to spend time in theological reflection on how our current leadership systems are impacting the church. Birchall points out that we are only seeing the beginning of the shifts in the church. He writes that “we are still only twenty years into what may be a fifty-year period of change in the way we understand and practise ‘ministry’ in the fullest and widest sense of that word.”⁷⁶ How the church is led now has shifted from where it was twenty years ago. Looking forward we can assume that how the church will be led in twenty years will be significantly different than it is now. This will only come about with careful consideration on the part of those who lead.

Conclusion

Practical theology offers the opportunity for the church to refine its practices in order to remain relevant in a shifting culture. Throughout this study this has remained the goal. Chapter 4 is a thorough review of the data collected through the online survey, focus group, and case studies. This will lead to a thick, rich description of how the church can regain its relevance to a disengaged young adult populace.

⁷⁶ Birchall, “Abuse,” 35.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter 4 is a detailed review of the data collected from the three phases of the research project. First, we outline the responses submitted to the online survey. Second, we detail the Focus group that was held for both data validation and to allow young adults to elaborate on the general responses given in the survey. Finally, we outline the five case studies that were conducted. These were done through both journaling by the participants as well as through interviews held with each of them.

Online Survey Results

An online survey was conducted using the McMaster University LimeSurvey platform. Young Adults ages 18 to 30 were recruited for participation in the survey through a variety of methods. Primarily, the researcher sent invitations to key denominational leaders. Secondly, young adults recruited friends through a variety of personal means including texting, Facebook, and Instagram posts.

This age range was specifically chosen because young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 represent the second half of the millennial generation. The introduction outlined the current age breakdown of the Canadian population and showed that Millennials are now the largest segment of the workforce in Canada. As well, those under 30 are the ones who have most recently transitioned into adulthood and have the most recent experiences with church leadership development. In total, 84 young adults began the survey, and 75 surveys were submitted. Of those submitted, 66 people gave answers beyond the first question.

Social Media

While not an integral part of the survey, the first question, designed to test the computer setup of the respondent, gave a useful insight into the social media usage of young adults. When asked to choose their favourite social media platform, almost two thirds (sixty-four percent) of respondents indicated that they prefer Instagram (see Figure 1 below). Another twenty-one percent chose Facebook. Combined, Instagram and Facebook represent eighty-five percent of social media users.

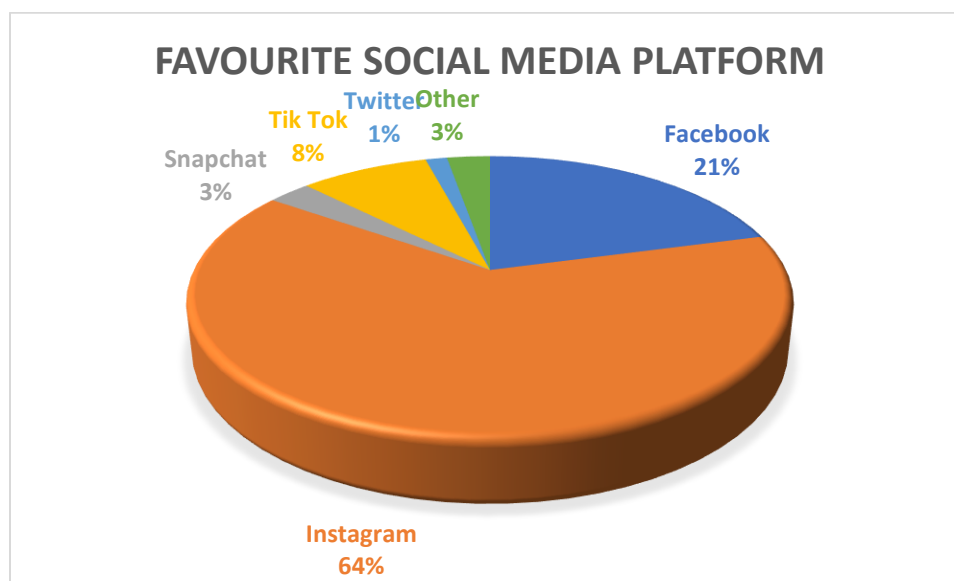


Figure 1. Favourite Social Media Platform

There is a myriad of social media platforms right now with new ones seemingly popping up every month. The implication of this is that it can be near impossible for anyone to know what platforms to focus on when trying to deliver content or maximize their time and resources. By focusing on Instagram and Facebook, churches can effectively reach 85 percent of young adults.

Survey Analysis and Interpretation

Following is an analysis and some interpretation of the responses submitted to the survey. Respondents were first asked a couple of closed categorization questions. Secondly, they were asked four open-ended questions to explore their experiences with leadership in their church. This analysis included an overview of the methods used to interpret their responses to where they are serving, what training they received prior to serving, any barriers that they feel exist to them being further engaged in leadership, and a final open-ended question to gather any final thoughts that they felt were missed in the questions.

Age Range of Respondents

While the survey was limited to those ages 18 to 30, as confirmed when they accepted the consent to participate in the survey, giving a more specific age range was voluntary.

Those who did identify their range fell into the following four age ranges: 18 to 20, 21 to 23, 24 to 26, and 27 to 30. Each of these ranges was specifically chosen to help illustrate the different stages of life of the respondents. Broadly speaking, those ages 18 to 20 are most likely to be engaged in college or university as their first steps out of high school.

Ages 21 to 23 reflect those who have graduated from their initial studies and are potentially entering the workforce. Young adults ages 24 to 26 are often beginning their careers as well as finding life partners. Finally, those ages 27 to 30 are often in the early stages of starting families and getting established in their careers. The survey responses come from a variety of people representing each of the age brackets. This helps to give a well-rounded look at the lived experience of young adults in the church.

To that end, a total of 59 respondents identified themselves in the following age brackets:

Age Range	Number of Respondents
18—20	13
21—23	19
24—26	11
27—30	16

Table 4: Online Survey Age of Respondents

Church Leadership Involvement

Next, respondents were asked to identify if they are currently involved in any type of leadership in their church. A total of 58 respondents answered this question with the others opting to skip the remaining questions but still submitting the survey (only 9 young adults began the survey and chose to not submit them, their responses were not used in this project). Thirty-seven (37) respondents indicated that they are currently involved in leadership at their church and twenty-one (21) are not currently involved.

The Involved

Of the 37 who indicated they were involved, 27 shared where they were serving in their church (this question was not mandatory). They indicated that 21 (78%) are engaged as volunteers, 5 (19%) are in some form of paid ministry, and 1 (3%) is currently an intern as part of their schooling. The specific roles mentioned were as follows:

Serving Location	Number of Responses
Youth / Young Adult Leadership	15
Worship Team Member	4
Group Leader	3
Audio / Visual Ministry	2
Associate Pastors	1
Church Planter	1
Intern	1

Table 5: Where Respondents are Serving in Their Church

The survey participants that identified as actively involved in their church were predominantly serving in either youth or young adult leadership roles (56%). The remaining 44% of participants serve in a variety of other areas, with worship teams (15%) and group leadership (11%) being the next two most represented areas. It is worth noting that the survey did not specifically ask for participants to identify why they were serving in these capacities. More research could be done to explore whether the high percentage of young adults engaged in youth and young adult ministry is indicative of a church culture that views youth and young adult volunteering as some sort of entry point or if young adults are naturally drawn to these roles. Any attempt to draw a conclusion from the survey alone would be pure conjecture.

Training They Received for Their Role

The respondents indicated a wide variety of training that they received prior to engaging in their current role. They were asked “what kind of training or instruction did you receive in order to serve in this capacity?” In response, they gave 13 different ways that they had been trained with answers being evenly spread among these methods. However,

5 respondents indicated that they had not received any training at all prior to serving. This was the highest total of any category and represented 17.8% of responses.

Training Received	Number of Responses
None	5
Church Based Training	4
Undergraduate Degree	3
Mentoring by a Church Leader	3
Seminary	3
Informal Advice While Serving	2
Internship	2
On the Go Training	2
Relying on their own Spiritual Gifts	1
Conferences	1
Outside Training	1
Self-Taught	1

Table 6: Types of Training Respondents Received Before Serving

While the largest number of responses was among those who said they had not received training, this accounted for only 18% of total responses. However, when added to the 18% of those who indicated that they had received informal training, were self-taught, or were relying solely on their gifts, almost 1 in every 3 young adults serving in their church have not received formal training for ministry.

It is of note that 61% of participants indicate that they are or have received formal training for the position that they are serving in at their present church. As discussed earlier in this project, this should not be surprising because surveys have indicated that young adults who are engaged in leadership as teens are significantly more likely to still be active in the church as young adults. This was mentioned by a participant who wrote that they were “a youth who never missed a service.” They were “front and centre to be given responsibility.” This is in line with the Hemorrhaging Faith report referenced in Chapter 2. Churches engaging youth is key to keeping them engaged as young adults.

Thus, it is understandable that those churches that are actively training young adults are also retaining them in leadership positions.

Training They Wish They Had

Next, participants who are engaged were asked to reflect on their experience in leadership by noting what training they wish they had received. Essentially, these are the areas of greatest struggle for them as they lead in their respective roles. Responses ranged from nothing, those who are satisfied with their training, to those who want practical training.

Desired Training	Number of Responses
Nothing – Satisfied with Training	8
Practical, Hands-on Training (general)	6
Child Safety	1
Planning Small Groups	1
How to Grow Spiritually	1
How to reach the Marginalized	1
Dealing with Mental Health Issues	2
How to deal with kids / difficult people	3
How to Plan Small Groups	1
How to address abuse	1
Knowing what is expected of leaders	3
How to care for yourself	1
How to be connected to other young leaders	1
What the details of upcoming events are	1
How to lead discussions	1

Table 7: Training Respondents Wish They Had Received

It is clear from this list that most responses can be categorized as practical training.

Regardless of where they are serving, respondents are seeking training on how to carry out the day-to-day activities of leadership. Whether participants are already serving in paid ministry or volunteers, whether they have post-secondary education or are self-taught, they are all asking for the same training in the practices of ministry. As was noted

in Chapter 1, seminary students already believe that they will need education beyond seminary if they are to be entrepreneurial in ministry. This recognition of a weakness of formal education seems to be acknowledged in the responses. Churches need to begin to either build or redesign their leadership development systems to train youth and young adults in areas of practical ministry on top of the theological training they are already receiving. One participant who noted that they had graduated from seminary said that they wished for “more hands-on training.” A graduate of Bible College noted that “more practical training would have been beneficial. I am naturally interested in theological study, but practical training is less of a pull and would have been very helpful in school.”

Furthermore, a current MDiv student, who indicated that they are nearly done their program, wrote that “no one ever actually taught me about the very practical things like mandatory reporting laws.” They mentioned that, when people shared about historic abuse they suffered while in that church, the pastor was “so overwhelmed trying to figure out” their legal responsibilities that they were “not nearly as present” as they could have been to ministry to the individual. Another current seminary student indicated that they would like training on ministering to people their own age as well as training on the purposes of church committees. A respondent who has served as an intern for 6 years spoke of the amount of experience they received on planning youth nights and children experiences. However, they wished for knowledge of how to “handle difficult people.” They had learned “how to make an event great but... [they] lost the opportunity” to learn how to handle “people who may be difficult.” Their desire is to know “the right things to say, how to handle their own emotions, and how to find productive end results.”

One respondent who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with a minor in youth ministry wished for training on how to plan for small groups. Finally, one student who has completed a Bachelor in Social Development Studies and is currently working on a second Bachelor (Social Work), along with training in mental health first aid and suicide intervention, remarked that they wished “there was training on how church programs can orient themselves to target marginalized groups such as race, disability, children who are being abused, and mental health.” Despite two undergraduate degrees and other training, they feel inadequately prepared for ministering to the marginalized in their church.

These all indicate a weakness in formal education when it comes to the practical components of ministry leadership. Young adults serving in ministry and formally trained in post-secondary schools are feeling unprepared and wishing for more training in the practice of ministry in the church. They are lacking the tools for the day-to-day life of a Christian leader and wish this was part of their formal education.

On the positive side, eight respondents said that they were satisfied with the training they have received. They represent 25% of the number of respondents who responded to this question (32 responses from 37 participants that indicated that they are actively involved in leadership). Those who feel satisfied with their training were spread among all age brackets and ministry positions. The vast majority (7) were volunteers. This does mean that the majority of those who identified as paid staff do not feel that their training was adequate for their ministry.

Barriers to Leadership

This question was asked to explore whether young adults were serving in areas of their choice or if they identified barriers that were keeping them from their desired ministry. It is of little surprise that the largest response was that those who are currently serving in leadership responded that there were no barriers to leadership in their church. A total of 13 participants said that they did not perceive barriers at their church. This accounts for 39% of all responses (33 responses were submitted). We can assume that this is due to those young adults actively serving. It would be difficult to perceive a barrier to leadership when you are already in leadership. Table 1.5 is a summary of all responses.

Perceived Barrier	Number of Responses
None	13
Lack of Time to Give	4
Moving Up Is Not a Goal	3
Lack of Education	3
Church Won't Accept My Help	3
Church Overlooks the Young	3
Church Not Interested in Reaching Marginalized	2
Social Anxiety	2
Don't Like Serving	2
Unaware of Opportunities	1
Don't Want to Face Criticism	1
Doubt Their Own Abilities	1
Don't Care for Church Politics	1
Perceived Ceiling without Seminary	1

Table 8: Barriers to Leadership in their Church as perceived by those who are currently serving.

Reviewing the other responses reveals a few common themes. One theme that emerged is that young adults don't feel that they have the time to commit to serving in any other position. There are different reasons why participants felt this way. One student mentioned that, because they go to school outside the area of the church, they are never in

one place for more than 5 months. Therefore, they feel that the church will not give a leadership position to someone who “won’t be in one spot for too long.” Another said that “time commitment is a massive one. More volunteering means more and more of my time is given to the church.” This would not allow them to find balance between volunteering and their families. They understand the weight of serving and don’t want to overburden themselves or feel stressed out all the time because they serve too much.

Perhaps this is one area that churches need to pay attention. Is it possible for the local church to provide leadership positions that are designed to be short term? As I wrote in my masters thesis, I propose that churches adopt flat leadership structures similar to Gore Industries where leadership is not permanent. Rather, leadership is granted for short term projects. “Churches can begin filling leadership positions with time limits established based on the length of need, not on a standard one- or three-year term.”¹ Churches need to consider the availability of young adults when planning for where they can serve. This does have implications for where some young adults can serve. However, that should be limited to their ability to meet the time demands of specific roles.

Other perceived barriers included young adults not wanting to get involved in church politics. One participant remarked that they are “discouraged to continue to serve God” because of the criticism they receive from older members of the congregation when they try to play modern music. A second participant plainly noted that “there is a lot of politics going on at the church recently.” Two others remarked that they felt overlooked by the church because of their age. One bluntly said “I think as a young leader I’m often looked over. I feel like there is some abuse in a church towards young leaders. We are

¹ Rutledge, “Flat Leadership,” 45.

always too young.” The other mentioned that they “feel sometimes [their] church is always looking for help but not always willing to accept it.” While this does not account for most of the reasons presented, it is a word of caution for churches that some young adults do feel that they are prevented from serving because they are young.

Final Thoughts From The Involved

The final question asked was if there was anything that was left out of the survey or if they had any final thoughts on leadership in the church. Responses were grouped by theme and are presented in Table 1.6

Further Requested Training	Number of Responses
Mentoring	9
None	6
Need Skills Training	3
Need for Leadership Accountability	1
Need for Ongoing Training	1
Gap Between School and Practice	1
Need for Wisdom of Abuse	1
Survivors	
Suicide Intervention	1

Table 9: Final Thoughts of Those Who Are Actively Serving in Leadership

The predominant response was that young adults are craving mentoring. One response was that, while “leadership development is often done through courses and books” they believe “the relational aspects and the idea of watch, do with, do with oversight, do it alone, is very beneficial.” Another mentioned that, while they had volunteered with youth programs since they were 12, “the most beneficial training... was through one-on-one discipling.” They found having a relationship with someone where they were able to be “real and honest with someone who will hold you accountable when needed” was the best

training they received. One participant simply wrote that “sometimes, people just need someone to listen to them, to understand.” Further to that, a participant noted that they believe that “leadership is all about mentorship. Leaders mentor and eventually replace themselves and that should be the constant cycle.”

Mentorship is not only something that young adults are asking for, it could also help cover some of the other areas that they mentioned. If young adults have access to a mentor they can be open with, it will foster an environment where they can talk about the other areas that they are needing training. A mentor can help them get training in suicide intervention. Furthermore, this can be a critical step in leaders putting theory into practice. Mentors have the wisdom to guide young leaders as they bridge the perceived gap between their formal education and the practice of ministry.

The Uninvolved

A total of 21 respondents said they are not currently involved in leadership in their church. Table 10 represents their ages:

Age Range	Number of Responses
18–20	8
21–23	3
24–26	3
27–30	7

Table 10: Age Range of Those Not Involved in Leadership

They were then asked if they were interested in becoming a leader in their church.

Surprisingly, most of them are not interested in becoming a leader at all. Those who are not interested represented 71% of responses. Their answers give some insight into what is preventing them from getting involved.

Reasons Not To Lead

The most common reason given was the lack of time that is involved in getting into leadership. One said they are “interested theoretically, and have been in the past, but am in a season of life where [they] cannot make the time.” Another mentioned being on the move for school as taking their time. A respondent simply stated that they “don’t have any free time.” In total, those who felt they don’t have time represented 25% of those who offered a reason as to why they did not want to get involved.

A couple of participants mentioned that they did not want the pressure and scrutiny of leading. One said they did not want the “pressure to be [a] perfect Christian.” Another said that they did “not want the responsibility that comes with leadership.” While they did not mention the pressure specifically, a third participant said they “have anxiety” about leading. This was echoed by a different respondent who said they “have anxiety and lack leadership skills.” It would be worthwhile to explore if this anxiety is related to the pressure placed on leaders or any perception that they need to be perfect.

Several responses included feelings of not being good enough or ready to lead. These same respondents also indicated that they were unaware of training that is offered by their church. One respondent said that they “do not think [they are] ready to be a leader.” They also noted that they “don’t know of any training that the church gives.” Another wrote that they “don’t think [they] will be good” at leadership. They also mentioned that they “don’t know about leadership for younger leaders.” A third said that they would “rather not lead... I don’t think that I will be good at it.” They also said that they were not aware of any leadership training at their church.

We can draw a correlation between these responses and recognize that young adults may not feel prepared for leadership because they are not being prepared for leadership. By contrast, those who said they did not want to lead but did acknowledge that their churches offer leadership training did not make references to feeling unprepared for leadership. Their responses were entirely about the amount of time it would take that they just cannot offer right now.

It is worth noting that two participants mentioned that they do not see a place for them in leadership. One wrote that “there is no place for me to lead. Where would I be used? It’s run by older people.” A second remarked that there are “not many ministries to be a leader or participant in it.” While these responses account for 10% of total responses, churches should pay attention to whether they provide space for young people to lead.

Reasons to Lead

A total of 5 respondents said that they were interested in leading right now. Three of them want to lead because they want to be part of something bigger than themselves. One noted that they “would feel like [they’re] contributing to something bigger.” A second said that they “believe in community and being part of a community... means to serve and to share my gifts and talents that God has given me.” The third participant wrote that they are “passionate and willing to do whatever is needed to see the kingdom of God grow.” Young adults are looking to make a difference in their churches! It is interesting to note that, of these five young adults who are interested, only one said that their church offers formal leadership training. Of the four, three said they do not know and one said they “definitely” do not offer training.

Training Provided by Their Church

It has been noted above that all of those who felt unprepared for leadership current attend churches where they do not know if leadership training is provided. Further to that, of the twelve respondents who said they are unwilling to lead at this time, only two mentioned that their churches have training programs for young leaders. One of those participants indicated that the training was related to dealing with kids in emergency situations. The other respondent said that the church “definitely” does offer training and that “they’re wonderful.”

It appears that a lack of training opportunities is impacting the vast majority of those who are not serving, whether they are interested or not at this time. Churches need to heed this and take some time to develop their leadership pipelines. This will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Barriers to Leadership

Participants were asked to reflect on any perceived barriers to leadership that exist in their church. Of the 21 respondents who indicated they were not currently serving, 16 responded to this question. Their answers are summarized in Table 11:

Barrier	Number of Responses
None	5
Lack of Time	4
Feel Unwelcome / Excluded	2
Disagree with Church’s Values	2
Unwilling	1
Social Anxiety	1

Table 11: Perceived Barriers to Leadership

Most respondents indicated that they perceived some sort of barrier that was preventing them from serving in leadership (67%). However, those barriers are not exclusively the

domain of the church. Nearly half of the barriers identified were related to personal feelings of not having enough time. As noted in the table, two were related to either social anxiety or the simple unwillingness of the participant to lead. That may be indicative of the fact that not everyone is called to leadership.

Another reality brought to the surface by the survey is that not everyone will agree with a given church's values. This came up in two responses. First, one participant noted that they were "not 100% sure if I am going to stay with my church or if I agree with quite a few of the ideals of my church." The second participant said that they feel that "some of my personal views may seem controversial to the norm." While these are areas that churches could pay attention to, it is also important to recognize that every church has its own set of values. Perhaps churches would do well to stop trying to keep everyone and helping people find churches that better align with their own personal values and convictions.

Two respondents felt excluded from the church, and this is not a healthy vision for the church. These participants wrote that they "have often felt not welcome or not included" and that "my opinions as a younger person [are] not valued." It was noted in Chapter 1 that Millennials are looking for churches that are inclusive. While this may seem contrary to the statement above, it is complementary. There is great diversity among the myriad of expressions of the church in Canada. What the church needs to do is learn to embrace everyone while helping them find the home that best fits them.

The positive side of these responses is that one third of participants who are not currently serving in leadership also do not feel that there are barriers stopping them from

engaging in leadership. This means that there is a path for them to serve in whatever capacity best fits their gifts and skills.

Things Missing

Finally, when asked if there was anything missing or that they would like to share that was not covered in the survey questions, those who are not involved overwhelmingly said that there was nothing missing (62%). However, there were a few comments that should be noted. First, one participant felt that the church is not doing enough to combat cliques. They noted that it seems like the same group of people lead in everything leaving little room for others to serve.

Secondly, one respondent in the 27–30-year age bracket felt that the church provided more opportunities for youth and young adults to serve. Their experience was that there are fewer opportunities for young adults over the age of 24. A third participant noted that a number of young adults lead in their own companies, but they find the church unappealing, so they do not engage. A final closing thought from one participant was that leadership development occurs best when it “comes from a place of relationship.” This is an echo of those who are involved who want a mentor to pour into them.

Focus Group

A focus group was held at Central Community Church and was attended by 26 young adults ages 18 to 28. These young adults represented a few different churches from across

the Niagara Region. The student researcher led the group as a follow up to the survey. Participants verbally agreed to be part of the focus group.

Opinion of Current Church Leadership

To begin, the group was asked what their thoughts were on the state of church leadership. This discussion focused on exploring what they see as barriers to church leadership and what is preventing them from serving. Their responses echoed the online survey in several areas.

First, several participants mentioned that serving in leadership is too time consuming. They are very busy with several tasks and do not want to add more to their already full calendars. One remarked that they don't want to "have to be there every Sunday and at every event." Coupled with that, a couple of participants mentioned social media as being a distraction. They would rather be online than serving in the church.

A second area of overlap was their feeling that the church expects leaders to be perfect before they can serve in the church. One respondent said that they believed their "hidden stuff" disqualified them from serving. While this was not a standard mentioned by the church, it was their perception of those who lead. As such, they felt they had to get their lives in order and be perfect before they could engage as a volunteer leader. This was agreed upon by the majority of those present. A follow up comment was that, because of this perceived standard, they were not willing to have others in the church "criticize their life." This unwillingness to be criticized was also mentioned in the online survey.

The other factor that was brought up was that some grew up in “strict” and “boring” churches. Traditionalism was a reason that they did not want to get involved as they are looking for church homes that better reflect their own contemporary culture. This included the feeling that the church was not inclusive, especially when dealing with members of the “LGBTQ2A” community.² A few remarked that they feel the church spends too much time telling you “what is wrong with your life.” They want a more encouraging environment that is more balanced between the negative and the positive.

Of interest was the lived experience of a young couple that had moved to Canada in the two months prior to the Focus Group. They were born and raised in Columbia and noted that they were surprised at how few young adults are involved in leadership in the Canadian church. In their experience, young people are heavily involved in leading at all levels in the church. They have also been trying to uncover the reasons why so few are engaged in all levels of leadership in Canada.

Perceived Barriers to Leadership

One respondent noted that they feel the church is hypocritical. This was echoed by a few others who spoke of those who put forward an “image that they are perfect.” However, knowing people who go to church, the participants noted how the illusion of perfection displayed on Sundays quickly evaporated throughout the rest of the week. This hypocrisy drives them away from wanting to participate in leadership.

A second common refrain was among those who “don’t see the need” to be involved. Specifically, several participants spoke of wondering “what they would get out

² This is the term used by the Focus Group participants and is included here verbatim.

of it.” Unfortunately, this is a consumer mentality and not the ideal. However, the young adults still see this as a barrier to them serving in the church. Perhaps this is in alignment with those respondents to the online survey who noted they want to serve to make a difference in the wider community. It is possible that the attendees of the focus group were speaking to a deeper need to make a difference as being what they were looking to get out of serving.

Finally, several of the attendees noted that they had grown up in the Catholic church. As such, they were always in a place where they were forced into how to behave and what to believe. They now desire to make their own choices and explore faith for themselves. Many of them noted that they have only been attending non-Catholic churches for the last couple of years. They are just now adjusting to churches that allow them to have more autonomy over their lives.

What They Need from The Church

During the Focus Group the conversation turned to what the young adults wanted from the church to encourage them to engage in leadership. The most important thing to those who responded was their desire to find “genuine connection” in the church. They want the church to accept them for who they are. They want assurance that “they will not be judged for who they are and the decisions they make.” Added to that was their desire to have a church not expect them to change before they start attending church. As part of acceptance, they want the church to allow them to begin to attend before they have their lives figured out. It is through this genuine connection and acceptance that they can then grow and change.

Secondly, they want the church to come to them, to meet them where they are at. Again, this is like the first response as they long for acceptance. Their desire is that the church would seek them out and not simply expect them to show up at church on Sunday. This will help “break the isolation” being felt by many young adults. Added to that was their suggestion that more churches offer a ministry to young adults that they can engage in as a “precursor to church.” They feel that “big church” is intimidating and, for those who have not grown up in church, can be a barrier to engaging in the church at all. While it is outside the scope of leadership, their suggestion was a young adult focused service that allows them to get comfortable with church and make key connections. We note this as it is a bridge that will serve to draw young adults to church.

Finally, they offered that sometimes the church simply needs to ask them to get involved. Several pointed out that they did not know where they could be used. They suggested that someone simply reaching out to them, explaining the need, and asking them to get involved would make the difference between them sitting on the sidelines and them getting engaged in the church.

Focus Group Closing Thoughts

The Focus Group ended with an open forum time where they were invited to share any closing thoughts of things we had not yet covered. They offered several things for churches to consider, a few of which were reiterations of issues brought up earlier in the Focus Group as well as in the Online Survey. Once again, one key issue that was brought up was the lack of time the young adults have in which they have to be involved. They feel overwhelmed and that they simply cannot squeeze any more into their week.

Secondly, they reiterated that they feel like they are “not Christian enough” or not good enough. This belief that leaders need to be perfect is a significant barrier. One participant felt they had a “not good past” that disqualified them. Another had a “fear of being judged.” A third felt that the church’s standards were “too high.” While these standards were not necessarily written in policy, they were perceived to be a limiting factor. This impacts their mental health and leaves them feeling too weak to serve. One suggestion they had was for churches to start giving more platform time to people who are “imperfect.” They see a number of testimonies from people who may have struggled in the past but now appear to have it all together. The suggestion was to offer “7-minute testimonies from imperfect Christians.” In their view, this would help to break down the stigma that Christian leaders are perfect and have it all figured out.

A few other, unconnected suggestions were for churches to offer bible studies where they can dig into Scripture and learn. Similar to this was their desire to see men’s groups where young adult guys can connect to older, mature Christian males. This space would enable them to simply “be men and learn from each other.” Finally, there was general agreement that too many churches are focused on Sundays and not the rest of the week. In their words, “why can’t we have the same quality of a service on a Thursday.”

Case Studies

Five young adults who either are currently or have previously served in leadership at Central Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario (hereafter Central) participated in the case studies. To avoid the researcher influencing the responses of the case studies, several other participants were asked to take part in the study. However, only five

journals were eventually submitted. Therefore, these case studies represent a random sampling of students. The case study guide is found in Appendix 3. Table 3.1 gives an overview of each participant. The following is a summary of the journals, and subsequent interviews, with each participant presented individually.³

Participant Designation	Age	Area of Leadership
CS 1	21	Youth Ministry Leader
CS 2	24	Youth Ministry Intern
CS 3	25	Youth Ministry Intern
CS 4	29	Youth Ministry Leader
CS 5	30	Youth Ministry Leader

Table 12: Case Study Participant Demographics

Participant 1

Participant 1 (herein CS1), in response to the question of their general view on church leadership and church leaders in general, noted that they have been in the church for their entire life. In their experience, they have seen two types of leaders: those who care about you and those who “felt non genuine, fake, or angry.” They concluded that this is “not a good way to be leading.”

Their view on the present state of church leadership focused heavily on their experience as a leader during the COVID pandemic. CS1 wrote that “COVID has been an interesting time as Christians where everything is so divisive in culture.” “If you don’t stand in the right lane, you will get destroyed and pushed to the side in what has been dubbed this ‘cancel culture.’” That said, they are fully invested in serving at Central. Part

³ This method is “called a *within-case analysis*.” See Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 100.

of this comes from hearing the Lead Pastor's vision and watching him lead the church. This is inspiring and, while "some balls are going to be dropped... ultimately I support our leadership because I feel like they are still on the right track."

In reflecting on the leadership development, they received while serving at Central, CS1 mentioned that it was predominantly done through mentoring and on the job training. They spoke of two separate youth pastors who provided "a solid example every step of the way." One specific pastor pushed them out of their comfort zone and into "leadership in some trial by fire situations." This led to them growing as the pastor encouraged them "every step of the way." Two other leaders were also mentioned. In both cases, they led by example while also encouraging and equipping CS1 along the way.

During the interview they lamented that one of their close friends did not have the same experience. Unable to find a mentor, their friend eventually left Central because they felt disconnected. In their summary, CS1 mentioned that what they and their friends are looking for is a mentor who will walk with them through the long haul. They do not want a mentor for just a short time. Rather, they want a real connection with someone who will help them through the stages of young adulthood. Someone that can help them get rooted in life.

Participant 2

This participant (herein CS2) is 24 years old, was an intern at Central, and is now in full time ministry. Reflecting on leadership, CS2 believes that "for the most part leaders have the best interest of those around them in mind." In their experience, the leaders around

them “want to grow and encourage others and make more leaders.” They have a positive view of church leaders in general.

However, when asked about the present state of church leadership, they did remark that “some leaders in the church have no interest in the younger leaders” and that this was true “especially if they aren’t around them all the time.” In general, they felt that “church leadership is moving forward from where it was years ago.”

Reflecting on what leadership development was given to them, CS2 mentioned that they felt they “missed out a lot on development because it was just assumed that I know what to do and how to grow myself.” They attribute this to their Bible College education. Due to this, they were “swept under the rug sometimes” by a church that assumed their education had fully prepared them for ministry. They felt like they were “thrown into situations and expected to float and not sink.” A lot of leadership development was done at staff meetings. But, since they were not on staff, they missed a lot of that development.

CS2 did not feel well prepared to step into leadership. While they did have good mentors that took “time to pour into” them and help them “step into their calling,” they did not feel well prepared to “handle situations.” Despite their formal schooling, they do not feel equipped to handle the day-to-day tasks of ministry. One of the only training opportunities that they identified was a class in child protection. However, in looking back on their leadership, they recognize that this was not “enough training to step into leadership.” Once they were serving, they did not feel that the areas they served in provided enough “outlets to voice” opinions “when things went wrong.” These areas also “didn’t give a lot of opportunities to be ... poured into.”

Responding to the question of what they feel would make church leadership better, CS2 reiterated that “church leaders [need to be] reminded that their young leaders need to be encouraged just as much as they do.” Looking back on their time as an intern, CS2 said that “often times I felt exhausted and that I was running on empty because I was pouring so much out and felt like I wasn’t getting poured into enough.” They felt that “young leaders get swept under the rug a lot because we were just seen as free work.” Thinking back to a time when they felt best serving in a leadership role was “when I was in youth and having weekly meetings with a mentor and doing a book study.” Their closing thought was that “having a chance where we get to be poured into and pour into each other is vital, especially in our society today where burn out is a real thing.”

Their closing thoughts in their journal were that church leaders need to “remember your young leaders. They have a lot going on in their lives and I think we need to pour into them more than ever.” Finally, churches must treat young leaders as “more than just a volunteer or free labour.”

Participant 3

The third participant (herein CS3) is a 25-year-old who served as an intern at Central and is now in full time paid ministry. Their general reflection on church leadership and church leaders is that they have grown to understand that church leaders are “a group of imperfect people attempting to bring vision, clarity, and grace to their community.” Their vision and hope for church leaders are that they would be a “combination of meeting people and communities where they are and helping bring the systems, structures, and

relationships required to teach them about God.” This is with the chief aim of increasing “their spiritual self-sufficiency, and to help them become the best version of themselves.”

However, CS3 also noted that “this is not always the reality.” In their experience, they have seen pastors and leaders “struggle with ego or pride, laziness, or any other struggle you see in any role.” They did acknowledge that this is because “leaders are just regular people, and sometimes they fail to lead themselves as an example to others.”

Reflecting on the state of church leadership, CS3 focused on the leadership at Central. They noted that, due to the large size of Central, there is high turnover. As such, it can make leading tough to navigate. However, they did acknowledge that the leadership is in a general state of health. Leaders are well grounded in the vision of making meaningful connections and spreading the message of love.” Their concern is that, with the large size of the organization, “it is possible that the structure and vision is lost as you move down the chain of command.” Their concern is that, while “everyone from the Lead Pastor to a greeter recognize that they have a large piece to play in spreading the news of Jesus, and that Central has created a volunteer culture with this value,” they are unsure how this filters down to those who are not volunteering. The question is whether those on the fringe would understand Central’s vision and mission.

When asked about what sort of leadership development they have received, CS3 said that they have not received any leadership development regardless of the number of different roles they have served in, from volunteer to paid staff. They did outline that they have consistently been in school (undergraduate and now masters). Due to their ongoing studies they “have not felt the desire to pursue additional avenues of leadership

development. However, they believe that, if they asked, they could take courses or training as needed as this is part of the culture of the staff.

Reflecting on whether they felt prepared for ministry, they wrote that “Bible college was a tough place to leave and truly feel prepared for ministry.” In their view, “even though Bible College aims to be a practical and relevant training ground for you to enter directly into ministry, I do not believe I was fully prepared.” They did temper this response by acknowledging that they do not believe “anyone has ever, or could ever, truly be prepared for the world of ministry.” CS3 did appreciate their time in the college internship program and recognized that they “are important for one main purpose, which is to help you recognize that you will not be ready for ministry, and it will be a learning process.”

During the interview they were asked to elaborate on any specific areas that they felt underprepared despite their education. Now that they are working full time in a church, they do not feel prepared for “the amount of energy it takes just to mobilize a small team of volunteers.” They were not ready of the “level of involvement required personally to try and get a team of volunteers together.” While they feel that they were warned they would be “walking through the mud” with people, they “were not actually trained to do it while still running the program side of the job.”

Their response to what would make church leadership better was entirely focused on work life balance. They journaled that they “have seen many pastors and leaders burnout because they have an unhealthy life-ministry balance.” In their estimation, this is due to “a narrative that self-care and personal lives needed to be constantly pushed aside

for your ministry.” Leadership in the church would be better if leaders recognized that they “are stronger when we have our priorities in line.”

Finally, their journal ended with a note that what they need from the church to better engage them in leadership is “the continual reminder of why we do what we do, of what is important to stay sharp, and how we as a church can all recognize our piece of the puzzle.” All of this is to enable them to “work as a team to better our community, our city, our country, and our world.”

Participant 4

Participant 4 (herein CS4) is a 29-year-old who has served in a variety of leadership positions at Central including a short stint on staff in the Missions Department. Their overview of the current state of church leaders is that they see “a lot of promise in the future of younger leaders as well as some great older leaders that are doing a good job of passing the baton.” This response was followed by an acknowledgement that the number of scandals involving high profile pastors demonstrates that no one is immune from making bad decisions. But “as the world changes,” there is a need for churches to show a greater openness to try new approaches to ministry “often with younger leaders at the helm of new initiatives.” This will need “older and wiser leaders to protect Biblical integrity and serve as true mentors, guides, and champions.”

Their reflection on the present state of church leadership is that the church has an over emphasis on biblical and theological education and not enough nurturing of character, giftings, and calling. They recognize that there is a place for formal education.

Rather, they have seen many opportunities be denied to people who do not have the formal education but have the willingness and the gifting to step up.

CS4 reflected that they have served in leadership in several churches over the last 10 years. It was only at their most recent church, where they served on staff, that they felt they were “truly equipped or empowered.” In previous churches they felt that, as a young leader, they were “expected to focus the majority of their time in areas outside of their giftings and passion.” Asked to expand on this in the interview, CS4 spoke of how limited they felt serving in their home church because the congregation could see them as anything more than a child. The leadership did not seem to acknowledge that a person grows in wisdom between the ages of 18 and 25.

What makes the difference at their present church is that their role and responsibilities are quite flexible and based on their callings, rather than simply on getting a set of tasks accomplished. Coupled with that were weekly meetings with their campus pastor that covered issues in ministry as well as reading through leadership books together. Expanding on this idea in the interview, the participant noted that, when they would meet each month, the pastor would ask two questions that were the backbone of mentoring. The first was “what in the Bible is standing out to you?” The second was “what are you learning?” While they seem simple on the surface, answering these questions on a regular basis forced the participant to reflect on what they were learning. In their experience, this was the prime driver of their growth.

The campus pastor would also do practical training by both reviewing past sermons and helping prepare for upcoming sermons together. As they stated during the interview, “the leader set the culture.” It was only through the mentoring that they felt

they were growing in their leadership capacity, and this was entirely due to the drive of their overseer.

This hands-on training and mentoring made a difference. In answering the question of whether they felt well prepared for ministry, they responded that, yes, this church did make them feel very prepared for ministry. For them, it wasn't just about the role that they had been filling (because they had served in a similar capacity in other churches), it was because this church provided a "safe place to explore giftings and the opportunity to have real authority to carry tasks out to completion."

Their reflection on what would make church leadership better was their request that leaders spend more time focusing on relational leadership. This contrasts with managers who just get things done. They would like to see high accountability on issues of character and integrity while also providing room to experiment. Secondly, they spoke of a desire to have performance reviews be less about how much they were getting done and more about how they were growing through their ministry. Their reasoning is that, when performance reviews are focused entirely on what got done, it leaves little room for leaders to practice self care.

Finally, their request of the church is that senior leaders would help younger leaders discover and develop their gifts rather than simply using them for grunt work. Secondly, they would like to have a truly open-door policy to discuss any area of church life with senior leaders. They recognize that they should not be consulted on all decisions. Rather, they want to have a deeper understanding of how decisions are made so that they can grow in their own leadership capacity.

Participant 5

The final participant (herein CS5) is 30 and serves in multiple areas at Central. When asked to reflect on church leadership and church leaders in general, they illustrated how they see two types of leaders. The first is those who carry the formal title based on the position they hold in the church, whether it be pastors, elders, group leaders and the like. Their second type of leader are those who are “willing to put their own interests behind them for the sake of others.” These are the informal leaders in the church and include those who are willing to pray for people. In many respects, they consider this type of leader the true leaders in the church and the people they are most likely to seek out when they need encouragement.

In reflecting on the present state of church leadership, CS5 noted that, in their own life, they often struggle to feel comfortable going to those that wear the label of church leader. This is partly because they look up to certain people as leaders who do not fill leadership roles. In part it is also because, at Central, they do not see leadership building being done regularly. This makes it difficult to approach leaders with any assurance that they are competent in their role.

They noted that Central has offered some leadership development including a formal class that they attended. However, they have not had the time to attend further classes. Their concern is that there is not a lot of formal leadership development taking place outside of casual conversations and training on ways to handle certain situations.

Question 4 asked if they felt prepared to step into church leadership. They responded that they were well prepared for leadership and that this was due largely to their experience serving at youth camps. They also noted that, while there have been

times when they were trained for leadership, predominantly they relied on prayer that God would guide them. This then leads to them jumping in and doing their best based on what they already know about leading.

They offer that “all leaders need some type of training specifically on how to be a leader. This includes leadership principles, and how to communicate with people. They also feel that “mentorship is key to developing leaders as well.” As they succinctly summed up this thought, they noted that “if all leaders had a mentor, I don’t think you could fail.” This was reiterated in their final thoughts. They would love a mentorship program and regular opportunities for leadership development.

Conclusion

A few recurring themes emerged from the online survey, focus group, and the case studies. These themes arose often enough to reach a saturation point that allows us to conclude that these themes are keys to reengaging young adults in leadership. The first is that young adults desire personal mentoring. They are looking for adults who will walk through life with them and help them tackle the day-to-day realities of life.

Secondly, young adults are dealing with calendars that are full. They feel that a lack of available time is keeping them from serving in church leadership. Third, they feel there is a lack of practical training that is preparing them for ministry. Fourth, they feel the church is not a place of authenticity. Finally, they view the church as an exclusive place that does not welcome everyone into leadership. Chapter 5 will present a deep discussion of each of these areas as well as recommendations on how the church can move forward.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

This project was designed as generative research with the chief question guiding the research being how might our practices of leadership development be enhanced to engage the full age spectrum of the church? The aim of this question is to contribute to the North American Protestant Church's understanding of engaging Millennials and future generations in church leadership. It has been established in Chapters 1 and 2 that the North American Protestant Church has historically been unable to engage young adults in leadership and that young adults are leaving the church in record numbers.

As a theological framework, Chapter 1 gave a brief overview of the priesthood of all believers. This theology means that everyone has a place in the church. Leadership cannot be the domain of only those who have attained a certain age. Churches need to give everyone a voice as well as a seat at the table of leadership.

Our theoretical framework was outlined in Chapter 2. Practical theology is the framework that dictated both how the study was conducted as well as how the findings were interpreted. The intersection of practice and theology is the heart of this work.

Finally, in Chapter 3 we outlined flat leadership as a leadership paradigm that allows churches to engage young adults in leadership. Flat leadership provides a way for leaders to share their roles. This sharing allows for the mentoring of younger leaders in real time. Flat leadership will be a key paradigm for churches looking to reengage young adults in leadership.

Chapter 4 was a “within-case analysis” in which we presented a “detailed description of each case and themes within the case.”¹ In Chapter 5 we engage in a “cross-case analysis.”² This is a “thematic analysis” of all the case studies as we draw out themes that arose in the online survey, the Focus Groups, and the Case Studies.³

In fulfilling Osmer’s pragmatic task, five main themes emerged from the data collection that can enhance existing practices of leadership development in order that churches can best develop young leaders. A key result of enhanced leadership development practices, as will be outlined in this chapter, is that churches will be able to better retain young adults. These five themes are: a desire for personal mentoring, time constraints, lack of practical training, authenticity, and exclusivity. In all the responses we received, these themes reached a saturation point.⁴

Personal Mentoring

The first key idea that emerged from the project is that young adults are desperately seeking deep connections with older generations. This is not a novel idea. Rather, it has been noted in multiple previous research projects. Ronald Gary Belsterling opened his paper on mentoring by remarking that “mentoring is an old concept, which has experienced a recent explosion in academic and practical popularity.”⁵ For example, in 2016, the Canadian Baptist Youth & Family Forum released the *Imaginative Hope* report.

¹ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 100. To clarify, a within-case analysis is a thorough look at the individual case studies and the data that was gathered during that study.

² Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 100.

³ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 100.

⁴ Osmer defines a saturation point as being the point at which gathering further data does not lead to the emergence of new relevant information (Osmer, *Practical*, 52). We arrived at that point during each phase of the study.

⁵ Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 31.

This report came out of a forum that was held in cooperation with the various Canadian Baptist denominations. The forum noted that the church has “not effectively fostered intergenerational relationships.”⁶ It goes on to note that young adults are “hungry for relationships with adults who love Jesus and will believe in them.”⁷ They want “Christian mentors who will walk with them through the complexity of life.”⁸ Adding “just one trusted adult in the life of a young person dramatically decreases their sense of loneliness and isolation.”⁹

This is certainly true in my own life and a reflection of my experience being raised in the church. As a teen I was given a leadership role within our youth ministry. It was not a large role. It did, however, keep me engaged. Moving into my young adult years, I had one specific adult who drew alongside me as a mentor. I learned much under his direction both how to lead and how to live. His influence continues to this day as he gave me space to lead and to fail.

Failing was a large part of my growth. It allowed me to not only experiment, but to learn from my mistakes. Broughton relays one story of a CEO that threw a party for two employees whose project failed, losing \$20 million in the process. The party was not to reward the failure. It was to reward the risk they took. “Businesses must innovate and make change to survive in the medium to long term. You’ve got to let your [mentors] know that it’s okay to screw up.”¹⁰ Learning to handle failure is a key role that a mentor can fill.

⁶ Canadian Baptist Youth & Family Forum, *Imaginative*, 13.

⁷ Canadian Baptist Youth & Family Forum, *Imaginative*, 13.

⁸ Canadian Baptist Youth & Family Forum, *Imaginative*, 13.

⁹ Packard, “Young People,” 29.

¹⁰ Broughton, *Emerging*, 121.

However, a significant number of young adults lack those relationships. This was highlighted in a January 2022 report from the Springtide Research Institute. Their report, *The State of Religion & Young People 2021*, which came at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, found that only 29% of young people “who say they are actively part of a religious/spiritual community chose to reach out to that community during a difficult or challenging time.”¹¹ Churches need to pause and consider the impact of this finding. Most young people who responded are actively involved in a church but will not turn to that church community in a difficult time.

It needs to be noted that the survey response is not simply young adults considering what they may do at some point in the future if they hit a crisis point in their life. One third of respondents indicated that they were currently experiencing a challenging event. This lack of connection is eroding the church as young people look elsewhere for the very relationships they are seeking but not finding.

Churches need to build leadership development structures that connect youth and young adults to older adults who will mentor them. The importance of this cannot be understated. Springtide’s report notes that, of those surveyed, 24% of young people said they “never feel their life has meaning and purpose.”¹² However, that number drops to only 6% of respondents who have just one adult mentor in their life. A significant relationship with an adult gives a young adult a sense of purpose and meaning.

Drawing from my personal experience, I was fortunate to have such relationships. In my early youth, I was blessed to have a youth pastor who took time to get to know me. This despite there being several hundred teens in our group. The mere fact that he knew

¹¹ Packard, “Young People,” 29.

¹² Packard, “Young People,” 15.

my name and took time to talk to me made me feel recognized. It was a blessing that this was repeated in every church while I was young. I had youth pastors and leaders (not all paid) who cared for me. This culminated in a mentor who took me under his wing during my first year of college. He proved to be a significant relationship that helped shape my understanding of my purpose and gave me meaning.

In short, “young people... need stronger connections with more adults in order to thrive.”¹³ David Sawler cautions that this cannot be a short-term project of the church. In order “for a generation to stay in an existing church, there must be constants.”¹⁴ He points out that one of the issues facing the church is the short-term nature of many leaders in the church, especially among generational pastors such as youth and youth adult ministers. It is noted that “the average stay for a youth minister in many denominations is eighteen months.”¹⁵ In this environment “it is impossible to grow sustainable, long-term relationships.”¹⁶ Yet, as noted in Chapter 4, CS1 wrote that they were looking for a mentor who will walk with them through the long haul, not a short-term mentor.

My experience is that my youth leaders came and went on a regular basis. My long-term mentors were people outside of the churches that I attended. They were leaders and pastors who established personal relationships with me and who maintained those relationships outside the formal ministries I attended. A few of these relationships continue two decades after I left my young adult years behind.

Reflecting on my growth illustrates a key point for any leader wishing to add mentoring as part of their leadership development system. Mentorship cannot simply be a

¹³ Packard, “Young People,” 18.

¹⁴ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 28.

¹⁵ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 28.

¹⁶ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 28.

program the church adds to its leadership development to fill this need. CS1 went on to note that mentorship needs to be oriented around walking with youth and young adults through the stages of young adulthood. As an example of this, Sawler highlighted one young adult who he noted has “an uncommon depth of spiritual health.”¹⁷ This depth was noted in several young adults from the same church. These young adults all had one thing in common: a youth pastor that had been at the same church for over twenty years. That constancy allowed the youth pastor to mentor them through many stages of life. It was only through constancy that the pastor was able to truly speak into their lives. Sawler affirms the fact that “for a generation to stay in an existing church, there must be constants.”¹⁸

For example, Belsterling’s research of students in Christian college revealed that most of those students had “at least one relationship with an adult youth worker.”¹⁹ Interestingly, those relationships were evenly spread between paid youth workers and volunteers. This is an important distinction to make because churches must understand that “the idea that hiring professional staff to work with our children and youth means we will retain our youth is false.”²⁰ The North American church has seen more youth pastors and youth ministries than ever before, but the church has also seen “the largest drop-off” in the age groups these very ministries were supposed to keep.²¹

It is an indication that students who stay active in their faith after high school do so in part because of a key relationship with an adult. His survey respondents indicated

¹⁷ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 29.

¹⁸ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 28.

¹⁹ Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 35.

²⁰ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 20.

²¹ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 20.

that “over 90% of these Christian college students maintained relationships with their youth workers for a least two years, and 72% of the relationships endured for three years or more.”²² It is not a surprise that “the longer an adolescent participates in mentoring relationships with a youth worker, the more likely he or she is to be attached to the youth worker.”²³

Sadly, with so many youth and young adult pastors transitioning on a regular basis, it is nearly impossible for long-term mentoring to take place. It is outside the scope of this project to discuss why these adult pastors have such short life spans in a church. However, churches need to be aware of this and not assume that simply hiring a pastor to fill a role will result in this mentoring taking place. Gordon MacDonald suggests that Senior Pastors should have a theology that recognizes “the value of investing deeply in the lives of the next generation.”²⁴ In practice, he offers that “by the age of 65 or 68, a huge perspective of your call and your priorities is investing backwards into the generations behind you.”²⁵ This needs to form the foundation of a formal mentoring program in a leadership development system. Leaders need to ensure that they are creating a place where young adults are paired up with mature leaders who will be around the church for an extended period.

Kinnaman directs us back to the Jesus’ Parable of the Sower found in Matt 13. Jesus demonstrates that it is the rich, fertile soil in which seeds grow. He reminds us that, while the task of “growing spiritual redwoods is God’s work,” we can partner with God

²² Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 35.

²³ Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 42.

²⁴ JACL, “Mentoring,” 23.

²⁵ JACL, “Mentoring,” 23.

by “tilling and tending the soil of the young lives God entrusts to us.”²⁶ We do this by moving away from “an industrialized, mass-production, public-education approach and embrace the messy adventure of relationship.”²⁷ He refers to this as apprenticeship, a term that may help in understanding the true nature of mentorship. It is a process of teaching others how to lead and live like the teacher. Modelled after Jesus’ own ministry, Kinnaman reminds us that, while he had many followers, Jesus “invested himself fully in just twelve disciples.”²⁸ They learned how to live by walking with Jesus, doing what he did, and following his example. He then reminds us that the early church grew through a network of relationships founded on this apprenticeship model. Belsterling, in evaluating Jesus’ mentoring approach, concludes that “Jesus’ mentoring approach... would be useful for those in youth ministry to apply.”²⁹

In developing a mentoring aspect of a leadership development system, Belsterling notes five key attributes that we can take from Jesus’ approach to his disciples. The first is that students need to know their workers truly care for them. Secondly, workers need to be concerned about the issues of the day that are of concern to the youth. Third, youth want “an adult who is willing to confront them with the truth” but this must come from a position of humility, not superiority.³⁰ Finally, youth are looking for someone they can imitate. Specifically, they want an adult who understands their “life purpose” and can help youth “adopt the same passionate purpose of living in relationship with the Creator of the universe.”³¹

²⁶ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 126.

²⁷ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 126.

²⁸ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 126.

²⁹ Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 41.

³⁰ Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 41.

³¹ Belsterling, “Mentoring,” 41.

This research affirms the importance of youth developing mentoring relationships in the church. It is noteworthy that Rainer and Rainer discovered that, among the one-third of young adults who never leave the church, they found that 65% of them said the church “was a part of their vital relationship with God.”³² Digging into their responses, the most common reasons given were that the church is where they were taught about God and His Word as well as the fact that the church is where they “connect with other Christians.”³³ These young adults indicated that they looked to the church to “help guide” their decisions in everyday life.³⁴ Nearly one in three of them said that the church helped them through a difficult time in their life.³⁵ It was in those moments that their personal connection to people in the church carried them through.

Finally, 24 percent of their respondents said that they were afraid of going through life without spiritual guidance. Rainer and Rainer note that a significant number of young adults think that the local church is an important part of helping them navigate life. Again, this does not need to be done through a formal ministry. Rather, it needs to begin with authentic relationships.

In Chapter 1 the need for mentoring was briefly mentioned. This included the suggestion that instilling wisdom in the next generation is a key part of churches raising up young leaders. Mentoring will serve that end as a personal relationship with a mentor will result in wisdom being passed down. Kinnaman reminds us that “this generation wants and needs truth.”³⁶ They need truth that will give them “substantive answers to

³² Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 195.

³³ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 195.

³⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 208.

³⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 209.

³⁶ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 127.

life's biggest questions, particularly in a time when there are untold ways to access information about *what to do*.³⁷ He then points us back to the work of Dallas Willard who wrote in his book *Knowing Christ Today* that one of the key ways that leaders must teach the next generation is through experience.³⁸

Teaching the next generation how to have wise judgement “is crucial to good leadership.”³⁹ As the respondents wrote, they are looking for “a wise interpreter of life,” a “guide who is thoughtful and knowledgeable and will point them in the right direction.” The Bible has several examples of those wise leaders that others seek out. One specific example Osmer points us to is the story of two women who seek out King Solomon to settle their dispute about their baby.⁴⁰ People desire leaders who can offer wisdom. Jesus is the fulfillment of wisdom. He pours into his disciples as they grow in their faith.

As Osmer notes, “the wisdom tradition is a rich and complex part of Hebrew Scripture.”⁴¹ He remarks that “learning wisdom is portrayed... as a lifelong task with something to offer the young and inexperienced, as well as the wise and discerning.”⁴² Paul instructs Timothy to take the things he was taught and “entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2, NIV). It is through these relationships that the church was established. It is through these relationships that the future church will thrive. As such, when young adults ask for someone to help them interpret life, they are seeking someone filled with wisdom to walk through life with them.

³⁷ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 127.

³⁸ Kinnaman, *Lost*, 127

³⁹ Osmer, *Practical*, 84.

⁴⁰ Osmer, *Practical*, 86.

⁴¹ Osmer, *Practical*, 86.

⁴² Osmer, *Practical*, 86. Osmer offers a detailed analysis of Hebrew Wisdom, and it is worth leaders reading through his work as it offers practical advice on how to pass on wisdom.

It is no secret that mentoring is an important part of growing leaders. John Maxwell did an informal survey of leaders at his conferences and discovered that 85% of them became leaders through the influence of another leader.⁴³ Bungay Stanier notes that the leadership press is full of articles about mentoring (which he calls coaching).⁴⁴ The terms mentoring and coaching are often used interchangeably as they are very closely aligned ideas.⁴⁵ What matters most is that young adults have a connection to someone who can walk through life with them.

However, based on the responses received in this project, there is a lack of formal mentoring taking place, especially within the walls of Central Community Church. Maxwell gives three reasons why this may be the case. First, some leaders simply do not recognize the importance of mentoring new leaders.⁴⁶ Jamie Broughton elaborates on this point and notes that many leaders “think that coaching [emerging leaders] is a great idea in theory, but [they] have reservations about it in practice.”⁴⁷ This project should serve as a reminder that it is too important to ignore.

Second, Maxwell notes that often leaders are so busy taking care of the day-to-day tasks and attending to the needs of their followers that they simply do not have time to mentor. Thus emerges a profound dilemma. Several young adults noted that they do not have the time to get involved in leadership and it is a common feeling among leaders that they do not have the time to invest in them. CS2 noted this in their journal as well. In their experience, “some leaders in the church have no interest in the younger leaders,

⁴³ Maxwell, *21*, 133.

⁴⁴ Bungay Stanier, *Coaching*, 3. For detailed information on the principles of coaching, Bungay Stanier’s book is one of the top coaching books on the market. See also Broughton, Jamie. *The Emerging Leader*. Toronto, ON: Footprint, 2010.

⁴⁵ Masango, *Mentorship*, 1.

⁴⁶ Maxwell, *21*, 133.

⁴⁷ Broughton, *Emerging*, 195.

especially if they aren't around them all the time." CS2 reflected on when they felt best serving in a leadership role. It was when they were in youth and "having weekly meetings with a mentor and doing a book study."

Yet, if developing young adults is a key to the future of church leadership, then something must give. Leaders absolutely must make time to pour into the next generation. We have already made it clear that finding space for youth to serve in leadership is a key to keeping them in the church. Therefore, one key step forward for any church is for leaders to make sure that they are pouring into them. Broughton reminds us that a leader's "time investment doesn't have to be as hefty" as one would think.⁴⁸ Mentorship is far too important to let time get in the way.

Third, Maxwell suggests that "the real problem may be insecurity."⁴⁹ This may be reservations based on a leader's own lack of being coached. Bungay Stanier remarks that research conducted in 2006 found that only 23% of people who were surveyed and were being coached found that coaching to have a profound impact on their leadership.⁵⁰ MacDonald takes a harsher approach and, in quoting Henry Nouwen, reminds us that "many Christian leaders are unable to give or receive love, and have opted for power and control instead."⁵¹ Expanding on this, MacDonald points to the weakness of this as being one of the reasons why pastors leave churches after short tenures. Leaders who have not grown deep roots in theology and ministry tend to quickly burn out.⁵² Mentoring young leaders is part of enabling them to grow deep roots. This may be an area of church

⁴⁸ Broughton, *Emerging*, 196. Broughton gives an in-depth look at a simple yet effective approach to mentoring that is not time intensive.

⁴⁹ Maxwell, 21, 136.

⁵⁰ Bungay Stanier, *Coaching*, 4.

⁵¹ JARL, "Mentoring," 26.

⁵² JARL, "Mentoring," 26.

leadership that needs further study to discover if those in pastoral leadership have been mentored and the impact that relationship had on them. In looking back on years of leadership teaching, Bungay Stanier reflects on Daniel Goleman and his work on emotional intelligence. He notes that Goleman spoke of coaching as being one of the essential leadership styles but that “many leaders” spoke of not having time to invest in others.

It is not necessary to overcomplicate mentoring. The heart of those respondents who want a mentor was to simply have someone in their lives who can share wisdom with them. Churches do not need to worry about creating complicated programs or events. Keel suggests that programs are counterproductive in establishing relationships. This is because, “with the focus on the program, staff people are largely interchangeable.”⁵³ Perhaps this explains why youth pastors come and go so quickly. Rather than orienting around specific programs, church leaders simply need to start by including young leaders in their day-to-day work. This harkens back to a time when young pastors learned alongside senior pastors “who served as ‘nursing fathers’ and mentors in the ministry.”⁵⁴

One of my mentors did this for me. I was included in his day-to-day life, eating in his home, going on visits, living life with him. Another of my mentors, a youth pastor, spent significant time with his youth outside the formal context of ministry. He was on their school campuses, went to their sporting events, visited their homes. He spent time being part of their lives. In watching the impact, he had on their lives I quickly learned to incorporate this into my ministry.

⁵³ Keel, *Intuitive*, 240.

⁵⁴ Bradley, “Serving,” 91.

MacDonald offers a simple paradigm for these relationships. He suggests that multi-generational leaders need to do two things. First, young people need to engage older people and ask, “tell me your story.”⁵⁵ Secondly, he suggests that older people “listen to the young people because they will build enthusiasm in you. They will give you fresh ideas.”⁵⁶ He goes on to suggest that older people tell young people their stories, letting them ask questions and not giving them advice until they ask for it.”⁵⁷

My experience happened outside the scope of a formal system. However, it would be detrimental for church leaders to assume that all youth and young adults will find mentors willing to pour into their lives. In short, for churches to begin strong leadership development systems, they must start by developing relationships with youth. Waiting until youth reach adulthood is too late. Churches need to capture teens and pour into them if they are to keep them engaged in the church once they graduate high school and life begins to change. One side effect of this is that these relationships will, in turn, keep more young adults in the church.

Time Constraints

One of the most common refrains that came up in our research was that young adults are busy. In the Focus Group, participants mentioned that they could not handle the pressure of having to be there every Sunday. This is not an unexpected response. Young adulthood is a busy time of life as several significant life changes take place. Young adults move to college, get married, have children, settle in new homes outside their own families. It is a

⁵⁵ JACL, “Mentoring,” 23.

⁵⁶ JACL, “Mentoring,” 23.

⁵⁷ JACL, “Mentoring,” 23.

time of great transition. Among the top ten life changes that cause people to drop out of church, moving to college ranks second. School ranked seventh and losing touch with friends from church came in at 10.⁵⁸ Added to these changes are “pressures other than the church that are pulling them in myriad directions.”⁵⁹ For many young adults who leave the church (more than two-thirds of them according to Rainer and Rainer), they do so because they want a break from the church.⁶⁰ When new and busy schedules arrive, young adults move church “to a lower priority” especially among the dechurched.⁶¹

There is reason to hope that the church can recapture these young adults. Most respondents, whether they are currently engaged in the church or not, are interested in volunteering. Of the 75 submitted responses, 63 are either currently serving in leadership or are interested in getting involved. This represents 84% of all responses. While young adults are underrepresented in leadership (as explored in chapter 1), they are interested. Churches wanting to reengage young adults should find hope in the fact that most young adults are ready and willing to serve.

If churches are to survive the ever-increasing pace of change, they must gear their leadership development “to accommodate for the change that the people of the church experience from their daily lives.”⁶² In short, churches need to reimagine how they can meet the needs of a transient population. Yes, this will create issues related to screening and scheduling. But it is essential that churches find ways to make this work if they want young adults involved in the church.

⁵⁸ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 73.

⁵⁹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 74.

⁶⁰ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 75.

⁶¹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 75. They simply define dechurched as those who “attended church regularly for years but then [join] the growing ranks of unchurched Americans.” See Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 2.

⁶² Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 74.

Practical suggestions for churches include recognizing that post-secondary school students will come and go at regular intervals throughout the school year. In my own experience, most churches have volunteer schedules that are designed around people who are home all year round. As such, it can be difficult for students to move into and out of a volunteer schedule. The same is true for churches near larger schools that attract a large student population. To restate what one Focus Group participant said, “the church will not give a leadership position to someone who ‘won’t be in one spot for too long.”⁶³ Those churches need to ensure that their volunteer systems can accommodate transient students without stifling their ability to serve due to lengthy screening processes.

A second suggestion is that churches move towards creating specific time limits on their volunteer roles. For example, it would be better to ask people to serve for eight weeks or every other week for four months. This would be in contrast to the broader ask typical of many congregations where there is no fixed timeline for volunteering. It is simply an open-ended invitation that can leave young adults feeling unable to fulfill the requirements of the role with so much else going on in their lives. Many would find it easier to say yes to serving if they knew a start and end date.

It should be noted that both suggestions go beyond simply accommodating students. The reality is that everyone’s life seems busier than a decade ago. In fact, Rainer and Rainer illustrate that the dropout rate between young adults in school and those not in school is nearly identical.⁶⁴ People in general have busy calendars. Sadly, for many who do leave the church, “a gaping hole doesn’t form when they exit.” This is important because, if their absence is unnoticed, there is little motivation for them to

⁶³ See chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 88.

return to their previous roles or get involved in another role. People are busy and tired. It is evident that the church becomes a casualty in this hectic pace. This is exacerbated by the feeling that people will not notice if they leave. By reducing the appearance of an overwhelming commitment, the church can offer a place for young adults to connect without feeling overwhelmed.

Practical Training

The third theme that emerged was the desire for practical training. This is in two forms: formal education and practical skills. Young Adults want hands on training that will equip them for handling the day to day demands of the church. In Chapter 4 we noted several respondents who are currently involved in leadership in the church and who feel there is a gap between their formal education and the training they wish they had now that they are serving. This gap is also felt by those without formal education. As summarized, collective responses included a desire to learn how to handle mental health issues that congregants face, how to talk to kids, plan small groups, care for themselves, child safety, and reaching the marginalized. While they did not prioritize these, personal experience would say that self care is the top priority with handling mental health issues being second. Both of those stresses can prematurely end a ministry career.

An online respondent wrote that they “personally believe there is a shortfall in the connection between formal education and hands on training.” They elaborated on this to say that “the two should happen simultaneously” and that churches should not expect a new hire to have finished school before they get a job. As quoted earlier, another online survey respondent mentioned that “leadership development is often done through courses

and books. But I think the relational aspects and the idea of watch, do with, do with oversight, do it alone is very beneficial when considering practical leadership development as well as other tasks.”

While it is a broad generalization of young adults, the shared experiences of the respondents demonstrate a disconnect. Those with an education felt it prepared them for being theologians. However, they do not feel prepared for the daily role of ministry, especially when it comes to putting theology into practice with those who wrestle with the issues noted above. Respondents without a formal education still point to a disconnect in their training in that they feel unprepared for the task of leading, especially in the context of speaking, leading groups, and handling the daily demands of ministry.

It may be that this is part of a larger shift taking place in the church. Not only are respondents seeing a gap between their theological education and the practices of ministry, but they are also experiencing a theological shift in the wider church. Butler-Bass refers to as the “practice gap.”⁶⁵ It is no secret that Canadian weekly church attendance has radically dropped in the last few decades.⁶⁶ Butler Bass suggests that part of this downturn is attributed to postmoderns demanding the church realign its practices to fit its theology. By that she refers to the fact that, at one-time, Canadians attended church simply because they were told that it was what they were to do.

She goes on to point out that while parents taught their kids how to be a Christian, they did not teach them “*what* was compelling about it or *why* [they] should devote [their lives] to these traditions.”⁶⁷ This is the practice gap. It is the space between the practices

⁶⁵ Butler-Bass, *Religion*, 139.

⁶⁶ For detailed information on Canadian church attendance see Reginald W. Bibby, “Post Christendom in Canada? Not so Fast,” *PCS* 1 (2016) 125–41.

⁶⁷ Butler-Bass, *Religion*, 140.

of the church and the theology that drives those practices. It is the recognition that “in an inherited familial culture, the what was assumed and the *why* was unnecessary.”⁶⁸ Yet, “in a fractured individualist culture, there exist no compelling reasons to re-enact familial vocations in work and prayer and many compelling reasons to depart from old ways.”⁶⁹

The reality of the practice gap was outlined further by Dreher who noted that “new social science research indicated that young adults are almost entirely ignorant of the teachings and practices of the historical Christian faith.”⁷⁰ This makes sense in that, when young adults are raised to do something without explaining why, you soon lose the why. The connection between historical faith and practice has been lost.

In the Focus Group this theme emerged in a few responses. One participant stated that they felt the church was too strict and boring and that most churches just wanted to tell you what was wrong with you. A second participant felt that the church presented itself as if all leaders are perfect. Therefore, they disqualified themselves from serving because they did not fit the mold of being perfect. This is a gap between the church’s theology of the priesthood of all believers and the perceived practice that only some can serve.

Gibbs and Bolger trace the practice gap back several centuries as modernity took root and “the tie between religion and the rest of life was broken.”⁷¹ The result of this break was that modernity created dualisms as a secular realm was created and everything in life was broken “into little parts for classification, organization and systematization.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Butler-Bass, *Religion*, 141.

⁶⁹ Butler-Bass, *Religion*, 141.

⁷⁰ Dreher, *Benedict*, 2.

⁷¹ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 66.

⁷² Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 66.

This separation impacted the church in that the practices of the church became something that was done solely at church. To the modern world, church practices did not directly impact life in the secular realm. Thus, as time wore on, we became very good at doing church. But we lost the theology behind church.

The good news is that contemporary churches are beginning to find a way forward and once again unite theology and practice. Webber, in evaluating the theology of the emerging church, points out that “emerging leaders... are saying ‘let us connect ministry to the essential convictions of the faith.’”⁷³ Dreyer calls us to “return to the roots of our faith, both in thought and in practice.”⁷⁴ “One of the roles that flourishing congregations might provide is that safe space where things of the spirit and things of religious practice can actually be talked about because we take them seriously.”⁷⁵

This has given rise to a critique of the contemporary church’s theology and practice. As Guder noted, academics have now begun “critiquing theologies of the church that neglect the church’s essentially missionary nature.”⁷⁶ Practical theology is an offshoot of this movement and is grounded in the desire to tie the practice of the church once again with the theology of the church. It is the desire to see “the focus on the maintenance of the church [being] absorbed into and redefined by the overarching missional purpose of the church.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Webber, “Theology,” 199. As an example of this, Hayes reviews one church in California that is evaluating the reasons behind churches even meet on Sundays. They offer Saturday services because they have spent time exploring the practice of Sunday worship and recognize that it is not truly grounded in theology. Gathering on Sundays is now largely based on tradition. For more see Hayes, Alan L. “Acknowledging the Post-Christendom Sunday: a Saturday Afternoon Eucharist St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church, Palm Desert, California Lent 4 20 March 2004.” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 74 (June 2005) 274–80.

⁷⁴ Thiessen et al, *Flourishing Congregations*, 29.

⁷⁵ Thiessen et al, *Flourishing Congregations*, 29.

⁷⁶ Guder, “Missional Leadership,” 252.

⁷⁷ Guder, “Missional Leadership,” 256.

The implication for leaders is that we cannot assume that we can simply continue to carry on the practices of the church simply because it is the way things have always been done. Post-Christendom church leaders must connect practice to theology. This is not to say that our practices are wrong. It is to say that, unless we connect our practices to our theology, contemporary church attendees will simply want to drop those practices. Or, worse, they will simply continue to drop out of church.

As a place to start, Bartholomew and O'Dowd, in referencing Ps 21, remind us that "education needs to start with, to continue with and always to return to the fear of the Lord."⁷⁸ This is because the Psalmist tells us that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps111:10a, NIV). William Brown explains that "wisdom is more than knowledge; it involves making sound judgments and doing the right thing."⁷⁹ He goes on to point out that "the wisdom corpus is more than simply 'advice literature.'"⁸⁰ "Wisdom has as its goal the (trans)formation of the self."⁸¹ As this is the starting point for wisdom in the Bible, it is also the foundation for any leadership development being done in a formal setting. Wisdom also forms the heart of any mentoring relationship. It is an opportunity for established leaders to help transform the next generation of leaders.

Beeley affirms that the Bible is the foundation of passing on the wisdom needed to lead in this difficult and demanding work. He views the early church as "one of our greatest resources for effective ministry."⁸² It is in Scripture that we find the wisdom to "exercise a clear and necessary authority over their flocks, by which they are able to

⁷⁸ Bartholomew, *Wisdom Literature*, 299.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Wisdom*, 25. Brown's work is a deep dive into the role of wisdom in character development and is worth reading for anyone desiring to mentor the next generation of leaders.

⁸⁰ Brown, *Wisdom*, 27.

⁸¹ Brown, *Wisdom*, 27.

⁸² Beeley, *Leading*, viii.

guide the members of the church toward God.”⁸³ The implications of this are two-fold. First, in the context of flat leadership, pastors do exercise authority over their congregations. However, this authority is limited and was never intended to be an all-encompassing authority. Secondly, this is a significant element of pastoral leadership and one that must not be taken lightly. Wisdom is the key to effective leadership, and it is of the utmost importance that the church instil wisdom in their young leaders. The church can and must be a key part of forming young leaders. Bartholomew and O’Dowd affirm this and note that “wisdom alerts us to the fact that there is *more* to wise formation than the school . . . wisdom is about the formation of the whole person and a wise theory of education will be sensitive to the fundamental role of the family and the church in the formation of a person.”⁸⁴

In preparing to raise up young leaders, churches need to reengage theology in training. As evidenced by the lack of young leaders in the church, traditional models of training young leaders are failing. Otero and Cottrell alert us to the reality that “recent public documents outlined key issues concerning the Church’s challenges in transmitting its faith in a very changed religious and socio-cultural environment, and reflected on its ability to respond to these changes.”⁸⁵ Specifically in the context of formal training, Elaine Heath, in referencing the 2017 ATS annual report, “highlights a range of current trends that impact how theological schools should think about preparing leaders for the church of the future.”⁸⁶ She points out the rapid decline in enrolment at ATS accredited schools for the last decade. This is especially pronounced in the decline of young adults

⁸³ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 8.

⁸⁴ Bartholomew, *Wisdom Literature*, 299.

⁸⁵ Otero, “New Paths,” 51.

⁸⁶ Heath, “Wisdom,” 465.

seeking an MDiv. This same concern is echoed in John, Nixon, and Shepherd's work on Christiane discipleship. They note that "recent decades have seen rising concerns about the health and sustainability of theological education for ministry among established denominations in the UK."⁸⁷

In Heath's view, "many mainline students come to seminary with a sense of call, but are put off by perceptions of expectations of church officials to shore up what students see as a stressed or failing institution."⁸⁸ She goes on to explain that "the more entrepreneurial these students are, the less likely it is that they will fit into a traditional mainline ordination path, and the more likely it is that they will have to educate themselves for entrepreneurial ministry after they leave seminary, or apart from conventional curriculum."⁸⁹

The decline in students enrolling in formal education provides an opportunity for the local church. The church can create an environment where they are raising up Christian leaders who understand the unique telos of church leadership and can differentiate it from secular leadership. Further to that, denominations need to reimagine their ordination paths to make space for the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders who will not fit into existing, aged paths. It is my personal experience that every denomination I have served in had ordination paths that were developed 50 years ago at a time when most pastors went from high school to Bible college, seminary and then into the ministry. This is no longer the case. Many leaders are now entering the ministry after

⁸⁷ John, "Christian Discipleship," 300.

⁸⁸ John, "Christian Discipleship," 465.

⁸⁹ John, "Christian Discipleship," 465.

working in the secular world. Church leadership is a second career for them and thus they do not fit into a traditional model of ordination.

As John Maxwell stated, “everything rises and falls on leadership.”⁹⁰ The future of the church will be determined by the quality of the leaders being raised today. Therefore, it stands to reason that how the Church develops emerging leaders will be a determining factor in how the Church navigates the rapid changing societal landscape. Waiting for external entities, including formal schools, to bridge this gap may leave the church with a significant gap in qualified leaders. All indicators are that this is already the case.

Heath’s caution is a warning that contemporary methods of training up new leaders are no longer working. It is a sentiment echoed by Bartholomew and O’Dowd who, in referencing psychologist Robert Sternberg, highlight the downfall of the modern education system in noting that “one of Sternberg’s concerns is that we are witnessing increases in IQs but no corresponding decrease in hate in our Western societies.”⁹¹ Sternberg is focused on finding “an approach to education that genuinely contributes to *the public good*.”⁹² Stenberg affirms Brown’s definition of wisdom in that it is “the application of intelligence.”⁹³ His critique of North American education is that it “has become woefully *reductionistic* and urgently needs to be opened up to relate to whole, embodied persons in relationship.”⁹⁴ Just as education needs a new approach, the church

⁹⁰ Maxwell, *Leader*, 49.

⁹¹ Bartholomew, *Wisdom Literature*, 295.

⁹² Bartholomew, *Wisdom Literature*, 295.

⁹³ Bartholomew, *Wisdom Literature*, 295.

⁹⁴ Bartholomew, *Wisdom Literature*, 296. Bartholomew and O’Dowd do disagree on Sterberg’s views of religion in the context of education as they affirm the need for biblical wisdom.

also needs a new approach to raising up the next generation of leaders that incorporates wisdom and is concerned with the entire being of the student.

Authenticity

The final two key themes will not be addressed through specific programs or classes. However, they are worth addressing as they are significant roadblocks to young adults engaging in leadership development. First, there was a recurring theme that young adults are looking for those in the church to live out authentic lives. This was especially a common theme of the Focus Group. We have already covered their feelings that the church presents the picture that you have to be perfect to assume a role as a leader. They went on to say that the church is overly critical of church goers and will criticize your life.

What upset the participants was their view that the church is hypocritical. The church presents a view of perfection, but the young adults see people outside of church and know that this is not the case. Discussing this further, they spoke of their desire to build genuine connection with people. However, that is impossible to do when people are being hypocritical. They are looking for adults who will accept them just as they are. It is their desire that the church not expect them to change before they can attend church.

To them, authenticity means living life without the pretense of perfection.⁹⁵ This is of vital importance to them because they want to be in relationship with others. They want someone to step into their lives and “break the isolation” that they are feeling.⁹⁶ It is

⁹⁵ As a youth I was raised to believe that Titus 1:6 was an instruction that leaders should be above sin. I did not fully understand that to be above reproach does not mean to be above sin.

⁹⁶ Quote from Chapter 4 as told to me by a young adult during the Focus Group.

important to them that they know the people in relationship with them will not judge them for who they are or the decisions they make, even if those decisions are poor.

Yet, their perception is that the church is a place of judgment. But, if people are willing to live authentic lives and show their weakness, then the young adults feel comfortable engaging in life with them. It is of interest that one specific way they shared, as noted in Chapter 4, that this can be accomplished was through churches creating short, 7-minute testimony videos from imperfect Christians. They want to see people “reflecting Jesus in a real way.”⁹⁷

When asked what was holding them back from church, participants spoke of being “not Christian enough.” They talked of their imperfect past disqualifying them for leadership. They spoke of their weak mental health and a fear of being judged for it. In their view, both written and perceived standards of leadership were too high for imperfect people.

Following up with this feeling, respondents spoke of the church presenting the appearance that leaders have it all together. In their words, the church “has the appearance of being perfect.” Leaders do not speak openly about their own struggles. Continuing this thought, they spoke of how churches give off the air of perfection in their production qualities on Sundays. Young adults view high production as another sign that the church has no room for imperfection. While there is a place for quality, church leaders need to heed this call for authenticity. Young adults want and need to know that the church is a place for them, regardless of their imperfections. Churches need to be willing to let their flaws show.

⁹⁷ Quote from the Focus Group.

This call for authenticity went beyond feelings of not being good enough. Online Survey participants wrote of a fear of criticism. They spoke of social anxiety. One response was that “churches need to keep leaders accountable for their behaviour outside of church.” Another wrote that they were “not Christian enough.” Yet another noted that they “don’t want the scrutiny and pressure to be perfect.”

One case study participant, CS1, wrote that one of the issues they see in church leaders in general is that leaders have felt “non genuine” and “fake.” In our follow up interview, they shared that they wish more leaders had accountability. CS3 reflected on leaders that they have seen who “struggle with ego or pride, laziness, or any other struggle you see in any role.” They know that “all leaders are just regular people.” Yet, when churches try to portray themselves as perfect, young adults see through that façade.⁹⁸ CS4 spoke of the scandals that have rocked church leadership in recent years. It was pointed out that they were not surprised to know that church leadership are sinful. They know that no one is “immune to making bad decisions.” The problem is when churches either try to hide these sins or when they act surprised that their leaders made mistakes. Young adults followed up this thought with a request that they could have “high accountability on issues of character and integrity while having a lot of room to learn and experiment.”⁹⁹

Again, what they are asking for is not a specific program or leadership development class. The issue with a lack of authenticity is two-fold. First, it creates an environment where they feel there is no place for them to serve. Secondly, this is driving young adults away from the church. As such, unless churches begin to present a holistic

⁹⁸ This is regardless of whether churches do this on purpose or if it is simply through their actions.

⁹⁹ Quote from CS4.

view of what it means to be human, faults and all, the best leadership development systems will be pointless in trying to recapture young adults and prepare them for leading the church.

Respondents want the church to be authentic. They want to know that, if they are to serve in the church, it is okay that they have made mistakes. Understanding the mistakes older Christians have made will help them navigate their own decisions. However, when they are met with a seemingly perfect church, it drives them away. They instinctively know that perfection is not possible. In turn, they reject a perfect church. The second most common reason young adults drop out of church is because “church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical.”¹⁰⁰ As Sawler summarizes, “we have not allowed room for mistakes in the Christian walk. We have been judgmental when Christians screw up.”¹⁰¹

A second way the church can create an environment of authenticity is through focusing on the homes of the families that attend. Rainer and Rainer point back to the home as a key place where young adults are looking for authenticity. “Parents are a critical element in keeping college-age young adults in the church.”¹⁰² It should not be surprising that students and young adults look closely at how their parents live. They want to know if parents will live out the very things they claim are spiritually important to them. A lack of authenticity at home “plays a major role in whether students remain or drop out” of the church.¹⁰³ They see “spiritual hypocrisy in their own family” and “this

¹⁰⁰ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 160.

¹⁰¹ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 117.

¹⁰² Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 93.

¹⁰³ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 93.

perception... carries over to the church in general.”¹⁰⁴ When a student sees their parents living hypocritically and then also see it in the church, it pushes them away from church.

Sawler gave a concluding thought that all Christians, not just the young adults, need to hear “it is okay to be you.”¹⁰⁵ Our churches need to become safe spaces where people know it is okay to make mistakes. They need to understand that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). That does not exclude us from the body of Christ. Our “self-worth is not to be found in how [we] compare to another person, but rather in Christ.”¹⁰⁶

Exclusivity

As with authenticity, exclusivity is more about the culture of a local church rather than a specific leadership development class or system. One respondent to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report put it this way. “You can have the best preacher and the best sermons and stuff, but if people don’t feel welcome, I mean, it’s not a very good church; there’s a lot of stuff to work on.”¹⁰⁷ In Chapter 1 we outlined how the aging demographic of church leaders is leaving young adults feeling like the church is an exclusive place where you are only welcome if you meet a certain age requirement.

A further point of contention with exclusivity in the wider contemporary church is the lack of gender diversity in leadership. However, the topic of gender in leadership did not come up in the online survey, focus group, or case studies. While this topic is debated

¹⁰⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 95. This book goes on to outline the roots of hypocrisy and offers some suggestions as to the role parents can play in keeping or reengaging their children in the life of the church.

¹⁰⁵ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 118.

¹⁰⁷ Penner, “*Hemorrhaging*,” 57.

at length in churches, it did not appear to be a major concern to those involved in this project. This deserves further study but that is outside the scope of this project. To further illustrate the issue, *Hemorrhaging Faith* notes that “young adults are ‘turned off’ of church by people, programs and practices that notice and account for certain individuals to the exclusion of others.”¹⁰⁸

In reflecting on their feelings of being judged and excluded, respondents noted that the church overlooks the young. Coupled with their feeling that the church would not accept their help anyway; young adults are feeling excluded from the church family. As noted in Chapter 4, online survey respondents felt that the church did not want the opinions of young adults. Or, where churches did ask for their opinions, it was felt that the church did not listen.

A primary response to this is that church leaders need only to ask for the thoughts and opinions of younger generations, leaders need to at the very least help young adults feel that their responses are valued. In short, leaders must ensure that young adults feel heard. This does not mean that churches have to act on every opinion that is shared. But, if young people do not feel heard at all, then they feel excluded. Leaders would do well to spend some time engaging with young adults in conversations around their responses. This will be a learning experience for both sides. It allows young adults to be heard. It also allows for established leaders to help young adults see all sides of an issue. Leaders can also share their own experiences in dealing with these issues in the past. This ties back into mentoring and is a practical way to live this out.

¹⁰⁸ Penner, “*Hemorrhaging*,” 64.

One focus group respondent noted in a follow up conversation that their own struggle with being excluded related to their feeling that the church could only use them if they had something to offer. As an example, they spoke of how one member of the worship team ministry became ill. In the early days of the illness the worship leader reached out to them a couple of times. However, as time passed, they were no longer welcome at worship practices and the leader stopped reaching out. This fed their belief that they were only included in the church if they could give something to the church.¹⁰⁹

The issue is further exacerbated by the recognition that young adults will leave, not only if they feel excluded, but if they feel others are being excluded. “Sometimes their ‘beef’ with exclusive church members and practices is motivated by empathy for others.”¹¹⁰ It needs to be stressed that I am not calling for churches to abandon their convictions or theology. Yes, young adults are approaching the contemporary world with less traditional views on a variety of theological issues. They are also increasingly questioning the ability for anyone to “lay an exclusive claim to the truth.”¹¹¹

How Do We Respond?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is hope for the church. This dissertation began by establishing that young adults are leaving the North America church in ever increasing numbers. This trend may be shifting. A new Barna research report released in the summer of 2022 “highlights some of the fluctuations that have surrounded church attendance

¹⁰⁹ A second example that they gave of this is around tithing. While this is outside the scope of this work, they spoke of churches that give the impression of having plenty of money by using fog machines, lots of lights, the latest gadgets and the like as creating an exclusive environment where the church appears to not need their money. Therefore, they do not tithe.

¹¹⁰ Penner, “*Hemorrhaging*,” 64.

¹¹¹ Penner, “*Hemorrhaging*,” 64.

through the pandemic, affecting all generations in similar fashion.”¹¹² Among these fluctuations is a noteworthy increase in church attendance among Millennials. “Since 2019, the percentage of Millennials reporting weekly church attendance has increased from 21 percent to 39 percent.”¹¹³ Their most recent data, based on U.S. church attendance, now places Millennials as the most active age group, outpacing Gen Xers and Boomers.

As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, the North American church finds itself in a place where people are coming back to church. Barna concludes their report by noting that “this data should serve as an encouragement to leaders... should church leaders keep themselves open to something new, there are new opportunities in store for the health and the future of the Church.”¹¹⁴ This is a key moment in the history of the church. Church leaders have the opportunity to meet this moment and reengage a lost generation.

We established that one key in which churches can begin to reengage young adults is through a robust leadership development system. Rainer and Rainer suggest that this is more than simply programming to try and keep them. First, churches need to make it very difficult to leave. By that, they mean many young adults leave the church and feel like no one noticed. Young adults “leave quietly, and the church continues on as usual.”¹¹⁵

A survey of young adults revealed four key factors that impact whether a young adult stays or drops out of church. These include a welcoming environment for their life

¹¹² Barna, “*New Chapter*,” para. 3.

¹¹³ Barna, “*New Chapter*,” para. 6.

¹¹⁴ Barna, “*New Chapter*,” para. 13.

¹¹⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 76.

stage, others in the same age bracket attending, appealing small-group studies for people in their age bracket, a feeling of being at home, and a source of support during a personal crisis.¹¹⁶ Rainer and Rainer dig deeper into each of these areas. For this study one key response can help a church begin to recapture young adults. They note that “most churches do not have a college and career ministry for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.”¹¹⁷ In Canada, a survey of churches done by WayBase revealed that “only 10% of churches have an active weekly Young Adult ministry.”¹¹⁸ This ministry is an important transition step for students leaving high school. Many students feel that, when they leave youth ministry, their church is over. They feel unprepared to step into adult church and take a break until they feel they are old enough. However, they often do not return. In the Focus Group, participants specifically asked for a “precursor to church.” They are looking for somewhere that they can fit in that is focused on them and can prepare them to integrate with the adult congregation.

Added to a young adult ministry is a circle of support for students when they go through a life crisis. We are reminded that, for a young person, a life crisis can be a myriad of moments, from “leaving home, paying bills for the first time, the increased workload of new studies, getting involved in a serious relationship,” many smaller things add up to a stressful time in a young adult life.¹¹⁹ Creating a truly caring and compassionate atmosphere where students can be nurtured and guided through these life stages needs to be a key part of the church’s ministry.

¹¹⁶ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 80.

¹¹⁷ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 81.

¹¹⁸ WayBase, “Normal,” 5.

¹¹⁹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 82.

Overwhelmingly, young adults who stay in the church indicate that this was a prime factor.¹²⁰ The church was important to their life. The church carried them through a life crisis. The church was there when they needed it. This is how the church can answer those who filled out the survey, spoke in the focus groups, and journaled that they want someone who will walk through life with them. Adrian Thomas plainly states that “there is no doubt that the churches that are significantly impacting young people, which are keeping their youth and also adding young people, demonstrate a deep love and care for young people.”¹²¹ This is why we need to acknowledge that changing leadership structures alone is not the solution. Churches need to have spiritual vitality if they are to see change.

In response to the church’s aging leadership and the fact that Millennials are not yet engaging in leadership, at least at the more senior levels of the church and denomination, there are five suggestions the church should heed to begin to create space and engage the next generation. This is not an exhaustive list. However, it is a starting point to reaching out to young leaders and offering them a seat at the leadership table.

First, it is imperative that we take some time to fully understand Millennials. As we considered in Chapter One, Millennials are often considered self absorbed and hard to manage. However, it is dangerous and counter productive to apply this label. “When students or emerging adults believe that adults perceive them as unreliable or disengaged, surprisingly many will default by living more deeply into that negative perception. Young people may have been stereotyped, but their attitudes and behavior can easily

¹²⁰ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 83. Around 78% of 18- to 22-year-olds who stayed in the church.

¹²¹ Sawler, *Goodbye*, 31.

fulfill the stereotypes.”¹²² To prevent this, churches need to move away from negative labels and stereotypes. We need to see Millennials for what they offer to the church.

Burkus notes that “Millennials will become the most educated generation in history, learning from an increased exposure to diverse experiences, viewpoints and cultures.”¹²³ Gilbert identifies Millennials as being “well educated, skilled in technology, very self-confident, able to multi-task, and have plenty of energy.”¹²⁴ Caprino adds that “Millennials can be highly motivated, productive and insightful when you set them loose with creative boundaries.”¹²⁵ Not all of the stereotypes about Millennials are accurate or even fair. This is important to note if we are to create a welcoming environment for them to be part of our leadership. Negative stereotypes of Millennials have prevented those in church leadership from welcoming Millennials to the table. The belief that they are not ready, lazy, or self-entitled, has led many to believe that Millennials should not be involved in leadership. As a start to engaging them it is imperative that existing leaders begin to understand them.

Secondly, we need to stop trying to engage Millennials. While it seems counter to the rest of this project, we would do well to heed this thought. The phrase comes from Kathy Caprino who, writing in *Forbes* magazine, states that “‘engage’ sounds pejorative – as if we have to run after Millennials with all sorts of enticing carrots to keep them interested in working rather than appreciate their bona fide differences and create work cultures that satisfy their legitimate needs.”¹²⁶ A look around contemporary offices would

¹²² Clark, *Adoptive*, 151.

¹²³ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 1.

¹²⁴ Gilbert, “Engagement,” no pages.

¹²⁵ Caprino, “Quit,” 1.

¹²⁶ Caprino, “Quit,” 1.

lead us to believe that, to engage Millennials, we need to create fun work environments with arcade games, fun colours, and staff perks. But, as Caprino points out, this is simply not the case. “Millennials do plenty of ‘engaging’ without our prodding.”¹²⁷ Instead of playing games to engage them, Caprino offers a more appropriate way to entice Millennials into leadership. One key driver is how we train them. Caprino suggests that “the truth is that Millennials prefer to learn at their own pace and schedule rather than go through lectures and overly structured training. Make your training content succinct, entertaining, mobile and self-directed.”¹²⁸ This step alone will go a long way in engaging them.

To summarize her point that we need to stop trying to engage Millennials, Caprino concludes by stating that:

We can be smug about how self-centered Millennials are and hopelessly continue to try to ‘engage’ them. Or, we can create work environments where Millennials do all the engaging themselves. The businesses that thrive in the next 10 years will do the latter.¹²⁹

While she was specifically addressing secular businesses, the principles hold equally true for churches. Engaging Millennials became the popular buzz word of leadership conferences and recruiting drives. Perhaps our efforts to engage them are having the opposite effect and are driving them away. Caprino’s insights suggest that churches stop trying to engage Millennials and start providing spaces where Millennials can engage God on their own terms.

Thirdly, churches simply need to make space in leadership for young adults. Churches can begin to identify the leadership potential within their own

¹²⁷ Caprino, “Quit,” 1.

¹²⁸ Caprino, “Quit,” 1.

¹²⁹ Caprino, “Quit,” 2.

congregation. Somers, writing in the *Globe and Mail*, reminds us that “perhaps you already have young talent on your team and don’t need to actively recruit them.”¹³⁰ It is a good reminder that our congregations can contain competent Millennials that have been overlooked. We need to start by recognizing their potential and then embracing that potential.

It is important that churches not miss the depth of this statement. The Hemorrhaging Faith report contained one chart that is of significance when it comes to the impact that offering youth the opportunity to lead in the church has upon their future attendance. To fully appreciate the following chart, it is important to understand the four spiritual types used in the report. Engagers are those who are still affiliated with a Christian tradition. Fence sitters are those who still have an affiliation but at least one quarter of them no longer affiliate with Christianity. Wanderers identify with a wide range of spiritualities. Rejectors are the fourth category and nearly half of rejecters identify as atheists. Furthermore, wanderers tend to be those who are drifting away from the church and rejecters have experienced some type of trauma and hurt that has driven them away from the church.

In the survey, when young adults were asked the question of whether they had been given the opportunity to lead in the church, 62% of engagers agreed that they had. In stark contrast to that, only 11% of rejecters agreed. An astounding 89% of rejecters had not been given the opportunity to lead in the church as a

¹³⁰ Somers, “Succession,” no pages.

teen.¹³¹ This is illustrated in their chart and subsequent comments, shown below in figure 2:

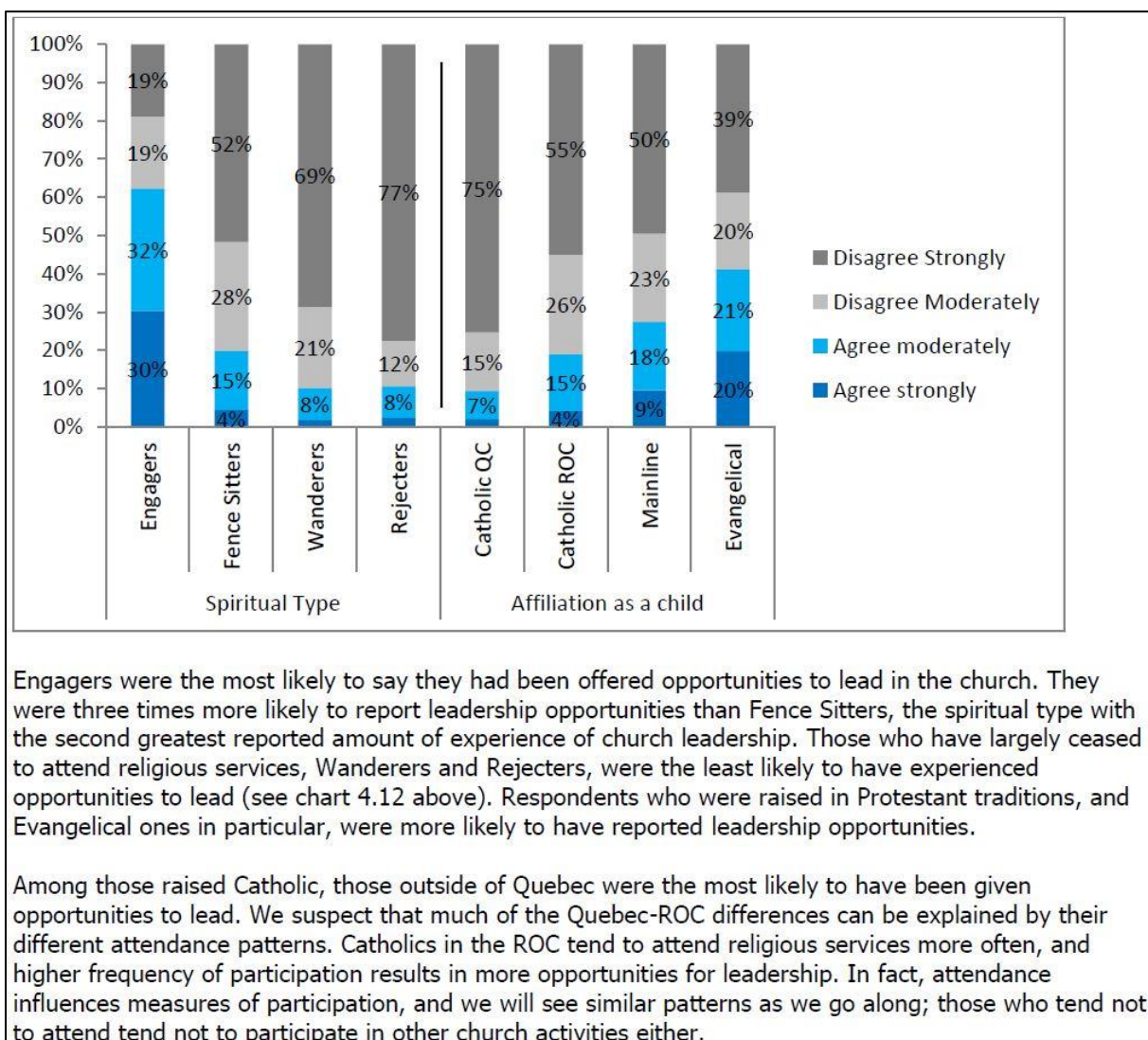


Figure 2: Survey of leadership engagement among four mainline denominations.¹³²

The seismic impact that offering teens the opportunity to lead in the church cannot be understated. “Young adults who perceive that their talents were unappreciated in the church are less likely to attend as a young adult.”¹³³ Simply

¹³¹ Heimstra, “Hemorrhaging,” 87.

¹³² Penner, “Hemorrhaging,” 87.

¹³³ Heimstra, “Hemorrhaging,” 87.

put, “when young adults feel their talents are unappreciated, they are more likely to be part of a spiritual type that is no longer attending religious services.”¹³⁴

Somers suggests that, beyond merely identifying their potential, we should provide them a front row seat to key leadership positions within the church. In his own experience of training Millennials, he notes that, when he brought on interns:

the interns do not make coffee or file documents. Our interns take on meaningful roles on major projects. The goal of the program is to contribute to the creation of a generation of qualified leaders by providing them with an opportunity to showcase their skills and witness what qualities are needed to be part of the C-Suite.¹³⁵

Somers further notes that we need to “spark their intellectual curiosity by making sure that the work you offer them is meaningful and challenging. If you’re looking to develop the next generation of leaders then you need to offer them opportunities that will enable you to see if they’re suited for the role and to help them develop the skills needed to succeed.”¹³⁶ Lizardy-Hajbi echoes this in noting that their research demonstrated that congregations where all members of the church were engaged in areas like programming, committees, and service projects outside of worship were significantly healthier and thriving. When people of all ages are engaged it “speaks to the presence of a mission and purpose that necessitates action and commitment beyond weekly worship attendance.”¹³⁷

As noted in Chapter 1, Millennials do not want to simply be cogs in the system. This has led Millennials to disengage from the formal church processes of

¹³⁴ Heimstra, “Hemorrhaging,” 87.

¹³⁵ Somers, “Succession,” no pages.

¹³⁶ Somers, “Succession,” no pages.

¹³⁷ Lizardy-Hajbi, “Engaging,” 7.

becoming members which would lead to them serving on committees and leadership teams. They also desire to do meaningful work.

Gallup has noted the same trend in the American workforce. According to their 2016 report, “How Millennials want to Work and Live,” Millennials are the least engaged generation in the workforce today. They discovered that 55% of Millennials report not being engaged at work with almost 1 in 5 reporting that they are actively disengaged.¹³⁸ This reinforces the reality that Millennials do not want to simply be cogs in the system. They are looking for meaningful work and will change jobs regularly until they find it. Gallup discovered that “many Millennials likely don’t want to switch jobs, but their companies are not giving them compelling reasons to stay.”¹³⁹ The report goes on to note that “while Millennials can come across as wanting more and more, the reality is that they just want a job that feels worthwhile – and they will keep looking until the find it.”¹⁴⁰

Erlacher points out that “many churches and organizations across America experience this phenomenon of disengagement from formal processes and programs by young attendees or participants.”¹⁴¹ As a means of engaging them, Somers suggests that we “give them the opportunity to lead a large-scale project with tangible results for the company, working under the direct supervision of a senior member.”¹⁴² Therefore, once we identify their potential, we need to make

¹³⁸ Gallup, “Millennials,” 7.

¹³⁹ Gallup, “Millennials,” 7.

¹⁴⁰ Gallup, “Millennials,” 7.

¹⁴¹ Erlacher, *Millennials*, 10.

¹⁴² Somers, “Succession,” no pages.

room for them at higher levels or risk putting them in a position that will drive them away.

This point is echoed in the Hemorrhaging Faith report. That study asked young adults whether their experience demonstrated that the opinions of youth mattered to church leaders. Rather unsurprisingly, over 80% of those who are actively engaged in the church said yes. Conversely, over 80% of rejecters said no.¹⁴³ There is a direct correlation between teens being given a voice in the church and them staying in the church into young adulthood. Churches need to make space for teens to be heard by leadership. Failing to do so is yet another reason why young adults leave the church.

Fluid hierarchies, mentioned above, can be part of the solution to creating room. By empowering people for short term leadership roles suited to their abilities we can more quickly move people in and out of leadership as the needs of the congregation shift. As well, creating shorter terms for various roles can enable people to move into leadership without having to wait for someone to leave. For example, in our church a person can serve up to six consecutive years on the Church Board. The downside of such long terms is that some must wait that long for a position to open up. Six years is long enough to drive people away if they are not willing to climb ladders. If not shorter terms, churches can consider creating non-voting spaces on church boards where people of all generations can be represented at the table. Central Community Church's bylaws allow for the

¹⁴³ Heimstra, "Hemorrhaging," 88.

Board to appoint as many non-voting board members as needed to fulfill their duties. This is a great mechanism to engage young adults in meaningful ways.

Another way to create space for Millennials is to consider moving to shared job descriptions. Churches such as North Coast Community in California use shared job descriptions to create room for greater leadership engagement. This is not just to accommodate Millennials. Yet, it can provide the room needed to engagement them. Shared job descriptions allow multiple people to fill one role. It allows for space for churches to broaden their leadership base. This is one way that flat leadership can be a response to creating space. Shared job descriptions can provide a means for established leaders to mentor and raise up younger leaders. By sharing a role, the free flow of experience, knowledge, and wisdom of how to respond to the challenges of leadership will take place naturally.

A fourth suggestion for engaging Millennials is an echo of the earlier discussion on building a mentoring culture within the church. Burkus, in quoting Erickson, writes that we have discovered an

interesting relationship building between Millennials and Baby Boomers. Erickson claims that when faced with a challenge outside their expertise, Millennials act like heat-seeking missiles, unwaveringly targeting the person with the most relevant experience. Often, Erickson explains, this is a Boomer, someone with years of needed experience but separated by several levels in the hierarchy.¹⁴⁴

This relationship between Millennials and Boomers is underappreciated.

Millennials want to learn from older leaders. Dale Carnegie Training highlights a similar relationship. They noted that Millennials are looking for a supervisor who

¹⁴⁴ Burkus, "Next Generation," 3.

will “help them learn a lot,” “demonstrate an interest” in their personal lives, and “treats them with respect.”¹⁴⁵ One example of this in practice is found at Gore Industries. Each new employee is paired with an older employee who mentors them in their job.¹⁴⁶

It is important to recognize that this mentoring must go beyond simply teaching skills and abilities. Banks writes that “when people are described as joining with or following after someone, it is as a consequence of that person’s character, approach, and spirit more than any specific kinds of abilities, skills, or charisma.”¹⁴⁷ My experience though, is that we too often only teach skills when mentoring new leaders. Building this culture within the church is an important step in raising up the next generation.

Finally, church leadership needs to build a culture of giving feedback to Millennials that is different than what would likely constitute the normal practice of most churches. It has already been noted that Millennials do not want to be cogs in a system. To that end, they are not content to serve year after year in a volunteer or leadership role without strong, effective feedback. Burkus points out that “Millennials crave knowledge and guidance from confident and talented leaders and colleagues.”¹⁴⁸ This is a direct result of them being “the most over supervised generation in history, having experienced a highly structured, child-centric nurturing.”¹⁴⁹ Burkus, in quoting Tulgan, concludes that “Millennials are

¹⁴⁵ Training, “Engagement,” 6.

¹⁴⁶ Hitt, *Strategic*, 181.

¹⁴⁷ Banks, “Formation,” 193.

¹⁴⁸ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 4.

¹⁴⁹ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 4.

used to receiving feedback on exactly how they are performing, where their strengths lie and where they need to improve. In the workplace, they crave this same feedback, especially if it is positive.”¹⁵⁰ Whether it be in the workplace or in a volunteer environment, Millennials need and want to know how they are doing. This is partly because, as noted above, they want to know that they are doing well. While their work was specifically focused on the secular workplace, Gallup’s report on how Millennials want to work and live was clear that the more often managers met with Millennials, the more engaged those Millennials were in their roles.¹⁵¹

Lencioni points to immeasurability as being one of the three signs of a miserable job.¹⁵² When people do not receive ways to measure their success it leads them to being miserable at whatever it is they are doing. To counter this, churches must develop a way to provide feedback on a consistent basis if they are to engage and retain Millennials.

As noted above, Millennials are used to receiving continuous feedback on their work. Therefore, churches need to go beyond yearly reviews as that will not be often enough to satisfy. Burkus, in quoting Alsop, writes that “Alsop continues to suggest that, while a formal evaluation process may only occur once a year, more frequent, informal feedback sessions should occur once a quarter, month, or even after the completion of any major project.”¹⁵³ While this project is specifically focused on Millennials, this shift in feedback is even more pressing when it comes to Generation Z, who are moving into

¹⁵⁰ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 4.

¹⁵¹ Gallup, “Millennials,” 9.

¹⁵² See Lencioni, Pat. *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

¹⁵³ Burkus, “Next Generation,” 4.

young adulthood now. The Center for Generational Kinetics released a survey in 2018 that “two-thirds of Gen Z say they need feedback from their supervisor at least every few weeks *in order to stay at their job*.”¹⁵⁴ More surprisingly, “one in five members of Gen Z need feedback daily or several times a day in order to stay with an employer.”¹⁵⁵ While most churches may not hire young adults, they do need to pay attention to this trend if they want to keep young adults engaged in leadership and volunteer positions. Developing this system will take work but will also benefit the church as Millennials engage, and stay, in leadership.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of the respondents in this project give us a description of their view of contemporary church leadership. Their experience shows that we have a gap between our practice of leadership and our theology of leadership. At the core, young adults want the church’s practice and theology to come together. The church has long held to the belief that all people are members of the priesthood. However, in the same breath the church has held leadership for a select few. This can no longer continue. To be clear, this dissertation is an argument that the church needs to focus on leadership development as a way of engaging young adults. The retention of young adults will be a residual, but important, benefit of leadership development.

Chapter 5 has illustrated a key aspect of young adult culture. They are choosing relationships over programs. This is in response to their desire to see theology and practice come back together. Programs are limited. Young adults do not want to simply

¹⁵⁴ Center for Generational Kinetics, “Gen Z,” 27.

¹⁵⁵ Center for Generational Kinetics, “Gen Z,” 27.

go through the motions of being part of a program simply so someone can say they were involved. They want to be in relationship. They want to serve. They want to exercise their priesthood in meaningful ways.

There are a few final, but important, points to consider. The first is that the current situation is not as bleak as it may appear. Not all young adults will leave the church. Rainer and Rainer point out that one third of young adults never drop out of church.¹⁵⁶ Our online survey demonstrated that a significant number of respondents are actively involved in the church. The case study participants all grew up in the church and are now serving, some in high-capacity positions. This should be a bit of good news amidst the exodus of young adults. Perhaps one place for the church to begin is focus on those who are still there. As we have uncovered, many of them are wanting to get involved. They just need the church to welcome them.

Secondly, as noted above, most churches can start to make a significant impact on young adults with very little financial investment. The starting point is authentic relationships between youth and young adults who are connected to mature Christians in long-term relationships. There is no need for complex programming or even paid staff to oversee it. While those can help, the need to get people in relationship should outweigh any time needed to create these formalized ministries.

To close, I challenge senior leaders to consider the key role you serve in both developing and then releasing young leaders. You are the primary audience of this dissertation. As the people currently filling senior leadership roles, you are uniquely positioned to make space for the next generation of leaders. As you engage them, you

¹⁵⁶ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential*, 195.

will naturally draw young leaders to you. This will benefit the church, the next generation, and it will build a legacy of your own leadership that will live on past your time in that position.

It is important to understand that this dissertation is not designed to simply tear down the work that has been done to lead the church over the last 2 millennia. It is to build upon that work to keep the church moving forward. We are also not saying that how the church has been led was wrong. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that, as society shifts, so too must the church. A seasoned analogy of this is the Choluteca bridge in Honduras. The bridge was well built. However, after a hurricane devastated the country, the river shifted. This left the bridge useless. There was nothing wrong with the bridge itself. The river had shifted. In the same way, there is nothing wrong with the church that has come before us. It is simply that culture has shifted. If the church does not shift as well, then it too will become useless.

At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, your work today will have a profound impact on the church of tomorrow. This work has not been about how to replace you. Rather, it is aimed at how to multiply you. Embrace this change as a way to ensure the next generation is filled with your wisdom.

APPENDIX 1: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Andrew Rutledge, BTh, MTS
Doctoral Candidate in Divinity
A Study of the Practice of Training Young Leaders

Recruitment Details

Email to Denominations Requesting Permission for Online Survey:

E-mail Subject line: McMaster University Study – The Practice of Training Young Leaders

“Good day [insert Director of Youth Ministry name],

I am contacting you today to request your permission to use [insert denomination name here]’s contacts across Canada in conducting research for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of Millennials and Generation Zs with leadership development in the Canadian church. A cursory look at age demographics among senior leadership reveals that there is a lack of engagement of youth and young adults at that level of leadership. As such, this research is aimed at finding common themes that can be used to enhance the church’s practice of developing young people into leaders.

My request is for you to send out the attached email to the young adults in your denomination requesting their participation in an online survey. This survey will gather their experiences in being trained for leadership within their churches. Their responses will be kept anonymous. As well, young adults will be given the opportunity to participate in virtual focus groups to further share their experiences. However, participation in the focus groups is not required to complete the survey.

I have also attached a copy of the Letter of Informed Consent that will be sent to all survey participants to give you greater insight into the nature of the project.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you any have concerns or questions about participant rights or about the way the study is being conducted, you can contact:

The McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
 Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
 c/o Research Office for Administration, Development and Support

(ROADS)

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration.”

Andrew Rutledge, BTh, MTS,
 Doctoral Student in Practical Theology
 Department of Divinity

McMaster University, Hamilton Ontario
 Tel: 905-525-9140
rutleda@mcmaster.ca

Email Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information
Andrew Rutledge, BTh, MTS
Doctorate Candidate in Divinity
Study Title:
A Study of the Practice of Training Young Leaders

Sample E-mail Subject line: McMaster study about young adult attitudes towards church leadership

Dear Young Adults,

Andrew Rutledge, a McMaster student, has contacted [Insert Denomination Name Here] asking us to tell our young adults about a study he is doing on leadership development in the church. This research is part of his Doctor of Practical Theology at McMaster Divinity College.

The following is a brief description of his study. Andrew is conducting a survey of young adults from across Canada and am inviting you to participate in this survey. The purpose of this research is to have you share your experiences with leadership development in your local church. This survey will be anonymous so you can share without fear of anyone knowing what you said. We will be using your experiences to help churches do a better job of preparing youth for leadership in the church.

He is inviting you to complete a brief 9-question online survey that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. As well, at the conclusion of the survey you will be invited to participate in a focus group where you can talk about your responses in greater detail. Participation in the focus groups is not required to complete the online survey. The risks in this study could include your reflections upon past negative experiences with church leadership.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in Andrew's study please click this link to the survey [insert link to Limewire Survey] and/or **CONTACT ANDREW DIRECTLY** by using his McMaster email address: rutleda@mcmaster.ca . The researcher will not tell me or anyone at [Insert Denomination Here] who participated or not. Taking part or not taking part in this study will not affect your participation in your local church and the denomination at large.

You can stop being in this study any time during the survey. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that gives you full details. This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you any have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, you can contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

[Insert Denomination Official Name Here]

[Insert Position Title Here]

[Insert Denomination Name Here]

APPENDIX 2: LETTERS OF INFORMED CONSENT

DATE: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT for Online Survey

A Study of the Church's Practice of Training Young Leaders

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Lee Beach, PhD
Department of Divinity
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23502
E-mail: beachl@mcmaster.ca

Student Investigator:

Andrew Rutledge
Department of Divinity
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 741-4706
E-mail: rutleda@mcmaster.ca

What am I trying to discover?

You are invited to take part in this study on the Canadian church and the practice of training young leaders. I want to hear from young leaders about your experiences with leadership training. I am hoping to learn how the church can do a better job of preparing young people for leading in their churches. I am doing this research for a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Practical Theology degree. This is a line of research that I hope to continue in the future and will use your data for this project as well as for future related studies, presentations, workshops, books, articles and the like.

What will happen during the study?

You will be asked to complete 10 questions. They will be related to your experiences being training for leadership in your local church. I will also ask you for demographic/background information like your age and gender.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: Are there any risks to doing this study?]

You should be aware that there are risks when taking part in this study. For example, as you reflect on your experiences with leadership development, this may stir unwanted emotions such as any negative emotions you may feel towards people who have been involved in leadership in your church. You may also worry about how others in your church may react to what you say.

If you begin to experience any sort of negative emotions, or you get worried that your answers may negatively impact your role at your church, know that you do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?]

While the research may not benefit you directly, I hope to learn more about the best practices for training young leaders. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand how to prepare you for leadership. This could benefit you through the improvement of your local church's leadership training.

Who will know what you said or did in the study?

You are participating in this survey research anonymously. No one including me will know that you participated unless you choose to tell them. I will not ask for your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell us.

Once the study is complete, an archive of the data, without identifying information, will be maintained for a period of one year to permit the analysis of the data. After one year the data will be destroyed.

Legally Required Disclosure:

If legal authorities request the information you have provided, I may be required to reveal it. However, the information will not have identifiable information contained in it.

What if I change my mind about being in the survey? Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the survey for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Once you have submitted your responses for this anonymous survey: your answers will be put into a database and will not be identifiable to you. This means that once you have submitted your survey, your responses cannot be withdrawn from the study because I will not be able to identify which responses are yours.

What will I do with your responses?

The responses will be primarily used in the dissertation. However, they may also be used in articles, public presentations, or other forms of publication. Regardless, your identity will never be disclosed. Any personally identifiable information will be removed from the results and deleted. At no time will your identity be revealed.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

A summary of the results will be presented within the dissertation. If you would like to receive the summary personally, please let me know how you would like me to send it to you.

Questions about the Study: If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

<i>Andrew Rutledge, rutleda@mcmaster.ca.</i>

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
 Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
 C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
 E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Andrew Rutledge of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the survey at any time or up until the end of the survey.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree to have my responses used for this project and for future related projects.

☐ yes ☐ no

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address _____

Or to this mailing address: _____

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

DATE: _____



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT for Focus Group Participants**A Study of the Church's Practice of Training Young Leaders****Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Lee Beach, PhD.
 Department of Divinity
 McMaster University
 Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
 (905) 525-9140 ext. 23502
 E-mail: beachl@mcmaster.ca

Student Investigator:

Andrew Rutledge
 Department of Divinity
 McMaster University
 Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
 (905) 741-4706
 E-mail: rutleda@mcmaster.ca

What am I trying to discover?

You are invited to take part in this study on the Canadian church and the practice of training young leaders. I want to hear from young leaders about their experiences with leadership training. I am hoping to learn how the church can do a better job of preparing young people for leading in their churches. I am doing this research for a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Practical Theology degree. This is a line of research that I hope to continue in the future and will use your data for this project as well as for future related studies, presentations, workshops, books, articles and the like.

What will happen during the study?

You will be asked to journal for a period of three months. In this journal you will write out your experiences with your church's leadership development system. You will be asked to record your observations about what sort of system exists, if and how you are recruited into that system, and the processes your church uses for then training you as a leader.

Following the journaling we will meet one on one and I will interview you. In that interview I will ask you questions related to your experience. These questions will explore your reaction to your church's leadership development. I will ask how you felt about your experience, what has been positive, and what has been negative.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: Are there any risks to doing this study?

You should be aware that there are risks when taking part in this study. For example, as you reflect on your experiences with leadership development, this may stir unwanted emotions such as any negative emotions you may feel towards people who have been involved in leadership in your church. You may also worry about how others in your church may react to what you say.

If you begin to experience any sort of negative emotions, or you get worried that your answers may negatively impact your role at your church, know that you do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

While the research may not benefit you directly, I hope to learn more about the best practices for training young leaders. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand how to prepare you for leadership. This could benefit you through the improvement of your local church's leadership training.

Who will know what you said or did in the study?

You are participating in this survey research anonymously. No one including me will know that you participated unless you choose to tell them. I will not ask for your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell us.

Once the study is complete, an archive of the data, without identifying information, will be maintained for a period of one year to permit the analysis of the data. After one year the data will be destroyed.

b) Legally Required Disclosure:

If legal authorities request the information you have provided, I may be required to reveal it. However, the information will not have identifiable information contained in it.

What if I change my mind about being in the survey? Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the survey for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Once you have submitted your responses for this anonymous survey: your answers will be put into a database and will not be identifiable to you. This means that once you have submitted your survey, your responses cannot be withdrawn from the study because I will not be able to identify which responses are yours.

What will I do with your responses?

The responses will be primarily used in the dissertation. However, they may also be used in articles, public presentations, or other forms of publication. Regardless, your identity will never be disclosed. Any personally identifiable information will be removed from the results and deleted. At no time will your identity be revealed.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect this study to be completed in April 2021. A summary of the results will be presented within the dissertation. If you would like to receive the summary personally, please let me know how you would like me to send it to you.

Questions about the Study: If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

<i>rutleda@mcmaster.ca</i>

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Andrew Rutledge of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately April of 2021.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the focus groups.
- I agree to maintain the confidentiality of all focus group participants. I will not share any information about the responses that are given to protect those who participate and to encourage the open sharing of experiences.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree to have my responses used for this project and for future related projects.

☐ yes

☐ no

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address _____

Or to this mailing address: _____

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

☐ Yes, please contact me at: _____

☐ No

DATE: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT for Case Study Participants

A Study of the Church's Practice of Training Young Leaders

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Lee Beach, PhD.
Department of Divinity
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23502
E-mail: beachl@mcmaster.ca

Student Investigator:

Andrew Rutledge
Department of Divinity
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 741-4706
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What am I trying to discover?

You are invited to take part in this study on the Canadian church and the practice of training young leaders. I want to hear from young leaders about their experiences with leadership training. I am hoping to learn how the church can do a better job of preparing young people for leading in their churches. I am doing this research for a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Practical Theology degree. This is a line of research that I hope to continue in the future and will use your data for this project as well as for future related studies, presentations, workshops, books, articles and the like.

What will happen during the study?

You will be asked to journal for a period of three months. In this journal you will write out your experiences with your church's leadership development system. You will be asked to record your observations about what sort of system exists, if and how you are recruited into that system, and the processes your church uses for then training you as a leader.

Following the journaling we will meet one on one and I will interview you. In that interview I will ask you questions related to your experience. These questions will explore your reaction to your church's leadership development. I will ask how you felt about your experience, what has been positive, and what has been negative.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: Are there any risks to doing this study?

You should be aware that there are risks when taking part in this study. For example, as you reflect on your experiences with leadership development, this may stir unwanted emotions such as any negative emotions you may feel towards people who have been involved in leadership in your church. You may also worry about how others in your church may react to what you say.

If you begin to experience any sort of negative emotions, or you get worried that your answers may negatively impact your role at your church, know that you do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

While the research may not benefit you directly, I hope to learn more about the best practices for training young leaders. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand how to prepare you for leadership. This could benefit you through the improvement of your local church's leadership training.

Who will know what you said or did in the study?

You are participating in this survey research anonymously. No one including me will know that you participated unless you choose to tell them. I will not ask for your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell us.

Once the study is complete, an archive of the data, without identifying information, will be maintained for a period of one year to permit the analysis of the data. After one year the data will be destroyed.

b) Legally Required Disclosure:

If legal authorities request the information you have provided, I may be required to reveal it. However, the information will not have identifiable information contained in it.

What if I change my mind about being in the survey? Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the survey for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Once you have submitted your responses for this anonymous survey: your answers will be put into a database and will not be identifiable to you. This means that once you have submitted your survey, your responses cannot be withdrawn from the study because I will not be able to identify which responses are yours.

What will I do with your responses?

The responses will be primarily used in the dissertation. However, they may also be used in articles, public presentations, or other forms of publication. Regardless, your identity will never be disclosed. Any personally identifiable information will be removed from the results and deleted. At no time will your identity be revealed.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect this study to be completed in April 2021. A summary of the results will be presented within the dissertation. If you would like to receive the summary personally, please let me know how you would like me to send it to you.

Questions about the Study: If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

<i>rutleda@mcmaster.ca</i>

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
 Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
 C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
 E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Andrew Rutledge of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately April of 2021.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the case study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree to have my responses used for this project and for future related projects.

☐ yes ☐ no

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address _____

Or to this mailing address: _____

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

☐ Yes, please contact me at: _____

☐ No

APPENDIX 3: ONLINE SURVEY PREAMBLE / SCREENING QUESTION / SURVEY QUESTIONS

Online Survey Preamble **To be Uploaded to LimeSurvey as the start of the Online Survey**

A Study of the Church's Practice of Training Young Leaders

This study is being conducted by Andrew Rutledge, Student Investigator, Department of Divinity, McMaster Divinity College, rutleda@mcmaster.ca, and Dr. Lee Beach, Principal Investigator, Department of Divinity, McMaster Divinity College, beachl@mcmaster.ca, (905) 525-9140 ext. 23502 .

The purpose of the study is to discover how the church can do a better job of preparing young people for leading in their churches. Information gathered during this study will be written up as a dissertation. People participating in this study must be between the ages of 18 and 30.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. To learn more about this study, particularly in terms of any risks or harms associated with the study, how confidentiality and anonymity will be handled, withdrawal procedures, how to obtain information about the study's results, how to find helpful resources should any questions or tasks make you uncomfortable or upset etc., please read the Letter of Information (link to be inserted once survey is set up).

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB 4862). If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, please contact: McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat Telephone 1-(905) 525-9140 ext. 23142 E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Consent Statements

☐ I agree to allow my study data to be stored and used for future research as described in the Letter of Information.

Having read the above preamble OR above preamble and the linked Letter of Information, I understand that by clicking the "Yes" button below, I agree to take part in this study.

YES I agree to participate in this study.

NO I do not agree to participate in this study.

Study Withdrawal

A Quit button and a Skip Remaining Questions button will be available on each page of the survey. If the participant chooses to click on the "Quit" button, the following statement will appear:

"Thank you. You have decided to quit this study. None of your responses have been collected or stored."

Post Study Actions

Following the survey, the following post study actions will be available:

- ☐ I agree to have the responses up to the point of quitting the study retained for use in the research.
- ☐ I agree to allow my study data to be stored and used for future research as described in the Letter of Information
- ☐ I would like a copy of the study results. Please send them here: (preferred contact)
- ☐ I agree to be contacted for a follow up focus group (preferred contact)

Survey Screening Questions

Andrew Rutledge, BTh, MTS

Doctoral Candidate in Divinity

A Study of the Practice of Training Young Leaders

Screening Question #1

Please identify your age range: ☐ 18-20 ☐ 21-23 ☐ 24-26 ☐ 27-30

Online Survey Questions

The Practice of Training Young Leaders

Andrew Rutledge, (Doctor of Practical Theology student)
(McMaster Divinity College – McMaster University)

Information for participants about these survey questions: This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your experience with leadership development in the church. You are not required to answer any of these questions.

1) Information about you: Your age now?

2) Are you involved in any type of leadership in your church? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, move to question #3. If no, move to question #6

3) Please explain how you are involved:

4) What kind of training or instruction did you receive in order to serve in this capacity?

5) Based on your experience in this position, what kind of training or instruction do you wish that you had been provided? In other words, what do you wish you knew before you started this position?

After #5, jump to #8

6) Are you interested in becoming a leader in your church? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please tell me more about why you think that?

7) Do you know if your church gives any training or instruction to younger leaders? If so, do you know what this involves?

8) Do you think there is anything preventing you from becoming a leader at your church? For those already serving, do you feel there is anything preventing you from moving up in leadership at your church?

☐ Yes If yes, please tell me more.

☐ No If no, please tell me more.

9) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience with leadership development?

END

APPENDIX 4: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Focus Group Guide

The Practice of Training Young Leaders

Andrew Rutledge, (Doctor of Practical Theology student)

(McMaster Divinity College – McMaster University)

Information about Focus Group Guide: The purpose of the Focus Groups is to validate the data collected in the Online Surveys. Therefore, the exact wording of these questions may slightly change to reflect the responses received. I will be walking the groups through the same questions as the Online Survey in order to gather more in-depth responses and to explore the responses collected.

1) Information about you: Your age now?

2) Are you involved in any type of leadership in your church? [☐] Yes [☐] No

If yes, move to question #3. If no, move to question #6

3) Please explain how you are involved:

4) What kind of training or instruction did you receive in order to serve in this capacity?

5) Based on your experience in this position, what kind of training or instruction do you wish that you had been provided? In other words, what do you wish you knew before you started this position?

After #5, jump to #8

6) Are you interested in becoming a leader in your church? [☐] Yes [☐] No

Please tell me more about why you think that?

7) Do you know if your church gives any training or instruction to younger leaders? Is so, do you know what this involves?

8) Do you think there is anything preventing you from becoming a leader at your church? For those already serving, do you feel there is anything preventing you from moving up in leadership at your church?

[☐] Yes If yes, please tell me more.

[☐] No If no, please tell me more.

9) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience with leadership development?

END

APPENDIX 5: CASE STUDY GUIDE

Case Study Guide

The Practice of Training Young Leaders

Andrew Rutledge, (Doctor of Practical Theology student)
(McMaster Divinity College – McMaster University)

Information about the Case Study Guide: The purpose of the Case Study is to gather personal reflections from young adults presently or previously attending Central Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario. Your journal entries will be responses to the following questions:

- 1) When you think of church leadership and church leaders in general, what do you see?**

- 2) How do you feel about the present state of church leadership?**

- 3) Are you serving, or have you served, in leadership at your church? What sort of leadership development have you received from your church?**

- 4) Do you feel that you have been well prepared to step into church leadership? Why or why not?**

- 5) What do you feel would make church leadership better?**

- 6) If you could request anything from the church to better engage you in church leadership, what would that be?**

END

APPENDIX 6: CASE STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The Practice of Training Young Leaders

Andrew Rutledge, (Doctor of Practical Theology student)

(McMaster Divinity College – McMaster University)

Information about these interview questions: This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your experience with leadership development in the church. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just “yes or no” answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: “*So, you are saying that ...?*”), to get more information (“*Please tell me more?*”), or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

1) Information about you: Your age now?

2) Are you involved in any type of leadership in your church? [☐] Yes [☐] No

If yes, move to question #3. If no, move to question #6

3) Please explain how you are involved:

4) What kind of training or instruction did you receive in order to serve in this capacity?

5) Based on your experience in this position, what kind of training or instruction do you wish that you had been provided? In other words, what do you wish you knew before you started this position?

After #5, jump to #8

6) Are you interested in becoming a leader in your church? [☐] Yes [☐] No

Please tell me more about why you think that?

7) Do you know if your church gives any training or instruction to younger leaders? Is so, do you know what this involves?

8) Do you think there is anything preventing you from becoming a leader at your church? For those already serving, do you feel there is anything preventing you from moving up in leadership at your church?

[☐] Yes If yes, please tell me more.

[☐] No If no, please tell me more.

9) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience with leadership development?

END

APPENDIX 7: MREB CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

**McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)**

c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

MREB Secretariat, GH-305

1280 Main St. W.

Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8

email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Today's Date: Nov/04/2020

Supervisor: Dr. Lee Beach

Student Investigator: Mr. Andrew Rutledge

Applicant: Andrew Rutledge

Project Title: Leadership Pipelines: Engaging Youth in Church Leadership

MREB#: 4862

Dear Researcher(s)

The ethics application and supporting documents for MREB# 4862 entitled "Leadership Pipelines: Engaging Youth in Church Leadership" have been reviewed and cleared by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants.

The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

If this project includes planned in-person contact with research participants, then procedures for addressing COVID-19 related risks must be addressed according to the current processes communicated by the Vice-President (Research) and your Associate Dean (Research). All necessary approvals must be secured before in-person contact with research participants can take place.

Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the Annual Report in advance of the yearly anniversary of the original ethics clearance date: Nov/04/2021. If the Annual

Report is not submitted, then ethics clearance will lapse on the expiry date and Research Finance will be notified that ethics clearance is no longer valid (TCPS, Art. 6.14).

An Amendment form must be submitted and cleared before any substantive alterations are made to the approved research protocol and documents (TCPS, Art. 6.16).

Researchers are required to report Adverse Events (i.e. an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible, and no more than 3 days after the event occurs (TCPS, Art. 6.15). A privacy breach affecting participant information should also be reported to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible. The Reportable Events form is used to document adverse events, privacy breaches, protocol deviations and participant complaints.

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Recruiting Materials	Recruitment-OnlineSurvey-Participants	Aug/12/2020	1
Interviews	MREB-InterviewQuestions	Aug/12/2020	1
Test Instruments	MREB-OnlineSurveyQuestions	Aug/12/2020	1
Interviews	MREB-FocusGroupGuide	Aug/13/2020	1
Interviews	MREB-CaseStudyGuide	Aug/14/2020	1
Recruiting Materials	Recruitment-OnlineSurvey-Denomination	Oct/20/2020	2
Letters of Support	CommunityCounsellingandSupportServices	Oct/21/2020	2
Consent Forms	CaseStudy-OralConsentLog	Oct/21/2020	1
Consent Forms	FocusGroups-OralConsentLog	Oct/21/2020	1
Consent Forms	InformedConsent-OnlineSurvey	Oct/23/2020	2
Recruiting Materials	Recruitment-FocusGroups-Participants	Oct/26/2020	2
Recruiting Materials	Recruitment-CaseStudy-Participants	Nov/02/2020	3
Recruiting Materials	MREB-ScreeningQuestion	Nov/03/2020	2
Consent Forms	InformedConsent-CaseStudy	Nov/03/2020	3
Consent Forms	InformedConsent-FocusGroups	Nov/03/2020	3

Consent Forms	Preamble-OnlineSurvey	Nov/03/2020 2
Response Documents	SummaryOfRevisions2-MREB4862	Nov/03/2020 2

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Page 1 of 2

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