

Southern Methodist University

SMU Scholar

Doctor of Ministry Projects and Theses

Perkins Thesis and Dissertations

Spring 5-14-2022

Taking A Strategic Approach To Care In The Local Church Using The Caring Church Model

Sharon Larkin

Southern Methodist University, sllarkin@smu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.smu.edu/theology_ministry_etds

Recommended Citation

Larkin, Sharon, "Taking A Strategic Approach To Care In The Local Church Using The Caring Church Model" (2022). *Doctor of Ministry Projects and Theses*. 14.

https://scholar.smu.edu/theology_ministry_etds/14

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Perkins Thesis and Dissertations at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects and Theses by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

TAKING A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CARE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH USING
THE CARING CHURCH MODEL

Doctoral Dissertation

Rev. Sharon L. Larkin

March 30, 2022

Advisor: Dr. Jeanne Moessner-Stephenson

Reader: Dr. James Lee

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Biblical Perspective of a Caring Church

Chapter 2: A Model of a Caring Church

Chapter 3: Caring Clergy

Chapter 4: Caring Disciples

Chapter 5: Caring Ministries

Chapter 6: Caring Culture

Conclusion

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Introduction

The local church does not have a “care strategy” when it comes to providing congregational or pastoral care for its members. When I took over as the pastor of congregational care in 2019, there was no real documentation of processes and procedures executed to care for the congregation. Pastors had rotated through the pastor of congregational care role, and each of them had managed ministries in their own way based upon their past experiences. Since there was no real documentation of standard operating procedures, it was necessary to create and re-implement a viable care plan.

Of the ministries that were underneath the organizational structure of congregational care; some of them were inactive; for example, the PALS ministry which was designed to connect new members with church pals. There was a ministry leader assigned to it, but that ministry leader was not participating, and there were no active church friends. Therefore, members were joining the church, but no one was helping them to assimilate into the church environment.

Another ministry that was inactive was the Care Ministry. A group of people working on care had originally created a detailed, convoluted plan and turned it over to the previous pastor of congregational care so that he could implement it. However, that pastor had been unsuccessful in implementing the plan because he had too many ministries to manage, and the only staff support that he had been given was a church secretary. With all the requirements and tasks necessary just to stay abreast of the daily operation, neither the pastor nor the church secretary had the time, resources, or people to implement the plan.

The Care Ministry later had been dispersed to other ministries and none of them had stayed to help with the execution of the care plan. When asked about the plan, they said that they had given it to the previous pastor, but he never did anything with it. One portion of the plan had

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

consisted of having callers to call “every” member of the church “every” week. It was a novel idea, but there were over 4000 members on the church database. That would have been a lot of work for even as many as 40 callers.

In the church environment, there was low involvement in ministry overall. There were a small percentage of the church members who were active in ministry, and the people in this pool basically rotated from one position to another. Logistically, there were not enough volunteers to make the calls. The plan had called for about 40 callers which equated to about 100 calls per week per person. Apparently, no one had done the math.

Another ministry had been created for the purpose of taking communion to the homebound saints, which consisted of about six to ten people who were still active from when the ministry started back in 2015. A previous pastor had developed a plan, but over time no follow-up had not been done. Captains of the team had become inactive. On the homebound list that had been passed on to me, there were names of people who no longer attended the church and people who had associated themselves with other churches. Also, there were a number of names of people who were not on the list at all, and they had not been visited for over a year. Of the names that have most recently been added, I (the new pastor of congregational care) have taken most of the visits along with the help of other servant leaders. This list does not include hospital visits or routine sick visits, which were solely left for the pastor of congregational care to do.

With the examples given above, it is obvious this local church needs a strategic approach in finding a care strategy that works within its specific context. For the past three years the church growth has been less than one percent. The church is maintaining its current size. However, without changes we may see the beginning of a church decline.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Churches are closing at an alarming rate of 6000 to 10,000 churches annually, which equates to 100 churches closing per week.¹ A study conducted by the PEW Research Center looked at the religious landscape of the United States where 168,890 Americans were interviewed and over 88 surveys were conducted from 2009 to 2019 across various affiliations of Protestantism and Catholicism.²

According to the PEW studies, attendance is dropping and the people who are attending churches are going less frequently. In almost every church setting there are people who believe that the church does not care about its congregants. In fact, one of the top five reasons that people attend church is for comfort in times of sorrow.³ The local church needs an effective and efficient strategy when it comes to caring for its congregation.

My thesis is: *In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.*

I. Methodology

The methodology that I will use in this dissertation is multi-faceted. The overall objective for the project is to build a care model as part of an overall strategy for the local church. The local church could be any local church in the United States, particularly focusing on the United Methodist Church whether the church is large or small. In other words, the plan what I have learned and experienced within my current context to build a strategy that can be utilized within other local churches using multiple surveys, methods, and tools.

¹ PEW Report, “*In the U.S. Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace*” (2019), page 9.

² PEW Report, page 3-4.

³ Thom S. Rainer, *Hopes for Dying Churches*, <https://factsandtrents.net/2018/01/16>.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The local church in which I am currently working is going through an initiative sponsored by the conference to improve the African American church. A detailed survey has been conducted evaluating several aspects of the church with one being “caring,” which focuses on the pastoral care aspect of the church. The responsibility to create programs to close the gaps that are identified by the results of this survey is within the purview of the pastor of congregational care (the care pastor). I will be utilizing the data and findings in that report as the framework to building an overall care strategy that will include a care model.

In addition to the survey, I have conducted a questionnaire to a targeted audience consisting of caregivers of the church. The purpose of this questionnaire was to get their ideas about what caring looks like in each of the sections of the model. I will utilize this information in the development of these caring areas of the model.

I also conducted a six-week class involving pastoral care where I utilized several tools such as books, case studies, spiritual gift tests, etc. This gave me additional information and data points that will help me to develop different components and/or categories of the care model as well. I was able to have conversations with the students, and I took copious notes on the feedback that I got from them concerning what a caring church should look like.

Assessments of the ministries to further identify both strengths and opportunities will be conducted. When I determine the processes and procedures, I will ensure that they are documented so that I can build a standard operation procedure manual for pastoral care as part of the overall care strategy. This will address and alleviate another major problem of incoming pastors having to constantly re-implement plans and having to start building the congregational care ministry with each reappointment. When there is so much pastor and lay member turnover, it is difficult to have consistency.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

I will be doing extensive research on other strategies and techniques. This will allow me to compare my care strategy with others. I will also be especially attentive to best practices, processes, and procedures. This dissertation will not only present a model of a caring church, but it will also be practical in that it will give some suggestions of programs that can be utilized in the different categories to achieve the most efficiency and effectiveness.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, I may not get to attend a care conference, so I will set up interviews with colleagues in the field of congregational care instead. I will ask them a series of questions to understand what their thoughts are about a caring church and get their suggestions on strategies that they have built within their local churches.

What skills will need to be utilized in this project? This will be a journey. I understand that this is not just an overnight project. For the next year, researching and writing will be the key to ensuring that the dissertation is written to address the issue presented.

The contribution to be made to the scholarly field is that I will be able to convince my readers that it is important to be more intentional about having a strategy when it comes to pastoral care. Pastoral care is being able to care for the congregation. There is a perception, which is either true or false, that the church does not care about the people. I have heard on numerous occasions that people believe that the church is more concerned about money than its congregation. This dissertation will give the local church an approach to building a strategy to eliminate dysfunctional programs within congregational care.

There are many strategies in our scholarly field of care, but this strategy includes a model of a caring church during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will help the local church to see what a caring church looks like even in a crisis as the church finds itself in the pandemic. It will have components, or categories, of care. As people read this dissertation, it is my goal to help

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

them to envision a model within their own local churches so that caring churches will become the new standard; and with each chapter I will be address the circumstances of the pandemic in the year 2020.

Imagine a local church that implements an intentional care model like the one that I will be building in this research. Congregants would begin to tell others about how much their church cared for them when they lost a loved one. Congregants would begin to share with their family, neighbors, and friends how when they were sick, the congregation and the pastors came to see them and prayed to God for their healing. Imagine that because of the prayers of the righteous, people were healed. The local church would begin to grow and become vital within the community. That is the impact that I would like for this dissertation to have on both our scholarly field, but the community and the world. The chapter outline of the dissertation will include:

Introduction

1. Biblical Perspective of a Caring Church
2. The Caring Church Model
3. The Caring Clergy
4. Caring Disciples
5. Caring Ministries
6. Caring Culture

Summary

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Chapter 1. The Biblical Perspective of a Caring Church

A. Building a Paradigm.

In creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation, it is important to build a paradigm within the minds of the creators of those who are building the strategy. A paradigm is having an image or picture of what pastoral care looks like.⁴ It is not just one, or even two pictures, but it may consist of many pictures or images depending on the model that is presented.

Within the field of care, there are three terms that are often used to describe care: pastoral care, congregational care, and caregiver. It is important to first understand that care looks different in each and every church. Within the context of the local church in which I am serving, the lead role is called Pastor of Congregational Care, which I simply call, “care pastor.” At one time in the history of this church, the role was called Pastor of Congregational Care and Outreach and Discipleship. What the role is called is depends upon what responsibility that the pastor has. Most churches cannot afford to have one pastor with the responsibility for just one area. Most pastors have responsibility over multiple areas, which in turn impacts the name of the position that a pastor is in.

In the history of my church setting, it was discovered that the pastor had so much responsibility that the area of care was suffering, so it has evolved to outreach, and discipleship being given over to other pastors within the organizational structure. I have other responsibilities,

⁴ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *A Primer in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press: 2005), p.37.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

but my main responsibility is congregational care which has significantly impacted the efficiency and effectiveness of congregational care as will be discussed in latter chapters.

The organizational chart looks different from local church to local church, which not only impacts the overall role of the minister, but it also impacts how particular tasks are managed and/or who is responsible for which task. For example, the prayer ministry at some churches falls under the Pastor of Congregational Care. In this local church, the prayer ministry falls under the Pastor of Discipleship. I will take the time to describe my role in this church setting and exactly what I am responsible for in later chapters. When building a strategy, it is important to understand the organizational structure of the local church for which the strategy is being built.

Pastoral care often refers to the work that is being performed by a licensed and/or ordained pastor, and the image that one gets from this is one of the shepherds.⁵ The other term that will be used is congregational care. Congregational care is simply caring for the congregation. However, it is different from pastoral care because it involves laity. Caring for the congregation is everybody's job not just that of the pastors. Dr. Marvin McMickle, in his book entitled, *Caring Pastors, Caring People* stated that

“Pastoral care is not limited to the work of the clergy. The same spirit of caring and compassion with which pastors go about their work is expected of the congregation. Pastoral care may begin with the caring pastor who interacts with individuals and families in church, but it must be extended to include the work of the laity.”⁶

⁵ Thang DEIH Suan, *Difference Between Pastoral Care and Counseling* (<https://www.academia.edu/30454822/>).

⁶ Marvin A. McMickle, *Caring Pastors, Caring People, Equipping Your Church for Pastoral Care* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishing, 2011, page 4.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The term “caregiver” is used to describe the one who is giving care to another.

Sometimes this term gets confused with a caregiver who cares for a sick loved one. Certainly, that person can be a pastor or laity, so I will be very specific whenever I use this term.

In terms of drawing a biblical perspective, it is important to understand what is happening in this work. The overall objective is to not only to explain the importance of creating a strategy, but also to present the strategy. The strategy will contain a model of “a caring church.” When we look at the decline in church attendance and church growth in the United States, we see that growth that churches overall churches are closing at an alarming rate of 6000-10,000 annually.⁷ Those are indicators that changes need to be made. In the local church where I am serving, the growth has been less than 1% for the past three years (based on church resources and reports). The attendance has declined as well. The average attendance three years ago was about 2000 per Sunday services (2). Our year-to-date average most recently is about 750 prior to the pandemic. Currently our online weekly attendance is averaging about 600.

It is important to be able to put strategies in place to counteract these negative factors in the church. One way to do this is to ensure that ministries are intentional about what it is that they are doing. We must be as intentional about caring for our congregations as God is intentional about caring for us. God is intentional, meaning that every action that God takes is performed with awareness; done deliberately, consciously, on purpose.⁸ In a church environment where there are no written processes and procedures in place, when there is not a consistent visitation plan for the sick and the homebound, and when ministry leaders are not active,

⁷ PEW study, page 9.

⁸ Christopher Rich, *Give, God Gave Intentionally, So We Plan* (Mercy Fellowship, 2012).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

and there are not enough servant leaders to operate programs, the caring of the congregation suffers. A perception develops that the church does not care. Not being intentional breeds not being in touch with the needs of the congregation. When people are hurting, and the church that they attend is not there to meet their needs, many will just stop attending or they may attend less frequently, as shown in the Pew Study. Over the last ten years, the share of Americans who say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month dropped by 7% and the percent who attend less or not at all rose by 7%.⁹ If people feel that there is nothing in it for them, or if there needs are not being met, they will not be motivated to attend, and may even leave the church altogether.

When we create a caring church, it may make the difference in whether the church is growing or not. People may be more excited about attending because of the care that they receive. When I first took over as Care Pastor, one of the tasks that I assigned to myself prior to the pandemic was attending all, or as many of, the local funerals as I could. Initially when someone died, the church would send a resolution. Sometimes the resolution got to them, and sometimes it did not. Most of the resolutions were sent to the funeral home. There were funerals that I would attend where the funeral home had no clue as to where the resolution was, even though our church secretary had faxed it to them in advance. The resolution was simply a document of encouragement and acknowledgement to say that we recognize the death of the loved one with the names of the family members of the church listed, a few encouraging words, and signature block of the senior pastor.

In attending funerals, I started bringing the resolution with me. In turn, I was asked to read the resolution on several occasions, or if someone else was reading I would ensure that the

⁹ Pew Study Research Center, page 6.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

person got our copy to read or at least acknowledge. As a result of this, our members began to talk about how someone from the church attended their loved one's funeral. The Senior Pastor started getting positive feedback from these families, and I started getting so many cards that I had to put them in a book. I have hundreds of cards from families who appreciated the church's support. This was just one of the many ways to say, "We care."

In the Covid-19 pandemic, I had to shift significantly. First, the church is closed, and has been for over four months and counting. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention completely changed the guidelines for funerals. Funerals began to limit the number of attendees to about 10 people, which included the pastor. I had to stop going to funerals so as not to impose upon the family's limit. In addition to that, even after the guidelines were changed to 50 or more, I have still limited going to funerals because of crowds. I had to change my process to attending funerals only when I was requested by the family (which usually meant that I was asked to participate in the funeral service).

So, what adjustments have been made? Upon learning about the death of a member or a member's loved one, I try to contact the family member within 48 hours after I am notified. When I speak to them, I let them know that I am calling on behalf of our senior pastor and the church to give them our condolences. I then pray with them (if they are available for prayer at that time). I close the conversation by saying: "If there is anything that we can do to support you in this difficult time, please do not hesitate to ask." I then give them my church secretary's contact information.

If I do not reach them, I leave a message, and I send an e-card if I have their email. People tend to respond to the e-card faster than a phone call. We will offer to send them a

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

resolution, which we now send directly to a family member rather than the funeral home. I also have a servant leader, who follows up with an encouragement card within a month.

We are having to look at no longer sending out actual cards because the CDC guidelines calls for churches to limit paper items being passed on from one person to the other. I did not realize that this was something that we should re-evaluate until a member mentioned to me that he was hesitant to open mail due to the virus.

We also support the family by sending food, but we must ensure that it is professionally catered rather than having the ministry to come in and prepare the food, which would put both them and the church at risk. This is just one of the many changes that have been made due to the pandemic.

Of the resources that I have read, it is difficult to prove how much care (or the lack thereof, has contributed to church closures or the decline in attendance. However, our senior pastor told us the story of a woman who was handing out paraphernalia in front of a local church. The church was having an event as well, and the staff tried to get her to join them. She stated, “No, I would rather not join you! You see, I care about people.” She alluded to the fact that the church does not really care about people.

In a time when we worry about putting “butts in the seats,” and we constantly talk about the budget, people began to believe that the church does not care about the people. That perception is certainly one to concern us. So, I believe that caring for the congregation is one area that can impact the future of the church. In a presentation that I made in a leadership summit for our church, I put the symbol of a heart beating on a monitor, and as I explained to them: “I believe that congregational care is the heartbeat of the church.” It is not that it is the most important ministry, but the way that congregational care is done indicates the amount of

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

love that the church has for its congregation and those within the community. If love does not drive what the church does, it will be felt. At some point, the church will die.

B. The Paradigm of the Caring Church

There are many images in the bible that will help us to develop a paradigm of what care looks like. When we consider the paradigm of a “caring church,” the first place to look at is the early church in the book of Acts. How could the early church give a biblical reflection of care?

In Acts 1, Jesus is about to return to heaven to be with his father. He has walked the earth and performed miracles for 40 days after he was resurrected from the dead. He gave his apostles many instructions prior to his leaving. While they were eating together, Jesus told them not to leave Jerusalem and to wait for what the Father had promised.¹⁰ He reminded them that John had baptized them with water, but that in a few days, they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.¹¹

Jesus was preparing the church to do ministry, but he knew that they could not do what they needed to do without power of the Holy Spirit, so that is why he told them to stay in Jerusalem. In other words, they were not ready! They did not have everything that they needed to perform. It is important that in our ministry work today, we should listen to the voice of God. We should pray and ask God for instructions; and unless we hear from God then we should not move forward with our plans. If the apostles had gone out without this power that God had promised them, they would have gotten slaughtered and defeated before the word could fully take root in the hearts of the people. In verse 9, after Jesus said these things, he was taken away. He was lifted up into a cloud which took him out of sight right before their eyes.

¹⁰ Act 1:4; (CEB)

¹¹ Acts 1:5 (CEB)

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The Jews had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost, which meant the “fiftieth day” after the Passover, which was a harvest celebration associated with covenant renewal.¹² They were all in one place. It was believed that the one place may have been in the temple courts due to the size of the crowd. A rushing wind came in, and individual flames of fire settled upon each person who were present. Suddenly, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak their native language.¹³ They were able to communicate in a way that normal, uneducated Galileans had not been able to do. God was preparing them to go back to their own areas and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to people that they may not have been able to communicate with before. They needed to be able to tell people about what had happened to them on this special day. They needed to be able to explain exactly how they had received this inexplicable power that would allow them to do intentional ministry like they had never done before.

People who did not understand thought the apostles had been drinking, but Peter was able to convince the people that that it was too early in the morning for drinking, and he began to tell them about the gospel story of Jesus Christ. He started out by letting them know that this fulfillment was of the prophecy of Joel.¹⁴ Then he shared with them the story of Jesus, and how Jesus had been the Son of God. Peter was able to explain to them how Jesus walked the earth and did miracles for all of the people. He told them how Jesus had been betrayed according to God’s plan, and how that crowd had been responsible for his death. He explained how they nailed Jesus to the cross. Peter told them that Jesus had risen, and how Jesus had been exalted to the Father. He testified that this indeed was the Savior sent by God, but the people had crucified him.

¹²Wesley Study Bible, www.CommonEnglishBible.com, (Nashville, TN., 2012) p. 1371.

¹³ Acts 2:1-5.

¹⁴ Joel 2:28-32.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

After Peter preached to the people, they began to feel sorry for what they had done. They were saddened that they had not received Jesus and honored him as the Son of God. So, they said, “What must we do?” And Peter answered them, “Change your hearts and your lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin.¹⁵ About 3000 people were baptized on that day and became followers of Jesus Christ. On that day the early church was born.

These people now had something in common with one another. They had something that had happened to them that they could share with others. What had happened to them on that day had brought them together in one place. It is understandable how they had so much love for one another. They began to care for one another. God began to perform many wonders and signs through the apostles.¹⁶ This was clearly an indication that God was with them. They had received God’s power, and God had manifested God’s self to them in a powerful way.

The unique thing about the early church is its members and their demonstration of care for one another. They became a “community of believers,” who began to operate like family members. Many of the people had traveled from other regions of the country. Naturally, they had to stay with other believers within that region. They had to eat and have other provisions, and this community of people began to provide for one another. “This is definitely the image of a “caring church. The bible said that there was sharing among the believers.

³² The community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say, “This is mine!” about any of their possessions but held everything in common. ³³ The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. Those who owned properties or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds from the sales, ³⁵ and place them in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Then it was distributed to anyone who was in need. ³⁶ Joseph, whom the apostles nicknamed Barnabas

¹⁵ Acts 2:14.

¹⁶ Acts 2:43.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

(that is, “one who encourages”), was a Levite from Cyprus.³⁷ He owned a field, sold it, brought the money, and placed it in the care and under the authority of the apostles.¹⁷

It is important, as we create a biblical image of the caring church to explore what other authors have said in regard to a “caring church” to see how it compares with the biblical image that I have chosen. Karen Lamp states “that good congregational care offers redemption – restoration-as we partner with God to heal others.”¹⁸ When Peter began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, it was a message of redemption. Redemption is a healing of relationship, and the relationship that was healed was the relationship between God and humankind. When Jesus died for us on the cross, he redeemed us back to our holy God. Our relationship with God that had been broken in the Garden of Eden and was restored on the cross of Calvary. We cannot begin to bring restoration to the congregation or those within the community unless we share the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we began to think about congregational care in this way, restoration becomes the cornerstone and aim for everything else we do in ministry.

When did the restoration happen in the early church? It happened when the people repented of their sins. Repentance means not just feeling sorry for what we have done, but orienting our lives toward God’s purpose.¹⁹ That is why Peter told them that they needed to change their hearts and their lives in Acts 2:38. The way to do that is through baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, as it says in Acts 2:38. In summary, our biblical image of a “caring church” has given us a characteristic of a “caring church.” A caring church is redemptive and restorative, and that is the cornerstone of our ministry.

¹⁷ Acts 4:32-37.

¹⁸ Karen Lamp, *The Caring Congregation* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2011), xiii.

¹⁹ William J. Abraham and David F. Watson, *Key United Methodist Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2013), 75.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

As we explore, the biblical paradigm of the early church in terms of being the image of a caring church, it is important to have a strategy. Marvin McMickle explained in his book, “Caring Pastors, Caring People,” that it is important to have a strategy of care because of the decline in church growth and the issues of the diminishing influence of pastors in the postmodern world.²⁰

McMickle explains that his strategy consists of three concentric circles of care: pastors, the congregation, and the community. According to his strategy, pastors equip the congregation, the congregation care for one another, and the congregation cares for the community.²¹

Reviewing the story of the early church, we can see a strategy. Jesus clearly communicated a strategy when he told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. When they received the Holy Spirit, the apostles began to teach the people, and the people began to care for one another. The interesting thing about the early church is that because of their strategy as initiated by Jesus Christ, the church experienced growth. Acts 2:47 says “They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The LORD added daily to the community of those who were saved.” It is important to note that love for one another lead to caring, and it was caring that lead to growth. However, the key here is that it was not creative preaching that caused the church to grow. It was not a marketing strategy that got the word on the streets that this church was a great place to come. It was not the music ministry that drew the crowd, but it was the LORD. It was God himself who grew the church. Pastors can certainly influence growth, but ultimately growth is up to God.

²⁰Marvin A. McMickle, *Caring Pastors, Caring People, Equipping Your Church for Pastoral Care* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishing, 2011), 3.

²¹ McMickle, 3-6.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

So many times, as we struggle with getting our churches to grow. We attend seminars and conferences to learn how to grow our churches. We read books and take classes to get strategies. We come up with all kinds of creative ways to get people into the doors. Preachers preach their hearts out and offer all of these props to get members when it simply takes a caring church strategy that connects to the very purpose of God to experience growth. When we think in terms of growth, we think how many “butts are in the pews” (a very common term used in talking about church membership), which we expect will ultimately drive revenue, but that is not always God’s idea of growth. Some churches may not experience growth in large numbers. The local church may be in the same predicament as the local church where I serve, which has seen only 1% percent of growth over the last three years. The good news is that we are maintaining our current membership, but sometimes God’s idea of growth is not how many members the church has on its books. It is important to analyze how many people are truly engaged in caring for one another and caring for the community. The 1% growth is a concern, but I believe what bothers God the most is that out of 4022 people only about 250 are involved in ministry, which is around 6.2% of the total membership.

Let us look at another strategy that Jesus communicated before he left the earth to be with his father according to Matthew. The Great Commission states that “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

the age.”²² Our strategy was to make disciples, which certainly began on the day of Pentecost in the birth of the early church.

What are disciples? Disciples are followers of Jesus and his teachings. However, disciples do more than just follow Jesus. Disciples take the teaching of Jesus to heart. Disciples are “doers of the Word of God.” Disciples mirror Jesus in their lives. In a disciple’s life, one can see Jesus in the way we treat one another. One can see Jesus in the decisions that disciples make in our daily lives.

If we are intentional about the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, and if we began to love and care for people within our congregation and in our communities, we will put an effective and efficient strategy in place to accomplish our mission. God will add to us as God sees necessary. Our new Senior Pastor was doing an interview so that the church could get to know him. One of the questions that he answered was, “What is your idea of a caring church?” He stated, “If you truly believe in Jesus Christ, to be caring comes naturally. There is no way that you can believe and not love your fellow congregants as well as those within the community. And so, as followers of Jesus, we have a moral obligation to serve each other as well as those who surround us.”²³

Over the next few chapters, I will introduce a model of a caring church and break down each component. I will also share some practical ways to approach each area within that caring church model. However, it is important to get a biblical perspective of what a caring church looks like first. Establishing a paradigm of what a caring church looks like will give some

²² Matthew 28:16-20.

²³ Senior Pastor of St. Luke “Community UMC, quote (July,2019).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

direction for the path that will be taken in explaining each component that makes up the caring church.

C. The Impact of the Pandemic on the Paradigm.

What is the impact of this Covid-19 pandemic on the paradigm of a caring church? I remember when our bishop closed all the churches in our conference, and everyone went into social distancing. In other words, people were ordered to stay home and only go out for necessities. Businesses were shut down as well as churches because the scientist and doctors believed that in order to prevent the virus from spreading, it was important to keep at least 6 feet of distance between each person. Later, it was discovered that the virus was airborne, and it was necessary to wear facemask.

Hospitals and nursing homes would not let anyone visit with patients, not even family or pastors. Family members would go to the windows to check on their loved ones when it was possible to do so, but they had to make sure that they were taking care of themselves as well.

As a care ministry, we could not visit the sick or be at their bedside for any reason. I remember receiving the announcement that the church would be closed. I burst into tears. I had been a pastor of congregational care for almost a year. Since my appointment, I had worked hard to put processes and procedures in place to care for the congregation. I had worked with the people in the congregational care ministry, and we had worked out visitation schedules; and how we would do communion every month. I handled the hospital visits. I had gotten a routine down in handling funerals. I had learned how to use my budget, and I even had a strategy to make up for the servant leaders who we did not have on the organizational chart.

Honestly, for the first time, right before the pandemic hit, I felt like I had finally gotten a grip on what I was supposed to be doing as a care pastor. I had finally gotten comfortable in

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

how I was working with the caretakers who had gotten comfortable working with me. Then suddenly, things shifted, the church was closed, and I went from knowing how to care to not having a clue as to what to do next. I will never forget praying and crying to God in frustration, when suddenly, I heard the Holy Spirit say: “It’s okay! You just got to learn how to care in these times!”

At that very moment, I realized that I had to build an effective and efficient strategy to be able to operate within the limitations of our current situation. As a matter of fact, the entire church had to shift. We all had to build a strategy that would be effective and efficient in these times of dis-ease and disease. We had to produce an overall strategy to continue to get the gospel out to the world. We had to produce a strategy care for congregants as they were social distanced away in their homes and their apartments. We took the gifts of technology and built a strategy.

First of all, as a church, we made sure to get with our media team to ensure that we would get Sunday worship celebrations out to the people every week. We have not missed a Sunday. We were already on Facebook Live and Livestream, and we were putting our services on YouTube after we had recorded. We simply perfected what we had. Rather than having two services, we decided to pre-record one service; and put it on the air at 9:30 am. We pre-recorded on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Every week we worked on perfecting our transitions between the prayer and the offering. We learned how to do virtual choirs. We worked with a praise team who cautiously distanced themselves from one another. We made sure to get the word out to everyone on how to find us (for those who had never streamed with us before). We used our newsletter and e-blast on constant contact.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

I had created an email called “wecare@***umc.org to receive information for people requesting care or support. This became our means of inviting people to join the church, and I created a slide of Christian invitation to let our viewers know what to do. Every Sunday after our 9:30 am service, I would go to the email and wait to interact with people who wanted to join and even those who simply wanted to pray with someone. For congregational care, since we could no longer visit our homebound saints and those in the hospitals and/or nursing homes, I created a procedure along with a tracking form and communicated this new policy through Zoom teleconferencing.

Zoom teleconferencing became our primary means of doing our meetings with one another for Sunday school, bible studies, ministry meetings, our conferences, and all of our group forums. Even when our new senior pastor arrived, we set up zoom meetings where members could register and meet him personally. I even had my first memorial service on Zoom. Even our children and our youth used Zoom, and they had their Vacation Bible School and their youth banquet utilizing this important piece of technology.

We continue to worship God through means of technology. We visit the sick through weekly and monthly phone calls. We send out electronic cards, email messages, and text messages. We send out links through constant contact. We continue to raise revenue. The bottom line is that people still know that we care. We have used the means of technology to continue to touch the people intentionally and strategically because we are a caring church even in a pandemic.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Chapter 2: A Model of a Caring Church

A. Introduction.

Being intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation begins with a model of a caring church. That model is the very framework that will give birth to an overall strategy. That strategy will provide effective and efficient care to the congregation. The model is called, “The Caring Church Model.”

When I first began to visualize a model, I envisioned an empty, new church. The church within my imagination still had the smell of fresh paint and new wood. There was no furniture, no pulpit, pews, or chairs. There was nothing but the beams of the sunlight coming in through the newly cut stained glass of the windows sending out a prism of beautiful colors in empty spaces. The church building was clean and ready to move into. However, I realize that this vision was distorted as it relates to a caring church. The church is not in a building. The church consists of the people in the building.

In the early church it was not about a building. People started out meeting in the upper room of someone’s home. The upper room, or upper chamber as it was referred to, was nothing more than an upstairs room in someone’s home.²⁴ The church were the people who were joined together based upon their belief in Jesus Christ. They came together, and they grew to love and care for one another. The space that they assembled in had no real significance in the story.

If we truly understand the church today, it should be understood that the building has no real significance. However, the visual that I first got is how most people see the church. We see the church as a place rather than a group of people. The church is in us rather than in a building. That is why in this pandemic when many churches were closed in April 2020, we were still able

²⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan Publishing House: 1974), p. 876.

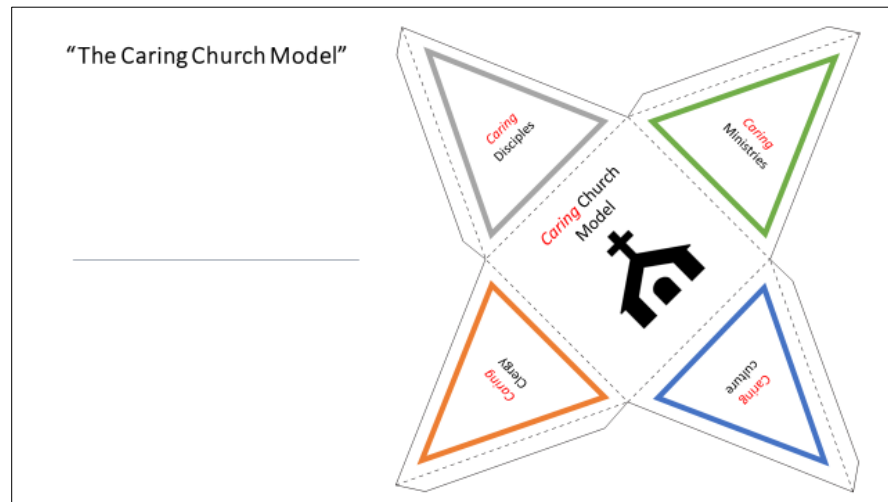
Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

to continue through the means of technology. Just because the building was closed did not mean that the people did not need to be cared for. The gospel of Jesus Christ was still being extended because the church is in the people and not the people in the church.

Our church has been closed, but we have had worship services every single Sunday through Livestream, Facebook, and YouTube. Rather than getting up and getting ready to leave the house for church, people are merely turning on their devices (cell phones, computers, or tablets), and they are connecting to the body of Christ that way.

So, as we discuss the model of the caring church, the model itself is based upon people and their individual and collective roles. In this chapter, I will introduce the model and break it down into the individual caring components.

B. The Caring Church Model



Above is a picture of the caring church model. The diagram is Microsoft office template called, "Pyramid Speech Pillars."²⁵ It looks like a star with the foundation of the caring church in the middle of the diagram. Each arm or point of the star represents a different caring component.

²⁵ <https://templatesoffice.com/en-US/Pyramid-Speech-Pillars> - TM16401954.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The caring components are caring clergy, caring disciples, caring culture, and caring ministries.

People make up each of these components. In the very center is the structure of the church. It is the foundation of the church. The center is what gives the church its structure. It is the foundation of the church. It is the stable core of the church. If arms of the church are folding upward in the diagram, the church comes together right before our eyes. However, there must be some glue in between the arms of the church. In the model of this caring church the glue is love, spiritual disciplines, and sacraments.

What does love have to do with the church? The church is built upon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was motivated to do what he did for us by the love that he had for us. That love began with God who loved us so much that he gave his only begotten Son; that whosoever believe in him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.²⁶ God, the father (or the mother), loved us and, in turn, the Son whom God gave us loves us as well. The Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of God, loves us also. Love was the motivation that made salvation happen. With that being said, love has to be the main motivator in a caring church as well. How can we come from a loving God, and not demonstrate that love toward ourselves and one another?

If we are a caring church, we are a loving church. What does love to look like in the church? A caring church whose people have love for one another will be guided by three simple rules as given to us by our founder of Methodism, John Wesley. John Wesley said that our lives should be guided by three simple rules: do good; do no harm; and stay in love with God.²⁷

To do good means that the church means well toward everyone in and around the church. The church has love for its people. The church wants to see people whole and doing well in their

²⁶ John 3:16.

²⁷ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 1976), p. 10.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

lives. If the church does not see people who are whole and who are doing well in their lives; it launches them into action. The church will want to help.

The church cannot meet every need for everybody. We are not all things to all people. To know what to act upon, it is important to be in tune with what is happening in and around the church. Because this is specifically about congregational care, we will stay focused in that area. The church must be alert and sensitive to the needs of its congregation. All congregations are unique. In our local church, we did a survey of the congregation to see what the needs of the church were. One of the needs of the church was to have mental wellness. Through the congregational responses, it was identified that families are in crisis because of mental illness. Therefore, the mental health ministry was created to meet that need. Through the mental health ministry, families and individuals can be a part of a group session that meets and discuss different topics at least once per month. Our church sponsors a mental health symposium consisting of different speakers addressing many different topics annually. The mental health ministry also provides a resource list with several options for counseling on many different things that people may need counseling on.

Another need that has been identified in the church that drove a specific action was the need for individual pastoral grief counseling. At the time, we had a group session for counseling grief which happened every 90 days; but we did not have specific counseling for individuals in between the 90 days, so I created individual pastoral grief counseling. I built a partnership with a local counseling center in our city, and that counseling center provided training to all the pastors who may be asked to conduct training. In addition to that, I created a four-session process of pastoral counseling.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The board of trustees developed a waiver for the counseling that would protect the church and the pastors from liability. Once this document is signed, we schedule four sessions including the following: what is grief, how to go through grief in a healthy matter, what is unhealthy grief, and how to deal with grief. Once a person goes through the four sessions, it is recommended that they get more in-depth counseling. At the point, we simply refer them to the counseling center which has the resources to be able to deal with grief through a more therapeutic process.

Programs were developed because the church did a survey to find out the needs of the people. A caring church will find out that the needs of the people are and build action plans to address the needs.

Another part of the love glue is to do no harm. Caring churches cause no harm. A church can cause harm to its people when there are no healthy boundaries. If there are no policies and procedures in place to protect people, then the church is not caring. For example, a church ensures that everyone and their opinions matter in meetings. The church needs ground rules of conduct and integrity. One of the books that gives us guidelines to go by in the Methodist Church is the *Book of Discipline*. The *Book of Discipline* was created to set healthy boundaries by explaining how we are to conduct ourselves when we are together. It keeps us from harming one another.

One of the programs that is very familiar in the local church is Ministry Safe. In the past, one of the leading causes of lawsuits in the church was sexual misconduct. Ministry Safe ensures that every person who is going to be working with children and/or teenagers understand boundaries. Ministry Safe ensures that leaders understand how to protect children and teens from sexual abuse.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Every church should have church bylaws. Every church should have financial procedures. Every church should have a standard way to deal with conflict. All these programs protect people from being harmed. The local church should be intentional about creating an environment where everyone matters. It should be a safe place to voice ideas. Some people believe that to agree on everything is a way to keep harmony but agreeing with everyone and everything can cripple the efforts of a church because creativity is limited. The local church should welcome diversity in thought and opinion for the overall health of the church.

Conflict in the church is inevitable. There is no way to avoid having conflict. As a matter of fact, we should not want to avoid conflict. Conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict can be the vehicle for real change.²⁸ However when a conflict arises, we should have procedures in place that will help to resolve the conflict without it tearing up the church because one party had a difference in opinion with another party. Every church should have conflict resolutions steps to follow to ensure that no one is harmed.

Church people need to know how to talk to one another. Yelling, name calling, and bullying is certainly unacceptable. The church should have procedures in place to ensure that this does not happen, and they need to have a team to enforce the procedures. A lot of people have been harmed by the church; and these people go on to become “done with the church.” A caring church will ensure that measures are in place to prevent harm in these ways.

The final piece regarding love is to stay in love with God. When we stay in love with God, we are in love with one another. One cannot love God and not love each other. When one loves God; that person wants to please God. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey me!”²⁹ Jesus also emphasizes loving one another by saying that whoever says that they love God, but

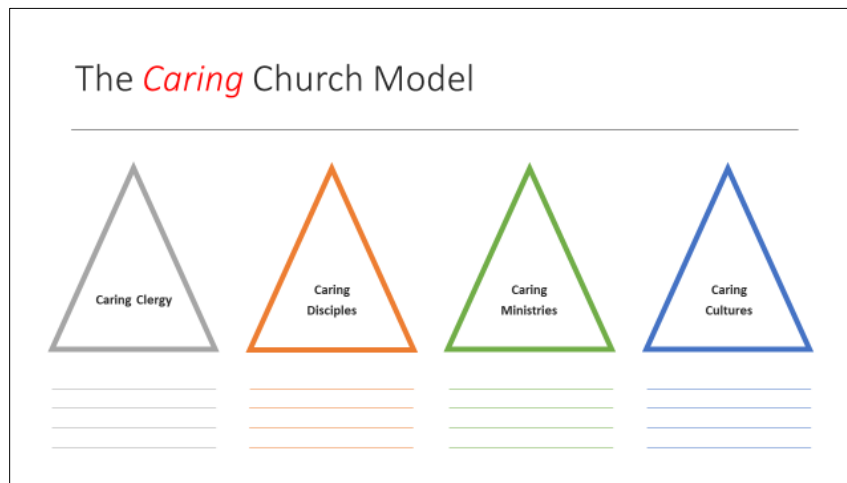
²⁸ John Paul Lederach, *Conflict Transformation* (New York, NY: Good Books: 2003), p. 4.

²⁹ John 14:15.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

hates a brother or sister is a liar.³⁰ So Jesus has clearly connected loving God with loving one another. It is hard to do one without doing the other.

C. Description of the Arms of the Caring Church Model



There are four arms (or components) to the Caring Church Model: caring clergy, caring disciples, caring ministries, and caring cultures. Caring clergy, caring disciples, and caring ministries all make up caring cultures. Each of arms is preceded by the word “caring.” Caring comes from the root word, “care.” According to Webster dictionary, care means, “a troubled or distressed state of mind; to worry. Therefore, caring means “to be concerned or interested in.”³¹

Does the church care about the congregation? Is the church interested in what is going on in the lives of the people who make up the congregation? If the church is a caring church, there should be some responses or actions toward the congregation to indicate that. Those actions must be strategic, and they must be intentional in order to have an overall impact over the congregation. There must be some research done to determine what the needs are. Once the

³⁰ 1 John 4:20

³¹ “*Webster II New Riverside University Dictionary*” (Boston, MA, The Riverside Publishing Company, 1984), p. 230.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

research is done, there must be a decision on whether to respond or not to respond. Once the church agrees to respond, there must be an action plan put into place.

At the same time, the church must understand its limitations. One church cannot be all things to all people. The church must be in tune with its capacity and capability to meet the needs that are discovered. Capacity and capability are based upon the church resources and the abilities, gifts, and talents of the people who make up the church. All of this is a part of understanding the church overall. It is also important to know what that church has been called to do by God. Capacity and capability should always align with the calling. God will equip us to do the work that God is calling us to do.³²

What kind of research needs to be done? First, the church needs to understand the community in which the church is located. The first reason is because God strategically put the church in that location to impact what is going on in that community. That church was placed in that community to respond to the needs of the community. The focus of this dissertation is to address the specific needs of the congregation, but if a church is located in a particular community, it is an assumption that a number of the congregation will come from that community.

However, there may also be those who commute to that church from other communities. Yet, because that church is located within that community, even if people commute in, they may be affected by its surroundings.

Hypothetically, a church is located in a particular poor community. The church does not do anything to meet the needs of the people within that community. As a result of it being a poor community with no support and no opportunities, the poor become desperate for food and other

³² Exodus 4:10-11.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

necessities. A neighbor who lives next door to the church sees an expensive sports car from the suburbs come to the church. While that person is in church, that neighbor breaks into the car and steals its contents. The owner of the car has then been affected by the community even though the owner lives in another location. Perhaps the church could set up a feeding program so that this neighbor could have received some legitimate help and would not have felt compelled to act out of desperation. This is a hypothetical illustration, but it just shows how even those who are not immediately in the neighborhood can be affected by its surroundings.

As it relates to the congregation, one way to determine needs is simply to ask. The local church in which I serve did an extensive survey that was professionally created to find out who was attending the church, what their needs were, and what they thought the church should be doing about the needs in both the church and the community. That survey revealed many things about the people in the church. Specific issues were identified about the church, and the church was able to set up programs based on the specific issues. One cannot begin to address the needs of the church, if the needs of the church and the people in it are not known. **So, the key idea is to get to know the demographics of the church and its people and then become proactive.**

If a church does not know the community or the congregation, the effects can be devastating. Our United Methodist Church was predominantly African American. It had been in that area for over 85 years. When it was first opened, the people within that community were all white. When African Americans started moving into that area, the white people sold the church to African Americans and moved to the suburbs. Now in the year 2020, the community that was once African American is now 80% Hispanic. In order for Blaine to be able to reach out within its community, they must be able to understand Spanish so that they can communicate with the people around them. However, the church itself is still 95% African American. Members

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

commute in from other areas within the city. Our local church is finding that it is no longer relevant for the community in which it is located. This is why a lot of churches, when they began to see a decline in their growth, find it necessary to move to a different location that will give them more access to the people who represent the makeup of that particular church. Marvin McMickle in his book, refers to this type of church as “introverted.”³³ McMickle cited James Harris of Virginia Union University who stated that “introverted churches are those whose congregations are focused on worship life inside of the church, and they become unconcerned about the work that should be taking place in the community that surrounds their church building.”³⁴ According to James Harris as McMickle cites:

“Something great is at stake when introverted churches remain detached from the communities outside its doors. The reign of God is inhibited when the church hides its light under a basket by remaining focused only on activities within its walls. The church must be engaged within its community.”

To follow Christ, the church has an expectation of reaching out to the community and to the world. That is just one of the areas that a caring, intentional church has to take into consideration in order to be effective and efficient as it strategizes a care plan.

D. The Glue, “Spiritual Discipline”

The proposal for a strategy of care begins with a model. The model is the Caring Church Model, which addresses the needs of the congregation in the local church. The arms of the strategy are caring clergy, caring disciples, caring ministries, and caring culture. Those arms cannot work alone, and they cannot work in silos. In order to have a caring church they must work together. Those arms must come together of one accord in one system to meet the needs of the congregation.

³³ McMickle, *Caring Pastors, Caring People*, p. 134.

³⁴ McMickle, “James Harris of Virginia Union University,” p. 154.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

However, just because they come together do not mean that they stay together. There has to be something that holds them together which is called “the glue.” Love is just one part of the glue that holds the arms together.

Other substances in that glue are spiritual disciplines. “Spiritual disciplines are those practices that nourish the individual and communal faith.”³⁵ In other words, they are the acts or the actions that Christians do that build a closer relationship with God. It is important that the church of God has a strong relationship or bond with God. If the relationship with God is strong, then the care for God’s people will be driven by the heart of God and not by human effort. God has a heart for God’s people. God has a certain strategy that needs to be put in place to care for one another in the local church. God was very strategic in caring for the Israelites. After they were liberated from Pharaoh, and they were in the wilderness those 40 years, God had a plan in how he provided food and water for them. Moses was given specific instructions which could be called “a strategy of care in the wilderness” to execute in order to take care of the people.³⁶

In the book, “Answering the Call” of the United Methodist Church, there is a chapter that is specifically designated to discuss spiritual disciplines.

John Wesley described spiritual disciplines as “means of grace” which opens oneself to God’s presence and guidance. Wesley’s belief was that God accompanies us in our daily lives, and to engage in spiritual disciplines allows the means to keep close to God and live as Jesus lived.³⁷

There are two types of spiritual disciplines: acts of piety and acts of mercy.³⁸ Acts of piety are those disciplines that focus on inner faith. They are those acts that bring individuals closer to God. Acts of mercy focuses on the outer faith. Acts of mercy are those actions that we

³⁵ *Answering the Call* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Education, 2016), p. 47.

³⁶ Exodus 16

³⁷ *Answering the Call* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Education and Ministry, 2016), p. 48.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

take to care for others. Examples of acts of piety are prayer, scripture reading, and fasting.

Examples of acts of mercy are giving to the poor, speaking out for social justice, and providing services for others. All of these things are important when it comes to caring for others.

Acts of piety grows Christian to where they are walking examples of Jesus Christ. As walking examples, Christians are considered to have the heart of Christ. Christians will begin to see people through the eyes of Christ, and it will motivate them to act. They will set up strategies that are clearly driven by God and not man.

Acts of mercy are the things that the arms of the caring church should be doing for the congregation and others in the community. Acts of mercy are the actions that we execute toward others. When one thinks in terms of a church that cares for its congregation different actions come to mind. When the church follows up with those who are sick, it is an indicator of a caring church. When the people in the church pray for those who are bereaved, it is an indicator of a caring church. When a pastor provides counseling for someone who is going through grief or when the church provides meals to the homeless, these actions are indicators of a caring church.

Acts of piety and acts of mercy come together in our spiritual formation.³⁹

Spiritual formation is the process of growing or forming one's spiritual self. It is explained in the article that everyone has a spirit, so everyone has spiritual formation, but for the Christian that spiritual formation is becoming like Christ.⁴⁰

Since spiritual formation is about becoming like Christ, it is also about the relationship that a Christian has with God. Our relationship with God is clearly driven by our inner faith which affects our outer faith. Our relationship with God correlates with our relationship with humankind. If we love God, we will love humankind. That love will motivate a Christian to demonstrate that love toward others.

³⁹ Ibid, page 49.

⁴⁰ Michael, Houdmann, [What is Christian spiritual formation? \(compellingtruth.org\)/CEO S. Michael Houdmann](https://compellingtruth.org/CEO-S-Michael-Houdmann)

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Spiritual formation is about our development as Christians. Acts of piety helps us to develop internally so that we can demonstrate our inner faith through our outer faith. Our outer faith is demonstrated through acts of mercy. As we develop internally, it greatly impacts how we act toward others. Internal development dictates how we live, breathe, and move.

E. The Sacraments.

As love and spiritual disciplines are the substances in the glue that holds the arms of the Caring Church model together, other substances include the sacraments of the United Methodist Church. Having a relationship with God is critical in the church. As we focus on caring for the congregation, a relationship with God helps us to be in tune with how God wants us to care for God's people. The sacraments of the United Methodist are essential in the local church because they help us to get to know God, and one of the main ways that we can do that is through the gifts of the sacraments.⁴¹

John Wesley defined sacraments as being “outward signs of an inward grace.”⁴² The sacraments are mysterious signs by which God's grace is conveyed. John Wesley also defined sacraments as “means” of grace.⁴³ As William Abraham and David F. Watson explained in their book, *Key United Methodist Beliefs*, that through the sacraments, we receive the power and work of the Holy Spirit within our lives.⁴⁴

There are two sacraments in the United Methodist Church: Baptism and Holy Communion. When we participate in the sacraments, we believe that God shows up and acts.

⁴¹ William J. Abraham and David F. Watson. *Key United Methodist Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), page 104.

⁴² Ibid. p. 104.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 104.

⁴⁴ Abraham and Watson, *Key United Methodist Beliefs*, p. 105.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Baptism is only done once in the life of Christians. However, Holy Communion is done often because every time we do it, we remember our redemption through Christ Jesus.

Baptism means that God is claiming us as God's own. Baptism is an initiation into the body of the church. The water symbolizes cleansing from sin, death to old life, and rising to begin new life in Christ. In Baptism, we enter a covenant, or a binding agreement, with God, and we become God's adopted children. It is an individual experience, but it is also a communal experience where the church body makes a commitment to pray for and support the believer.

The other sacrament is Holy Communion. It is the meal that Christ commanded His disciples to do continuously before His crucifixion. John Wesley believed that through this mysterious meal "conviction, repentance and conversion, forgiveness, and sanctification are available."⁴⁵ When we participate in this sacrament, we remember our redemption through Christ, and we give thanks for God's continuous grace as a community. Holy Communion is done with bread and wine. With the bread, we partake in the body of Christ, and with the wine we partake in the blood of Christ that was shed for us. It is during this sacrament the Holy Spirit makes Christ present for us, and through that presence He begins to work on our hearts.⁴⁶

We believe in an open table communion. Whereas some churches believe that only members of the church can partake in Holy Communion, we believe that everyone is invited to the table because it is God's table and not ours.

The sacraments are what all Christians within the local church have in common. They are truly substances in the glue that connects caring clergy, caring disciples, and caring ministries together to form a caring culture that makes up the caring church. When creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation, the sacraments are essential because

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 109.

⁴⁶ Abraham and Watson, p.109.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

it is important in being intentional that there is a genuine connection to the people and between the people. God is the glue. God is the commonality that all Christians share with one another.

F. The Glue

In summarizing the glue that holds together the arms of the caring clergy, the caring disciples, and the caring ministries together to form the culture of this caring church model, there is love, spiritual disciplines, and sacraments. Without the glue, the arms of the caring church would not come together, but they would not stay together. The arms would simply fall apart with the caring clergy going one direction, the caring disciples going into another direction, and caring ministries going in yet another direction. This would mean chaos, disorganization, confusion, and discord. Think of what this would look like in a local church. Think of what kind of results would come out of a church like this. Unfortunately, this is a reality in some local churches. It would be impossible to have an effective and an efficient strategy of care in a church that looked like this.

A church that is experiencing chaos, disorganization, confusion, and discord would need to do an evaluation on its glue. The church would need to ask questions such as do we love each other and how to we display this love? Are our spiritual disciplines aligning with our spiritual formation? Are we being developed into true disciples of Christ? If we are becoming disciples, what are some of the indicators of that development? Are our ministries working efficiently and effectively together? What kind of culture do we have in this church, and does our congregation believe that we care about them? How do our neighbors feel about us in the community? If the church was no longer there, would they miss us? All of these questions would help us to assess the local church as to whether it is considered to be a caring church with a caring culture.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

There are many ways to find out the answers to these questions. One method is simply to ask the people and ask the community. The local church in which I serve has done this through the means of surveys or assessments. Surveys ask particular questions, and these questions are usually answered by selecting a, b, c, or d answer. There may also be a segment by which a participant in the survey can make comments about specific areas.

Ministries can create its own survey with the use of tools like Survey Monkey, which will allow the church to create their own questions. The questions should be based on what the church wants to find out from the people and the community.

Once a survey is created, it needs to reach a critical mass of people within the church or the community that is being assessed. In order to have a successful implementation of the assessment, it is important to establish a communication plan that will determine who needs to take that assessment and how the assessment will be distributed to the people who needs to take it. It would be important for the Senior Pastor of the church to communicate to the congregation what it is, why it is being done, when it will start and finish, and how to access it. It would also help to offer some type of reward because people do not like to fill out surveys. If the Senior Pastor or some other influential person could get their buy-in, it will help them to get critical mass. The more people that complete the survey, the more accurate the assessment will be.

Once the assessment is completed by the congregation, then the assessment needs to be analyzed. Analysis of an assessment is simply taking the answers and drawing a conclusion based upon the feedback that has been collected. It does no good to have an assessment and not do a proper analysis of the feedback that has been given. Again, if you have a consulting firm to do this, this is already included in the cost that is paid to the consultant. If the church is doing

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

the assessment internally through a ministry, it is important to have someone within that ministry who has that skill set to lead this process.

Once the analysis is over, then it needs to be communicated to the people. One of the problems that we had in my local church is that we would do the assessment and the analysis, but we would not get back to the people with the results. This impacted other assessments because people began to say, “We always participate in surveys, but we never hear anything about the results! We have done this before, but we never do anything with the information.” That is why people do not want to do the assessments. They need to know that their feedback has been taken seriously, and that they have not wasted their time in taking the survey.

In the analysis, it is not enough just to quote what percentage of the people gave a particular answer. Another part of the analysis is to explain what the numbers may be saying about the church. As this information is shared with them, the people may agree or disagree, and this will further help to validate what has been analyzed. If the church is collecting information about the needs in the community, it may be more difficult to share that information with that community, but the information can still be utilized to develop programs to meet their needs.

Once the analysis is done and shared with the congregation, the next step is to create action plans to address what was analyzed. This is another problem with assessments; sometimes the data is not utilized to resolve issues. For example, in the rather extensive assessment that was conducted by the Black Church Initiative, we had the roll out of the results. However, we did not go back as a church to create action plans to address the issues that the data presented. The data told us a lot about what we needed to do in order to create effective and efficient strategies, but we basically did not create action plans to address what we found out. It

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

does no good to know what the problems are but never put actions in place to address the problems.

There is also another step involved in that once action are put in place, there should be key performance measures or indicators that will inform us of when and if we are achieving the goals. It is important to have a scorecard that has SMART goals to achieve. It is important to note that goals that are set should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. We should know specifically what it is that we are measuring. In congregational care, we set a goal that the homebound will be contacted at least once per month. That goal lets us know what we are going to do (make contact with the homebound saint as they are called in our local church), and the measure is at least once per month. That is achievable based upon the work that the care team has to do, and it is realistic. It also tells us how often we are going to do it, once per month.

These are the things that must happen as it relates to us doing assessments. There are other ways to access or ask people about their needs such as having round tables or one-to-one conversations. Certainly, in the pandemic, it is not realistic to have face-to-face meetings, but vast use of technology has given us tools to use even though we cannot physically meet.

My current senior pastor came to the local church where I serve about a year ago. When he was appointed as senior pastor the church was closed due to the pandemic. We created a platform that included meeting with all of the ministries and others within the congregation by setting up zoom calls. Some of the zoom calls were set up where anyone that wanted to meet the pastor, could register for a certain zoom call. Other calls were set up based upon speaking with certain ministries. This forum worked out really well and allowed the Senior Pastor to meet the congregation and leaders despite the church being closed.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

There are many ways to gather information that will help us to create a care strategy that will be effective and efficient. These are just some of the ways that we have gathered information in our local church.

G. Considering the Pandemic

When we look at the Caring Church Model, one cannot help but consider how the model has changed in light of the pandemic. The components or the arms, remain the intact organizationally. There are still caring clergy, disciples, ministries, and cultures. What has changed is “how” they care and “how” they operate. In order to survive the pandemic, the CDC called for the world to distance per household. Everything except critical businesses was closed down. A lot of people including me, worked from our homes. All churches were closed as well. However, we realized that we still needed to care for the people but caring for the people literally went from caring for them physically to caring for them virtually.

Nursing homes were closed to visitors. It was recommended not to go around sick people. Hospitals stopped visitors from coming into the hospital except for the staff chaplains. Relatives were not allowed to come in with their sick loved ones. Unfortunately, many patients of hospitals and facilities died alone. During this time, I remember getting a call from one of my care members who was responsible for visiting the sick. He left the care ministry with concerns for his health and those in his household because he was of the group that was high risk for getting Covid-19. I understood his concern and, as a result, I had to put procedures in place that would help us to continue to keep in touch with the sick.

. The church found itself in a position where an immediate change in how we cared for our people took place. I had to rewrite the policy to where visitations to nursing homes, hospitals, or homes were not allowed. This allowed for the protection of not only the care

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

member, but also the one who was being visited. I scheduled a zoom training and taught people how to check on people virtually. I gave them a log where they were to write down their activities, and they were to turn in a monthly report. They were responsible for “touching” people by calling them, texting, and/or emailing them. There were times that I even prayed for people at their bedside by facetime arranged by their loved ones. The church began to rely heavily on the help of technology in order to do ministry.

We also had to reach out to the rest of the congregation as well. One of the members mentioned that this was the first time that the whole church was sick and shut in. Everyone had to be cared for. This added complexity to a universal organization that was already believed to have been losing momentum. The universal church had already been struggling to connect to younger generations. Even before the pandemic, attendance was already declining. Now the church was closed.

If the perception was that the churches did not care when churches were open in full operation, then certainly this made matters worse. Being distanced away from the building, not being able to worship or serve in communion with one another made it even more important to have an effective and efficient strategy of care that was intentional about reaching out to the congregation in a time of intense mental stress, increased sickness and death, and increase anxiety as a result of the pandemic. How well a church was able to strategically care for its people was a determining factor in whether churches were able to survive or not.

I remember feeling sheer panic at the beginning of the pandemic. I had gotten to a place where I finally felt comfortable with my job and what I needed to do, but all of a sudden, I felt that all of that had gone up into smoke. Entering into a pandemic, I had no clue as to how I was going to care for the congregation through this. I was in tears as I prayed to God saying, “God, I

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

had gotten it figured out. I had a routine of care that was working. I had just gotten to a point where people were starting to get a sense that the church cared. Now, I have no clue as to what to do!”

The Holy Spirit within me said, “It is ok. You have just got to find a way to care for people in these times!” From that point, I had to build an effective and efficient program for the times that we found ourselves in.

There is a lesson to be learned by churches considering the pandemic. We have to be intentional to build effective and efficient strategies of care that are fluid and flexible in the times that we find ourselves in. There may be times when our strategy worked in one season, but when we find out that our strategy has become stale, we must quickly adjust to one that meets the needs in that particular time. The components, or arms, of the strategy remained the same, but the strategy itself had to be adjusted for the church to continue to care for the congregation after the church building was closed.

We are now on the backside of the pandemic. It is certainly not over yet, but our future is very promising. According to the CDC COVID-19 tracker, the United States has had over 32,933, 337 reported cases of COVID-19 and 586,793 deaths.⁴⁷ The seven-day average for hospitalization is down 15.5% in comparison with that of January.⁴⁸ The case rate of deaths per 100,000 has improved by 51.3%.⁴⁹

Businesses and churches are opening, the economy is beginning to get some traction, and things are definitely on their way to recovery. However, there are some churches that could not survive and have had to close. These churches were struggling prior to the pandemic. According

⁴⁷ #trends_dailytrendcases, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker>

⁴⁸ #new-hospital-admissions, <https://covid.cdc.gov>

⁴⁹ #cases_casesper100klast7days, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker>

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

to an article in the *Christian Post*, one in five churches are facing permanent closure within 18 months due to COVID-19 shutdowns.⁵⁰ According to David Kinnaman, president of the prominent Christian research organization Barna Group, “a lot of churches have opened, but a lot less people are coming and as a result the giving is down.” The United Methodist Church reported a 26% drop in collections for the denomination in the month of April compared to the previous year.⁵¹ According to Kinnaman, “digital worship is here to stay.”

The local church where I serve has managed to survive quite well. From a budget perspective, we were about \$400,000 off from where we had planned (decline of 10% to the prior year). However the government assistance of the PPP loans helped to close the gaps during 2020. The PPP stands for the paycheck-protective-program loan, which is a loan designed to provide a direct incentive for small businesses to keep their employees working as a federal program provided by the Trump and the Biden Administrations in Washington, DC.

We are about \$84,000 above projected revenue for the year 2021. However, it is important to note that the budget plan is less this year due to last year’s performance. We are beginning to trend toward pre-pandemic levels of 2019 according to our Chief Financial Officer.

When we looked at some of the factors that had influenced this performance a few came to mind. First, we had previously positioned ourselves technologically to be able to have online worship. For at least four years, we have had an online presence on Facebook and Live Stream. We quickly changed from Live Stream to YouTube. Due to our well-established online platform, we have been able to continue to worship non-stop. We had also implemented Zoom and began to use it to have church meetings and continue our discipleship and care program. From a care perspective, I used Zoom for counseling sessions, training, meetings, funeral

⁵⁰ Michael Gryboski. <https://www.chistianpost.com>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

planning sessions, etc. I conducted my first funeral on Zoom, which was organized by a company in Baltimore, Maryland, for a church member who passed away.

The second factor that has helped was our establishment of online giving. We not only provided worship and other items online, but we also made it easier to give. We have options that resonate with all generations. The offering can be dropped off at a church drop box. It can be mailed in. We have online giving and text-to-give through applications. We also have Cash Application. According to our Chief Financial Officer, online giving doubled during the pandemic.

Third, not only did we continue to provide worship and discipleship and provide multiple ways to give, but we also continued to care for the congregation strategically and intentionally. In a pandemic, caring is pertinent just to keep people connected. We implemented a care strategy that helped us to continue to pray for the sick, check on the homebound, and attend to the bereaved in a safe and healthy way. (See care plan and a sample of the log that was kept.)

We began to look at the number of touches and calls that were being made. We decided that we wanted to reach more people faster. By the end of the year through the help of a grant from the North Texas Conference, we implemented a Dialmycall technology that allowed us to reach our entire congregation by voice, text, and/or email within minutes. We went from 5777 touches in 2020 to over 20,000 touches only five months in to 2021. Those numbers speak to the fact that we are touching our congregation multiple times per month. We send out care cards to the homebound monthly, and on Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc. and other information like Covid-19 testing and vaccination information, etc.

Lastly, we did have a change in leadership with the senior pastor. The Senior Pastor we currently have now has experience running his own non-profit organization along with a church,

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

which allowed him to contribute to the outreach in the community in unprecedented ways.

Under his leadership, we have been able to provide Covid-19 testing and vaccination in the underserved communities around us. We had Easter at Klyde Warren Park. We just recently created a Hero Fund to provide funds to people who are struggling to keep their homes due to lost jobs or other reasons brought on by the pandemic. All of these things have allowed our congregation to care for the community in a major way. It literally gave our church a newfound feeling of purpose in the community in which it is located. I will discuss more about this kind of leadership in the next chapter.

All of the factors that I have just mentioned speak to the fact that when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for both the congregation and the community.

Chapter 3: Caring Clergy

A. Caring Clergy Roles

As the discussion of the arms, or the components, of a Caring Church Model began, the Caring Clergy is certainly the first to be discussed. The Caring Clergy consists of the leaders in the Caring Church Model. Leaders are responsible for the strategy of the local church. They are responsible for the success and/or the failure of the strategy. The leaders set the pace and the tone for how the strategy is created and managed. The leaders are certainly responsible for a strategy being effective and efficient. The leaders are responsible for whether the local church is perceived to be one with caring people. The strategy will dictate how well the church cares for its congregation.

To discuss this specific arm, or component, it is important to establish a specific image of care for a church with a staff. This model will work best for a medium to large church or a

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

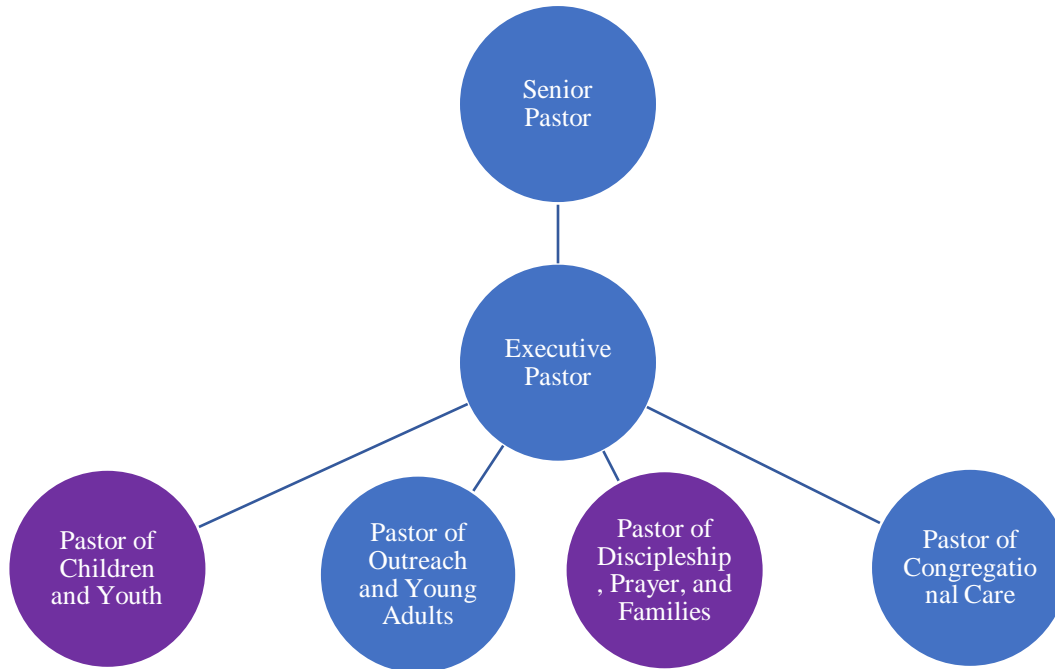
church with multiple pastors. However, it is important for pastors with a small church who may work alone that the needs of the congregation are going to be the same as a larger church, but there will be less people. Solo pastors or those pastors who operate without other staff pastors must be organized, and though they have less people, those people still need to be cared for. This model will still be helpful; however, solo pastors will have to see the organizational chart as task rather than individual pastors, and they must rely on their laity to help them.

In every local church there is a staff of one or more pastors. In some churches there is only one Pastor, but in larger local churches there may be several clergies and/or pastors. In the local church where I serve there are United Methodist Clergy who have gone through the formal process of either being licensed or ordained. If they are licensed, they are Local Pastors. If they are ordained, they are provisional Elders or Elders in full connection with the United Methodist Church. Those who have gone through the United Methodist process of licensing or ordination, are appointed to their positions by the bishop of the conference in which the local church is in. The bishop of the church conference assigns all appointed positions in the United Methodist Church.

There may also be Pastors in the local church who are not United Methodist Pastors in that they come from some other denomination. These positions that they hold are positions that do not have to be filled with pastors appointed by the bishop. The non-appointed Pastors are hired directly by the church. These Pastors are a part of the lay staff. The lay staff includes everyone else in a staff position other than the appointed Pastors. These positions may include musicians, administrative and finance people, church custodians, etc.

In the local church in where I serve, our organizational structure looks like this.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.



The Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, Pastor of Outreach and Young Adults, and Pastor of Congregational Care are all positions appointed by the Bishop of the Conference. The Pastor of Children and Youth and the Pastor of Discipleship, Prayer, and Families are both lay staff positions. The Clergy structures vary from local church to local church. Yet for all practical purposes, when the term is used in this dissertation to describe Caring Clergy, we will refer to both appointed and non-appointed pastors.

The Senior Pastor is the Lead Pastor. He is the Chief Executive Officer of the Church. He is responsible for administering the word through sermons, teachings, etc. He is the leader in administering sacraments to the congregation. He is responsible for keeping the order of the church according to the *Book of Discipline*. He is responsible for the service of both the congregation and those within the surrounding communities through the church. The Senior Pastor can be a male or a female. Our Senior Pastor happens to be a male.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The Executive Pastor is second in the organizational structure and is responsible for church operations and the pastoral and lay staff. She acts in the absence of the Senior Pastor. She may also be responsible for working with the Administrative Ministries such as the Church Council and the Board of Trustees. Underneath the Executive Pastor are the other pastors consisting of both appointed and non-appointed.

The Pastor of Children and Youth is responsible for strategy and programs concerning the children and youth of the church. He is responsible for ministering these individuals and working with parents to ensure that their needs are met within the local context of the church.

The Pastor of Outreach and Young Adults is responsible for all efforts involving the community. All of his programs involve how the church is reaching out and serving the needs of those surrounding us. He is responsible for feeding programs, vaccinations, Covid-19 testing, etc. His other responsibility is ministering to the Young Adults, ages 18 years to 40 years of age.

The Pastor of Discipleship, Prayer, and Families is responsible for the spiritual formation in the church as it relates to Discipleship. She is responsible for growing individuals and groups at all levels and developing them into Disciples of Christ through bible studies, Sunday schools, and other curriculum.

As a Pastor responsible for prayer, she manages the prayer team, and sets the priorities of prayer for the entire church. This individual is really in tune with the culture and what is happening in the church, the community, and the world to come up with prayer themes for the church to pray about.

This pastor is also responsible for the Mental Health Ministry, which concerns itself with the mental well-being of everyone within the church. She does a lot of work with families and individuals. She is responsible for having monthly Mental Health meetings discussing different

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

topics concerning mental wellness topics and concerns. She is also responsible for conducting an annual Mental Health Symposium that consists of bringing various experts from all over the city to discuss different issues through panels and presentations.

The Pastor of Congregational Care, which is the role I serve, has several key areas to include bereavement, grief recovery, membership intake, the sick, and the homebound saints. I am also responsible for the parking lot ministry. I have kept some of the responsibilities from my previous role in the church due to my professional expertise in human resources such as and staffing, benefits, compensation, etc.

There is no standard staff as it relates to pastors. Across local churches, organizational churches look different based upon the tradition of the church, the profiles of the Pastors who are hired, and the areas of responsibilities that the church has deemed as priorities. Some churches are structured better than others particularly as they have a structure of support for these pastors to operate. It is important that pastors are structured in such a way that they are creating and managing the strategies to care in their areas while they are developing that underneath them to do the work of ministry.

In my role as the pastor of congregational care, I am responsible for caring for the immediate congregation of the church. In the area of bereavement, I am the point of contact when people pass away. There are two kinds of funerals that get reported to our church: funerals of members and funerals of those who are family members of members. Death is a time when the congregation needs a lot of care. The church secretary is a major point of communication for all deaths. Whenever someone dies, the church office is contacted. If the deceased is a member of the church, we will more than likely be contacted to help with the funeral. Once a call comes in, I communicate to the rest of the pastors by sending out a text.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Then I will contact that family within 24-48 hours to assess the needs of the family. I will pray and then ask about their needs. If they request a funeral, I will set up a meeting with them in conjunction with their visit to the funeral home. My involvement depends solely upon the specific needs of the families as well as the support that the church can provide. I help them with funeral planning ranging from help with the program and coordinating participants for the program. I have conducted funerals and burials by acting as the officiant, scripture reader, resolution reader, and eulogist. I coordinate the music with our Minister of Music. The church secretary assists me with all of these responsibilities. She is a huge asset to congregational care.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, funerals were typically scheduled at the church. I would have to check the church schedule and coordinate dates and times for the funeral. I would also help to schedule repasses (family dinner after the funeral). However, the pandemic changed all of that. Since the pandemic, our church has been closed. During the winter storm, a pipe burst and flooded the front offices and the sanctuary, which has further delayed our opening. In addition to repairing the current damage, the Senior Pastor has decided to include some much-needed renovations. Since our church is closed, all the funerals have been at the funeral home, at the graveside, or at other churches. This has taken a lot of the burden off the church staff because it is not in our facility. In addition to the church being closed, we have also had to cater meals for repasses (dinners for the family after the funeral) back in 2020 because we are not allowed to handle dinners or banquet type food due to the rules of the CDC for churches.

In 2021, we had to cut back even further due to budget cuts, so now we offer \$100 gift cards only to bereaved families of deceased members instead of giving them a repass dinner. At the same time, most people have not been having repasses with large number of people gathering. Now repasses include a few close family members and friends. As improvements are

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

being made toward opening things back up due to the growing number of vaccinations and the constant decrease in deaths and cases, families may start to gather again. However, we will not be able to accommodate them with anything other than the gift card.

The pandemic certainly changed a lot of the ways in which we celebrate those who pass away. Funerals used to be opened to anyone who wanted to attend. When I first took over as the Pastor of Congregational Care, I went to every most of the local funerals whether it was a member or not. I look back on that now, and I think how insane it was for me to do that, but this is how I got comfortable with funerals, and the members of the congregation really appreciated having the Care Pastor to show up at the funeral of their loved one. I say that it was insane because it was extremely taxing physically and mentally. I would bring the resolution, and I would read that resolution on most occasions depending on the needs of the program. Resolutions are letters written to the family acknowledging the death of someone and giving words of comfort to that family on behalf of the church and the Senior Pastor. These are simple ways that we would show people that we care. Resolutions are often used a substitute for someone being present from the church. With everything that is going on in the life of the church it is almost impossible to keep up with deaths in every family of a rather large church. The pandemic certainly increased the number of deaths that we would typically see. I would guess that the numbers have doubled.

When the pandemic came, funerals were limited to 15 people at one point including the Pastors. As things got better the limit of people who could attend increased to 60. During these difficult times, funerals were limited to no more than an hour for a specific ceremony. Because of the number of people who were dying, the lead time to plan a funeral was at least one month. Due to pandemic, many people did not get an opportunity to celebrate their loved ones in

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

traditional ways. This was very difficult for families and friends. Traditionally, the funeral offers comfort and closure for people. There were many family members who did not get to go to the funeral at all especially when people were in quarantine (when everything was shut down, and people were not allowed to travel). It was very hard for people, and at that time caring meant having to console people and pray with and for them through the means of technology. I believe that we are going to see a lot of fallout over situations like these for months and maybe even years to come. What I mean by fallout, is that grief is going to be more complicated and if that grief is not dealt with it could result in a more serious mental illness.

Another responsibility I have is grief recovery. Over the past year during the time of the pandemic, grief has intensified. That intensity is due to all the changes that were made to funeral celebrations, but also due to the number of deaths due to the pandemic. People were losing multiple family members in very short periods of time. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were families losing four and five people in one family in the worst-case scenarios. Not only were we seeing multiple family members passing away, but they were passing away one after the other in very short times of periods. Last September, one of my best friends lost his mother, and he died two weeks later. His mother died of a long-term illness not related to Covid-19, and he died of an apparent suicide. Nevertheless, this type of death in such short time caused grief to be more intense and compounded which can be described as complicated grief.

In grief recovery, we offer both one-to-one counseling and group counseling. I take quite different paths in each, so that if one person wanted to do both, she could and learn different things. When I first took over this role, two people were over the group counseling. We were not doing one-to-one counseling at all. The group sessions were being offered once every quarter.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

One of the members brought up in church council that we needed a program where people could get counseling in between those times. So, we decided to offer one-to-one pastoral counseling as well. The Board of Trustees who oversee the legal aspects of the church created a release form which explained that this was pastoral counseling only. There have been times when churches have been sued because of something that took place in a counseling session. There are no guarantees, but this release form provides some protection for the church and for the pastor who is counseling just in case. We use release forms for almost every activity in the church involving the congregation and others in the community. It is a standard operation procedure in our local church.

In the meantime, the Mental Health Ministry and the Care Ministry had developed a partnership with several counseling centers in the area. A list was created and handed out in case people needed to go deeper than pastoral counseling. I highly recommend that pastoral counseling and professional counseling should be both be explored during times of grief.

In my one-to-one sessions, I give them some material that describes what grief is and how it affects us. The best way to deal with grief is to educate people about what is and give them some techniques in how to deal with the stress of it. I created a PowerPoint presentation so that these sessions could be done on zoom rather than in person.

I also have a talk sheet that allows them to talk about their grief and why they felt that they needed to come to the sessions. I discuss with them the five steps of grief as introduced by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in 1969 in her book on death and dying.⁵² We begin with a chart where I briefly discuss step by step. Then I have the bereaved participant to identify where she thinks that she may be in the process and throughout the process we talk about how she may

⁵² Christina Gregory, PHD, Five Stages of Grief- Understanding the Kubler-Ross Model. www.psycome.net/depression.central.grief.html.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

return to a meaningful life. During this time, I am identifying areas of concern which I share with them.

I also teach the bereaved ways to cope. I have them to do research online for sources that may be helpful. I give them scriptures and devotionals. I give them activities like journaling, coloring to music, and meditation exercises. Every program is different based upon the person and what they are going through. I give anywhere from one to four sessions, and when I give my final session, I always leave the door open, so that they can set up a time to come back if they need to.

There is a group session that is conducted as well. Some people prefer to deal with grief in one-to-one sessions. Others prefer to deal with grief among others who are grieving. There are even some who do both, which is why I have developed a slightly different program for the group session.

The group session is based upon a book called, *Good Grief*, written by Granger E. Westberg. Westberg was a pastor, chaplain, and a teacher from the University of Chicago Divinity School. I received the idea to order the book from a member who told me that years ago our Pastor Emeritus used to give this book out to members of the congregation whenever they were going through grief. I ordered the book, read it, and decided to do a group session from it.

The title of the book is the first thing that one notices. I thought to myself, "How could grief be good? Westberg explained the title of the book by stating that following in the preface.

We come out of our grief experience at a slightly higher level of maturity than before. We come out of our grief as deeper persons because we have been down in the depths of despair and know what it is like. We come out of it stronger, for we have had to learn how to use spiritual muscles to climb the rugged mountain trails. We come out of it

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

better able to help others. We walked through the valley of the shadow of grief. We can understand. That is why I have chosen to call this little book, *Good Grief*.⁵³

He then goes on to write a chapter describing the ten stages of grief. I created a PowerPoint presentation on each chapter. I also included activities in each chapter of discussion and reflection based on the main points to ensure an understanding of what had been written about the stages. I also included journaling, reading and reflecting on scripture, coloring, meditation, and other ways of coping with grief.

Group sessions allow participants to share their grieving experiences. They begin to feel that they are not alone, and it reinforces the idea that the stages of grief are experienced by everyone. They get a chance to bond with others who are experiencing loss. There were not only people in the class who had lost loved ones, but there were people who had lost jobs and people who had gone through divorce. I noted that most of the participants were going through grief of multiple situations and even the death of multiple people in a short period of time.

One of the most important things that can be done with people who are grieving is to educate them about grief. It is essential to let them know how important it is to go through the grief process in a healthy way and what to expect when this happens. It is important that they develop some coping skills. It is also important to let them know all the resources that are available to them.

The Mental Health Ministry in our church developed a resource list of professional counselors, therapists, and agencies available to help with different needs. That list is given to each of the participants encouraging them to continue through their grief process by reaching out for the help of professionals who can help them to deal with their grief in a deeper way. Using both pastoral and professional resources along with faith can ensure that their grief is “good,”

⁵³ Granger E. Westberg. *Good Grief: A Companion for Every Loss* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press: 2019) p.xi.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

and they can come out on the other side of grief being whole and being able to help others in their process.

These are just some of the roles that pastors fill in our local church. Every church is different organizationally. There are some churches that are so small that they only have one pastor to meet all the needs of the church. This type of pastor must be highly organized, and she must possess a strong, general background of skills to be able to meet the needs of the church. The local pastor or elder in this role must be able to preach, teach, visit the sick, bury the deceased, and offer pastoral counseling. It can be a very difficult role; however, pastors must be able to seek out resources that will be essential to the leadership of this church, and they must be able to train and rely on the laity to help.

B. How Caring Happens

Regardless of the roles that each pastor has organizationally in the church, all must demonstrate a level of care within that role. It is not just the responsibility of the Pastor of Congregational Care to care for the congregation. Each pastor in his individual role has people whom needs to be cared for. In the caring church model, care is demonstrated across the organization.

It does not matter what organizational structure is utilized in the local church. What matters is that within each individual pastoral role there must be a sense of what it means to be a “caring” pastor within that role. It is not enough to just be “caring.” It is important to have a plan or strategy in each area about how caring will be carried out within that church.

It is always important to solicit feedback from the congregation, the community, the homebound saints, and others whom the pastors serve to have a way of measuring how well that

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

they are being cared for. Every local church should have a way to measure the level of care that is being given.

Our local church is currently doing another church assessment. In addition to other things, this assessment will measure how our congregation is feeling overall, and if they feel cared for. We have done assessments before but coming out of a pandemic where we have been estranged from the church building for almost two years, it is time to reassess our needs. **Building an Effective and Efficient Strategy**

The Clergy is an **ASSET** to a caring church. As an asset of a caring church, the Clergy must be able to build effective and efficient strategies within the local church in order for the church to be vital to those who make up the congregation. The tasks that a Clergy must execute can be expressed by the letters in the word asset, **A-S-S-E-T**: assess, set, set, equip and engage, and train.

In order to build effective and efficient strategies within the local church, it is important to **assess** the current strategies. In order to assess, the Clergy must be able to ask a lot of questions.

Some of the questions that may be asked are the following: What programs or strategies are in place right now? Who are the people who are being served by these programs or strategies? How well are the people being served, and do they feel cared for in these areas? If not, why or why not? How might we add a caring component within our program that may close the caring gaps?

In order to access the caring church, it can be done informally or formally. Informal assessments may include talking to the congregation about what is needed. This can be done in several formats. When our Senior Pastor first came to the church, he spent time doing meet and greets on zoom to get familiar with some of the leaders in the church. In these zoom calls, he

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

would ask questions that would allow him to find out what the needs are and if they are being met. The Senior Pastor came at the onset of a pandemic, so meeting in person was not an option at the time.

Clergy must build relationships with leaders and the congregation. We must learn to have conversations with people about what is going on in our church, and what we need to do in order to resolve issues. As Clergy we have to have an open-door policy that allows people to come to us comfortably and talk to us about things that matter within the church. Building relationships is the first step to having made good assessments of the church whether formal or informal. Formal being a planned evaluation to look for certain information. Informal is when may not necessarily be a planned event, but information is still gathered. It can include a conversation, or it may be something that comes up at a church council or ministry meeting.

We must be able to have great relationships with our ministry leaders and coordinators. There is information that often flows to them that never make it to the Clergy. If we have good relationships with them, they will always tell us what we need to know to help us to build winning strategies.

As clergy, we must be able to receive feedback and information that may not always be productive, pleasant, or positive. However, we must allow ourselves to be open to what is being said without getting defensive and taking things too personally. We have to learn how to listen well. Listening well also includes being able to hear what is not being said or being able to read between the lines. We also have to learn how to decipher as we listen in order to know what we need to do with the information that we are getting. There will be some information that will be useful, and some will not be.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

There are also formal ways to get information through assessments as has been discussed previously. Assessments are important in that they allow us to find out information in a systematic way that can really tell us a lot about what we need to know, depending on how well the assessments are designed. However, what is even more important is what we do with the information that we get. If we get the information, but do not build action plans with the information, it will not do any good in helping to build an effective and efficient strategy.

Assessing should be ongoing by either formal or informal means. That helps us to be able to change and adapt our strategies as we need to for our strategy to stay effective and efficient. Our strategy needs to be consistent, but it should be fluid enough that when we see things that need to be changed, we can make the necessary changes. We should never get stuck or limited in a certain process or a certain way of doing things so that we are not willing to make changes if needed. This can be a problem in the local church. This can cause the church to become irrelevant to the times in which we find ourselves. That, in turn, can cause people to get disinterested in the church, and leave.

The local church is having problems retaining millennials and young adults in the church. In one study, millennials between the ages of 18-29 were surveyed on why they did not attend church. 25% of them said that they had not found a church that they liked or could relate to.⁵⁴ This has certainly been an issue in the local church where I serve. The local church must be attractive to all age groups for the church to stay viable.

Assessing is also important in my role as a Pastor of Congregation as I am dealing with individuals. Whether I am doing grief counseling, planning funerals, or dealing with an individual who is sick or even dying, it is important to create an individual strategy or care plan.

⁵⁴ Pew Report, p.9.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Thomson K. Mathew in his book entitled, *Ministry between Miracles: A Biblical Model of Spirit-led Pastoral Care* talks about the importance of doing a pastoral care assessment.⁵⁵ He compared the role of a Care Pastor to that of a physician. He stated that “physicians do not prescribe without observing and then assessing.”⁵⁶ Each person that is being cared for needs an individual care plan to meet their specific need. In his assessment, he talks about the importance of understanding individual needs and doing an assessment of the whole person by asking five specific questions:

1. Why is this person telling me this now?
2. What is troubling this person?
3. What is causing the problem?
4. What is missing?
5. What is needed?⁵⁷

Whenever I am doing grief counseling, no two grief strategies for people look alike. I share with them the same content, but it is always tailored to meet the needs of that specific person. For example, I counseled one person whose aunt passed away. She was dealing with the guilt over having made an accounting error in her aunt’s finances which caused her aunt to have to leave her home and go to the nursing home sooner than she needed to, and she had not told her family about it. I had to help her to deal with her guilt, and I also had to help her plan to have the conversation with her family members.

Another person was dealing with the grief of a divorce rather than a death of a loved one. I had to help her by letting her know that she would still experience the same stages because she had lost a marriage. I also had to give her some resources on how to deal with divorce, and I had to help her to deal with some self-esteem issues.

⁵⁵ Thompson K. Mathew, *Ministry between Miracles: A Biblical Model of Spirit-led Pastoral Care* (Kottayam, Kerala, India: Goodnews Books: 2020) p. 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Each person counseled has to have a care plan that fits that individual's specific situation. There may be people who are going through the same issues of losing a loved one, but each person needs a different care plan based upon the circumstances surrounding the death and the spiritual maturity of the person. It is important to pray before each session and allow the Holy Spirit to help us to know how to approach each person. God will give the Clergy discernment for the situation that she has been assigned to handle.

In summary, being able to assess is important whether it involves strategizing a program, a ministry, or an individual care plan. The "A" in asset stands for "assess."

The next letter in **ASSET** is "s" which stands for **set the goals and objectives**. Whenever an assessment is done, the outcome is to find out how well the congregant is being cared for. In order to know how well, there must be goals set based upon a particular vision. It may even be necessary to discover some objectives.

When I first became a Pastor of Congregational Care, I did an assessment to see how well the homebound saints were being care for. Homebound saints are those individuals who are confined to their homes or a nursing/rehabilitation facility. According to the assessment, we were not doing well. The overall objective was for each person to be contacted at least once per month. This was a standard goal that had been set prior to me taking the role. So, the overall goal was once per month. In my assessment, I found out that there were people who had not been contacted consistently. As a matter of fact, the list that I had been given did not have all the names of the people who were homebound.

Once the assessment was done, I had to re-establish or **set** the goal of contacting the homebound saints at least once per month because the objectives was to ensure to contact those people for the purpose of monthly communion as well as to check to see how they were doing. I

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

had to assign every person on the list to my Encouragement, Motivation, and Support Team along with myself. So, every person on the list had someone or a team of people assigned to contact them. Then I had to communicate that goal and the objective to everyone who was responsible for visiting them.

The Encouragement, Motivation, and Support Team encourages, motivates, and supports those homebound members who are often referred to as the “sick and shut-in.” We choose to use different wording. This team ensures that each homebound saint gets communion, and they communicate the needs to the pastor of congregational care. This is a great way to utilize the laity in any church.

The second “S” in **ASSET** stands for **set goals and objectives based upon the vision and mission of the church**. Most local churches have a vision and a mission. It is important in ministry to *set* the goals and objectives of the strategy to match the vision and mission of the church. An example of a vision and mission of the local church is as following:

Vision: (Name of local church) is called to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We will be prophetic voices that will transform lives by becoming Christ-centered, Justice-driven, and kingdom-minded community pursuing excellence in all we do. Mission: To proclaim the gospel, transform lives, and make disciples for Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

So as goals and objectives are put into place, it is important to ensure that they are aligned with the vision and the mission of the church. Certainly, having a goal to contact the sick and the shut-in of the church is aligned with being Christ-centered because Christ is centered around people. The objective is contacting them around communion is certainly aligned with transforming lives and being a kingdom-minded community as the church cares for those who are homebound and cannot come to the church. Caring is allowing the church to go to them and to reach out and touch them.

⁵⁸ St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church of Dallas, Texas, www.slcumc.org.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The “E” in **ASSET** stands for **equip** and **engage**. As Clergy, we must get the entire church engaged in caring for the congregation and the community. It is not solely up to the Clergy to do the caring. In order to get everyone engaged, it is the Clergy’s responsibility to equip. McMickle described the Pastors as shepherds, and in his book, he stated that what constitutes effectiveness in pastoral care is to equip and encourage each member within the flock of God to assume some personal responsibility for the care of those both inside and outside the walls of the local church.⁵⁹ Clergy must be able to show others how to demonstrate care in all areas of their responsibility. It is the responsibility of each Clergy within the local church to equip the people with the necessary skills needed to do ministry, and everyone that is served should feel that their needs have been met, and that they are truly being cared for. As I am the Pastor of Congregational Care, the congregation should feel cared for not just from my efforts but from the efforts of the people within my ministry as well.

McMickle had the best example of this when he created three concentric circles of care in his caring church model. In his concentric circles, he had pastors caring for members, individuals, and family; members caring for one another; and the congregation caring for people in the wider community.⁶⁰ The day is long gone where the Pastor does all the caring. Pastors cannot do all the visiting the hospitals or checking on the sick. Pastors cannot be expected to keep in contact with all of the others in the congregation who may be well. Pastors cannot be expected to do every task at a funeral. Certainly, there are services that are reserved for persons with licenses like Clergy, but there is a lot of work that can be done by laypersons. However, the church depends on the Clergy for strategies. Clergy must be able to equip the people to care for one another and to care for the community.

⁵⁹ McMickle, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

McMickle uses Ephesians 4:12 as evidence of this. In Ephesians 4:11-13, he said that Paul sets a model to effectively and efficiently shepherd the flock of God which is every Christian congregation could benefit from. The essence of Paul's message is that rather than doing all of the work themselves, pastors should continuously equip the church to be involved in ministry. Paul says that some are gifted to be apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.⁶¹

McMickle goes on to describe the roles of pastors and teachers in the local church. Pastors and teachers were gifted to be the builders of the church, but they were responsible for equipping the saints to do the ministry of the church.⁶²

When Clergy create strategies not only should they equip laity, but they should engage the laity in creating the strategy. If people are equipped to create strategy, and if they are engaged in creating the strategy, they will have more ownership of the strategy and will know how to do the work involved in the strategy. It up to the Clergy to equip them to be able to do this.

How do Clergy equip people? First, it is important that all strategies along with the tasks to execute them are documented. So many times, we find processes and procedures taking place, but there is no documentation of them. Documenting strategies and developing processes and procedures ensure that the strategy is long term. So many of our strategies within our local church are only done if the Clergy who created them is there. Then when new clergy is appointed, there are no processes and procedures in place. The laypersons cannot help the new pastor because they had not been properly trained or equipped to do so. That is why equipping and engaging everyone is important to creating effective and efficient strategies within the local church. It is essential to document processes and procedures and then equip the laypersons to know what to do. Documentation also ensures that when laypersons change for whatever reason,

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶² Ibid., p 9.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

the processes and procedures can serve as guidelines for the new laypersons and even new Clergy.

Finally, the “T” in **ASSET** stands for **training**. Efficient and effective strategies require effective and efficient training at every level. This is related to equipping. Clergy should be the first level trainers within the local church. What do trainers do? Trainers often train the trainers. This means that Clergy will train those who will do the training. This is all a part of equipping or giving the laity the tools necessary to train other laity.

When a clergy member is assessing a ministry, part of that assessment is not only to assess the strategy that is in place, but to also assess the training that has been put together. This practice will ensure that the laity doing ministry work is equipped and properly trained in the steps and/or the tasks of the strategy. The key to look for is documentation. I was talking to an auditor who evaluates the church finances, and he stated that if there is no documentation, it is considered to not be happening. It does not matter how well someone can quote or articulate a process or procedure. If it is not documented, in a court of law, it does not exist.

Documentation gives us processes and procedures to follow, and it gives us processes and procedures to equip and train our ministry coordinators, leaders, and other laity who participate. Ensuring documentation is the first order of business for the Clergy to create an effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

A question was asked, “What about the Pastors’ families? The pastors’ families referring to the Senior Pastor and all the other pastors was not mentioned in McMickle’s work. Pastors’ families have access to the same resources as other families within the local church.

Pastors’ families may have even more support because they have the support of the Staff Parish Pastors Relations and the Personnel Committee who ensure the care of the pastors. Some

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

local churches have special programs or support groups for pastors' families. For all practical purposes, I will continue to address the congregational needs in this dissertation.

Chapter 4: Caring Disciples

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV): The Great Commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

At one of the churches that I belonged to previously, I was a decision counselor. A decision counselor is someone who helps people to decide when they respond to the invitation that is extended by the pastor once she preaches during worship service. Churches handle this process in various ways. The invitation is a call to join the church, to be saved, rededicate one's life to the church, or it is a chance to ask for prayer. As a decision counselor, I would go through a brief gospel presentation. The gospel presentation was a short story to help determine where a person was with salvation. There would be a series of questions such as, "If you were to die tonight would you have eternal life in Jesus Christ?" It was through a series of question that the decision counselors helped people to Jesus Christ, helped them to join the church, helped them to rededicate or whatever the case may have been at that time. There would be several decision counselors, and we served at a large Baptist church, so we would get a lot of people coming down to the altar making decisions. I would sometimes go back and tell my mother how many members had joined church or how many people who had been saved. I really thought that we were doing something significant. It was significant, but as I began to grow in Christ, I realized that this was just half of the job.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

When we look at the Great Commission, Jesus specifically defined to the disciples exactly how we are to shepherd people into the church. When we are to make disciples by sharing the gospel with them, baptizing them, and then teaching them everything that we have been taught. Jesus did not give instructions to make members and get volunteers. He specifically commanded that we make disciples.

Members of the church are people whose names are listed on the church membership roll. They belong to the church, but they are not necessarily committed to the church. They may or may not serve in the church based upon what is convenient for them. Often, they are the people who are interested in church based upon what they can get out of it for themselves. It is not about what they can do for the church. They see their relationship with Christ as being mostly for their own benefit.

In the church, there is an 80/20 rule. Only 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Often there is one person who serves in two or three different ministries. The leaders are the same people over and over. They just swap from one ministry to the other. Usually in this ministry scenario, the engagement is low.

We must be intentional about making disciples. Disciples are defined as true followers of Jesus. To follow Jesus means to learn about Jesus and live according to Jesus's teachings. Disciples are Christians whose lives are rooted in the practices in spiritual disciplines: prayer, scripture reading, bible study, etc. As disciples spend this quality time with God, they become little Jesuses. They began to look like Jesus and act like Jesus. They are not perfect in the sense of doing nothing wrong, but they are constantly perfecting their lives as they fall deeper and

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

deeper in love with God as our founding father, John Wesley, would say. He called it “striving for perfection.”⁶³

As disciples of God strive toward perfection, they fall deep in love with God. Not only do they fall in love with God, but John Wesley stated that they also “fall in love with their neighbors.”⁶⁴ One cannot be in love with God and not be in love with humankind. God is love.⁶⁵ In order to have a congregation that cares for one another, it is important to have a good discipleship program. Discipleship is not a one-time event. It is ongoing. Being a disciple is a way of life. We are always evolving as disciples.

When people join the church, we start developing them immediately. I am not the Pastor of Discipleship, but making disciples is within every Pastor’s job description. One of my areas of responsibility is that I am over the New Members Orientation. This is the beginning of the discipleship strategy. In doing an assessment of the New Members Orientation, we discovered that we were overwhelming them with information. My Senior Pastor suggested that we redevelop the New Members Orientation with the intention of having three objectives: Teaching members how to connect with God, grow with God, and serve God. We took the word “new” off the program because we wanted to not only invite new members to the orientation, but also members of tenure who had not gone through the program before. We decided to send all new ministry leaders through this program. This program serves as the basics to becoming a disciple of Christ. Becoming a disciple is the first step in teaching congregation to care for one another. As we began to open this program up to new ministry leaders, we found out that a lot of members had forgotten a lot of the information or had not gone through it in the first place. We

⁶³ Answering the call, p.38

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.38.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.40.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

also went through this information in a Leadership Summit, which is an event that occurs among and for the leaders once per quarter to teach them various leadership topics.

We had to change the name one more time. As we looked at the name Members Orientation, we realized that we are not trying to make members but disciples, so we changed the name of the strategy to Disciples Orientation.

A. Pre-Work.

Other tasks that we ask them to do are to

read spiritual gifts material and to complete a spiritual gifts assessment⁶⁶. Both resources came from the UMC Discipleship site. According to the pre-work “spiritual gifts are attributes given to the Christian believer for the building up of the whole body of Christ according to Ephesians 4:11-13.”⁶⁷

Based on the information, we created a worksheet that takes the gifts and aligns them with a ministry category of the church. After filling out the worksheet, they are asked to commit to a particular ministry according to their spiritual gifts. It is essential in building disciples to help them discover their spiritual gifts. If disciples are going to be effective in the church, they must be aligned according to the gifts in which the Holy Spirit has given them. This is the only way that they can effectively and efficiently become disciples in the body of Christ.

Since we limited the class to only two hours on the second Saturday of every month, it was impossible to do everything within that class. Also, we knew that we were giving out a lot of information in one setting, so we wanted to make sure that we were not overloading the participants with too much information.

⁶⁶<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en>.

⁶⁷ An Introduction to Spiritual Gifts, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en>.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

B. Connect With God.

In this section connecting with God is discussed. The person has connected to the church by joining the church. When a person makes the request to join the church, there are several ways that a person can do this. One way is for the person to have decided to receive Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Therefore, the person comes to a particular church to start this lifelong relationship which is called, “sanctification.”

Another way that a person can join is to transfer his/her membership from another church to this particular local church. That church may be a United Methodist Church, or it may be another church from a different denomination. This information is gathered for practical purposes. In other words, it is routine when processing new members. It helps us to know this when we are starting the discipleship process because it dictates what information that we want to share. If a person is coming from another denomination, that person may require more training beyond orientation. If the person is coming from another United Methodist Church, information may be communicated more as refreshers because that person is probably familiar with that information.

Another way for a person to join is to join as an associate member while maintaining membership at another church. People often join this way if they are in the city temporarily. For example, college students do this. A college student may be from another state going to school in our city, and they want to attend church and have a sense of belonging while they are away from their home church.

In our local church, we have partnered with Southern Methodist University to be a church of choice for those students who may be looking for a church in the city. The Pastor of Young Adults has made the connections with the university where they can register for in person

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

worship on Sundays, and when they come to service, the Senior Pastor will take them out for lunch. This is just another way the church can be a *caring church* within the community.

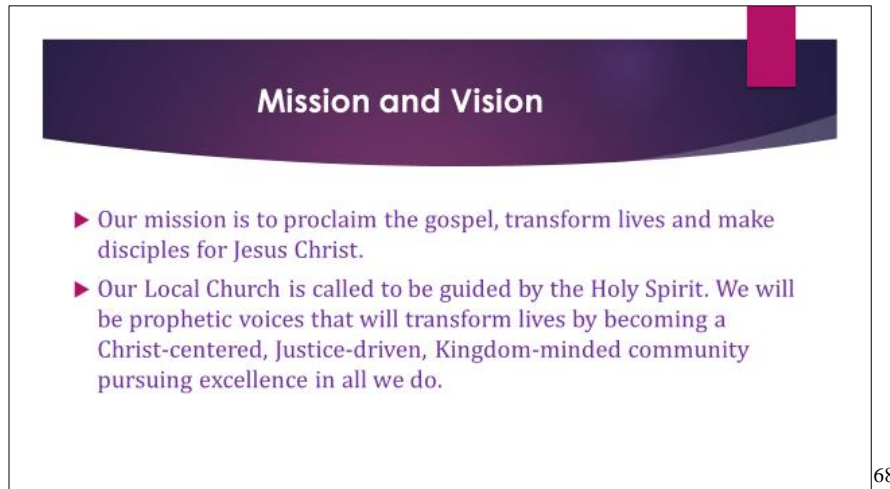
So, joining the church is the initial way to connect. When a person joins the local church as with any organization, it is important to find out about the church. No one should join a church or any other organization without getting to know what that church or organization is all about. In making this connection, we introduce new members to the organization by sharing with them the vision, mission, the core values, and the motto. Every church should have these things. A vision and mission give the direction in which the church is going. If the local church is using the vision and mission like they should be used, the vision and mission will drive the ministries that are created to support the church. The vision and the mission help to align the church, so that everything being done moves the church forward toward its goal. If it does not align, then it should not be done.

The core values are the foundation that the church is built upon. They are what the church is about. It is important for the church to define itself by what it is built upon. Core values are the things that the church deems as important as they express who they are as that local church. For example, one should be able to look at a church's core values and get an image of the church's culture. A church should have a motto to reflect the vision, mission, and core values in a very short sentence or phrase that can easily be quoted. The motto is often seen on church correspondence, literature, and other paraphernalia. When it may be too much to have the vision, mission, and core values, the church can use this motto that should contain all of that but briefly.

Looking at church's mission, vision, core values, and motto helps one to connect with God in terms of understanding what the local church is about. When one understands the mission, vision, core values, and motto of a local church, it is easier to make a personal

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

connection to church. A person cannot connect to the church if he/she does not understand what these things are in the church. Attached are these items for our local church.

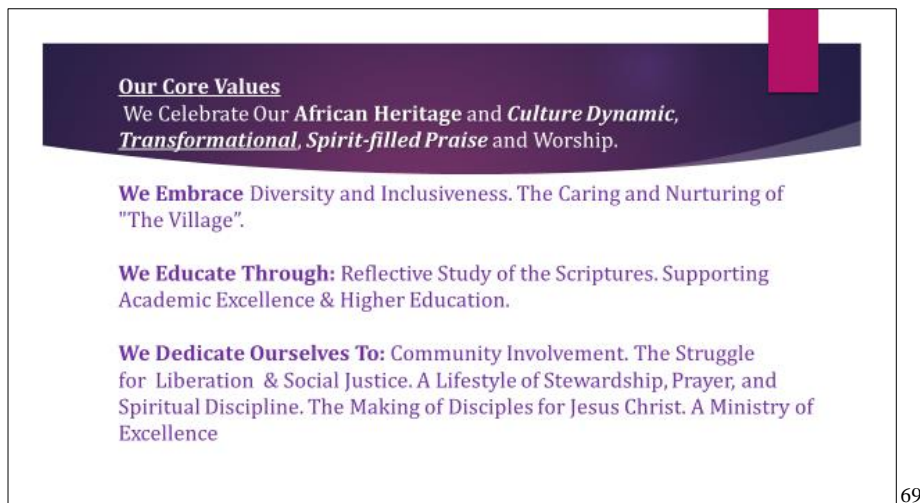


A slide titled "Mission and Vision" with a dark purple header and a pink tab on the right. The content is as follows:

Mission and Vision

- ▶ Our mission is to proclaim the gospel, transform lives and make disciples for Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Our Local Church is called to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We will be prophetic voices that will transform lives by becoming a Christ-centered, Justice-driven, Kingdom-minded community pursuing excellence in all we do.

68



A slide titled "Our Core Values" with a dark purple header and a pink tab on the right. The content is as follows:

Our Core Values

We Celebrate Our African Heritage and *Culture Dynamic, Transformational, Spirit-filled Praise* and Worship.

We Embrace Diversity and Inclusiveness. The Caring and Nurturing of "The Village".

We Educate Through: Reflective Study of the Scriptures. Supporting Academic Excellence & Higher Education.

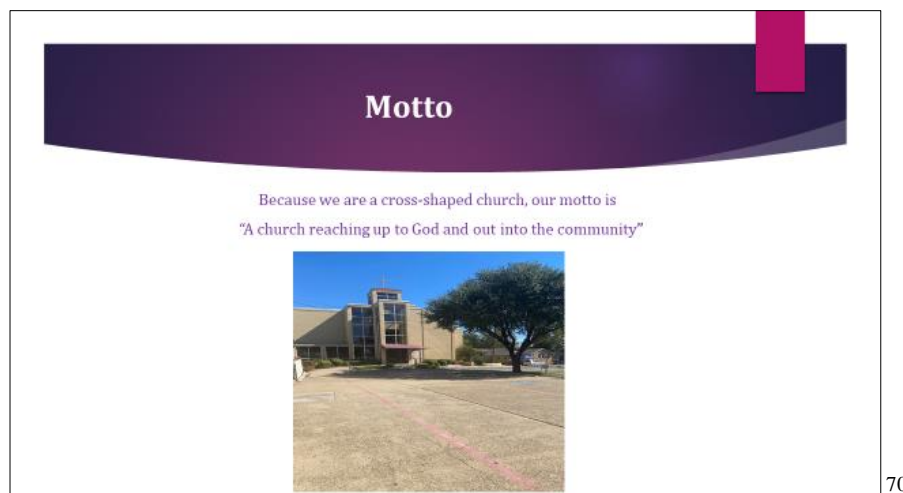
We Dedicate Ourselves To: Community Involvement. The Struggle for Liberation & Social Justice. A Lifestyle of Stewardship, Prayer, and Spiritual Discipline. The Making of Disciples for Jesus Christ. A Ministry of Excellence

69

⁶⁸ St. Luke "Community" UMC Disciples Orientation (powerpoint presentation, 2021), p. 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.



The above information gives an indication of the type of culture that this local church has. Culture is going to be discussed in the latter part of this dissertation. However, taking this information into consideration helps one to understand that local church. This information lets one know the things that the church considers to be important. These important factors (mission, vision, core values, and motto) are what give birth to church ministries, mission work, etc.

These factors also help the church to be intentional about what it is doing. It is from this framework that the care strategy is born. One can look at these factors and understand that the overall intention of the church is to help to make disciples from members of the congregation. In support of that, the new members and the discipleship programs are designed to move people from membership to discipleship.

Discipleship is clearly guided by the Holy Spirit where Christ is in the center of everything that it does. The theology is rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. With Jesus

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Christ being the center of everything there should be a strong discipleship program that builds a relationship with Jesus rather than a religion of Jesus.

Social justice is important in my local church. The church gets involved in social issues and social problems within our community. In our particular side of the city (as with many other metropolitan areas) there is a serious breakdown in the relationship between the police officers and people of color. The church decided it should be in the forefronts of helping to close this gap, therefore one of the activities that my Senior Pastor sponsors within his non-profit organization is to have basketball games with police officers. Pastors and other community officials come together once a year in a friendly game of basketball to build relationships and help with this social issue within the community.

The church is also involved in ensuring that all congregants are registered to vote. We do not tell people who to vote for, but we encourage voting because voting is our voice. Voting gives people, the opportunity to make changes in the community. Voting and taking part in the political process is what we as citizens of Dallas and citizens of the United States of America should be doing. So, we have a Social Justice Ministry that helps us in this area. They do voter registration drives, and they circulate voting information in the community.

Our core values are typically lived out in our worship celebrations. Our praise and worship reflect the culture of who we are. The local church is about 98% African American, but we still embrace diversity and inclusion. We welcome all people, not just African Americans; however, we know that people tend to come together with people like themselves. We must be conscious of that and intentionally build programs around embracing people of all races.

We also draw from and embrace from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender society). Considering the controversy going on in the United Methodist Church as they continue

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

to fight for equal rights to be clergy, despite the language in our *Book of Discipline* that clearly discriminates against them, we have taken a position that although we will not violate the current rules of the United Methodist Church, we will lead change by continuing to value people from this society by seeing people as people who need the love of Christ.

We have gay couples within our congregation, although we have not been allowed to do gay marriages. However, when we celebrate marriage on “Renewal of the Vows” Sunday (when married couples renew their vows), we have changed the language to include every couple. We even included vows for singles since we have more single people than married people. It is all about the culture of inclusion and diversity. We believe that everyone should have access to a relationship with Jesus as their savior.

These are just some of the ways that we live out mission, vision, core values, and motto within our local church. We help new members and those who have been there for several years understand how to connect to the church as they are connected to God.

Another aspect of connecting to God is to better understand Methodism. In the section entitled, “What We Believe,” we discuss the Apostle’s Creed – Affirmation of Faith. A creed is a summary of basic Christian beliefs.⁷¹ The Apostle’s Creed dates to the early church and the days of the Apostles. There were so many different beliefs circulating at that time, it was important for Christians to put a stake in what they believed, so they wrote the Apostle’s Creed. The creed clearly explains what Christians believe about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The Apostle’s Creed is written in the form of a responsive reading and is often read during Communion Sundays.

⁷¹ Abraham and Watson, “Key United Methodist Beliefs, p. 121.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The second creed discussed is the Nicene Creed which is the second oldest creed in the church. It is a statement of faith written in the 4th century that expresses belief in the Trinity.⁷² We believe that God is a triune God in that God is three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each person of God has a different function within the Trinity. When I was a little girl, I thought that God was one person with three different names, but I later came to understand that they are three different persons of God with different functions.

Then we discuss the Wesleyan Quadrilateral briefly. John Wesley believed that the Core of Christian Faith is revealed in scripture, illuminated in tradition, made vivid in our personal experiences, and confirmed by reason.⁷³ I do not go into a lot of detail on this, but the important thing to help them to understand is how the United Methodists make theological decisions as we try to interpret scripture. The bible is our main source, but we also look at what has been done traditionally; we think in terms of our own personal experience with God, and then after considering all those things, we reason and come up with a conclusion that is supported by what we have discovered.

In the next section dealing with Methodism, I give John Wesley's definition of grace. If we were to ask several people to define grace, we would get a variety of answers. However, as Methodists, it is important to understand the definition as given by John Wesley, the founding father of Methodism. John Wesley describes it as the "powerful process by which believers come to experience God and know God's salvation."⁷⁴ Then I describe the three aspects of grace using the illustration of a house as John Wesley had done. The three aspects of grace being prevenient, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Prevenient grace is the porch of the house

⁷² Abraham and Watson, "Key United Methodist Beliefs,"90.

⁷³ General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, "Answering the Call," p. 28.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 36.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

that draws us to it. Prevenient grace is that grace that goes before us. Before we knew God, God knew us and begins to draw us into God. By the time that we get to a point of repentance, God is already there waiting on us.

Justifying grace is the door of the house, which is described as “making our brokenness whole.”⁷⁵ The hymnist asked the question, “What can wipe away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Jesus Christ is that door. Through a relationship with him, humankind has forgiveness for our sins.

Finally, to walk into the house is sanctifying grace.⁷⁶ Sanctifying grace is smoothing out the rough edges. As we begin to live in the house, we strive toward Christian perfection. John Wesley describes Christian perfection as “developing a perfect love for God and our neighbor.” This is when we began to live a life of faith, to love the world more energetically, and to keep growing in the love and knowledge of God.⁷⁷

That concludes the section on connecting with God. As we focus on the component of caring disciples, we must develop disciples. As people develop in becoming disciples, it is our hope that they develop in caring for one another. However, that connection with God is certainly the first step in this process. We connect to God by walking upon the porch of the house and walking through the door. It is like pieces of a puzzle that come together. Human beings must make that connection in order to fit into the puzzle of life. Connecting with God makes life more complete. To connect with God is to fall in love with God. One who loves God cannot help but the love and care for others.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 36

⁷⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 38.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.⁷⁸

And loving someone is caring about someone. When disciples care about one another, what hurts God's heart will hurt our hearts. When we see someone suffering, we will reach out in response to that suffering. The church is made up of caring disciples therefore the church cares for people in the congregation, people in the community, and people in the world.

C. Grow with God.

In our strategy, a disciple who is connected to God has been drawn in from the porch of prevenient grace, knocked on the door of salvation, and is now living on the inside of the house where sanctifying grace is taking place. We now must teach our disciples how to grow in God. Based on the belief of John Wesley, it is not enough to have faith, we must exercise our faith in our daily lives; he called that "practical divinity."⁷⁹ We must teach disciples how to grow in God.

The first thing that is discussed in this part of the strategy is means of grace. Means of grace are ways in which we open ourselves up to God's presence and guidance.⁸⁰ There are two means of grace: works of mercy and works of piety.⁸¹ I describe works of mercy as being how we show grace toward others. Works of mercy includes feeding homeless, providing clothing and food to the poor, caring for the sick, visiting those in prison, sheltering the homeless, welcoming strangers, peacemaking, and serving the common good.

⁷⁸ 1 John 4:20 (NIV).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁸¹ Ibid., 48.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Works of piety are how we develop a closer relationship with God. Works of piety include public worship of God, reading God's word, Holy Communion, family, and private prayer, studying scripture, fasting and abstinence, and Christian conferencing.⁸² Participating in these activities will help us to grow in God.

In growing in God, Baptism and Holy Communion are discussed again. Earlier in this work, I mentioned that the sacraments are a part of the glue that holds the caring church together. It is important to help disciples to understand the importance of these in the United Methodist Church and the church universal. Every disciple should be able to articulate basic information about these two sacraments. Baptism is the initiation into the body of Christ. We enter a covenant (a binding, sacred agreement) with God.⁸³ We are baptized with the water and the spirit of God.

Holy Communion is the holy meal that we partake in to celebrate what God has done through Jesus's Christ. Christ was broken and bruised for us. We also remember to give thanks, and we remember that Jesus is coming back to get his church. Holy Communion is done often because, as the bible tell us, "As often as we do this, we do this in remembrance of Christ."⁸⁴

Another thing that disciples need to learn in the orientation strategy is Wesley's three general rules. Wesley created these general rules to help the Methodist Society have some basic rules for holy living. The general rules are **do no harm** (by avoiding evil of every kind, **do good** as often as you can (addressing helping the human bodies and human souls), and **attending all the ordinances of God** taught to the disciples by Jesus.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid., 48.

⁸³ Abraham and Watson, "Key United Methodist Beliefs," p. 106.

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

⁸⁵ General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, "Answering the call," p.26.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Do no harm. When we do evil toward others, we bring harm to them and/or to their lives.

When we harm someone, we can often harm those who are around them as well. In our baptism covenant, we vow not to do evil of any kind. The reason for this vow is so that we will not bring harm to our fellow human beings or to the ones who are close to them.

When one cares for someone, he/she does not want to do harm to that person in any way. Through this general rule, we hope to create disciples who will love other disciples enough not to want to harm them in any way. This is essential for a disciple.

When considering Jesus as our role model, we understand that Jesus said that he came into the world not to condemn the world, but so humankind could have life and have it more abundantly.⁸⁶ So as followers of Jesus, we should have the same desire. Our desire should be do no evil, bring no pain or hurt to anyone. This biblical concept should impact the way that we live, and it should impact the way that we make decisions regarding not only people in the congregation, but those with whom we are close like family members and co-workers. Sometimes we tend to treat the people at the church well, but we mistreat our family or relatives. We may be great to our family members, but we mistreat the people at the church. As disciples, we should learn through this rule to treat all people well.

Do good. When it comes to doing good, service to others come to mind. Another term for that means of grace or works of mercy. It is not enough to just care or love someone. That care and love should impact our actions. If I love someone, and discover that they need food, I should be driven by the Holy Spirit within me to make sure that they get food.

We should not only do good to people, but as many people as we can possibly be good to. Impacting the lives of one person is pleasing to God, but if we can multiply our good deeds

⁸⁶ John 10:10 (ESV).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

toward people, it multiplies the very pleasure of God toward us. That is why the scriptures tells us that if we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord.⁸⁷ When we lend to the Lord, the Lord always pays us back with interests.

Practice the means of grace. Rueben P. Job called this rule, “Staying in love with God.”⁸⁸ To practice the means of grace means that we are keeping the ordinances of God.⁸⁹ We keep the ordinances of God because of our love for God. As Job described in his book, the word “ordinance” is a strange word to us, but to John Wesley it was a word that described the practices that kept the relationship between God and humans vital, alive, and growing.⁹⁰

It makes sense that the beginning of caring for people in the congregation starts with caring for God. When one cares for another, there is always going to be action behind that love. The love of God should prompt Christians to act. We act by reading and studying scripture. We act by praying to God, which is a way to have a conversation with God. We act by participating in communion with God as we honor the covenant that we have made to God through our baptism.

In caring for God, we will care for one another, which should in turn prompt us into action. In caring for one another, we pray for one another. We take the time to listen to our sister or brother who may be hurting. We feed someone who is hungry. We provide clothing to someone who needs to be clothed.

In caring for one another, we are not only in tune with the needs of those within our congregation, but we are also in tune with the needs of those within our community. We are in

⁸⁷ Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)

⁸⁸ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 1976), p. 53.

⁸⁹ *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 103.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

tune with the needs of our world and the world around us. However, it all starts with a relationship and love for God.

D. Serve God.

The last section within our Disciples Orientation is “Serve God.” In this section the focus is on sharing what we have with God and one another. There is a heavy emphasis on spiritual gifts. Prior to the class in the pre-work, we require the new members to take a spiritual gift assessment that was created by the United Methodist Discipleship.⁹¹ “Spiritual gifts are the attributes given to Christian believers for the building of the whole body of Christ.”⁹² As explained in Ephesians 4:11-13 (NRSV), “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the world of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

Spiritual gifts are not talents or skills. “These fruits and gifts are not our own achievement. They and others are the outgrowth of the Spirit’s work in us, by grace, through our faith in Jesus the Christ. And they are not given for personal gain. Through these fruits and gifts, the Holy Spirit empowers us for ministry in the world.”⁹³

So basically, the Holy Spirit gives us these gifts so that we can use them for and in the body of Christ. Everyone who receives the Holy Spirit through salvation also receives various gifts. The assessment is designed to explore characteristics of the person taking the assessment to determine which gift that the person possesses. The assessment includes 20 different spiritual gifts: wisdom, knowledge, administration, apostleship, shepherding, faith, miracles, prophecy,

⁹¹*Spiritual Assessment* <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en>

⁹² Ken Sloane, *An Introduction to Spiritual Gifts* ((United Methodist Member’s Handbook, Revised by George Koehler {Discipleship Resources, 2006}, 84- 85.

⁹³ Sloane, p. 84-85.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

leadership, giving, compassion, healing, discernment, teaching helping/assistance, evangelism, servanthood, exhortation, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.⁹⁴

The gifts are broken down into clusters of nurturing gifts, outreaching gifts, witnessing gifts, and organizing gifts.⁹⁵ We took each of our ministries and lined them up underneath these clusters. Therefore, we would be able to see which gifts lined up with what ministry, so that the disciples would be able to select a ministry in which to work.

It was very important to align disciples with the proper ministries because we wanted to ensure that disciples were serving within their gifted areas. Nothing is more ineffective than having a person working in a ministry area for which he is not gifted. This leads to frustration for the person in that ministry as well as the people that they may be serving.

I created a worksheet that allowed people to list their top gifts in the cluster and the ministry areas that align with that cluster. Then the question is asked, “What do your gifts say about you? The final step is to have them to select at least one ministry to serve in based upon that information. In a *caring* church, it is important to get disciples engaged right away. Serving is caring.

In this section, disciples are reminded that serving is about being the hands and feet of Jesus. Jesus is not going to come down to the earth and feed the hungry. Jesus is not going to come down from heaven and put clothes on the backs of those who are naked. Jesus is not going to come down from heaven and give shelter to the homeless. That is why he has disciples. We are to do that work as being in a caring church.

Another part of serving is giving. Disciples are encouraged to give at least 10% of their earnings which is what we call a tithe. Disciples understand that the church needs money with

⁹⁴ Barbara and Dan R. Dick. <http://equippedforeverygoodwork.wordpress.com>.

⁹⁵ Ibid., <http://equippedforeverygoodwork.wordpress.com>.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

which to operate. When disciples are generous givers, God will bless a seed to do many things, and God will also bless the one who gave the tithe.

E. Conclusion.

We close out Disciples Orientation with having them to repeat a membership covenant:

By the power of God, made available to me through my faith in Jesus Christ, and manifested in my life through the presence of the Holy Spirit, I enter into this sacred Membership Covenant. With sincerity of heart, mind, and soul, I commit to the membership of (the name of the local church) and enter into this covenant with almighty God.⁹⁶

It is important to be intentional about creating *caring* disciples to have people engaged enough to carry out the will of God and to serve the church through ministry. It all starts with getting people to become committed disciples for Christ. Specific emphasis is put on helping people to understand what their roles are as disciples. Members do not always understand their roles in the church, which is probably one reason why people remain members rather than become disciples for Christ.

Disciples Orientation is just the beginning of making disciples for Jesus Christ. Becoming a disciple is a lifelong process, and this new member strategy is just the beginning of the process. However, the components of this strategy will need to be revisited throughout the lifetime of the Christian. This strategy will become our foundation in building up the body of Christ. The church must start somewhere, and this is certainly a way in which to start the disciples process.

Some may see this as too idealistic, but it is important to understand that I am building a caring model of what disciples should look like. A model may not be what we are right now, but to become, we must have a model by which to pattern ourselves after.

Chapter 5: Caring Ministries

⁹⁶ *St. Luke Membership Handbook*, (St Luke Community United Methodist Church, 2014) p. 8.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Caring Clergy and Caring Disciples form Caring Ministries. What are Caring Ministries?

Caring Ministries are ministries that have been formed to meet the needs of the local church's congregation as well as the community surrounding the local church. It has been discussed that there are various ways to find out the needs of the congregation and to find out the needs of the community in previous chapters through one-to-ones, group discussions, and through doing assessments.

If the local church is an older church (like our local church is), the footprint of the ministries may not necessarily be relevant to the needs of the congregation based upon the number of changes that the church has experienced in its past. The local church in which I serve is a prime example. A couple of years ago, there were over 70 ministries within our church. We had been going through a period where there was a lack of engagement. As I stated in chapter 1, we have over 4000 members in our database, but the actual number of members engaged in ministry was about 6.2 percent.⁹⁷

In addition to low engagement, it was also noted that the same core leaders were staying in positions for several years. If they did move to another ministry, it was like they were playing musical chairs through the ministries in that they were just switching out with one another. Most of these leaders are between the ages of 43 and 77. There was almost no involvement from a leadership standpoint among younger generations such as millennials.

When we have this type of scenario in the local church, ministries get stale. The ministries kept doing the same things every year. Eventually people stopped coming. There was too much going on, and the programs became too predictable. Times and people were changing but not ministries, so a lot of those ministries became stale and irrelevant for today.

⁹⁷ 2020 Leadership Summit (Local Church Leadership Attendance Data for 2020).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The previous Senior Pastor had a solution to break this cycle, which helped to break up the monotony of using the same leaders repeatedly. He instituted a Servant Leadership Institute, which was a six-week program to prepare new leaders in the church. In this program, they covered topics like those in the Disciples Orientation. The curriculum had leadership courses to prepare people who had never been in ministry for how to be a leader in the local church. After people finished the six-week program, they were encouraged to sign up for new leadership positions. This program allowed people from younger generations to be in ministry as well as the people who had not been involved in ministry in the past. The face of leadership within the church changed somewhat. However, the overall engagement remained flat.

The Senior Pastor also went back to tools like the *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation*, which were guidebooks written by the United Methodist Discipleship through Cokesbury publications. In each leadership role, there is a particular time frame for leaders to oversee a ministry, particularly the administrative ministries like the Church Council, Board of Trustees, Finance Committee, etc. In the programming ministries, leaders can stay if they want to be involved.

The latest count of ministries indicated that we still have about 60 ministries (which has been reduced by about nine percent reduction over the past two years). About half of those were put underneath other ministries. The others were eliminated through attrition, which means that no one signed up to lead the groups or the persons who were leading stopped working in the ministry altogether. Since there was already low engagement, those ministries were simply phased out.

The lack of people in the workforce that has been trending lately has greatly impacted ministry involvement because people are finding themselves busier at their jobs than ever before.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Other ministries went away as we have had to tighten the budget. To stay viable in the pandemic, it has been necessary to cut our overall budget by as much as twenty percent over previous years.

The pandemic has impacted ministry programming tremendously and is certainly making us rethink what we are spending our money on. We are finding that since church is occurring more virtually than in person, we have had to put more money into media, technology, and marketing. According to the numbers from the Chief Financial Officer, our budget from 2021 to 2022, we have seen an increase of 30%, but what it meant is that programming ministry budgets had to decrease. More people are watching on Facebook and YouTube than ever before. Now that more people are watching virtually, it also means that people are not as involved as they once were. Maybe this will change once we re-open our sanctuary.

As a matter of fact, for about a year and a half, this is the way that people were attending church. Our local church shut down in March of 2020 and did not start regular in person worship consistently until July 2021. We are having in person worship consistently, but we have less than 250 people attending per Sunday compared to 600-800 prior to the pandemic according to the attendance reports.

From a congregational care standpoint, the pandemic care is virtual. We have not been able to visit hospitals, homes, or nursing facilities. Further, misinformation continues to reduce the number of people getting vaccinated, and more variants continue to threaten the well-being of the entire world. Each variant seems to be more contagious, but so far vaccinations are keeping people from getting hospitalized and/or keeping vaccinated people from dying. However, the unvaccinated are adversely impacted because more of them are dying and being hospitalized, so we have to continue to care for and love people from a distance.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

My overall budget from 2021 to 2022 has been reduced by about \$6000. However, since most of ministry work is done through technology like smartphones, Zoom, and Dialmycall, I will be able to maintain effective ministry with this budget. Technology has allowed us to reach more people faster and more often. During the first year of the pandemic congregational care had over 5000 touches (individual interaction with members). With the help of our new technology of Dialmycall, the entire church has had over 40,000 touches for the year. Through voice, text, and email, we can literally reach the entire church with just a click of the button. This technology has truly sustained us. The more that we operate in this manner, the less hands-on interaction the congregation really needs or wants. However, I have also seen the trend where ministry engagement is shrinking. People are just not signing up to get involved with ministry. That is why we must continue to build our people through discipleship. We are literally having to learn how to do more with fewer people. Technology has been our strength in caring for the congregation during this pandemic.

I was in a cohort meeting where I met with other Pastors within care or similar ministries every month, and the Pastors were saying that although all of us are having in-person worship, a significant number of people have yet to return. In the local church in which I serve, the attendance is about 20% less including the online congregation. However, we are still out of our sanctuary due to the winter storm damage, and we are having in person worship at another United Methodist local church. Yet, we are still healthy financially due to PPP loans and people are still giving. We are still in unprecedented times in the local church.

The church is changing and so are the ways in which we operate and care for people. Based on what I am seeing in our local church, I believe that ministries will continue to be streamlined, and we will have to be even more intentional as we build strategies to support our

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

congregation and community. At the same time, it seems that programming ministries tend to be more hands off, but outreach ministries (those that support to the community) tend to continue to be hands-on because they are testing or giving vaccinations, handing out clothing and food, and giving out school supplies. People within our community must show up in order to get the help, so that may be the difference.

All our programming ministries (children and youth ministries, grief recovery, discipleship bible classes, etc.) are on Zoom. We have very few in-person gatherings except for in-person worship and funerals.

To have caring ministries, an assessment must be done first to see if the needs of the congregation are being met. We tried to do an assessment of the ministries at my local church, but we were not successful the first time. One reason for this was that we were unsuccessful is because we lacked a viable process by which to do it. In this section, I am going to propose an assessment strategy that will allow a church to know what needs to be done in order to create an effective and efficient strategy that will meet the care needs of the congregation.

In this chapter, we will review how to assess programming ministries which are the ministries that serve the congregation. Assessing programming ministries will ensure that we are meeting the needs of the congregation.

Our ministries in our local church can be divided into two basic groups: administrative ministries and programming ministries. Administrative ministries manage church business. Administrative ministries consist of Church Council, Finance, Board of Trustees, Nominations and Leadership Development etc. The Church Council is the executive agency of the charge

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

conference and create and supervise the strategic plans for an effective congregation.⁹⁸ The Finance Committee is responsible for the budget along with other financial affairs within the church. The Board of Trustees is responsible for the property of the local church and everything from insurance to security of the property. Nominations and Leadership Development is responsible for ensuring that leadership roles are filled, and that the leaders are developed to lead throughout their tenure.

The programming ministries are those ministries that are established to meet the needs of the congregation: It may include the Children and Youth Ministries, Congregational Care, Discipleship, and Outreach. These are the ministries that will be assessed for the purpose of caring.

A. Prep Work

The Senior Pastor should designate a point person to oversee the assessment process. This person will ensure that the process is going smoothly and will give regular updates to the Senior Pastors, the Executive Staff (including other Pastors) and the Church Council. The Executive Pastor who oversees church administration/operations and who is second chair to the Senior Pastor is perfect for this role. Before when we attempted an assessment, we did not really have a designated person to follow-up on the process.

The ministry chairpersons and/or coordinators should be responsible for gathering the information from the ministries. The information requested for each ministry should be captured on a ministry form to make sure that every ministry is gathering the right information needed by the assessment team.

⁹⁸ Betsey Heavner, *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation, Church Council*, (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury: 2016), page 5.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

There should also be an Assessment Ad hoc Team (AAT) formed to do the assessment of the information that is turned in by the ministries. Before, we only had one person to meet with all of the ministries and gather all of the data. This is one of the reasons why we may not have been successful. It was a lot of work for just one person. She started the process, but she had no one to follow up with her or to hold her accountable for the information. All she did was to look at the ministry handbook, talk to a few ministries, and she gave an overall report that did not have enough information to make a difference in the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the ministries.

The AAT should consist of no more than five people. It is not necessary to have more than five because the more people involved the harder it is to get focus and achieve consensus. Since the administrative ministries are not being assessed and since they oversee the business of the church, these leaders should make up the AAT that will be conducting the assessments.

Once the AAT is established, the point person will call for a meeting to determine the communication strategy to the Pastors, the chairpersons and/or coordinators of the programming ministries. The AAT needs to determine how long the process is going to take and lay out the guidelines for how everything is going to go. They should be able to determine the timelines and the strategy. The proposed strategy that I would suggest is quite simple. Attached is a ministry assessment sheet that asks for specific information about the ministries. (See the attached). It would be helpful if the assessment started and completed before the budget process starts. That way decisions can be made about whether the ministries will continue to

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

(Date Completed)

Ministry: EMS Ministry - Purpose

- Care for the homebound saints, Ensure homebound and EMS safety
- Follow up with them at least once per month
- Report their needs to the Pastor of Congregational Care

Area of Service and/or Care: Congregational Care

Activities or Action Items: (Major events not counting monthly meetings)

- Conducted monthly communion mail outs or porch drops
- Conducted monthly calls
- Followed up on those in hospitals and temporary rehab care
- Did porch drop to sick (upon request)
- Did Christmas Gift Card Mail outs

Budget

Planned Budget	3000.00
Actual YTD	2457.08
Remaining Budget	542.92

How much money (if any) has been transferred to other budgets for any reason?

\$0

Local Church:

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Vision		Alignment (Yes or No)
Mission		
Motto		
Core Values		

Ministry Assessment Recommendations:

	(Check one)	
Ministry remains intact.		
Ministry should be combined with another ministry		
Ministry should be eliminated.		
Need more information.		

Additional notes:

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Signatures

<u>Title</u>	<u>Printed Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>

exist, be discontinued, and/or be combined with other ministries. Once this process is over, budgets can be adjusted to reflect the decision.

The AAT will communicate and announce the assessment giving the timelines and process to the entire church. Then they will meet specifically with the ministry leaders and coordinators along with the Pastors over those ministries to roll out the communication plan. They will also give each ministry leader the form and explain what they will be looking for in the process.

B. Assessment.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The ministry leader will be responsible for taking the form and filling it out for a specific ministry. Each ministry will have a separate form. Once the form is filled out with the pertinent information, it will be submitted to the Pastor over that area for his review. Once he reviews and approves the information, the Pastor of that area will sign off on the form.

It will be helpful to publish a schedule and communicate it in at least two weeks prior to the actual date. Every meeting will be conducted on Zoom. Along with the Ministry Leader and Coordinators, the Pastors over the ministries will be expected to attend and/or fill in for Ministry Leaders and/or Coordinators who may not be able to make it. Pastors may also designate others who may be engaged enough to be able to present information and ask questions, but it is preferred that the Ministry Leader and then Coordinators. It is important to show laity engagement if they are truly leading. If a Pastor is presenting all the meetings, it could be an indicator that there is not enough laity engagement.

The meetings should be scheduled over several days so as not to exhaust the AAT. They need to be well rested and fresh for each meeting. The more engaged the AAT is the better they will be able to assess ministries and give recommendations. These meetings should always begin with ground rules that will ensure a very productive and respectful assessments. Assessments should never be used to demean or undermine the ministry or its leaders. Feedback should always be given in a positive and professional manner regardless to the outcome.

Once all the ministry forms are turned in, a date will be set to review the information. The AAT can be split up to look at certain ministries and then all the team will come back together to review. During the review of this information, the AAT will generate questions to ask the ministry leaders. They can create a standard list of questions to check for efficiency and

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

effectiveness, and then generate ministry specific questions based upon the data that they will have reviewed.

Once the AAT has met with all the ministries, a date will be scheduled to have chairpersons and/or coordinators along with the Pastors over those ministries to come in and do a 30-minute presentation on each ministry. After the presentation, the ministry leaders will go through a short questioning session about the ministry information that has been provided. This will also give the ministry leaders and coordinators an opportunity to ask any question that they may have as well.

Once all the ministries have completed their presentations and answered all the questions, the AAT will set a date to review all the information and make recommendation. Once all the meetings are completed and all the information is gathered another date should be set to assess everything and make recommendations. This gives time for the AAT time to absorb all the information they have been given.

C. Recommendation.

Once the Assessment Ad hoc Team gathers all the information, they will schedule a meeting among the team. Ministries are to be put in one of the three categories: Ministries should remain intact, ministry will be combined with other ministries, or ministry should be eliminated.

If ministries are to remain intact, it means that ministries will remain a part of the organizational ministry structure chart because it meets the requirements of meeting the vision, mission, core values, and motto. Their activities and tasks are consistently making a difference in the life of the people to whom they provide a service. It also means that this ministry will continue to be a part of the ongoing budget process. The Team may also give recommendation in how to strengthen the ministry to sustain its viability in the future. A person from the team

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

may be assigned to schedule a follow up with them to determine if action plans have been put in place and are executed according to the recommendations.

One ministry may also be added to another ministry, by taking the specific task and putting it under another ministry that is viable. We did this to my caretakers' ministry. The caretakers' ministry had not been functioning for a couple of years prior to my arrival. No one would sign up for the leadership position and there were no activities scheduled. Caretaking (those who agree to care for a sick or aging loved one) is certainly an area of concern so I went to the Church Council to recommend that Caretaking be included with the overall Congregational Care. Those budgets were consolidated, and we included caretaking as a monthly topic for discussion.

Most of the ministries would fall in the two categories mentioned above. The main mission of the Assessment Ad hoc Team is to ensure that the footprint of the ministry meets the current needs of the congregation in the most efficient and effective ways possible.

There may be, however, ministries that have simply passed their shelf life of viability, and simply do not meet the current needs. An example in our local church is when we had a lectionary series every year where we would invite certain speakers to come and lecture for three nights and have dialogue with our Pastor Emeritus (retired pastor who had served the congregation for over 26 years). When the Pastor Emeritus relocated to another city, the lectionary series congregants started decreasing to fewer than 10 people coming to the event for three years in a row. To plan and set up the event became more expensive, so it was decided to eliminate the event altogether. This was the right decision for this ministry, and it saved money in the budget for other more pressing needs. It also saved time and effort of the ministry leaders and volunteers who could simply be used to do something else in the church that needed to be done.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The AAT scheduled time with each ministry and made recommendations for follow up on some type of regular basis. This is a strategy that will ensure that ministries are viable and meeting the needs of the congregation effectively and efficiently. This process helps the local church to be intentional in building ministries to care for the needs of the congregation and the community.

D. An Alternative.

This process of assessing ministries is very detailed. There are roles to fill, and a lot must be done to prepare and go through this process. However, there is a way to assess and not have to go through these steps, and that is to simply fill out the form. If each ministry would take the time to fill out the form, there is a lot that can be learned about how the ministry is functioning.

For example, I filled out this form for my grief ministry using the budget that I had been allotted for 2022. I realized that the strategy that I had planned was not going to work because I only had \$400.00 that had been allotted to me for 2022 opposed to 2021 when I had a budget of \$1600.00. Just filling out this form helped me to understand that I would not have the funds to support all the things that I wanted to do and had done in 2021. I can take this form and present it to the budget committee. There is nothing like having raw data to show to get support to increase the budget.

This is how this process can work for smaller churches with just one pastor leading the church. Laity of each ministry can provide the data for that ministry, and the assessment team can be the church council of that church. The good thing about this process is that it can be altered to fit a caring church of any size. If one fills out the information on the assessment form, that data will give indicators of how well a ministry is working to meet the needs of the congregation or community that it is serving.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Chapter 6: Caring Culture

A. Culture Characteristics.

To have a caring church, there must be a caring culture. To understand culture, it is important to look at some characteristics of culture as defined by Robert F. Nideffer.

Culture is learned. It is not biological; we do not inherit it. Much of learning a culture is unconscious. We learn culture from families, peers, institutions, and media. The process of learning culture is called “enculturation.” While all humans have basic biological needs such as food and sleep, the way we fulfill those needs varies cross-culturally.⁹⁹

To have a caring culture in the local church is to intentionally set up a strategy to do so. We are not innately born to care. Even when we become Christians, we have to learn to be disciples. So, the local church has to be intentional about teaching their Pastors to lead, their congregation to become disciples, and their ministries to have effective and efficient strategies in caring for its congregation and its community.

Culture is shared. Because we share culture with other members of our group, we are able to act in socially appropriate ways as well as predict how others act. Despite the shared nature of culture, which doesn’t mean the culture is homogenous (the same).¹⁰⁰

The only way that we can share a culture in the local church, whether it is caring for the congregation or caring for those within the community, is to teach people what is expected. Once caring is taught, we must inspect what we expect. This is what will ensure caring is taking place across every ministry.

That is why it is important to do assessments. Assessments help to find out what the opportunities are within our ministries. Once we discover what those opportunities are, we create action plans that close the gaps on where we are and where we want to be. It helps us to have an intentional strategy, and that strategy becomes the way that we care. When we have an

⁹⁹ Robert Nideffer, *The Characteristics of Culture*, [Chapter 8: The Characteristics of Culture \(nideffer.net\)](http://www.nideffer.net).

¹⁰⁰ Nideffer, www.nideffer.net.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

intentional strategy, everyone will know what the standards are and even though our approaches may be different, we will all be caring for one another.

Culture is based on symbols. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Symbols vary cross-culturally and are arbitrary. They only have meaning when people in a culture agree on their use. Language, money, and arts are all symbols.¹⁰¹

The symbols in our local church are our vision, mission, motto, and core values. These symbols stand for who we are as a local church. It is important that we constantly communicate these symbols so that everyone knows who we are and what we are about. In Disciples Orientation for new members one of the things we include in the agenda is who we are as a local church.

However, we also use symbols to let people know who we are in Christ. Our sacraments in the United Methodist Church are baptism and holy communion. They are symbols to explain who we are as United Methodists. Even when we see the cross with the red flag which is our symbol in the United Methodist Church, people know who we are as a United Methodist Church faith.

Culture is integrated. This is known as holism, or the various parts of the culture being interconnected. All aspects of a culture are related to one another and to truly understand a culture, one must learn about all of its parts, not only a few.¹⁰²

When we look at the caring church model, and we see the components or arms of the caring church which includes caring Pastors, caring Disciples, caring ministries, and a caring culture, we began to see how they are intertwined with one another. The church is just a building of mortar and clay, but the body of Christ speaks to the people who make up the church. Caring Pastors are those who care through leading, assessing, training, and teaching others how to care for one another and those in the community. Caring Disciples are members of the church who not only have salvation from Jesus Christ, but have a practical lifestyle based upon having a

¹⁰¹ Robert Nideffer, www.nideffer.net.

¹⁰² Nideffer, www.nideffer.net.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

relationship with Christ. They are people of perfection, who have not only mastered the love of God, but also the love of their neighbors as themselves. Caring ministries are those ministries that have been assessed by the Assessment Ad hoc Team and have received recommendations on how they can better care for the people that they serve. All of these components together form the Caring Church.

Culture is dynamic. This simply means that cultures interact and change. Because most cultures are in contact with other cultures, they exchange ideas and symbols. All cultures change, otherwise, they would have problems adapting to changing environments. And because cultures are integrated, if one component in the system changes, it is likely that the entire must adapt.¹⁰³

I have never witnessed as much change as I have in the local church and the world as I have in the last two years since the entire world has been in the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed our lives forever. It has impacted how our whole human experience is with one another. Whether we like it or not, or whether we are good at it or not, our culture has had to shift to stay well and to stay alive.

Congregational Care has changed drastically, and one of the ways that we have been able to survive and continue to care for people is through collaboration with one another. Our Bishop has continued to gather and share information with all of the churches. He has given directives based on the most current information coming from the CDC and state and local officials to keep the conference safe. We have a portal on our conference website filled with information as we plan in person worship and other gatherings. There is information available for how to keep our staffs safe whether in the office or in the church.

We have survived, and we have continued to provide care and carry on the business of the church. We have been able to do this through our ability to be able to connect with others.

¹⁰³ Nideffer, www.nideffer.net.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

When I talk about connection, I am simply talking about connecting to other local churches within the Metro District of the North Texas Conference. I have colleagues at Highland Park United Methodist Church, Lovers Lane, First United Methodist Church of Richardson, and others. There is no United Methodist Way of caring for one another. It is about connecting with others who do the same job and sharing best practices with one another. There is power and strength in connecting and collaboration.

B. Caring Church Culture.

A caring church culture is everything that has discussed in previous chapter. In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation. To create that strategy, the culture has to be considered.

In chapter 1, I talked about creating a paradigm within the minds of those who will be creating a caring strategy. Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner talked about the importance of having pictures or images of what pastoral care looks like.¹⁰⁴ It would be difficult to create a strategy and not have an image in mind of what care looks like. I created that image by what I had experienced in the culture of my local church as well as to take into consideration some statistics that speak to the church universal. This helped to create the framework for the strategy that was being put together.

The strategy of a Caring Church can be developed by using the Caring Church Model as described in chapter 2. If the local church has a caring culture, this is what it may look like. My

¹⁰⁴ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *A Primer in Pastoral Care*, p.37.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

idea of a caring church was put into Microsoft office template called “pyramid speech pillars” to help me to organize my idea.¹⁰⁵

Caring Clergy.

The Caring Clergy component in the caring church model represents the leadership of the church, both appointed pastors and non-appointed pastors, who are responsible for the success of the caring church strategy. Caring starts with the Clergy, and they are responsible for the strategy that determines whether the local church is to be a church that cares for its people as well as the people within the community.

In this chapter is an example of an organizational structure of Clergy within the local church. Organizational structures of local churches vary based on several factors, which include the priorities that have been established at that local church. Some local churches only have one pastor who is responsible for providing multiple services to the congregation which can be difficult. Nevertheless, regardless to the organizational structure each pastor must ensure that the people within their specific areas are cared for.

However, we must always remember that caring is everybody’s job not just the pastors. Pastors must always foster an environment for caring to happen at all levels of the church among disciples, ministries, and the congregation.

The specific roles within my current local church setting were discussed in detail. I have also discussed the specific area that falls directly under a Pastor of Congregational Care, and how tasks vary based upon church needs and the educational experience of the pastors. Finally, I discussed how tasks have changed to meet the needs of the congregation because of the pandemic.

¹⁰⁵ <https://templatesoffice.com/en-US/Pyramid-Speech-Pillars> - TM16401954.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

In chapter 3, section B, there was a brief discussion about how caring happens within the local church. Each role within the local church must demonstrate a level of care within the role in which the pastor is assigned. It is not enough just to be a caring pastor, but it is important to have a plan or a strategy of care to be intentional about caring. For example, I as the Pastor of Congregational Care, and I am responsible for grief counseling. If someone comes to me for grief counseling, I have a strategy that consists of one-to-one sessions, group sessions, and providing a list of professional resources. With this strategy, I know what to do and what to offer each person based upon that person's needs. I have documented those steps in my strategy. That is how I envision care for each pastor in their areas of responsibility. If a pastor is responsible for care in a particular area and someone comes to the pastor for help, that pastor should know what to do based upon a written strategy that has been implemented.

It is not only important for caring Clergy to have a strategy, but it is essential to get feedback from the congregation, the community, homebound saints, and other constituents to constantly measure the level of care of the church. Assessments are a good way to do this. It is important to do assessments at various times especially after a lot of change has occurred, such as the closing of the church during the pandemic.

In chapter 3, section B, I also discussed how to build an effective and efficient strategy based upon the acronym ASSET. The Clergy of the local church is an ASSET to the local church, and it is that acronym that can be used for the actual tasks of Clergy in building that effective and efficient strategy.

A stand for **assess** the current strategies that are in place. In some cases, there may not be a strategy but maybe there are processes and procedures to evaluate. It is important to ask a lot of questions regarding processes/procedures and or strategies that are currently in place, who is are

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

the people being served, and how do they feel they are being cared for. Assessing the church can be done formally (with a designed assessment) or informally (just by having a conversation).

S stands for **set the goals and objectives**. Whenever a new leader joins the local church, it is important to understand what the overall objectives of the ministries are and what the goals are. It may be important to establish those goals and objectives if none are in place. It may be important to reassess the goals and objectives based upon what is found in the assessment. To set the goal and objectives allows everyone involved to understand what is expected within the organization.

The second **S** stands for to **set goals and objectives based upon the vision and the mission of the church**. As goals and objectives are put into place, it is essential to ensure that they align with the vision and the mission of the local church.

The **E** stands for **engage and equip**. The Clergy is responsible for getting the entire church engaged in caring for each other and the community. McMickle created an image of care with the Clergy being the shepherds, and he equated effectiveness in pastoral care to how well Clergy can equip the congregation to assume responsibility of care for one another and those within the community.¹⁰⁶

Part of engaging and equipping the congregation for ministry is to always ensure that processes and procedures are documented. Documentation of process and procedures ensures longevity of how things are being done, and it alleviates things being done around who is the Clergy of the ministry. Documentation also makes it easy to assess and to make adjustments that may be needed.

Finally, the **T** stands for training. Efficient and effective strategies require efficient and effective training at every level. Training is directly related to equipping. The first level of trainers

¹⁰⁶ McMickle, *Caring Pastors, Caring People*, p. 33-34.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

should be the Clergy. Trainers should train other trainers. This is what needs to happen to equip and give the laity the tools necessary to train laity.

Overall, chapter 3 emphasizes that Clergy are ASSETS to the church in which they serve. They are shepherds who prepare the body of the local church to care for one another and to care for the community. This is done with the tasks that have been highlighted using the acronym of ASSETS.

Caring Disciples.

In the *caring* disciple's chapter 4, I have introduced a strategy to begin the process of moving people from membership to discipleship. We certainly cannot rely on one two-hour class to do everything in terms of helping people to make this transition, but it certainly gives a good start. This is just the foundation of making disciples for Jesus Christ. This strategy makes the connection needed for people to grow into a caring congregation that reaches out to one another and to those in the community with love and compassion.

The objective is to connect, grow, and serve. We demonstrate how to connect with God, grow with God, and serve God. Connecting with God means that we get to know the local church and what it stands for. The only way that one can do that is to understand the mission, vision, core values, and motto.

We also explore our history. One cannot know where they are going if they do not know where they came from. We explore the history of Methodism introducing John Wesley as our founder. Then we look at the history of the local church. Every local church is a subset of its history. Then we look at black church history because we are predominantly African Americans.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Our Affirmation of Faith is discussed by reviewing the Apostle's Creed. The Apostle's Creed gives us the basics of our faith and what we believe. If a person does not believe any portion of the Affirmation of Faith that person is not a United Methodist.

Because we are a people built upon grace, we explore the three aspects of grace as defined by John Wesley, our founding father. Three aspects of grace are prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. The definition is given for each of them by using the model of a house.¹⁰⁷

After we connect with God, then we move into growing with God. Growing with God is growing in love with God as our relationship with God develops. The first thing that is discussed as a part of that relationship is "Means of Grace." Grace is God's not only unmerited favor of God, but it is also God's power at work within us increasing our capacity to love God and others. God's grace for us grows deeper as we develop holy habits or "means of grace." Practicing means of grace and other spiritual disciplines positively affect our spiritual lives.

What are means of grace? There are two categories that are discussed: works of mercy and works of piety. Works of mercy are when we show grace toward others such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for the sick. Works of piety are when we show grace toward God which includes public worship, reading of God's word, and Holy Communion.

Then we discuss the sacraments or what is called signs of grace. There are two in the United Methodist Church: Baptism and Holy Communion giving the definition of each.

The final section in growing with God is a review of Wesley's Three General rules: Do no harm, do good, and practice the means of grace taught to the disciples by Jesus (staying in love with God).

¹⁰⁷ Answering the Call, p. 36.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

The final section is to serve God. To serve God, we must give ourselves to God. All of us have been given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit to be a blessing the body of Christ or to the local church. However, we must find out what those spiritual gifts are, and we do that by taking a spiritual gifts assessment. Once we discover what our gifts are, then we select a ministry that matches our gifts, and that is where we will serve.

We also serve by giving our tithes which is defined as 10% of our earnings. Some people give offerings, which may be less than the actual tithe or it may be in addition to the tithe. We not only tithe with our money, but with our time and our talent.

We close out our discipleship orientation by reciting our membership covenant. Upon our baptism into God's Holy church, we make a commitment and a covenant with God. The membership covenant is just an extension of that covenant into the body of a local church which is where our discipleship role is nurtured and fulfilled.

Overall, we serve by caring for one another, the community, and our world. That is what it means to be *caring* disciples.

Caring Ministries

In terms of Caring Ministries, there is often a problem in making sure that the footprint of ministries matches the care of the congregation and the community surrounding the local church. The way to resolve this problem is to implement a process to assess each ministry to ensure that they are relevant, efficient, and effective for the current time in which the local church finds itself in. That way ministries will remain viable and intentional in meeting the needs of its constituents or those who benefit from those ministries.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

In chapter six, I have created a process out of a process that failed to hit its objective. The tools that were needed had been attempted but had failed to deliver an assessment of the ministries. Here is a review of that process in steps.

Step 1. Assign an Assessment Point Person.

Step 2. Select an Assessment Ad hoc Team.

Step 3. Create a communication plan and execute it.

Step 4. Do the prep work.

Step 5. Assess the ministries.

Step 6. Make recommendations.

Step 7. Follow up.

Following the Ministry Assessment process effectively will ensure that the local church is being intentional and strategic in the way that it conducts its ministries to care for the congregation and the community that surrounds it. The information that will be gathered by assessing ministries will allow the Assessment Ad hoc Team to identify ministries that do not meet the vision, mission, motto, and core values of the church. It will help to realign ministries to ensure that they are viable and relevant. Assessing ministries makes the best of the budget dollars that will be spent. It also ensures that ministries that are no longer aligned or working efficiently and effectively will have a process by which to either eliminate these ministries or to add them to other ministries. It also allows follow up to happen. Ministries can be enhanced and improved by the feedback and follow up of this team.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

This is just one process and one that will be fluid. As this process takes place, we always reserve the right to adjust and make improvements, but at least this process will give the local church a process by which to start.

Conclusion

My thesis is as follows: “In times when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.” In my approach, I have been very practical in sharing what has worked and what has not worked in our local church as we have been intentional in creating strategies to care for the congregation considering a pandemic.

As I close out this dissertation, I would like to share data from a presentation from the Church of the Resurrection Leadership Conference that I attended online on September 29-October 1, 2021. Savannah Kimberlin, the Director of Research Solutions for Barna Group, did a presentation on the “State of the Church.” She gave some astounding statistics in how the church has been doing considering the pandemic. In one section, she gave statistics on how the church and its pastors are viewed to churched and unchurched people. She presented this information because she said that she “wanted to be able to show the church’s reputation within communities and how well we have taken care of people in the congregation and the community.”¹⁰⁸

In the introduction I discussed church attendance, and how it had continued to decline. Savannah Kimberlin from Barna Group presented data that showed a study from 2013 through 2020 nationwide across denominations which included the United Methodist Church. According

¹⁰⁸ Kimberlin, “*State of the Church.*”

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

to this study, church attendance was struggling even before the pandemic.¹⁰⁹ The graph shown indicated the attendance decline started somewhere around 2008. It is not known what is the exact reason for the decline, but Savannah Kimberlin noted that “during that time when the I-phone was invented, Facebook was created, millennials entered adulthood, there was an economic downturn, and there was a presidential election.”¹¹⁰

Of the practicing Christians within the church (specifically focusing on protestant churches), 79% were faithful before the pandemic compared to 51% being faithful after the pandemic. When she used the term faithful, she said that she was talking about congregants who attended church on a regular basis. She called them, “the faithful few.”¹¹¹ One in five practicing Christians completely pulled away from the church during the pandemic, and they have not returned. When they were asked what they were waiting on to return, over half of them stated that they were waiting on things to go back to normal. It is not known as to when and if these people were going to return.

However, the good news is that 73% of them said that they were feeding themselves or in other words, they continued to practice the faith. Only 16% percent had drifted from their faith altogether and that number increases to 20% when millennials were added into the equation.

These statistics gives the church an idea of what type of issues need to be worked through as worship is being planned. We know what we are facing and can work on action plans based upon the numbers.

However, the most positive section of the presentation was when she began to talk about the reputation of the church and the pastors. For churchgoers and non-church goers put together,

¹⁰⁹ Savannah Kimberlin, *The State of the Church*, (Church of the Resurrection Leadership Summit, 2020), slide 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Kimberlin.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Kimberlin.

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

76% believed that the church offers hope to people. 60% believed that the church cares about people. 61% believed that the church is generous. 59% believed that the church is trustworthy; and 53% believed that the church is making a difference. Savannah said that these numbers are higher than they have been over the past few years. She believed that the pandemic has certainly improved the reputation of the church because the church has stepped up to the needs that have come because of the pandemic.

Just thinking in terms of our local church, we provide covid-testing and vaccinations, and we fed people weekly and handed out milk and other food to school children. We created a housing fund for those who were at risk of losing their homes, and we instituted many other programs to meet the needs of congregants and those within the community. The pandemic created many needs, but the church stepped up to meet the needs that had been created.

Savannah then discussed the perception of local pastors of both churched and unchurched peoples' opinion. Of people surveyed, 83% of churched and 57% of unchurched believed that Christian Pastors in the community have been strong leaders during the pandemic; 79 churched and 56% unchurched believe that Christian Pastors in the community have been strong leaders when it comes to racial justice. 83% churched and 52% unchurched deeply trusted Christian Pastors in their community. Savannah said that people overall still believe in their pastors, and that they recognize the work that we are doing.

We do not know what the future holds, but we believe that the church will continue to have a place in the future of the world to come. We do not know how fast the church will grow, but if we keep addressing the issues of the people within the congregation and the community, I believe that the church will remain a vital part of the community and the world. We just need to continue to be intentional and create winning strategies that are effective and efficient in caring

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

for the congregation. God is not finished with us yet, and God will continue to use the local church as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

Bibliography

- Abraham, William J. and Watson, David F., *Key United Methodist Beliefs*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013).
- Adams, Jay E., *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Publisher, 1974).
- Answering the Call* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Education, 2016).
- Bass, Diana Butler, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004).
- Berkley, James D., *Leadership Handbook of Outreach and Care: Practical Insight from a Cross Section of Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 1994).
- Best, R. (2002) *Pastoral care and personal social education. A review of UK research Undertaken for the British Educational Research Association*. Cited 2005, 1 December. Retrieved from <http://www.bera.ac.uk/pdfs/BEST-PastoralCare&PSE.pdf>.
- Book of Discipline*, paragraph 103.
- Burge, Ryan, *Faith in Numbers: Is Church Attendance Linked to Higher Rates of Coronavirus?* (www.Academic rigor, journalistic flair, 2021),
- Cartmill, Carol and Gentile, Yvonne, *"Serving from the Heart: Finding Your Gifts and Talents For Service"* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 2011).
- #cases_casesper100klast7days, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker>.
- Dick, Barbara and Dan R., <http://equippedforeverygoodwork.wordpress.com>.
- Dykstra, Robert C., *"Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings"* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press: 2005).
- Edmondson, Ron, *Sometimes You Have to Cancel Service*, (<https://www.careleader.org/manage-pastoral-care-responsibilities/>).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Gregory, Christina, PHD, Five Stages of Grief- Understanding the Kuber-Ross Model.
www.psycome.net/depression.central.grief.html.

Gryboski, Michael, <https://www.chistianpost.com>.

Harbin, Michael A., *The Promise and the Blessing: A Historical Survey of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

Houdmann, Michael, [What is Christian spiritual formation? \(compellingtruth.org\)](http://www.compellingtruth.org)/CEO S. Michael Houdmann.

<https://www.umcdiscipliship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en>.

<https://templatesoffice.com/en-US/Pyramid-Speech-Pillars> - TM16401954.

Job, Rueben P., *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 1976).

Kimberlin, Savannah, *The State of the Church*, (Church of the Resurrection Leadership Summit, 2020).

Kujawa-Holbrook, Sheryl A. and Montagno, Karen B., *Injustice and the Care of Souls Taking Oppression Seriously in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

Lampe, Karen, *"The Caring Congregation"* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011).

Lattimore, Vergil, *Pastoral Care Strategies of Black Pastors (Ministers, Church Counseling Illinois)* Illinois: Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 1984).

Lederach, John Paul, *"Conflict Transformation"* (New York, NY: Good Books: 2003).

McMickle, Marvin A., *"Caring Pastors, Caring People, Equipping Your Church for Pastoral Care"* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishing, 2011).

Mims, Gene, *"The Kingdom Focused Church"* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers: 2003).

Nideffer, Robert, *The Characteristics of Culture*, Robert Nideffer, *The Characteristics of Culture*, [Chapter 8: The Characteristics of Culture \(nideffer.net\)](http://www.nideffer.net).

#new-hospital-admissions, <https://covid.cdc.gov>.

Ogden, Greg, *"Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan: 2003).

PEW Report, *"In the U.S. Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace"* (2019).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Rainer, Thom S., *Hopes for Dying Churches*, <https://factsandtrents.net/2018/01/16>.

Rich, Christopher, *Give, God Gave Intentionally, So We Plan*, (Mercy Fellowship, 2012).

Rock Church Spiritual Gifts Test, <http://www.giftstest.com>. (2022).

Rummage, Aaron J., *a Model for Pastoral Care and Shepherding of a Large and Growing Church* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary: 2005).

Schnase, Robert, “*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*” (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 2018).

Sloane, Ken, *An Introduction to Spiritual Gifts* ((United Methodist Member’s Handbook, Revised by George Koehler {Discipleship Resources, 2006}, 84- 85.

Stevenson-Moessner, Jeanne, “*A Primer in Pastoral Care*” (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press: 2005).

St. Luke “Community” United Methodist Church of Dallas, Texas, www.slcumc.org.
Spiritual Assessment <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en>.

St. Luke Membership Handbook, (St Luke Community United Methodist Church, 2014).

St. Luke “Community” UMC Disciples Orientation (powerpoint presentation, 2021), 2021, A. Smith.

Suan, Thang DEIH, *Difference Between Pastoral Care and Counseling*,
<https://www.academia.edu/30454822/Difference>

Tenney, Merrill C. “*Pictorial Bible Dictionary*” (Nashville, TN: Zondervan Publishing House: 1974).

Thomas, Anderson, “*Developing a Pastoral Leadership Team at First Baptist Church*” (Vancouver, British Columbia).

Thompson K. Mathew, *Ministry between Miracles: A Biblical Model of Spirit-led Pastoral Care* Kottayam, Kerala, India: Goodnews Books: 2020).

#trends_dailytrendcases, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker>.

“*Webster II New Riverside University Dictionary*” (Boston, MA, The Riverside Publishing Company, 1984).

Thesis: In a time when churches are declining, it is important to be intentional about creating an overall effective and efficient strategy to care for the congregation.

Wesley Study Bible, www.CommonEnglishBible.com, (Nashville, TN., 2012).

Westberg, Granger E., *Good Grief: A Companion for Every Loss* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press: 2019).

The Holy Bible, www.YouVersion.com. (Edmond, Ok.,2008)

2020 Leadership Summit (Local Church Leadership Attendance Data for 2020), Dallas, TX.