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## Leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

LEADERSHIP TRAITS OF LONG TENURED YOUTH MINISTERS IN  
CHURCHES OF CHRIST

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Gregory Anderson

July, 2017

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Gregory Anderson

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D., Chairperson

Lani Simpao Fraizer, Ed.D.

Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to Jesus for mercy and grace beyond measure, and to Dalene, the love of my life, who has encouraged me every step of the way.

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To youth ministers in all fellowships past, present, and future – thank you for being the hands and feet of Jesus.

## VITA

### EDUCATION

2017	Doctor of Education (Ed.D) Organizational Leadership	Pepperdine University Malibu, CA
2003	Master of Arts (M.A.) Religion	David Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN
1988	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Speech Communications	David Lipscomb University Nashville, TN

### PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

2016-Present	Connections Minister A&M Church of Christ, College Station, TX
2014-2016	Senior Partner Interim Ministry Partners, Sunnyvale, TX
2006-2014	Chief Learning Officer Strategic Government Resources, Keller, TX
2003-2006	Senior Minister Twickenham Church of Christ, Huntsville, AL
1997-2003	Senior Minister Western Hills Church of Christ, Nashville, TN
1996-1997	Senior Minister Clanton Church of Christ, Clanton, AL
1992-1996	Youth Minister Homewood Church of Christ, Birmingham, AL
1989-1992	Youth Minister Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ, Cookeville, TN

### PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Fall 2016	Spirit of the Times: Investigating Faith-Based Leadership Development - Presented at the International Organization of Social Sciences and Behavioral Research (IOSSBR) Conference
October 2015	The Price of Inequality: A Review and Response of Economic Policies, Globalization, and Disparity between Rich and Poor – Presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Business

## ABSTRACT

Although typically not responsible for leadership decision-making that impacts the spiritual growth of the entire organization, youth ministers play a vital leadership role in congregational health as leaders of smaller communities within greater communities of faith. This leadership role is threatened by numerous challenges facing youth ministers of all denominations.

Specific to this study, the vital role of youth ministry in Churches of Christ is threatened by high turnover rates of those within the profession. The purpose of this study was to determine leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ, identify the challenges those youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices, discover how they measure successful youth ministry leadership strategies and practices and ascertain their recommendations for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession.

Data were collected from 15 full time youth ministers in Churches of Christ from throughout the United States. The qualitative, phenomenological study utilized a 12-question semi-structured interview format to gather the lived experience of subjects. Key study findings identified 70 themes that answered four research questions. Specifically, self-awareness was the top trait study participants used to describe themselves as leaders. Additionally, participants identified creating an others-focused environment as the top strategy or practice as a contributor to long tenure at the same church. The findings of this study have substantive implications for men and women considering youth ministry as a career or calling, and for institutions of learning that train those preparing for the youth ministry profession.

Keywords: leadership; Christian ministry; youth ministry; tenure

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The study of leadership in Christian ministry and the interest in clergy leadership development in the United States and beyond has increased dramatically since the turn of the century (Stewart, 2008). Simultaneously, expectations of ministers as leaders have been shifting and continue to morph in response to dynamic culture change. Although traditionally assessed through external markers like growth in attendance, finances, or buildings (Forward, 2001), leadership growth is now measured by competencies such as purpose-aligned vision casting (Stroope & Bruner, 2012) and capturing culture and creating movement (Mancini, 2008). Mastering such competencies is critical for all ministry staff members. However, this is especially true for youth ministers who spend tremendous amounts of time with highly impressionable teenagers, their parents, and other primary caregivers.

Ministers are now expected to grow not only in Biblical knowledge and mastery of external markers, but also in organizational leadership capacity and competency that contributes to a congruent self. In the context of Christian ministry, leadership effectiveness may no longer be captured by antiquated markers of success, but may be better realized via noteworthy life events that shape overall character, integrity, calling and vocation and one's sense of identity (McKenna, Yost, & Boyd, 2007; Reave, 2005).

### **History**

Leadership in Christian ministry is not a modern phenomenon. The roots of leadership in Christian ministry predate the life of its founder, Jesus Christ. Examples of forerunners of Christian ministry leaders and characteristics used to describe them permeate the literature of the Old Testament. Moses is considered one of the greatest leaders of all time. He exhibited

leadership characteristics such as courage, faith, passion, and determination (Cottrell, 1998; Dilenschneider, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Stroope & Bruner, 2012). Various New Testament authors also mention other great leaders of ancient Israel such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, and King Solomon.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught and modeled various leadership characteristics that millions would ultimately model their lives after. These characteristics included moral uprightness, ethics, charisma, service, motivation, inspiration, social architecture, humility, prayer, and compassion (Canales, 2014). He was not however, the only individual in the New Testament to model effective leadership. The Apostle Paul offered leadership counsel to those in Christian ministry and those who served as church leaders. When writing to his young protégé, Timothy, the Apostle Paul encouraged him to set an example for others in his words and behavior. Timothy was encouraged in love, faith, and purity to be devoted to public Scripture reading and exhortation and teaching. Paul also challenged him to not neglect his giftedness as an evangelist and to continue practicing what he had been taught so that his progress would be visible to everyone (1 Timothy 4:12-15, New International Version).

The Apostle Paul offered similar counsel when writing to appointed leaders; those he referred to as *elders* or *overseers* of the church. In his letter to the evangelist Titus, Paul challenged church leaders who were designated as overseers to be blameless. This blamelessness was to be modeled by faithfulness to one's spouse and expressed behaviorally through believing children. Paul noted the importance of not being overbearing or quick-tempered. He emphasized the importance of avoiding drunkenness, violence, and not pursuing personal gain through dishonest means. Paul also emphasized hospitality, loving what is good,



self-control, uprightness, holiness, and discipline as characteristics of a godly and effective leader (Titus 1:5-8).

As early church councils contemplated various issues such as the divinity of Christ, the veracity of texts for canonization, and heresies that threatened the budding religion, precedent established by their decisions contributed to a leadership framework based on the teachings of Jesus and the instructions of the Apostle Paul and other New Testament writers. As the centuries passed and Christianity began to grow, various church leaders divided over theological, philosophical, and political issues. The most noticeable divisions occurred between the Eastern and Western churches in 1054 (Gonzalez, 2010a) and the Catholic and Protestant churches beginning with the Protestant Reformation in 1517 (Gonzalez, 2010b). While theology, philosophy, and politics contributed to division, leaders also parted ways over leadership issues, including those involving authority, polity, and governance (Gonzalez, 2010b). The division train shows no signs of slowing down with churches dividing over issues ranging from approaches to leadership (Webber, 2002) to the ordination of homosexual clergy (Gryboski, 2016).

Despite multiple divisions over the centuries, Christian ministry leaders throughout the past two millennia continue to directly influence modern Christian ministry leaders in substantive ways. The writings of saints and scholars such as Augustine, Benedict, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Thomas À Kempis, and Karl Barth continue to be referenced from academicians within institutions of higher learning to pastors who lead small, rural churches. Their influence is also indirect. For example, modern institutions of higher

learning such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Dartmouth, all trace their roots to Christian leaders (Hansen, 2005).

Although history reveals a significant impact of Christian ministry leadership on institutions and individuals, the study of Christian ministry leadership within the context of academically oriented research is relatively new. As early as 1912, Jefferson observed, “It is commonplace that a minister is a leader, and yet not every minister knows how to lead” (p. 57). When he made those comments however, the study of leadership theory and the articulation of leadership frameworks were seeds lacking fertile soil within which to flourish. That would change dramatically in the 1900s as various researchers began itemizing and analyzing hundreds of studies on leadership prior to 1981 (Gini, 1997). From the decades that followed to the present, the field of leadership studies in academia, business, and communities of faith continues to expand and seems to grow exponentially year after year (Canales, 2014).

Within the context of Christian ministry, numerous authors began addressing leadership issues, qualities and characteristics that specifically focused on leadership growth and development of clergy. Sanders (1967) identified critical leadership qualities such as discipline, vision, wisdom, courage, humility, integrity, and sincerity. Although not exclusively writing to clergy, Blanchard and Hodges (2005) addressed leading like Jesus, the individual they asserted was the greatest leadership role model in history. Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) addressed spiritual leadership and the implications of making a positive impact on followers. Collins (2009) authored a 400-page book on Christian coaching. These works barely scratch the surface of the scope of leadership resources produced for those in Christian ministry, but they are indicators

of the hunger for leadership development among those in Christian ministry who are attempting to lead in complex times.

## **Background**

At least two pioneers (Burns, 1978; Stogdill, 1974) of modern leadership studies struggled to capture the essence of a definition of leadership. Stogdill (1974) noted, “There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (p. 7). A few years later, James MacGregor Burns (1978) observed, “Leadership is one of the... least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). Their observations propelled later authors to make observations regarding our inability to draft a definition that fully captures the essence of leadership. While individuals may be able to intuit a definition, or recognize it when they see it, leadership can have multiple meanings for different people (Allio, 2013; Northouse, 2016).

Despite the tens of thousands of books published on leadership, a succinct definition of leadership that captures the full essence of the term remains elusive. Reflecting on the work of Fleishman, et al., (1991), Northouse (2016) noted that approximately 65 unique classifications had been articulated to define various aspects of leadership. Bass (1990) developed one scheme among those 65. Northouse (2016) revisited this scheme several years later, keying in on the many ways various researchers conceptualize leadership. Table 1 provides a summary of his observations. These conceptualizations showcase the various ways researchers define leadership, but fail to offer a cohesive definition.

As Northouse (2016) explored the literature and continued crafting a comprehensive definition of leadership, he acknowledged multiple components he considered central to the

phenomenon of leadership. Table 2 reviews these components which are based on Northouse's (2016) extensive research on leadership classification systems, definitions, and frameworks.

Table 1

*Ways of Conceptualizing Leadership*

Group processes	The leader embodies the will of the group while acting as a principal component of group change and activity.
A personality perspective	This perspective suggests leadership is attributable to unique traits or characteristics of certain people. These traits enable leaders to influence others to action.
An act or a behavior	Leadership actions or behaviors drive group change.
Power relationships	Leaders wielding power to effect change.
Transformational process	Leaders move followers to exceed expectations.
Skills	This perspective stresses capabilities (knowledge and skills) that enable effective leadership.

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*Note.* Adapted from *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (p. 3), by P. G. Northouse, 2016, (Kindle). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Copyright 2016 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

The components in Table 2 ultimately culminate within his working definition of leadership: "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2016, p. 7). Northouse did not stop with the definition. Beginning with differentiating between traits-based leadership and process-oriented leadership, he encouraged readers to situate the definition within a greater context of types and concepts pertaining to the nature of leadership. Such information is locatable within the study of leadership theories.

Table 2

*Defining Leadership*

Leadership as a process	Leadership is about transactions between leaders and followers. <i>Process</i> implies mutual, interactive effect. Leadership is no longer exclusive to the leader (Notgrass, 2014).
Leadership involves influence	How leaders affect followers is this definition's chief concern, and influence is a key leadership ingredient (Yukl, 2002). Some argue leadership is influence, period (Maxwell, 1998).
Leadership occurs within groups	Leadership involves influencing various types of groups who have a common purpose or desire fulfilling common goals. (Ford & Sears, 2006). Leadership does not occur in a vacuum.
Leadership is attentive to common goals	In this definition, leaders steer energies in the direction of followers who have a mutual purpose. The resultant ethical overtone increases the likelihood of collaborative leader/follower work toward a common good (Rost, 1991).

*Note.* Multiple components considered central to the phenomenon of leadership. Adapted from *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (pp. 5-6), by P. G. Northouse, 2016, (Kindle). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Copyright 2016 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

## Leadership Theories

Over the past several decades, multiple authors and researchers, differentiated between leadership as a trait and leadership as a process. They also noted how appointed leadership and emergent leadership differ as they contrasted concepts such as power, coercion, and management with leadership. Table 3 depicts a summary of these differences.

## Setting

Churches of Christ in the United States are somewhat difficult to define. As many as eight wings and 26 different kinds of Churches of Christ have been identified, due in part to a spirit of divisiveness that has troubled the fellowship since its inception (Garrett, 2003).

Table 3

*Differences Pertaining to the Nature of Leadership*

Leadership as a trait	Trait theory proposes leaders naturally possess innate qualities or characteristics. Trait theory has experienced a bit of a revival in recent years via charismatic leadership studies (Gibson, Hannon, & Blackwell, 1998; Lunenburg, 2012; Milosevic & Bass, 2014).
Leadership as a process	This viewpoint suggests leadership exists in leader/follower interactions. As a result, leadership is available to all. Examples include authentic leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and adaptive leadership (Canales, 2014, Northouse, 2016).
Assigned versus emergent leadership	This theory is based on position or title. Emergent leadership is based on perceived influence regardless of title. (Northouse, 2016).
Leadership and power	Position power is derived from positions such as title or rank within a formalized structure. Personal power is derived from positive influence and competence (Northouse, 2016).
Leadership and coercion	Coercion focuses the leader's needs, sabotaging fulfillment of common goals (Northouse, 2016). Citing Western (2008), Crossman (2010) observed that elements of domination and social coercion exist in all organizations, including religious institutions.
Leadership and Management	Managers focus more on accomplishing activities and staying on task. Leaders influence others while creating vision for change (Northouse, 2016).

*Note.* Multiple components considered central to the phenomenon of leadership. Adapted from *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (pp. 7-15), by P. G. Northouse, 2016, (Kindle). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Copyright 2016 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

Most mainstream Churches of Christ trace their American heritage roots to Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell in the early nineteenth century (Garrett, 2003; Hughes, 1996). Some within the fellowship who view church history through a highly conservative lens deny the historical influences of Stone, Campbell, or any other figure outside the first century church (Hughes, 1996). In many instances, these more theologically conservative individuals claim

those who follow the pattern or blueprint of the New Testament Church have “restored” the one true church (Garrett, 2003, p. 184).

Other leaders within Churches of Christ have shifted away from such sectarian rhetoric. These individuals do not deny the influence of Stone and Campbell on shaping much of the polity, policy, theology and philosophy of modern Churches of Christ and are generally more open to broader ecumenical ideologies (Williams, Foster, & Blowers, 2013). Regardless of one’s point of reference, Campbell’s plea of restoration of the ancient order of things was a message that resonated with many, especially throughout the southern states (Williams et al., 2013). As a result, Alexander Campbell and his contemporary Barton W. Stone are credited as contributors to a religious movement in the United States referred to as The Restoration Movement.

The leadership structure of Churches of Christ also contributes to an elusive definition. Churches of Christ have no district, state, national, or international denominational headquarters. Each church is autonomous, meaning the governing board, commonly referred to as elders (Ferguson, 1996), has ultimate decision-making authority within respective congregations. Since there is no greater governing board beyond the local congregation, Churches of Christ have historically taken organizational leadership cues from a hermeneutic shaped by various publications and journals including the nineteenth century publication *The Millennial Harbinger*, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century publication *The Gospel Advocate*, the mid twentieth century publication *Restoration Review*, and the late twentieth and early twenty-first century publication *Wineskins*. Institutions of higher learning affiliated

with Churches of Christ also influenced both polity and practice through classroom teaching, lectureships, and various publications (Williams et al., 2013).

Churches of Christ also have no formal, written creed, claiming only, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent” (Williams et al., 2013, location 928; Willis, 1971). This mantra was birthed as an antithesis to denominationalism that in Alexander Campbell’s view, contributed to division. Campbell also believed that restoring primitive Christianity would result in Christian unity that would in turn usher in the return of Jesus Christ to the earth (Hughes, 1996). This speak/silent mantra continues to have ardent devotees within Churches of Christ who adhere to strict interpretation of Scripture in all pattern and practice. The mantra is also questioned by many in Churches of Christ who view its assertion within the context of its origins (Anderson, 1994; Woodroof, 2000).

As a result, many leaders within Churches of Christ are struggling with a sense of direction in the twenty-first century. Leadership books by authors affiliated with Churches of Christ entitled *Navigating the Winds of Change*, *A Church That Flies*, and *They Smell Like Sheep* are becoming more commonplace in the libraries of elders and ministers. To date, no volume has been published that specifically targets youth ministry leadership development within Churches of Christ. Christian colleges and universities affiliated with Churches of Christ offer youth ministry as a major area of study, yet due to internal and external cultural shifts and to a lack of a guiding coalition for leadership development, many youth ministers in Churches of Christ are attempting to lead in uncharted waters.



As an internal culture shift example, strict adherents to primitive Christianity refrain from using musical instruments in worship assemblies since the practice is not overtly ordained in New Testament writings. The vast majority of mainstream Churches of Christ continue this practice today. Other Churches of Christ however, are implementing the use of musical instruments in their assemblies as they live into a broader view of biblical interpretation and application (Ross, 2007). Since many youth ministers work in Churches of Christ that are experiencing these and similar changes, it is possible they are on the frontlines of leading their respective churches into a healthier future even amid potentially heated dialogue.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although typically not responsible for leadership decision-making that impacts the spiritual growth of the entire organization, professional youth ministers play a vital leadership role in congregational health as leaders of a smaller community within a greater community of faith. This leadership role is threatened by numerous challenges facing youth ministers of all denominations. Specific to this study, the vital role of youth ministry in Churches of Christ is threatened by high turnover rates of those within the profession. The turnover issue is not exclusive to Churches of Christ. Fields (2002) observed that longevity in the field of youth ministry is uncommon. Devries (2008) noted most church leaders lack the patience to build a sustainable youth ministry. There are many contributing factors, not the least of which is the fact that religious professionals in general are facing numerous challenges.

For instance, many members of the clergy have indicated they would change jobs if they could since some now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans (Ferguson, Andercheck, Tom, Martinez, & Stroope, 2014; Scott & Lovell, 2015).

In the late 1990s, research observations and anecdotal reports showed the potential negative impact ministry demands can have on psychological and spiritual functioning of professional clergy. It was shown early in the twenty-first century, antidepressant use rose, while life expectancy fell. Even though almost all pastors were feeling rather highly satisfied in ministry (Barnard & Curry, 2011), a vast majority were experiencing loneliness and discouragement (Hall, 1997; Roach, 2011; Vattello, 2010). Youth ministers are certainly not immune from the challenges religious professional face (Fields, 2002). Systemic issues including lack of structure, superstar syndrome, churches recruiting talent away from other churches, and unrealistic expectations of parents and church leaders contribute to higher rates of turnover (Devries 2008).

These symptoms and issues, which did not occur overnight, may also be impacted by lack of leadership acumen. In the early 1990s, Barna (1993) concluded the reason why so many churches demonstrated little positive impact was largely due to lack of leadership. His observations appeared to strike a common chord with other authors and researchers who discovered that many churches are desperately seeking improvement in both pastoral and organizational effectiveness in the midst of constant, cultural transformation (Gräb, 2014; Stewart, 2008). This issue may be exacerbated in Churches of Christ since there is no central, guiding leadership development manual or plan. While this lack of hierarchical organization model allows for diverse approaches to governance, youth ministers in Churches of Christ either do not study church leadership at all or they study church leadership from disparate sources. A disjointed, disconcerted misunderstanding of effective leadership practices may

contribute in part to the phenomenon Barna (1993) described and may also contribute to turnover within the profession.

### **Purpose Statement**

There is excessive turnover in youth ministry due to various stressors such as holistic health issues, declining numbers within churches, and cultural transformation. Other transition factors include aging out, transitioning into another ministry position or career calling, disappointment, burnout, loss of faith, clergy mismatches, conflict, church politics, and immorality (Devries, 2008; Mueller & McDuff, 2004; Severe, 2006). The challenges are great. The Pew Research Center noted that numbers of Americans not identifying with a particular religion or religious group continues to increase. Their research indicated that one-fifth of the U.S. public and one third of adults under thirty are now unaffiliated religiously. These numbers represent the highest percentages in their polling history (The Pew Forum, 2012). Similarly, only time will tell how problematic personal health issues and the cultural transformation will be for youth ministers in Churches of Christ. Part of the dilemma for those in ministry regarding cultural transformation stems from the growing reality that stigma is no longer associated with lack of participation in a community of faith (Fazzino, 2014).

Despite these challenges, there are long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ (Bruner, 2016). Such sustainability is typically healthy for churches (Devries, 2008; Vanderbloemen & Bird, 2014). This study proposed that this group has been able to overcome challenges and threats to long tenure through exercising a series of leadership practices and strategies that have allowed them to continue in their ministries. The purpose of this study was to determine:

- The leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ.
- The challenges long tenured youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies within Churches of Christ.
- How youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ.
- What recommendations youth ministers have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1 - What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?
- RQ2 - What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?
- RQ3 - How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?
- RQ4 - What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?

### **Significance of the Study**

The timing of this research complements the interests of many who are investigating church staff and leadership development (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Canales, 2006, 2014; Carter, 2009; Devries, 2008; Forward, 2001; McKenna et al., 2007; Resane, 2014; Rowold, 2008;

Tidball, 2012; Wilkes, 1998). The timing also aligns with emerging interests in overall leadership development within churches and parachurch organizations (Clark, 2008; Russell, 2000; Small, 2011). This interest in part is due to a void in research-oriented literature. For example, McKenna et al., (2007) captured a sense of urgency related to filling the void of lack of understanding of leadership development among religious leaders when they observed limited knowledge regarding how pastors actually develop as leaders. An even greater void in the literature regarding the continuing leadership development of youth ministers makes this study unique and one of great urgency.

The study also has meaning for those who lead churches as paid professionals or as volunteers and the youth ministers who operate under the oversight of these key stakeholders. Others who may benefit from the study include parents of teens and teenagers within Churches of Christ and other communities of faith with similar polity models such as independent Christian churches, community churches, and non-denominational churches and those within their circles of influence. Additionally, the results of the study may lead to a better understanding of why turnover occurs within professional youth ministry and as a result, reduce it. The results may positively impact university curricula, youth ministry conference planning, and local church training programs. Study findings may also help churches recruit, assess, and develop youth ministers in order to sustain long-term youth ministries that highly contribute to congregational health.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

**Limitations.** A challenge to this study is that the literature does not define “long tenured” in the context of professional youth ministry employment. Anecdotal evidence suggests the

average youth minister's tenure at the same church is approximately two years. Cole (2016) noted that numerous regional and denominational studies consistently report tenure averages ranging "between 12-18 or 18-24 months" (p. 23). Popular research data indicate approximately four years (Lawrence, 2006).

To establish a benchmark, the study was limited to professional youth ministers in Churches of Christ who have been employed by the same church for at least ten years. The study acknowledged that long tenure precludes various demographic data from highly competent short tenured professional youth ministers. Although a limitation, the preclusion may provide a springboard for future research on emerging leadership characteristics of those who are new or relatively new to the profession. Other limitations of this study included:

- The author of the study formerly served as a youth minister in Churches of Christ, which may have influenced data interpretation.
- Participants were exclusively from Churches of Christ. While some findings may not apply to all theological and philosophical frameworks, the study may provide future researchers an opportunity to identify similarities and differences in leadership traits in other communities of faith. Additionally, youth ministers within other denominations and non-denominational communities of faith face similar cultural challenges, indicating that study findings could potentially provide insights into helping leaders and staff within those churches effectively address such challenges.
- This study did not discount the veracity of theologically based research related to the study of Christian leadership. Although this study examined the leadership characteristics of long tenured youth ministers, the focus was limited to identifiable

relationships with those characteristics to leadership theories, frameworks, and processes within research literature that are beyond the scope of theological exclusivity. This limitation will possibly encourage future research that explores relationships between secular and theological perspectives as a mutually agreeable means to a leadership development end.

**Assumptions.** An assumption of the study is that the need for youth ministry in Churches of Christ will continue. This assumption is somewhat tenuous since Churches of Christ are in decline in the United States, losing some 102,000 adherents between 2003 and 2012 (Ross, 2012). During that same timeframe, 708 Churches of Christ closed their doors, representing a 5.4% decline. Additional assumptions include:

- As part of this study, candidates responded to semi-structured interview questions. The second assumption is that the questions are reliable and valid as means of identifying leadership practices and strategies.
- Responses are honest and that subjects are willing to speak freely.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the definitions of terms are offered to clarify how select terms were used in the research. The definitions are also provided to assist the reader with terms that may be unfamiliar. Additionally, the definitions are offered to provide a consistent, congruent vocabulary throughout the study.

- *Churches of Christ*: An American Restoration Movement fellowship of Christian adherents with roughly 1.5 million members in 12,500 congregations throughout the world. The majority of Churches of Christ are in the United States with the highest

density populating southern states from Tennessee to Texas. In general, Churches of Christ resemble other conservative evangelical denominations; embracing a more literal view of the Bible (Ross, 2012; Surdacki & Gonzalez, 2014).

- *Leadership*: A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal through service to others to create a better tomorrow (Maxwell, 1998; Northouse, 2016; Parris & Peachey, 2012).
- *Youth Minister*: An individual who is employed full-time by a Christian community of faith (i.e., a church) and whose primary responsibility involves ministry to adolescents (Devries & Dunn-Rankin, 2011).
- *Turnover*: Voluntary or involuntary cessation of employment in an organization (Based on the definition offered by Mobley (1982)).

### **Organization of the Study**

This qualitative study was structured within five unique chapters. Chapters one through three provided background information, rationale for the study, and a review of the methodology. Chapters four and five provided the framework for presentation of data, analysis, and findings.

**Chapter 1.** The first chapter introduced the research topic and provided general background information on the biblical roots and modern history of leadership. The chapter also identified the problem of youth ministry turnover in Churches of Christ, articulated the research questions, the significance of the study, and definitions of the terms. Limitations and assumptions of the study were also articulated.



**Chapter 2.** Chapter two began with an examination of four leadership models and theories: servant leadership, moral leadership, spiritual leadership, and transformational leadership. The chapter then surveyed literature that explored relationships of these models and theories to leadership approaches within Christian ministry, especially within professional youth ministry. Additional aspects investigated included examining the history of youth ministry in the United States, the history youth ministry in Churches of Christ and identifying the importance of youth ministers. Finally, it examined current studies related to challenges youth ministers face that may impact turnover and recommendations from youth ministry experts to those who have recently begun or are preparing to engage in professional youth ministry as a career.

**Chapter 3.** Chapter three reviewed the nature of the study and the steps and methods involved in the data collection process. The research design was articulated, interview protocol was reported and human subjects protections were also identified. Specifically, the chapter outlined steps taken to protect subjects from negative effects attributed to participation or refusal to participate in the study.

**Chapter 4.** Chapter four reviewed the data, analysis, and findings from the study. Subject recruitment, demographic information, semi-structured interview questions and subject responses were reported. The chapter provided a detailed summary of the data collection process and identified issues that surfaced as a result of data analysis.

**Chapter 5.** Chapter five presented key findings from data analysis and supplemental issues that surfaced during the course of the study, including field notes and recommendations

for future research. Chapter five also provided a comprehensive study summary. Implications of the study and recommendations for future research were also articulated.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter one reviewed leadership history and concepts in order to lay a foundation for the study of leadership characteristics of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. The chapter laid a foundation for deeper analysis of leadership and the specific types of challenges professional youth ministers face within the context of massive cultural shifts. The chapter also articulated the intent of this study, which is to identify leadership characteristics in long tenured youth ministry professionals that may contribute to mitigating excessive turnover in the profession.

The chapter also introduced the purpose of the study, which was to identify:

- Strategies, and practices that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ.
- The challenges those long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices
- The means by which those youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices.
- Recommendations those youth ministers may make for implementing strategies and practices within their profession.

The Christian fellowship Churches of Christ, a group that traces its modern roots to Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone was identified as the setting for the study. The lack of research within professional youth ministry leadership development along with the impact on

youth ministry leadership on key stakeholders contributed to study significance. Limitations and assumptions of the study were articulated, as were the definitions of terms.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Reviewing the literature is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of youth ministry leadership characteristics. Although relationships may exist between multiple secular leadership models and professional youth ministry best leadership practices, certain leadership models are referenced more in the literature in relationship to Christian ministry, and more specifically youth ministry, than others. This chapter begins with an examination of four such leadership models and theories: servant, moral, spiritual, and transformational leadership.

The chapter then surveys literature that explores relationships of these models and theories to leadership approaches within Christian ministry, especially within professional youth ministry. Additional aspects investigated in this chapter include examining the history of youth ministry in the United States, the history of youth ministry in Churches of Christ, and identifying the importance of youth ministers. Finally, it examines some of the challenges facing youth ministers that may threaten longevity within the profession.

### **Examining Four Leadership Models and Theories**

Although the dynamic between leaders and followers has intrigued humanity for centuries, empirical leadership research is a relatively new phenomenon (Fry, 2003). Most essays on leadership have been published in the twentieth century, and seemingly no other topic has outpaced the volumes dedicated to the topic of leadership (Nicholson, 2013; Tourish, 2008). Ironically, while various Christian universities and organizations embrace myriad Christian leadership theories (Scarborough, 2010), scant empirical research on the leadership development of youth ministers has been published. Most of what has been published appears

in the popular literature. This is perhaps why Lambert (2004) observed that youth ministry and research rarely appear in the same sentence.

The landscape is slowly shifting as universities, seminaries, researchers, and practitioners place more emphasis on spiritual, emotional, and leadership development within youth ministry as some of the key contributors to long-term sustainability (Canales, 2014; Devries, 2008; Fields, 1998; Heflin, 2009; Jack & McRay, 2005; Mohler, 2004; Myers, 2016). As a result, according to Jack and McRay (2005), “A collective portrait is beginning to emerge representing the ideal well-trained youth worker, but this portrait has some large gaps” (pp. 71-72). Even with a clearer picture coming into view, Canales (2014) observed that while much has been written about how youth ministers can develop leadership in others, no one has offered a solid definition of Christian leadership in youth ministry.

While multiple scholars and practitioners articulated various characteristics of what youth ministers should do and how they should do it, multiple authors affirmed that all who participate in Christian leadership are right to model all life choices first and foremost after the ministry and message of Jesus (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Canales, 2014; Cole & Nielson, 2016; Dawn & Peterson, 2000; Fields, 2002; Heflin, 2009; Jones, 2001; Pembroke, 2002; Sanders, 1967; Stott, 2002; Willimon, 2002). The leadership theories and models reviewed here share multiple characteristics with Jesus’ life and public ministry. With minor exceptions, the literature does not suggest that authors of secular models of leadership considered leadership characteristics of biblical figures when developing their models (Scarborough, 2010). The literature does suggest various aspects of these models may serve to

help frame a cohesive leadership development approach that complements the leadership qualities and characteristics modeled by Jesus Christ (Canales, 2014; Scarborough, 2010).

The literature does not suggest that such models be held up by those in Christian ministry as idols, cure-all's, or replacements for biblical knowledge, personal spiritual growth, or practicing spiritual disciplines (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005; Stott, 2002). The counsel of Jones (2001) remains wise, "Youth pastors must never become beholden to any model" (p. 89). The counsel of Robbins (2004) is also worth noting, "Any youth ministry training that focuses on how without thinking about why is vapid and bankrupt" (para. 4), as is the insight of Carter (2009) who appreciated the role leadership theories play in effective leadership evaluation while simultaneously appreciating spirituality in ministry leadership effectiveness.

Canales (2014), one of the leading proponents of integrating positive attributes and implications of various empirically studied models of leadership into Christian youth ministry, specifically noted four leadership approaches worthy of consideration: a) servant, b) moral, c) spiritual, and d) transformational. Canales (2014) asserted the models are worthy of introduction and insisted they have the capacity to greatly influence youth ministry. Due to its many similarities with the life, message, and ministry of Jesus Christ, servant leadership is the most subsequently reviewed of the models and theories discussed below.

### **Servant Leadership**

In the modern era, perhaps no other name is more closely identified with servant leadership than that of Robert Greenleaf (Bass, 2000; Canales, 2006, 2014; Dierendonck, 2011; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Spears, 2014). In 1970, Greenleaf published *The Servant as Leader*, the first of multiple works on servant leadership (Spears, 2014). When examining the

relationship between this particular theory and Christian ministry, it is worth noting that Greenleaf was greatly impacted by his religious upbringing (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Bekker, 2010). Regarding the servant leadership characteristic of persuasion that Greenleaf would ultimately weave into the servant leader framework for instance, Spears (2010) observed that persuasion over coercion was rooted in the belief system of the Religious Society of Friends. This religious body was also known as the Quakers, the community of faith to which Robert Greenleaf belonged (Canales, 2006; Tidball, 2012).

Even though Greenleaf's servant leader values were shaped in part by his religious upbringing and his own personal faith, it was not until shortly after he read Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East* that servant leadership as a leadership framework was fully conceptualized (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Bekker, 2010; Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Thompson, 2002; Tidball, 2012). Hesse's story described a league of men on a mythical quest through space and time on a search for peace and unity. Leo and HH are identified as the two central figures in the story. Leo is the party's servant and is assigned basic tasks and chores. However, he also sustains the entourage with spirit and song. Even though he is a servant, he exudes extraordinary presence. At some point in the journey, Leo disappears. His absence causes such disarray, the cohort can no longer continue. An entourage member who is also narrator of the story drifts for several years until he is ultimately reunited with Leo. HH begins to search for Leo and in the process; the Order that sponsored the journey takes the narrator in. Soon afterward, he discovers that the servant he had known as Leo was actually a noble leader, and that he, not Leo, had abandoned the journey and turned from the values and principles of the league. HH discovered that meaning is found when one embraces the values of

humility and faithful servitude. The paradox of servant leadership is that leaders are servants of followers, not the inverse (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Greenleaf, 1977; Herman & Marlowe, 2005).

Greenleaf speculated that the story paralleled Hesse's life in many ways. He noted there had been much inference regarding the meanings and metaphors in Hesse's writing, but he was convinced that the clear message was that the successful leader is first and foremost observed as servant, one called to serve to become complete and make meaning through service to others (Greenleaf, 1977; Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011; Tidball, 2012). His conclusions led Greenleaf (1977) to write what Dierendonck (2011) later described as perhaps the most well-known quote in the scope of servant leadership theory and study:

The Servant-Leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead... The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (Dierendonck 2011, p. 1230)

These foundational underpinnings positioned Greenleaf to theoretically articulate, then subsequently and behaviorally differentiate between leader-first and servant-first outcomes. He contrasted these outcomes as divergent types noting the difference between the two was manifested in the caring exhibited by the servant-first to ensure the most significant needs of others are first served. In essence, the best test of a servant leader was positively realized if yes was the answer to the question, "Do those served grow?" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27).



The servant leader's motivation is serving his or her followers, positioning them to become servant leaders who continue the trajectory until an organization's culture is transformed (Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). Greenleaf expanded his message by articulating ten key characteristics of servant leaders. The competencies and their traits are listed in Table 4. The servant leadership characteristics are in no particular order, with some authors simply listing them alphabetically (Canales, 2014).

Table 4

*Greenleaf's Ten Characteristics of Servant Leadership*

Listening	Intentionally focusing on the thoughts, heart, joys, and pains of others.
Empathy	The most successful servant leader exercises empathy with others. Empathy can respond to positive and/or negative emotions.
Healing	One of the powerful forces for transformation and integration.
Awareness	Remaining highly alert and reasonably disturbed; not seeking solace; having inner serenity.
Persuasion	Trusting persuasion over positional authority in organizational decision-making.
Conceptualization	The ability to create a future orientation providing vision and mission.
Foresight	Understanding past lessons, present realities, and the probable consequences future decisions.
Stewardship	Holding institutions in trust for society's greater good.
Commitment to Growth of Others	Believing others have intrinsic value beyond noticeable workplace contributions., and being deeply committed to everyone's growth.
Building Community	Sensing the significance of loss in recent human history due to the shift from the local community to the larger institution as the primary shaper of lives leading to a desire to build organizational community.

*Note.* The original ten characteristics of servant leadership as articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf. Adapted from *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness* (pp. 27-61), by R. K. Greenleaf, 1977, (Kindle). Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press. Copyright 1977 by Robert K. Greenleaf. Copyright 1991, 2002 by the Robert K. Greenleaf Center, Inc.

Servant leadership was introduced via three primary essays: *The Servant as Leader* (1970), *The Institution as Servant* (1972), and *Trustees as Servants* (1972), which were all published after Greenleaf retired as a manager from AT&T (Parris & Peachey, 2012). It is somewhat ironic that despite the countless contributions Greenleaf made to the study of servant leadership, he left no empirically validated definition of the term. Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) observed that in his original work *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf failed to offer a concise, conceptual definition of the term.

This may contribute to observations shared by some critics who continue to debate if servant leadership theory is significantly distinguishable, sustainable, and valuable for success within organizations (Parris & Peachey, 2012). Years after Greenleaf's groundbreaking work, authors noted that empirical research on servant leadership had remained scarce (Bass, 2000; Chiniara & Bentein, 2015; Russell, 2000; Russell & Stone 2002; Russell, Stone, & Patterson, 2004). There may be good news, however, for servant leadership enthusiasts who also value the academic rigor of quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Critics did not intimidate researchers nor were academic enthusiasts satisfied with such scarcity of empirical research.

The desire to validate servant leadership beyond the scope of a theoretical framework has manifested in numerous ways. For instance, various authors have offered multiple variations to Greenleaf's ten characteristics in an attempt to operationalize empirical servant leadership assessment (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Erhart, 2004; Laub, 1999; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Russell & Stone, 2002). One of the most recent is Dierendonck (2011), who observed characteristics of empowering and developing people; exercising humility

and living authentically while accepting others for who they are, affording direction, and exercising stewardship as they work for the good of all.

Servant leadership enthusiasts may also be encouraged by an increase in servant leadership assessment tools. Laub's (1999), research which emphasized a stronger focus on servant leadership behaviors gave rise to various servant leadership focused assessments and measurement instruments (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Assessments identified in the literature include the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006); the Servant Leadership Scale (Liden et al., 2008); the Servant Leadership Survey (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011); the Executive Servant Leadership Scale (Reed et al., 2011); the Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011); and the Servant Leadership Scale-7 (Liden, Wayne, Meuser, Hu, Wu, & Liao, 2015). A brief review of these assessments is offered here.

**Servant leadership questionnaire (SLQ).** The purpose of the SLQ is to assess servant leadership characteristics. The authors conducted a comprehensive literature review and identified eleven potential dimensions that captured major servant leadership precepts. These included: calling, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, and community building (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Spears, 1995). To operationalize their construct, the researchers created and validated items for these characteristics. Through factor analysis the data were condensed to five distinctive subscales: altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

**Servant leadership scale (SLS/SL-28).** Liden et al., (2008) contend the relationship between leader and follower is central to servant leadership. They asserted, however, that the related literature offered a varying set of dimensions that defined their construct. In response, and based on their interpretation along with the works of Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), Page and Wong (2000), and Spears and Lawrence, (2002), the authors of the SL-28 identified, defined, and validated the following nine dimensions of servant leadership: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) practicing conceptual skills, (d) empowering others, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, (g) behaving ethically, (h) building relationships, (i) servanthood, even when requiring self-sacrifice (Liden et al., 2008, p. 162).

Although the authors noted in subsequent research that this particular scale is often used due to the rigor utilized in development, they noted a potential limitation related to the 28-item length. Citing Credé, Harms, Niehorster, and Gaye-Valentine (2012), they observed the required time could alternatively be used to measure other variables and could also cause participants to experience boredom or fatigue. They noted the limitation could have a negative impact on response quality (Liden et al., 2015).

**Servant leadership survey (SLS).** When developing the SLS, Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) identified the need for a more concise scale that reflected the essence of Greenleaf's servant leadership characteristics. The authors observed the SLS was the first measure to develop and confirm the underlying factor structure. They affirmed potential use in future investigations to test foundational bases of servant leadership theory. They also noted the SLS brings into focus key qualities of servant leadership while revealing opportunities for

improvement for both the individual and the organization, which the authors observed may open the door for developing leaders (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

As a result of an extensive literature review and interviews with exemplary servant leaders, the authors considered eight qualities as prime servant leadership indicators. These indicators were included in the empirical design and are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

*Servant Leadership Survey Eight Indicators of Servant Leadership*

Empowerment	Recognizing, acknowledging, and realizing the intrinsic value and abilities that are unique to each person and what persons can still learn is central to empowerment. (Referencing Greenleaf, 1998).
Accountability	The authors describe accountability as a powerful tool that shows confidence in others while providing boundaries that allow for achievement of goals.
Standing Back	The degree to which leaders first prioritizes the interests of others while offering necessary support and credit and moving to the background when work is successfully completed.
Humility	Keeping one's achievements and talents in proper perspective (Referencing Patterson, 2003); acknowledging personal limitations and therefore asking for help.
Authenticity	Referencing Peterson and Seligman (2004), the authors observed that authenticity is being true to self by legitimate, congruent living in private and public.
Courage	Taking risks and innovating.
Interpersonal Acceptance	Exercising empathy.
Stewardship	Taking responsibility for the greater organization while choosing service over control and personal interest.

*Note.* Indicators of servant leadership as articulated by the developers of the Servant Leadership Survey. Adapted from "The Servant Leadership Survey: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Measure," by D. V. Dierendonck & I. Nuijten, 2011, *Journal of Business Psychology*, 26, pp. 251-252. Copyright 2010 by the authors.

**Executive servant leadership scale (ESLS).** The ethical implications of leadership and its impacts on followers, organizations, and the greater society were of key importance to the developers of the ESLS (Reed et al., 2011). It consists of 25 employee-rated items (e.g., recognize low morale; organizational commitment; refuses manipulation and deceit), with responses provided on a Likert-type scale (Reed et al., 2011). The scale measures five first-order factors reflecting critical servant leadership characteristics:

1. Interpersonal Support (six items)
2. Building Community (five items)
3. Altruism (four items)
4. Egalitarianism (four items)
5. Moral Integrity (six items).

The ESLS may be of particular interest to those studying servant leadership in the context of youth ministry since it does in part focus on a spiritual dimension. Preiss (2014) applauded the design of the ESLS, observing a strong reliability of groupings and consistency of categories with Greenleaf's, Spears', and Reed's servant leadership concepts.

**Servant leadership behavior scale (SLBS).** The SLBS is a 35-item assessment comprised of six servant leadership hypothesized factors: voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality and transforming influence (Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011). The authors of the SLBS built upon their initial validation work on a servant leadership behavior model (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Regarding their study, Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) expressed concern over their results.

**Servant leadership scale-7 (SL-7).** The SL-7 (Liden et al., 2015) was designed to measure global servant leadership. The instrument was developed as a shorter version of the SL-28 (Liden et al., 2008). The seven dimensions identified by Liden and colleagues included: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) Helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically (Liden et al., 2008). The authors noted the previous version of this particular scale has been frequently used due to rigorous development. This led to acknowledging the limitation related to the 28-item length of the original instrument (SLS). In order to mitigate validity concerns, SL-7 designers noted that they followed the recommendations of Credé et al. (2012) when creating the shortened version of the scales. They concluded their investigation provided strong support for using the SL-7 as a viable alternative to the SL-28 when investigating servant leadership as composite or global variables (Liden et al., 2015).

Regardless of the characteristics, criteria, or dimensions the assessments seek to measure, substantive overlap is noticeable throughout assessment terminology. This is possible good news for academicians and church leaders who may wish to review the terminology along with various emphases on servant leadership characteristics in order to potentially expand servant leadership implementation strategies related to professional youth ministry. For instance, churches utilizing a competency model approach to staff assessment and evaluation could identify how certain key servant leadership characteristics may align with the church's mission (Mwangi & Klerk, 2011). Church leaders could also utilize the characteristics when creating candidate profiles, job descriptions, core values, vision and mission statements, performance reviews, philosophical, and servant leadership frameworks (Searle & Barbuto,

2011). In essence, the assessments may provide more to youth ministry professionals and their supervisors than just serving as means to measurement ends. They may also provide empirically based peer-reviewed tools that have been and continue to be vetted within the greater research community (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Erhart, 2004; Laub, 1999; Liden et al., 2008; Russell & Stone, 2002). Ironically, the ultimate existence of these tools is a result of Robert Greenleaf's theoretical leadership construct that was shaped by deep religious convictions (Frick, 2004). Additionally, the opportunity for church leaders and empirical researchers to speak into the same space may contribute to filling the observable servant leadership void in youth ministry related literature (Canales, 2014).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is rooted within the greater study of charisma; a concept theorized by Max Weber in 1947 (Friedman & Langbert, 2000; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009; Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Milosevic & Bass, 2014; Northouse, 2016; Paul, Costley, Howell, & Dorfman, 2002). Weber (1947) re-contextualized charisma from an original and exclusively ecclesiastical expression through divine gifting by the Holy Spirit, as evidenced in New Testament writings such as Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12, to a more modern phenomenon of special qualities that allow individuals to inspire or influence others (Krishnakumar, Houghton, Neck, & Ellison, 2015; Paul et al., 2002). The qualities of the charismatic leader and the transformational leader are often referred to as similar if not the same and may appear interchangeably throughout the literature (Christie, Barling, & Turner, 2011; Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). It is important to note, however, that charismatic leadership



emphasizes and describes individual leader traits while transformational leadership describes attitudes and behaviors of a leader and their relationship to follower response (Stewart, 2008).

Although J. V. Downton first introduced the phrase *transformational leadership* in 1973 (Northouse, 2016, p. 162), James MacGregor Burns is credited as the first to fully articulate the construct (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership has proven to be a popular research topic long after Burns' introduction (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1999; Friedman & Langbert, 2000; Harms & Credé, 2010; Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Northouse, 2016; Scarborough, 2010; Yukl, 1999). Burns (1978) is also credited as the first to pioneer, categorize, and differentiate the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978; Krishnan 2003; Northouse, 2016; Rowold & Rohmann, 2009). The two constructs were originally introduced as a single continuum with transforming leadership at one end and transactional leadership at the other (Avolio et al., 1999; Burns, 1978).

Transactional leadership focuses on what leaders and followers gain in clearly defined exchanges for mutual cooperation with each receiving one thing from the other in return for something else (Aronson, 2001; Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Friedman & Langbert, 2000; Rowold & Rohmann, 2009). The transactional leader caters to his or her followers' immediate self-interests through recognition of what followers want to get from their work in exchange for specific rewards as followers reach certain goals or accomplish certain tasks (Bass, 1999; Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999; Tejada, Scandura, & Pillai, 2001; Weinberger, 2009). As they expanded the work of Burns (1978), Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) noted that transactional leadership involves contingent reinforcement. The authors observed that in a transactional leadership dynamic, promises,

praise, or rewards may motivate followers or negative feedback, reproof, threats, or disciplinary actions may contribute to course correction. Leaders then respond to outcomes based on transacted agreements between leaders and followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Alternatively, transformational leadership involves gaining the trust and confidence of followers as one or more individuals connect with others in a manner that results in subsequent outcomes of higher levels of mutual motivation and morality (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Burns, 1978; Friedman & Langbert, 2000; Leong & Fischer, 2011; López-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Landa, 2008). Transformational leadership motivates followers to set aside individual interests and work for the greater good of the organization as a means of achieving meaningful results (Black & Porter, 2000). The transformational leader uplifts his or her followers' morale, motivation, and morals (Bass, 1999). The outcome is a transforming of both leader and follower. Transformational leadership has been heralded by many as one of the most desirable and effective forms of leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Leong & Fischer, 2011).

Bass (1985) contributed significantly to the field of transformational and transactional leadership as he operationalized and refined the earlier work of Burns, via his concept of multifactor leadership theory (Tejeda et al., 2001). Bass (1985) theorized that four dimensions comprise transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence, (b) individualized consideration, (c) intellectual stimulation and (d) inspirational motivation. He further theorized three dimensions comprise transactional leadership: (a) contingent reward, (b) active management by exception, and (c) passive management by exception; and added non-leadership as a *laissez-faire*, non-transactional leadership dimension (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003, Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1985; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Leong & Fischer, 2011).

Bass (1985) later observed that charismatic leadership and inspirational leadership were typically not empirically distinguishable, and as a result reduced his model to six factors: four transformational and two transactional (Antonakis et al., 2003; Avolio et al., 1999). The six-factor leadership model ultimately served as the basis for the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ); one of the most broadly utilized transformational and transactional leadership measurement assessments originally developed by Bass and refined over time to measure the two types of leadership processes (Avolio et al., 1999; Tejeda et al., 2001; Yukl 1999). The six factors and their operational definitions are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6

*The Six Factors and Their Operational Definitions*

Charisma/ Inspirational	Provides followers with a clear, energizing sense of purpose while serving as an ethical role model and vision consensus builder.
Intellectual Stimulation	Encourages questioning of problem solving and improvement methods.
Individualized Consideration	Understanding unique follower needs and consistently focuses on realizing one's full potential.
Contingent Reward	Clarifies follower expectations and how followers will be rewarded when meeting expected levels of performance.
Active Management-by- exception	Focuses on corrective action when problems arise to meet workplace expectations.
Passive-Avoidant Leadership	Tends to react only after problems merit correction, and often avoids decision making.

*Note.* The six factors of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and their operational definitions. Adapted from "Re-Examining the Components of Transformational and Transactional Leadership Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire," by B. J. Avolio, B. M. Bass, & D. I. Jung, 1999, *Journal of Occupational and Organisational [sic] Psychology*, 72, pp. 444-445. Copyright 1999 The British Psychological Society.

A key attribute of the transformational leadership approach is that transformational leaders exert influence within their organizations by communicating an idealistic future vision as a means of convincing followers to embrace major change (Black & Porter, 2000; Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, & Sassenberg, 2013). Although a less frequent occurrence, followers may also influence leaders (Scarborough, 2010). Burns (1978) observed that although more complex, transformational leadership was also more potent as the transforming leader identifies personal followers' motives while also attempting to satisfy their higher priority needs as a means of engaging the whole person. The result is a mutually stimulating, elevating relationship that "converts followers into leaders" while possibly converting "leaders into moral agents" (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Transformational leaders may also act as mentors as they encourage learning, achievement, and individual growth (Harms & Credé, 2010).

Transformational leadership is not without its detractors. Yukl (1999) warned against the "heroic leadership stereotype" (p. 39) researchers may find permeating most transformational leadership theories. Regarding the dimension of inspirational motivation, he cautioned it could encourage followers to grasp and implement a leader's vision while not challenging it or developing a better alternative (Yukl, 1999). Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) lauded the important role charismatic-transformational leadership has played in advancing overall leadership research. However, they identified "four fatal and fundamental problems with the state-of-the-science" (p. 2). These flaws include:

- A lack of a clear, conceptual definition that is independent of definition by effects or operational terms of charismatic-transformational leadership.

- A lack of explanation regarding how dimensions have distinct influence on mediating processes and outcomes, and distinct contingencies.
- Consistently confounding leadership with its effects.
- Failure of the most commonly utilized measurement tools “to reproduce the dimensional structure specified by theory” (Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013, p. 3).

### **Moral Leadership**

The concept of and interest in moral leadership has grown in significance in the twenty-first century (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Bush, 2010; Canales, 2014; Covey, 1999; Feldman, 2007; Friedman, 2001; Gini, 1997; Greenfield, 2004; Krishnan, 2003; Maguad & Krone, 2009; Maldonado & Lacey, 2001; Northouse, 2016; Quick & Normore, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

Although the topic of moral leadership within the greater, secular study of leadership ethics has been discussed for millennia, as far back as Aristotle (Northouse, 2016; Zhu, Zheng, Riggio, & Zhang, 2015), interest in the study of moral leadership within the past four decades gained traction as a result of Burns’ (1978) work on transformational and transactional leadership approaches.

By distinguishing between transformational and transactional leadership, Burns focused attention on and validated the concept of moral leadership (Greenfield, 2004). Burns (1978) observed that transformational leadership may ultimately “convert leaders into moral agents” (p. 4). Of all of the concepts Burns (1978) associated with transformational leadership, moral leadership concerned him most. He observed it was more than preaching, pious language, or social conformity. For Burns (1978), moral leadership emerged from, and always returned ultimately satisfying the authentic needs of followers.

The moral component was so important to Burns that the concept made its way into his definition of transformational leadership which he articulated as, “[a process in which] leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (Burns, 1987, p. 20). Although Burns largely had political leadership in mind when making his observations (Fambrough & Hart, 2008), management and education scholars built upon his work and its impact on approaches to effective leadership (Greenfield, 2004). However, such work did not come without substantive debate and discussion.

Gini (1997) insisted the entire spectrum of leadership whether good or bad is moral leadership, regardless of the colloquial or normative sense of a culture’s definition of “moral” (p. 325). From his perspective, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill and Adolph Hitler and Saddam Hussein were all “moral leaders of a sort” (Gini, 1997, p. 325). While Gini’s observation may be considered somewhat shocking at first glance, leaders who highly impact the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of followers do embrace standards by which they lead even if such standards are ultimately judged as immoral by the rest of humanity. Gini’s observation reveals a difficulty experienced by all humankind; defining moral. Thompson (2004) captured the essence of this tension when addressing the difficulty facing individuals and collective enterprises attempting to discern a moral center in the midst of increasingly complex and pluralistic worldviews. The pluralism she addressed is one of the key challenges of postmodernism youth ministers face on a daily basis (Jones, 2001; Roebben, 2012; Root, 2009; Schaefer & Jacobsen, 2009; White, 2007). *Postmodernism* is a term used to describe the current this side of modernity worldview of Western society that is steeped in moral relativism and religious pluralism (Roebben, 2012; Thompson, 2004; Vorster, 2012).

Bass (1998) crafted the term *pseudo-transformational leadership* to differentiate between leadership that raises the morality of others versus power-oriented leadership that is self-consumed and exploits others (Bass, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2016). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) also reviewed authentic versus pseudo-transformational leadership, asserting that though the difference may not be fully described behaviorally, an authentic transformational leader is differentiated by the ultimate goal of transforming those who follow into those who lead, along with an easily notable lack of an agenda or manipulation of others. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) identified a pseudo-transformational leader as one who fails to uphold standards required for transformational leadership. From their perspective, transformational leadership that elevates the morals of followers “must rest on a moral foundation of legitimate values” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184). In essence, the pseudo-transformational leader is significantly influenced, if not utterly controlled, by self-interest, creating and pushing a warped vision that moves aside the best interests of others while using positional power to achieve his or her own personal goals, needs, and desires. Absolute power and personal gain are the primary concerns of the pseudo-transformational leader (Christie et al., 2011; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Maguad & Krone, 2009).

Such types of leadership have been evidenced numerous times in public, private, and nonprofit sectors within the past two decades ranging from the Enron scandal in the corporate sector (Lunenburg, 2012; Maguad & Krone, 2009) to sexual abuse scandals that have plagued church leaders and various communities of faith (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Lambert, 2007). Although leadership scandals have contributed in part to distrust in various organizations, a silver lining may be that interest in the ethical and moral dimensions of

leadership has grown in both academic and practitioner circles (Feldman, 2007; Lawton & Páez, 2015; Toor & Ofori, 2009). Increased interest has also opened doors for research in newer leadership theory arenas such as authentic leadership (Northouse, 2016; Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, Brown, & Evans, 2006; Pembroke, 2002; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008; Zhu et al., 2015).

Northouse (2016) contextualized moral leadership within a greater framework of leadership ethics. It is important to note that although some authors generally use the terms *ethics* and *morals* interchangeably (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2012), others more clearly delineate between the two (Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). Drawing from Northouse's observations, Canales (2014), reviewed the following five principles of moral leadership: Respecting others, serving others, showing justice, manifesting honesty, and building community. Canales (2014) also noted that authenticity is an additional key component. Reflecting on years of examining leaders and leadership characteristics, George (2003) asserted that authenticity is the beginning and end of leadership. In light of the many corporate scandals that have plagued the leadership landscape in the past two decades, a call for authentic leadership has awakened within the hearts and minds of key stakeholders of various organizations (Novicevic et al., 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

### **Spiritual Leadership**

Diverse literature representing public, business, and academic sectors indicates interest in the role spiritual leadership plays within secular organizational contexts has experienced a resurgence in recent years (Balog, Baker, & Walker, 2014; Benefiel, 2005; Case & Gosling, 2010; Chaston & Lips-Wiersma, 2015; Crossman, 2010; Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003,



2009; Krishnakumar et al., 2015; Miller & Ewest, 2013, 2015; Vandenberghe, 2011; Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin, 2005). Although religion and spirituality rarely appear in organizational research, the literature suggests they substantively impact workplace attitudes and behaviors (Neubert & Halbesleben, 2014).

At first glance, one might see the word spiritual and immediately conflate the term with religion. “The concept of spirituality has often been defined indirectly through its similarity with or dissimilarity from religiousness” (Liu & Robertson, 2011, p. 35). However, for many secular scholars and practitioners of leadership, “the definition of spirituality is offered by way of the *via negativa*—that is, spirituality is not religion” (Hicks, 2002, p. 381). Some have noted spirituality’s relationship with religion may hinder articulating a definition of spirituality in the context of the workplace (Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Tourish & Tourish, 2010). Religion is not the only component of spirituality that is suspect in the mind of the empirical investigator. Researchers in academia generally focus on spirituality in a personalized sense while excluding any sort of supernatural component (Speck, 2005).

Although the concept of spiritual leadership has been commonplace within Christian ministry for decades (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Sanders, 1967), utilizing the term within secular organizational and empirical research contexts is a relatively new phenomenon (Crossman, 2010). This may contribute to an inability to realize a suitable definition for a broad audience. Dent et al., (2005) provided a detailed overview of various definitions and characteristics of spirituality. Krishnakumar et al. (2015) identified five alternative definitions ranging from adherence to religious principles (Hicks, 2002) to ethical and moral values (Fowler 1981, Kegan 1982). Speck (2005) reviewed nine definitions, and ultimately observed, “Clearly, a

consensual definition of spirituality is lacking... We are left with a definitional dilemma” (p. 4). Northouse (2016) referred to spiritual leadership as an emerging leadership approach along with authentic leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership. He defined spiritual leadership as a leadership approach that “focuses on leadership that utilizes values and sense of calling and membership to motivate followers” (Northouse, 2016, p. 5). Northouse (2016) had nothing more to say on the topic.

Canales (2014), referencing Fry, Matherly, and Ouimet (2010), referred to spiritual leadership as an emerging model that focuses on key characteristics such as motivation, inspiration, and nurturing of one’s inner life. Fry (2003) is credited with developing spiritual leadership from an intrinsic motivation approach that incorporated the key components of hope/faith, vision, and altruistic love (Case & Gosling, 2010; Fry, 2003, 2009; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005; Fry et al., 2010; Zhu et al., 2015). Fry et al., (2005) identified spiritual leadership is a causal leadership theory that impacts transformation of organizations by developing internal motivation to learn.

Spiritual leadership has several purposes. One of the primary is to engage the fundamental needs of leaders and followers for spiritual survival that is realized via the avenues of calling and membership (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005). This is necessary to ultimately realize congruent vision and value across all components of an organization to ultimately achieve greater organizational commitment and productivity (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Fry et al., 2010; Reave, 2005; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Zhu et al., 2015).

Various characteristics have been identified as central to the construct of spiritual leadership. In spiritual leadership, there is no clear distinction between leaders and followers

(Krishnakumar et al., 2015). A leader's personal spirituality is assumed to permeate both leadership and non-leadership contexts and behaviors (Benefiel, 2005). A leader's personal spirituality is situated within the spiritualities of others within the workplace and may be evidenced via the characteristics of interconnectedness, religious or existential faith, and charisma (Krishnakumar et al., 2015). Key characteristics such as creating vision, value congruence, and fostering organizational commitment contribute to the triple bottom line which is comprised of realizing the well-being of humanity, corporate social responsibility, and organizational performance (Case & Gosling, 2010; Fry et al., 2010; Krishnakumar et al., 2015).

As positive as these characteristics appear, spiritual leadership also has the potential for devastating consequences. Zinnbauer, Pargament and Scott (1999) reflected on historical examples of individuals who utilized extreme measures to experience closeness to God. Lips-Wiersma, Dean, and Fornaciari (2009) identified numerous ways spirituality could be abused or misused in the workplace: control, instrumentality — the degree to which employees are treated as means to an end — seduction, evangelization, manipulation, and subjugation. To counter the potential negative effects of spiritual leadership, Chaston and Lips-Wiersma (2015) noted while in the early stages of spiritual leadership as a growing concern, depths of follower perspectives should be examined in conjunction with leader perspectives to mitigate the potential impact of one-sided theoretical outcomes.

### **Leadership Theories and Relationships to Leadership Approaches in Youth Ministry**

Generally, a youth minister reports to a board of elders, a senior or executive minister, or a leadership team. In many cases, they report to a senior minister and a board (Fields, 2002; Makin, 2004). Polity models vary across denominations, but regardless of governance model,

youth ministers report to someone in the organization even if informally to the teens and parents they serve or more formally within a collaborative leadership or team oriented structure. As a result, youth ministers lead and follow, positioning them to be uniquely examined through the lens of more traditional and more recent leadership theories and emerging followership models.

The diversity of polity models and their unique position as leaders and followers are set within a greater framework of diversity of youth ministry models. Canales (2006) proposed eight models of youth ministry facilitation in the United States from broad theological and religious philosophical perspectives. These models are outlined in Table 7. The models are not rank ordered or listed by merit. Canales (2006) also noted they are working models and should not be interpreted in terms of absolutes.

Regardless of the challenges they face, denominational affiliation, and model or hybrid models implemented, those serving in youth ministry wear many hats: administrator, educator, facilitator, counselor, spiritual director, friend, theologian, worship leader, and mentor (Canales, 2006; Cloete, 2015; Fields, 1998; Lanker, 2012; Powell, 2000). Although typically not responsible for leadership decision-making that impacts the spiritual growth of the entire organization, youth ministers play a critical spiritual development role during the transition of congregants from childhood to adulthood (Canales, 2014; Cannister, 2003; Nel, 2015).

Youth ministers are placed in a vital leadership role in relationship to overall congregational health as they serve as leaders of a smaller community within the greater community of faith and as supporters of their respective church's vision and mission (De Vries, 2008; Gibbons, 2015). If youth ministries are to make a lasting impact, a healthy leadership

framework is vital to long-term success (Canales, 2006, 2014; De Vries, 2008). However, very little empirical research exists that examines how a leader’s spiritual or religious beliefs impact a leader’s actions (Dent et al., 2005).

Table 7

*Models for Adolescent Ministry*

Friendship Model	Emphasizes Jesus as friend, establishes healthy adult/teen friendships, and creates a culture that fosters peer-to-peer friendships.
Spiritual Awareness Model	Fosters spiritual depth and stimulates a sense of the sacred among teens through personal, spiritual awareness and discovery via various worship and spiritual formation experiences.
The Servant Leadership Model	Integrates five principles that are consistent with a servant leader’s ethic of caring: a) respect, b) service, c) justice, d) honesty, and e) building community.
The Liberation Model	Approaches ministry through a liberation theology construct emphasizing conscientization, liberation, and praxis. Release of the oppressed is a key component of this model.
The Biblical Hermeneutic Model	Investigates and interprets Scripture to find meaning and purpose for teen religious experience and expression.
The Liturgical Initiation Model	Is highly influenced by and based on the <i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i> .
The Social Justice Model	Nurturing social mindfulness and commitment to justice and service through faith in Jesus, study of scripture, and adherence to Catholic social teachings; Incorporating a hands-on, multi-ministry characteristics approach to alleviate human suffering.
The Christian Discipleship Model	Focusing on key movements and concepts of the Christian faith such as conversion, morals, prayer, community, spiritual growth, and leadership.

*Note.* Adapted from “Models for Adolescent Ministry: Eight Ecumenical Examples,” by A. D. Canales, 1999, *Religious Education*, 101, pp. 207-229. Copyright 2006 The Religious Education Association.

Christian leadership is one small slice of the greater scope of leadership studies (Canales, 2014). The void of studies within research literature indicates the slice is much smaller regarding leadership studies within professional youth ministry. “Until just recently, with the Zondervan Publishing House/Youth Specialties Academic line and recent Baker Academic Youth, Family, and Culture series, there has not been a body of literature from which youth ministry educators could draw” (Powell, King, & Clark, 2005, p. 94). Even with glimpses into broader emphasis on empirical youth ministry research (Black, 2006; Canales, 2006, 2014; Cannister, 2003; Dodrill, 2013; Jack & McRay, 2005; Lambert, 2004; Powell et al., 2005), potential roadblocks may contribute to a lingering void in the broader body of knowledge. One recent study indicated at least one potential reason. In a research study that observed successful leadership in the initial years of ministry, Small (2011), observed:

There was agreement within [the sample] and its affiliated denomination [and] utilized literatures, that pastoral leadership is not first a set of skills to be learned and applied. Pastoral leadership is a gift, given by God through the church to persons called and equipped to lead congregations as apostles. Unfortunately, amidst this agreement, there was also ambivalence to define and shape pastoral leadership *theologically*, relying instead on educational and social science disciplines, which are necessary, but incomplete in themselves (Small, 2011, p. 53).

Martin (2001) provided additional insight when he observed that when research is conducted, individual church leaderships or denominations normally lead it, which mitigates significance of academic inquiry at the local church level.

The tug of war Small and Martin describe between calling and skills contributes to a standoff between some in local church leadership and some in academia. On the one hand, ministry occurs through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, indicating leadership gifts are empowered through supernatural force (Clark, 2008; Nel, 2015; Tidball, 2012). In that case, how can one quantify or evaluate if a youth minister is responding effectively and/or appropriately to a leadership influence that is not of this world? On the other hand, youth ministry has many practical components that are more easily defined and subsequently evaluated. For example, when a church defines job expectations, desired outcomes, and goals for youth ministry efforts, it may easier to identify necessary core competencies, performance qualities, and technical skills (Mwangi & Klerk, 2011).

Not all scholars remain mute on youth ministry and empirical research however. Cannister (2003) conducted a study of 120 youth ministry faculty members throughout colleges and universities in North America to in part, create more conversation to facilitate proactive strategic planning for the future of youth ministry. In a mixed-methods study, Black (2006) conducted research to identify what keeps teens engaged in church into adulthood — a study that may assist youth ministers and other key influencers in the lives of teenagers to better prepare teens for long-term, active church engagement. Lambert (2004) conducted a study to determine areas and questions that were most pressing in Christian youth ministry research. Leadership development ranked 46 out of 159 coded responses from subjects representing multiple denominational backgrounds and from across theological perspectives. However, Lambert (2004) lamented the overall state of research related to youth ministry. Reflecting on

the amount of research specifically addressing youth ministry he observed “weak and sporadic” results in the literature (Lambert, 2004, p. 69).

In a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities study conducted by Jack and McRay (2005) the authors observed, “Few empirical research studies have been published reporting information gathered from those teaching youth ministry in colleges and universities” (p. 56). Their study utilized two primary questions to develop a profile of youth ministry programs: (a) “What is the picture of a well-trained graduate of a youth ministry program? (b) What type of training is done to achieve this outcome?” (p. 57). Sub-questions were posed within each primary question. In response to the sub-question, “What qualities of character will be true of them?” (p. 59), leadership was a key theme among numerous responses including integrity, calling, love for people/being relational, and love for, and obedience to, God. In response to the sub-question, “What ministry skills will they have acquired?” (p. 59), leadership/vision was identified along with biblical interpretation, teaching, administration, interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, and ministry. In response to the sub-question, “How is your program designed to meet these stated outcomes in the training of these emerging youth ministry graduates?” (p. 63), leadership was included among Bible and theology, psychology, educational theory, sociology, ministry, and methods (Jack & McRay, 2005).

Perhaps the most outspoken scholar on youth ministry leadership development is Arthur David Canales (2014) who insisted upon engaging in and learning from “various leadership ideals and philosophies” (p. 27). Canales (2014) offered a detailed review of four leadership models that secular business and nonprofit leaders have employed, but have not



been considered within the world of professional youth ministry. Those models include servant, moral, spiritual, and transformational leadership.

**Servant leadership.** Although the concept of servant leadership as a leadership framework has received much attention in scholarly and practitioner circles in the past several decades (Wilkes, 1998) the concept of servant leadership is not a modern phenomenon (Joseph & Winston, 2005). Over 2500 years ago in Biblical literature, the prophet Isaiah used suffering servant language as he prophesied of the coming Messiah who would “justify the many” (Isaiah 53:11). Jesus would later impress upon his disciples the concept of “greatness” being most appropriately embodied by servanthood (Mark 10:43).

Jesus exemplified this teaching in his own ministry, specifically in the biblical account of washing the feet of his disciples. The passage reveals a shocking paradox of servant leader. On the one hand, “...the Father [God] had put all things under his power” (John 13:3). On the other hand, ...Jesus washed and dried his disciples’ feet (John 13:5). In the same passage, Jesus is presented as ultimate leader and ultimate servant. This leadership approach was practiced throughout his earthly ministry (Owusu, 2015). Later in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul identified various leadership roles such as pastor and teacher given by Christ to church leaders as a means of equipping them for service (Ephesians 4:11-12). Later, he offered the following servant equipping counsel to his apprentice Timothy as he reflected on the power of Scripture to equip the “servant of God for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). These types of servant references are consistent throughout the Bible. Specifically, ministers and pastors are charged to continue the work of Jesus, by primarily being servants of all (Manala, 2010; Wilkes, 1998).

More generally, serving one another is to be characteristic of the whole Christian community (Tidball, 2012).

Even though the concept of Jesus' ministry was predicated on his status as servant leader, and broader secular empirical studies are leading to greater insights on the impact of servant leadership on employee attitudes and behaviors (Chiniara & Bentein, 2015), the scholarly literature contains very little information on servant leadership within the context of pastoral ministry. Several denominational and nondenominational authors from various backgrounds permeate reference lists in recent doctoral dissertations on the topic of servant leadership as situated in various communities of faith (Makin, 2004; McEachin, 2011; Miraz, 2006; Owusu, 2015; Russell, 2000). However, references to academic articles published within the past two decades within the reference lists of those dissertations related to servant leadership in the context of professional ministry are almost non-existent.

This review does not imply that books, magazines and other non-peer reviewed works by church leadership authors or youth ministry practitioners have no value. Many of the textbooks used in youth ministry classes in universities are written by practitioners who are writing with a broader audience in mind than just the local, professional youth minister (Jack & McRay, 2005), but this does not mean the resources should be discarded. There is little to suggest however that the lived experience, raw data and anecdotal evidence will sufficiently capture the comprehensive landscape that is servant leadership. The reviewed scholarly literature suggests that validated research has its place in all types of organizations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 8). However, if one concludes there is room for knowledge of faith community environments within "all types of organizations" then one must be prepared to wait

patiently as the faith community scholars heed recommendations for future research on the topic of servant leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Chan & Mak, 2014; Chiniara & Bentein, 2015; Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Liden et al., 2015; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010; Sun, 2013).

The work to do is more evident when one realizes the scarcity of empirical research on servant leadership within the expansive scope of leadership studies. It is easily noticeable when comparing topical search outcomes on servant leadership with other leadership models. For example, when utilizing an EBSCOhost database topical search, this review located 1323 peer-reviewed journal articles related to servant leadership. When conducting a search on transformational leadership, 9619 peer-reviewed articles were identified. Approximately 190 articles mention both. The void of empirical research within the context of youth ministry and servant leadership is even more pronounced. When coupling the search term servant leadership with youth pastor and subsequently youth minister no peer-reviewed results were found.

The lack of peer-reviewed scholarly articles may be encouraging because it indicates the doors are open wide for scholarship in youth ministry servant leadership development. Opportunities abound for graduate and doctoral students and Christian college and seminary professors to research servant leadership and its potential impact within various denominations. Although not specifically addressing servant leadership, Clark (2008), opened the door for further emphasis on servanthood when he noted, "In youth ministry education, it is central to our task to produce graduates who recognize that the calling to adolescents and

their families in a given context is an expression of the call to be servants of God's mission in the world" (Clark, 2008. p. 23).

Although these and other yet-to-be-identified tensions may contribute to limitations in future studies, various authors have offered definitions of servant leadership in the context of Christian ministry. Canales (2014), asserting that his definition fits perfectly within the values of Christian youth ministry, defined servant leadership as, "A process of modeling Jesus' attitude of humility, service, respect, and love, which leads the followers in promoting the mission of the group, organization, or institution" (p. 44).

Tidball (2012) offered his version of a resolution to the tension between leadership and servanthood when viewing concepts through a New Testament social world lens as a means of understanding the nature of "father" (p. 46). He attributed the definition to the worldview of ancient followers of Jesus who understood father [and in a broader sense parents] in charge and family servant because of who they were in Christ. He affirmed historical and biblical accuracy of a construct that included attributes of father such as support, encouragement, decision-making, and practical service and noted if believers grasped and practiced the same concept in modern families, "we will have healthier churches because we will have healthier leaderships" (Tidball, 2012, p. 46).

When reflecting on his own literature review of this topic Russell (2000) observed, "The attributes of servant leadership revealed in the academic, popular, and Biblical literature constitute the foundation for an operative definition of servant leadership" (p. 66). His subsequent lengthy definition is one of the most all-encompassing identified in the literature, as he incorporated many of the characteristics of servant leadership noted by other authors,

both religious and secular. While that is true for the other definitions, perhaps except for Tidball's, all continue to support Greenleaf's core belief that above all else, the leader is servant.

Although Ebener and O'Connell (2010) indirectly discussed how a youth minister within parish ministry could utilize servant leadership, Canales (2014) specifically noted how servant leadership could effectively contribute to a healthy youth ministry framework. He encouraged the ministry staff to study the writings of Greenleaf as a ministry staff in order to engage servant leader concepts and philosophies; to conduct a multi-week series on the topic for all within the youth ministry's circle of influence; planning a servant leadership project along with older teens in order to empower teens to lead service learning experiences; and offer a video based series featuring films that showcase servant leadership based themes.

Youth ministers may also benefit from studying Greenleaf's journey and processing the literature related to his work and conclusions. The spiritual dimension of servant leadership is best understood when viewed through the lens of Greenleaf's Quaker faith tradition that is contextualized within the greater theological framework of Quaker founder George Fox and the Quaker movement of marginal counter-spirituality (Bekker, 2010). Pacifism, peace, and human capacity for goodness are central to Quaker values. Interaction with others is the valued means through which this capacity is realized (Feldman, 2007). The influence of such values on Greenleaf's personal faith development within the Quaker tradition is prominent throughout his writings.

Frick (2004, p. 126) observed that a book could be written on the influence of Quaker thought and practice on Robert Greenleaf's corporate work and servant leadership writings. In

a one on one interview with Frick, organizational development pioneer Peter Vaill observed, “Greenleaf was one of the first to openly bring spirituality into formal thinking about organizations and management” (Frick, 2004, p. 40). Greenleaf, however, lamented the dogma that people built around his treasured Judeo-Christian upbringing (Frick, 2004).

With all the emphasis on Greenleaf’s faith, students of servant leadership may find it somewhat ironic that a deeply religious man coined the phrase *servant leadership* yet empirically speaking and based on the void in the literature, communities of faith are some of the last organizations to implement Greenleaf’s servant leadership framework. Canales (2006) noted a potential reason for this lack of implementation when he observed that a limited audience was aware of Greenleaf’s concepts (Canales, 2006). He did not, however, offer support for the observation. In a later article, he narrowed the timeframe for lack of popularity or widespread knowledge to the 1970s (Canales, 2014). As a religious practitioner and scholar, Canales affirmed servant leadership in both articles as a pragmatic, methodological leadership theory for which modern youth ministry is well suited (Canales, 2006, 2014).

Not all religious scholars share Canales’ enthusiasm however. Niewold (2012) argued that servant leadership as theorized by Greenleaf is a blend of secular and faith-based concepts, and even within a religious construct, presents a distorted Christology. He suggested a lack of critical investigation of servant leadership by those in Christian leadership is distorting a true understanding of the nature of Christ both past and present (Niewold, 2012). The literature does not suggest Niewold’s views are widely embraced.

**Transformational leadership.** Green (2001) affirmed transformational theory as well suited to a local church's vision; one that visualizes ministry forming around the core competencies of leader and his or her followers. In a literature review of transformational leadership in the context of Christian ministry, Scarborough (2010) observed that Christian transformational leadership incorporates several Christian leadership theories. He identified: connective (Gibbs, 2005), courageous (Hybels, 2002), relational (Wright, 2000), servant (Hunter, 2004), spiritual (Sanders 1994), ternary (Banks & Ledbetter 2004), and transforming leadership (Ford, 1991) approaches (Scarborough, 2010). Regardless of the name or components of the theory, the concept of transformation is central to the Christian message.

The New Testament gospel writers describe Jesus Christ as one who healed the infirmed, offered community to the disenfranchised, and whose physical body was transformed from death to life. "[Jesus] preached repentance of sins, a complete change of life direction for those to whom He spoke. He sent His disciples to do the same" (Dodrill, 2013, p. 19). The Christian message asserts that Jesus offers forgiveness of sins to all who repent and believe that he is the Son of God (1 John 4:15). Many communities of faith also include baptism as part of the conversion process as a symbolic transformation of death to life (Ferguson, 1996; Resane, 2014).

The transformative theme is echoed throughout the New Testament as evidenced by new birth language in 1 Peter 2:3 and new creation affirmation in 2 Corinthians 5:17. The Apostle Paul also encouraged Christians in Rome to avoid worldly conforming and instead be transformed by renewing their minds (Romans 12:2). Whittington et al., (2005) noted the Apostle Paul may have been the greatest Christian missionary and theologian of all time. The

authors identified 10 leadership qualities of the Apostle Paul based on his first letter to the church in Thessalonica. These qualities make up a leadership style Whittington et al., (2005) referred to as legacy leadership. The authors of this particular transformative theory approach articulated three overarching categorizations of the legacy leader: motives, methods and measures. Within the sub-categories, the authors identified the following legacy leadership characteristics:

- Motives: (a) pure motive, (b) authenticity and sincerity, (c) follower-centric, (d) affectionate and emotional.
- Methods: (a) leadership worth imitating, (b) boldness during opposition, (c) an influencer who does not have to assert authority, (d) vulnerability and transparency, (e) active rather than passive
- Measures: changed lives that reveal the ultimate impact of a leader's effectiveness (Whittington et al., 2005, pp. 754-762).

Although the authors refer to legacy leadership as a spiritual leadership model, they observed numerous parallels between the Apostle Paul's leadership style and transformational leadership. They asserted however that a limitation of transformational leadership is that it exclusively focuses on behaviors and characteristics of the leader (Whittington et al., 2005). They concluded however that their model also explicitly identifies and addresses a leader's motives. Changing motives may involve transformational encounters or "road to Damascus" moments (p. 768). This is a direct reference from the apostle Paul's transformative encounter with Jesus Christ as recorded in Acts chapter 9.



Ties to transformational leadership are not exclusive to New Testament leaders.

Friedman and Langbert (2000), observed that the Jewish patriarch Abraham, a central figure in both Judaic and Christian traditions was “arguably the most successful transformational leader in history” (p. 90). When examining the story of Abraham, they identified the following transformational leadership traits: (a) vision, (b) courage (c) confidence, (d) caring about people (e) hospitality and generosity, (f) a strong sense of justice, (g) humility, (h) charisma, (i) personal sacrifice, (j) daring to be different, and (k) being a change agent (Friedman & Langbert, 2000).

Specifically addressing application of transformational leadership components discovered within the popular and research literature, Canales (2014), identified various transformational leadership characteristics of Jesus: leading by example; encouraging disciples to live to their full potential; leading by empowerment, guiding with inspiration and motivation; leading by encouragement and teaching excellence through commitment to the highest moral standards; and charisma. Canales (2014) identified various means of introducing multiple components of transformational leadership into youth ministry. He encouraged youth ministers to research transformational leaders throughout history such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Cesar E. Chavez, and the Dalai Lama, and introduce these leaders to students via movies, historical records, and outreach events. Additionally, youth ministries could plan and execute a local run to raise awareness for a special cause — a sort of transformational leadership immersive experience for teens (Canales, 2014). Finally, youth ministers could plan an immersive pilgrimage to a historically oppressed region of the country, to walk in the footsteps of African Americans, for example, in order to profoundly impact young hearts and minds, and increase social transformation interaction and dialogue (Canales, 2014).

A critical component of transformational leadership that is often referenced in the popular youth ministry literature is the importance of being a visionary leader (Devries, 2004, 2008; Heflin, 2009; Robbins, 2004, 2011). Fields (1998) in *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, one of the most utilized resources in youth ministry education (Jack & McRay, 2005), explored purpose statement and big-picture language that may serve as a means of complementing a youth ministry's vision. Heflin (2009) dedicated an entire chapter to vision, noting that visionary youth ministry: precedes accomplishment, provides encouragement, and promotes unity. Heflin (2009) also encouraged youth ministers to consider John Kotter's leading change model as a framework for youth leaders "as they function as visionary leaders of youth ministry" (p. 128). Another characteristic of transformational leadership that may prove worthy of study and implementation into youth ministry practices is mentoring. This aspect of transformational leadership may be significant to youth ministers who are often directly mentoring teens, are working with other adults in churches to create mentoring programs, or are looking for qualities in a mentor for themselves (Fields, 1998; Lanker, 2012).

Although generally writing to senior pastors Willimon (2002) offered insightful counsel for all Christian ministry leaders on the topic of transformational leadership. From his perspective, transformative leaders within Christian ministry must believe that God makes all things and people new. The result of this insight creates an expectation that continual transformation is a normal and expectant faith gift. In essence, within the context of Christian leadership, only the transformed leader can be a transformer of others.

**Moral leadership.** For youth ministers in Christian ministry, the standard of moral uprightness was realized in the words and work of Jesus Christ (Canales, 2014). His life was and

remains worthy of imitation for all leaders in Christian ministry and adherence to his teachings was and is expected of his followers. Early followers of Jesus were reminded by the unknown writer of the Hebrews letter to remember their leaders and keep in mind the outcomes that resulted from their ways of life; ultimately challenging these followers to imitate the faith of these leaders (Hebrews 13:7-8). The apostle Paul encouraged Christians in Philippi in their relationships with one another to have the same mindset as the humble Christ (Philippians, 2:5).

How then might moral leadership complement the ministry and message of Jesus while creating avenues of integrating insights of other New Testament writers into a moral leadership youth ministry model? Bass (1985) observed, “Moral leadership helps followers to see the real conflict between competing values, the inconsistencies between espoused values and behavior and the need for realignments in values, changes in behavior, or transformations of institutions” (Bass, 1985, pp. 182-184). Canales (2014) observed numerous ways moral leadership can effectively be implemented within professional youth ministry. He noted the consistency of morality within discipleship and as such, encouraged integration within youth ministry practices. He encouraged youth ministry professionals to study moral leadership as a means of learning about morality shaping principles (Canales, 2014). He also encouraged youth ministers to consider a weekend or weeklong experience he referred to as “Morality Bootcamp” (Canales, 2014, p. 33). The idea is to collaborate with community organizations such as healthcare professionals, social workers, and juvenile justice system employees to evaluate the ministry and message of Jesus and its impact on moral outcomes as Christ’s followers (Canales, 2014). In a third approach, Canales (2014) encouraged youth workers to consider a

multi-week study entitled, “The Great Moral Leaders Series” in order to introduce moral leaders throughout history such as Abraham Lincoln, Albert Schweitzer, Helen Keller, and Booker T. Washington, George Muller, Joan of Arc, and Florence Nightingale (p. 34).

Friedman (2001) recommended an inverse strategy for moral leadership instruction. He observed that authors of Scripture did not hide the mistakes of characters throughout the Bible. He noted, “These lessons are not only valuable for individuals in positions of leadership but all people who wish to improve their character” (Friedman, 2001, ¶1). Youth ministers could utilize Friedman’s seven character studies on the biblical characters Jacob, Joseph, Balaam, Samson, Saul, David, Solomon, and Haman to drive home the price of immorality, the power of forgiveness, and the importance of ethical, God-honoring choices.

Pembroke (2002) asserted authentic navigation through the waters of postmodernism, authentic spirituality, and authentic relationships are crucial components of shaping the leadership capacity of the next generation of church leaders. Jones (2001), observed, “Students don’t want to be tricked into attending a meeting at someone’s house or in a warehouse only to find out later that there’s a hidden agenda of saving their souls” (p. 89). Fields (2002) encouraged youth ministers who are new to the profession to make ten ministry commitments. The second of those is to “regularly check my motives and evaluate my heart” (Fields, 2002, p. 24). The message is consistent and clear and is one that honors one’s sacred calling as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Authenticity is a critical component of moral leadership.

**Spiritual leadership.** The Christian ministry literature that identifies relatable concepts of secular based spiritual leadership studies consistently recognizes Jesus Christ as the primary spiritual leader for all Christian leaders to imitate (Canales, 2014). Ironically, of all the secular

models of leadership that exist, spiritual leadership is one in which youth ministers may need to wade most cautiously. While Canales (2014) may be correct in his observation related to Christian ministry literature and relatable spiritual leadership concepts, secular-based spiritual leadership does not differentiate one religion from another. While some observe religion and spirituality as concepts of the sacred or divine, others embrace New Age concepts as viable aspects of one's spirituality (Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008). Such pantheistic overtones may have influenced writers such as Stott (2002) who when reflecting on observing church leadership all over the world in over thirty-five years of ministry observed, "Our model of leadership is often shaped more by culture than by Christ" (p. 113).

Christian spiritual leadership literature posits that leadership characteristics are gifts from God through Jesus Christ that range from more obvious supernatural manifestations to subtler natural giftedness (Sanders, 1967). In the former instance, various spiritual gifts including leadership in forms of apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoring and teaching gifts, are given to disciples by the ascended Christ for the sake of building up the community of faith (Ephesians 4:11-12). Such gifts are also credited to God's Holy Spirit in other passages of Scripture (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). In the latter instance, training, discipleship, study, prayer, and practice all contribute to leadership growth. Various passages of New Testament scripture speak to concepts of imitating leaders (Hebrews 13:7), keeping and modeling instructions received from more mature leaders (1 Timothy 5:21), following the example of godly leaders (Philippians 3:17), and putting religion into practice (1 Timothy 5:4).

The secular-spiritual leadership literature posits that spirituality and religion are separate constructs (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2010; Krishnakumar, et. al., 2015; Reave, 2005).

Spiritual leadership within this context has been defined as “comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (Fry, 2003, pp. 694-695). This type of spirituality is “broader than any single formal or organized religion... From this perspective, spirituality is necessary for religion but religion is not necessary for spirituality” (Fry, 2003, pp. 705-706). Fry (2003) articulated the following key components of spiritual leadership:

- Vision - This component identifies an organization’s future.
- Altruistic love - A sense of wholeness, harmony, and wellbeing produced through care, concern, and appreciation for self and others.
- Hope/faith - Fry (2003) referenced Webster’s dictionary to define faith as “The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (p. 713). Within the context of spiritual leadership, “Hope/faith adds belief, conviction, trust, and action for performance of the work to achieve the vision” (p. 714).

Although Christian youth ministers may find themselves at odds theologically and philosophically with some aspects of secular spiritual leadership, there is much to be gained by studying this particular leadership theory and possibly integrating various framework components into one’s ministry structure and processes. For instance, youth ministers in Churches of Christ may gain valuable insights into cultural shifts, which could potentially indicate why Churches of Christ are in such rapid decline in the United States; losing some 102,000 adherents between 2003 and 2012 (Ross, 2012). A study of the theory may also provide insight into hostility towards religion and the role it plays in spiritual formation.

Additionally, youth ministers may also develop appreciation for other faith practices and gain insight into how various peoples, cultures, and organizations experience spiritual intrinsic motivation.

Canales (2014) purposefully intertwined the components of secular spiritual leadership and Christian spiritual leadership. Regarding the latter, he articulated nine attributes of Christian spiritual leadership as conceptualized by Blackaby and Blackaby (2011). Spiritual leaders: (a) are called, (b) exhibit trustworthiness, (c) base their leadership in Scripture, (d) have the gift of discernment, (e) believe in God's authority, (f) are established by Jesus, (g) are obedient to God's purposes, (h) are Christ-centric, and (i) move others toward God's agenda. Canales (2014) observed that youth ministers can introduce key spiritual elements to teenagers via study of the contemplative life, spirituality, and spiritual leadership while leading them into experiences such as seeking God's guidance, discerning God's will, and prayer and meditation. He also invited youth ministers to consider a weekend spiritual retreat, conduct prayer gatherings during a liturgical season, and explore well-known spiritual leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa.

Recently published popular resources are plentiful for youth ministers wishing to deepen awareness related to Christian spiritual leadership. Jones published *Postmodern Youth Ministry* in 2001 and dedicated ample space to ancient, spiritual deepening practices such as *lectio divina* and the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Yaconelli authored *Contemplative Youth Ministry* in 2006 and *Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry* in 2007. Blackaby and Blackaby released a second edition of *Spiritual Leadership* in 2011 and Root and Dean published *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* in the same year.

Borgman authored *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture* in 2013, and Cole and Nielson edited *Gospel Centered Youth Ministry* in 2016. These books do not represent an exhaustive list, but they do reflect a growing desire to move into deeper waters of faith development and discipleship.

### **History of Youth Ministry Within the United States**

Approaches to youth ministry result from the ebb and flow of history and is best contemplated within a historical perspective (Webber, 2002; White, 2007). Webber (2002) noted the concept of youth ministry was primarily a phenomenon of the twentieth century; particularly the last half. Senter (2014) traced the roots of youth ministry to the 1800's, referencing the formation of organizations like The American Sunday School Union (ASSU) which was founded in 1824 and was highly influential in promoting the Sunday School movement (Senter, 2014). The Juvenile Temperance movement also impacted the future of youth ministry. Senter (2014) labeled it "the grandparent of modern local church youth ministry in that it was primarily focused on providing support to volunteers in Protestant churches to assist them in fostering one aspect of what they understood as moral behavior in children and youth" (p. 87).

While the Sunday school union movement was ultimately reframed within individual denominational development initiatives at least one organization founded in 1844 has continued to experience long-term sustainability. That organization is the Young Men's Christian Association known more commonly as the YMCA. Regarding the impact of the YMCA on youth ministry, Senter observed:



The YMCA, unlike the other youth ministry movements, professionalized their movement relatively early. As a result, the need to standardize their training called for greater depth and technical training. This model of training more closely paralleled youth ministry education in the last quarter of the twentieth century than that of any other youth ministry movements of its own day (Senter, 2014, p. 88).

In one of the most comprehensive volumes on the history of youth ministry in the United States, Pahl (2000) identified four youth ministries: the Walther League (Lutheran), the Young Christian Workers (YCW, Catholic), Youth for Christ (YFC, Evangelical), and African-American congregational youth ministries (Methodist, Baptist, and United Churches of Christ) as the real youth ministry shakers and movers in the latter portion of the twentieth century (Pahl, 2000). Young Lutherans who affiliated with the Walther League found an avenue into mainstream Christianity and American culture. Similarly, Catholic teens who were part of YCW contributed to making Catholics the largest faith demographic in the United States. YFC teens comprised in part the Evangelical awakening of revival-based faith practice. Leaders such as Billy Graham grew in significant influence. African-American congregational youth ministries developed distinctive worship styles and theology in local churches and national youth organizations and had an impact on and were impacted by the civil rights movement. (Pahl, 2000).

The formation of various organizations was not the sole influencer of youth ministry formation in the United States. Senter (2014) asserted that newspapers and other published literature:

Were the most influential form of youth ministry education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century volunteer driven youth ministry movements... This type of publication

remained important for leadership training in the church youth fellowship movement that followed in the middle of the twentieth century... They were the blogs and websites of their day (p. 89).

Journals such as *The American Sunday-School Teacher's Magazine and Journal of Education* which began in 1823, and newspapers such as *The Cold Water Army and Picnic* which was published in the 1830's, were complemented by national publications by the YMCA such as *Association Men, Association Boys, Association Boys' Work Journal* (Senter, 2014).

Although organizations such as the YMCA, the Walther League, and Young Christian Workers had long specifically targeted various developmental aspects of young men and women, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that churches began developing ministries for various ages (Bruner 2015; Webber, 2002). Youth ministry had entered a new era and the Christian publishing marketplace responded to the hunger for materials and resources to equip youth ministers for effective ministry. In 1969, Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice founded Youth Specialties, the first non-denominational business organization specifically oriented for youth ministry among evangelicals (Bruner, 2015; Keeler, 2011; Senter, 2014). The organization hosted its first National Youth Workers Convention in 1970 (Senter, 2014) and has continued to host numerous conferences and publish multiple books and resources. In 1974, Thom and Joani Schultz founded *Group Magazine*, another non-denominational business, to fill a training gap created by a lack of exclusive youth ministry focus by Youth Specialties (Bruner, 2015; Senter, 2014). The organization has expanded its footprint well beyond youth ministry and now offers resources for multiple ministries and church staff positions (Group.com, 2016).

Senter (2014) described numerous individuals and organizations that contributed to the shaping of modern youth ministry. He mentioned organizations such as Sonlife, created in 1979 by Dann Spader, and the formation of the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry, a more academically oriented research association. Senter (2014) also identified two waves of formal youth ministry education. The first was spearheaded by the YMCA in the nineteenth century and was based on the need for General Secretary positions to staff the worldwide growth of the organization. But by the arrival of the twentieth century the YMCA began dividing into two camps: one progressively secular and the other more traditionally conservative (Senter, 2014). Even though the organization was divided into two camps, curriculum developers remained committed to the “body, mind, and spirit” mantra symbolized by the YMCA triangle that represented “muscular Christianity, academic preparation and personal conversion” (Senter, 2014, p. 93). The impact of the YMCA on current church educational models should not be underestimated. The YMCA leadership education model impacted public schools, which in turn impacted the framework for church Sunday schools and other educational approaches. Even though the theological and philosophical divide grew, mainline denominations and fundamentalists held onto the schooling model (Senter, 2014). Many churches continue embracing this same model today, as they utilize Sunday morning classrooms that largely resemble public school classrooms.

The second wave of formal youth minister education came on the heels of World War II. During the war, Evangelical, nondenominational organizations like Young Life, Youth for Christ, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship were founded and began making an impact on teens, college campuses, and churches (Pahl, 2000; Senter, 2014). “Between them, these three

organizations drew thousands of youth people to rallies, small-group meetings, and Bible studies throughout the forties and fifties” (Pahl, 2000, p. 58). In 1949, the Southern Baptist Convention hired its first Professor of Youth Education, Phillip B. Harris, who served in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s School of Religious Education. Noting the words of Merrick (1994), Senter (2014) credited Harris’ doctoral dissertation as the research that provided a framework for the vocational identity of youth ministry as a profession.

While Harris’ contribution cannot be overlooked, the influence of Young Life and its strategic partnerships with universities and seminaries dramatically shaped the future of youth ministry education. Early relationships with organizations such as Fuller and Gordon Conwell opened the door to more advanced training in other universities and seminaries as churches began hiring more youth ministers in the 1970s and 1980s (Senter, 2014). Although youth ministry continues to play catch-up with other disciplines in academia, advanced programs are now available to those wishing to experience a research oriented immersion into the field of professional youth ministry (Black, 2006; Senter, 2014).

Currently, youth ministers are wrestling with shifting worldviews within a highly cynical, ever-growing secular culture. The wrestling match is exacerbated when considering that three cohorts simultaneously serve in evangelical churches throughout the United States, sometimes contributing to a clash of values within approaches to ministry. Webber (2002) labeled these cohorts Traditional Evangelicals, Pragmatic Evangelicals, and Younger Evangelicals. Table 8 provides a review of various characteristics of these approaches.

Webber (2002) noted the impact of charismatic leadership on the birth cycles of evangelical groups. Initial organization leads to institutionalization. As time passes, a new group

emerges from the original group and the cycle repeats. Younger evangelicals represented the first group to emerge in the twenty-first century. Original cyclical iterations still exist but have generally lost effective ministry influence. While multiple subgroups may be identified within evangelicalism, the primary categories referenced in Table 8 represented the main voices of the movement at the turn of the century (Webber, 2002).

Table 8

*Approaches to Youth Work*

	Traditional Evangelicals, born between 1950-1970	Pragmatic Evangelicals, born between 1970-1980	Younger Evangelicals, born post 9/11 era (2000-?)
Outreach	Programs primarily for church families.	Programs for outreach.	Interactive, worship, prayer, and Bible study.
Context	Assume some Christian understanding.	Secular world. New age spirituality.	Postmodern pluralism and relativism.
Focus	Provide alternative fun and games.	Focus on individual needs.	Create a community of open and real people.
Approach	Parties with a devotion.	Friendships that foster conversion experiences.	Immerse seeking persons into communities of faith.
Message	Salvation of the soul. Faith is birthed in a decision for Christ.	Jesus can meet your need and give you meaning.	Faith is birthed in a welcoming community where Jesus is embodied and lived out. Discipleship is a lifelong process.

*Note.* Adapted from *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (p. 162), by R. E. Webber, 2002. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. Copyright 2002 by Robert E. Webber.

## Historical Review of Youth Ministry in Churches of Christ

Ron Bruner (2015) is the author of the most comprehensive historical review of youth ministry in Churches of Christ. He drew heavily from a master thesis published by Stephen Craig Joiner entitled *A Comparative History of Youth Ministry in Churches of Christ* in 1998; thirteen video based interviews with “youth ministry pioneers among Churches of Christ conducted by the National Conference on Youth Ministries (NCYM) in 2005” (Bruner, 2015, p. 233), and from his own lived experienced as a youth minister in Churches of Christ.

Bruner (2015) identified three cohorts of youth ministry leaders within Churches of Christ between 1965-2014. He observed:

The first cohort (1965-1970) [established] youth ministry as a credible ministry profession; the second (1970-2000) emphasized ministerial education and practices forming spiritual relationships among youth; the third (2000-present) attended to a critique of youth ministry practice and an eventual move toward the spiritual formation of students and parents (Bruner, 2015, p. 233).

In 1965, the Central Church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas, hired Dan Warden as the first full-time professional youth minister in Churches of Christ. Soon afterwards, other churches within the fellowship followed suit. This first cohort quickly began collaborating on best practices and in many cases created best practices that future cohorts would continue to utilize as more and more churches hired youth ministers.

The second cohort began reaching out to organizations such as Youth Specialties, “the first publishing company for youth ministry among evangelicals” (Bruner, 2015, p. 238) to identify additional best practices and resources within which to engage parents and teens in

effective ministry. This cohort also launched major youth events such as Winterfest, an annual youth conference that attracts almost 15,000 attendees to conferences in Gatlinburg, TN, and Arlington, TX (Adams, 2005). As this second cohort began to mature, members of the first cohort began teaching youth ministry at various institutions of higher learning affiliated with Churches of Christ. This created internship opportunities for late second cohort and third cohort youth ministry professionals.

The third cohort benefitted from a wealth of resources ranging from numerous how-to books and undergraduate majors and graduate-level courses and degrees in youth ministry and also began opening the door for more women to participate in full time youth ministry. However, this cohort is struggling to grasp the fallout associated with the dramatic number of teens who disaffiliate with organized religion by the time they are sixteen (DeVries, 2004). This cohort within Churches of Christ began asking many of the same questions as youth ministry professionals in churches throughout the United States related to how to respond to changing worldviews, secularization, and best practices that had run their course. “As third-cohort ministers shaped youth ministries for their twenty-first- century context, a recurring concept was spiritual formation” (Bruner, 2015). This theme continues to be explored by those within professional youth ministry as they wade deeper into the waters of the twenty-first century (Mohler, 2004; Myers; 2016; Powell et al., 2005, Roebben, 2012).

To date, no database exists that accounts for a precise number of full-time professional youth ministers within Churches of Christ. Anecdotal evidence suggests the number is approximately 400, but until a study is conducted to validate the number, there is no way to be sure. Since the fellowship has no governing body beyond the local church and due to the many

divisions that plague the fellowship (Garrett, 2003), a valid number may prove difficult to discern.

### **The Importance of Youth Ministers**

Youth ministers in churches throughout the United States serve in positions that are somewhat similar to department heads in non-profit environments and organizations (Butler & Herman, 1999; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Myers, 2016; Powell, 2000). They have budgets to administer; equipment, resources, and volunteers to manage; deadlines to meet; and communication processes to implement and maintain. A key difference is that youth ministers, in partnership with other church staff, are expected to significantly impact spiritual formation in teens while simultaneously contributing to the spiritual well-being of parents and other adolescent caregivers (Canales, 2006; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Nel, 2015; Severe, 2006).

Youth ministers are also on the front lines of numerous issues and challenges facing adolescents and their caregivers. The ripple effects of their ministries are potentially staggering for worldwide change. Senter (2014) focused on the importance of youth ministry educators and the breadth of their students' mission field when he identified the integrative role these educators play in bridging the gap between theology and social science. He observed rigorous dialogue that seeks to process the roles of general and special revelation and their potential impact on almost half the planet's population who are less than twenty years of age (Senter, 2014).

Youth ministers are directly and indirectly impacting the formative years of the next generation of men and women who will fill jobs in every sector. They have the opportunity to model various aspects of the Christian faith while integrating complementary components of



moral, spiritual, servant, and transformational leadership. They are poised to engage in meaningful, theological dialogue (Myers, 2016) with teens during the post-Christian era in the United States.

### **Challenges Youth Ministers Face**

Research indicates that members of the clergy generally find their work fulfilling, significant, and worthwhile (Barnard & Curry, 2011; Crossley, 2002; Kinman, McFall, & Rodriguez, 2011). Research also indicates that pastoral ministry can be emotionally draining due to various stressors associated with the demands of caring for others. Long hours within 24/7 on-call expectations, interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, lack of clear expectations, low wages, church politics, and high expectations from church members have been cited as contributors to clergy stress (Fields, 1998; Kinman et al., 2011; Lewis, Turton, & Francis, 2007; McMinn et al., 2005; Schaefer & Jacobsen, 2009).

Such work-related stressors have been found to have an adverse impact on the wellbeing and retention of clergy (Kinman et al., 2011). In addition to stress that is somewhat quantifiable, more subtle forms of stress may also contribute to emotional strain. For instance, many who enter the ministry may be unaware of the various types of leadership challenges before them and the often-unexpected types of adversity they will face (Elkington, 2013; Fields, 1998, 2002).

The impact of these stressors is symptomatically expressed in numerous and sometimes negative outcomes as they take their toll on physical, spiritual, and emotional health (Doehring, 2013). Burnout, for instance, which can result from chronic stress from the demands of interpersonal relationships may be described symptomatically by characteristics such as

emotional and/or physical exhaustion and can negatively impact family, productivity, and relationships in and out of the workplace (Hall 1997; Miner, Dowson, & Sterland, 2010), appears to be a contributing factor for clergy deciding to leave the profession (Barnard & Curry, 2011; Beebe, 2007; Doolittle, 2010; Randall, 2013).

Hoge and Wenger (2005) conducted a multi-year research project involving Protestant and Catholic clergy. Of the five Protestant denominations studied: Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church, the study discovered that burnout was the third most frequently reported feeling among clergy leaving the church (Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Miraz, 2006). In addition, many members of the clergy have indicated they would change jobs if they could since some now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans (Doehring, 2013; Ferguson et al., 2014).

In the late 1990s, researchers observed from formal research and anecdotal reports the potential negative impact ministry demands can have on pastors' psychological and spiritual functioning. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, antidepressant use rose while life expectancy fell. Even though almost all pastors feel a rather high sense of satisfaction in ministry (Barnard & Curry, 2011), and although clergy mortality rates are typically lower than the general population (Doehring 2013), a vast majority experience loneliness and discouragement (Hall, 1997; Roach, 2011; Vattelto, 2010).

As members of the clergy, youth ministers face many of the same types of stressors and leadership challenges faced by fellow staff members; stressors that weigh on their own personal health and well-being. However, youth ministers also face additional stressors that are

unique to their positions. One unique potential stressor is being stereotyped by criteria such as clothing choices, office hours, and interactions with church leaders and parents by other ministry professionals or parents (Lambert, 2004). Such stereotypes are changing however as youth ministry continues to grow as a profession, as seminaries and universities examine coursework related to the profession, and as individuals within the profession are making longer term commitments to youth ministry as a career (Lambert, 2004).

Reframing stereotypical assumptions does not eliminate all stressors that are unique to the profession. In addition to understanding how to navigate cultural trends and providing counsel to adolescents during some of their most formative years, youth ministers are expected to be knowledgeable of the Bible and the theological streams of thought emerging from Christian Scripture (Jack & McRay, 2005). In addition, youth ministers generally operate in a demographic that is immersed in rapid-change technology, placing youth ministers in a unique position to not only understand the technology, but also how to teach teens to steward such technology in holistically healthy ways (Oliver, 2014; Powell et al, 2005).

Youth ministers are also ministering to the first generation of teens in the history of the United States who have never drawn a breath outside postmodernism (Jones, 2001; Roebben, 2012; White, 2007). This may be good news for youth ministers since certain aspects of postmodernism such as questioning established precedent, calling for authenticity, and appreciating diversity have opened the door to creative approaches for how religious educators impact the world (Oliver, 2014; Pembroke, 2002; White, 2007). Other aspects of postmodernism are proving challenging as youth ministers are caught in the crossfire of receiving instruction from institutions that are shifting curricula to prepare them for ministry in

a postmodern, post-Christian culture then finding themselves employed by church leaders who have failed to recognize the magnitude of cultural change. Youth ministers may also fail to grasp the impact of cultural change and fashion their youth ministries to follow postmodern trends versus critically analyzing the culture within which their ministries are situated and identifying how the gospel can impact culture (Root, 2009; White, 2007).

It is possible that many youth ministers may also suffer various types of anxiety as they attempt to discern how to lead and be led within antiquated, hierarchical leadership structures on the one hand or highly unstructured environments on the other in the midst of changing cultural values (Canales, 2014; Jones, 2001). Although the literature reports scant research on such tension, some authors do address how lack of structure impacts desired outcomes. For example, DeVries (2008) asserted most youth ministries (and youth ministers) are woefully short on structure and linked such lack of structure to lack of successful ministry.

Although limited within the literature, certain authors have addressed some of the supervisory challenges and issues facing youth ministry professionals (Makin, 2004). Often, the hierarchical nature of religious organizations creates a “power distance” between senior and junior staff that inhibits full implementation of servant leadership elements. and the challenges that may arise when attempting to implement a servant leadership framework (Ebener & O’Connell, 2010, p. 331). Canales (2006, 2014) expressed similar concerns. While multiple studies examine leadership theories such as servant leadership with supervision as a variable (Ebener & O’Connell, 2010, Liden et al., 2015; Sendjaya et al., 2008, Sendjaya & Cooper, 2010), fewer studies are situated within the context of professional youth ministry. The timing of such research however, is critical due to various crises plaguing the faith sector.

In recent years, numerous nationally recognized church leaders have lost the trust of their congregants due to scandal or moral failure (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Lambert, 2007). The ripple effect has been astounding. When reflecting on the Barna Group's 2015 study on atheism in the United States, Zaimov (2015) observed that one fourth of unchurched adults in America identify as atheists or agnostics. Rejection of the Bible as an ultimate source of authority and a lack of trust in the church were identified as the primary reasons for the shift (Zaimov, 2015). Certainly, pastors do not bear the burden for exclusively contributing to the rise in atheism and agnosticism. However, the data indicate growing in trustworthiness is worthy of pursuit.

Robert Greenleaf asserted via multiple writings targeting religious leaders that servant leadership could restore and maintain such trust. Greenleaf considered servant leaders transformative prophets characterizing them with qualities such as vision, high ethical standards, excellence, persuasion, rational thought, prophetic imagination, and listening (Spears, 2010). These characteristics align with the necessary skill sets of those who supervise staff members in faith community contexts, which for thousands of churches include professional youth ministers (Canales, 2014). The prophetic role is perhaps more clearly envisioned when exploring various characteristics of servant leadership in greater detail. For example, within the servant leadership framework, empathy is a trait that is generally associated with those who provide pastoral care. However, Harrison (2008) encouraged a moderate exercise of empathy in order to not lose one's sense of self when caring for others.

Harrison's counsel is key to long-term youth ministry leadership viability. If leaders are to develop this strength in associates, they must remain consciously aware that expressions of

compassion and empathy toward the suffering are expected of professional clergy and in many cases their spouses (Darling, Hill, & McWey, 2004). An empathetic presence is an expectation of many who seek the counsel of their pastor. Without cultivating this competency, servant leaders are left with an incomplete set of skills (Canales, 2014).

Contributing to the growth of others is another characteristic of the servant leader. However, this is difficult in numerous contexts because many churches are strongly tied to tradition and rigid systems (Clark, 2008; Mueller & McDuff, 2004; Root, 2009). Resistance to change often contributes to pastors transitioning to more progressive churches or leaving professional ministry altogether (Mueller & McDuff, 2004).

Oliver (2014) speaking on the importance of setting ministers up for success in academic environments noted, “In order to succeed with the aim of training ministers that are competent and positive change agents, educators must act proactively by experimenting with the tools and resources available to them and ask how these can be helpful in reaching the set goals” (p. 2). Not only is the burden on seminary educators, it also falls on senior leadership at the local church level to prepare and equip associates to respond appropriately to leading and managing change. This type of guidance reinforces studies that emphasize the positive impact of a healthy supervisor/supervisee relationship within a community of faith (Butler & Herman, 1999; Liden et al., 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Resane, 2014; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). Although not always overt in peer-reviewed literature, youth ministers as part of the professional clergy will most likely benefit from personal and professional development.

## **Chapter Summary**

The study of leadership continues to expand at a rapid pace. Numerous authors and

researchers continue to explore various vocabularies, frameworks, and approaches to attempt to capture the essence of leadership characteristics. While those in Christian ministry generally turn to the Bible for leadership guidance, the professional clergy's interest in popular leadership literature continues to grow. Leadership research in professional youth ministry however has lagged behind. Although various models such as servant leadership, moral leadership, spiritual leadership, and transformational leadership have been recommended as suitable frameworks for youth ministry (Canales, 2014), a lack of empirical study on current leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers remains virtually non-existent.

Galletta (2013) observed, "The existing literature should inform your development of a research question, selection of methods for data collection, and formulation of an analytical framework" (p. 11). The literature review in this chapter has positioned those and other components of this study to identify the leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ with a potential impact that is far beyond the scope of a single fellowship of youth ministry practitioners.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ, the challenges those youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies, how they measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry, and what recommendations they have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. This chapter details the procedures, processes and protocol used to analyze the data obtained for a study involving identification of leadership traits of 15 long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. The chapter reviews the nature of the study and the steps and methods involved in the data collection process. The research design is articulated, interview techniques and protocol are reported and human subject protections are also identified. Specifically, the chapter outlines steps taken to protect participants from negative effects attributed to participation or refusal to participate in the study.

### **Re-Statement of Research Questions**

This study utilized a qualitative approach to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?
- RQ2: What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?
- RQ3: How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?



- RQ4: What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?

### **Nature of the Study**

This research was designed as a qualitative study. “The strength of qualitative inquiry is the integration of the research question, the data, and data analysis” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 1). The qualitative research method may involve multiple pathways of inquiry and investigation including case study, phenomenological study, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, narrative study, grounded theory, content analysis, dramaturgical interviewing, and participant observation which is a special form of ethnography (Conklin, 2007; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Kuckartz, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Richards & Morse, 2013). Even though these approaches may vary, they all have at least two similarities: (a) they focus on one or more phenomena within a natural setting, and (b) these phenomena are studied “in all their complexity” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). Regardless of the approach, qualitative inquiry is rigorous (Conklin, 2007). Creswell (2013) addresses various aspects of such rigor when offering the following definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of

the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2013, p. 44).

Qualitative research may also be identified by more specific characteristics. For instance, qualitative research generally occurs in a natural setting, meaning the investigator often collects data within the real-world environment of study subjects (Andrade, 2009; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Another characteristic is that the researcher is considered a primary instrument of the study (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Xu & Storr, 2012). A third characteristic is the gathering of multiple forms of data such as interviewing, observing, and collection of documents as opposed to exclusively relying on one data source (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, the investigator utilizes complex reasoning when examining these various forms of data to dig deeply into the phenomenon being studied from multiple vantage points in order to articulate a rich, deep holistic account of potentially complex and multifaceted situations (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Another distinguishable characteristic of qualitative research includes focusing on meaning that participants hold versus focusing on meaning that researchers bring to the study (Creswell, 2013). A clear and concerted effort to differentiate and clearly contextualize participant responses is perhaps the most essential aspect of solid qualitative research (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Creswell (2013) also identified emergent design as a characteristic of qualitative inquiry. In essence, since qualitative studies often use open-ended questions as data gathering begins, it is sometimes challenging to identify precise methods of approach prior to inquiry (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Emergent design often appears in subtle ways: a sort of unexpected aha moment that may occur in one interview that could then be incorporated into

remaining interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). “[Qualitative researchers] should... be on the lookout for moments of interpretation whenever they arise and be ready to capture them” (Schiellerup, 2008, p. 165).

A final component of qualitative research reviewed here is reflexivity. Reflexivity which is defined as an awareness of self (Rennie, 2004; Seale, 1999a) is another key component of valid, qualitative research that requires the investigator to assume a reflexive stance to all aspects of a qualitative study (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008; Conklin, 2007; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2010; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Reflexivity helps researchers openly acknowledge personal biases and positions them to speculate on how those biases may have impacted their approach, data collection, and interpretation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Although a qualitative research approach has numerous strengths, critics also note potential weaknesses. Some quantitative enthusiasts question precision within qualitative data analysis (Chowdhury, 2015). Others question if smaller sample sizes accurately represent the larger population (Hodges, 2011; Polit & Beck, 2010). Others note a proliferation of concepts designed to legitimize the quality of qualitative approaches stand in stark contrast to generally agreed upon quantitative terms such as the distinction between validity and reliability (Seale, 1999b, Williams & Morrow, 2009). Another criticism questions the impact of personal bias on findings (Chowdhury, 2015). In order to mitigate such concerns, Shah and Corley (2006) observed, “To ensure the negative impressions of qualitative research are completely overcome, qualitative researchers must be vigilant as they write and review papers, ensuring that papers are methodologically sound and consistent in their use of terminology” (p. 1825).

This study gathered data from the lived experiences of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. Utilizing the complementary components of a qualitative approach positioned the study to obtain best leadership practices from participants while ensuring their legitimate voices were heard. A qualitative approach allowed the study to clearly identify leadership traits and competencies that have contributed to long tenure within the profession of youth ministry.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a phenomenological method to gather the lived leadership experiences of subjects. “The phenomenologist aspires to access the personal, the individual, the variations within themes... [Phenomenology] is, inherently, a means of creating knowledge that is particular — knowledge that offers a portal of insight into the individual and idiosyncratic” (Conklin, 2007, p. 276). Phenomenology provides opportunity for “a descriptive, reflective, interpretive, and engaging mode of inquiry from which the essence of an experience may be elicited” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.67).

The perception of the meaning of lived common or shared experiences of a phenomenon by study subjects is the key focus within a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Van Manen, 2014). One’s perception of a life-event is considered one’s experience of a phenomenon (Richards & Morse, 2013, referencing Van Manen, 1990). “A phenomenological study... attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 141). This approach generally phrases the phenomenon under consideration as a single idea or concept

(Creswell, 2013). In the context of this study, the single concept under consideration is leadership characteristics of long tenured youth ministry professionals.

**Structured process of phenomenology.** Creswell (2013) leaned heavily on the works of Moustakas (1994) and Van Manen (1990) to articulate features of various types of phenomenology such as hermeneutical and transcendental that are consistent throughout phenomenological research. These features are included below along with several observations related to why phenomenology is a well-suited approach for this study:

- Emphasis on a phenomenon for investigation that is articulated as one concept or idea. This feature strengthened the outcome of examining leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ.
- Investigation of the concept or idea with a population comprised of “individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell 2013, p. 78). All subjects within this study have experienced long tenure within their profession as members of a greater faith community.
- A philosophical discussion regarding the basic ideas of subjective and objective experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. Although the discussion “turns on the lived experiences of individuals and how they have both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78), authors of studies also have a moral obligation to differentiate between the two perspectives. “The relationship between the object and the observer, the objective and the subjective, is critical in collecting a particular instance of the phenomenon” (Conklin, 2007, p. 278).

- Depending on the phenomenological form utilized for the study, the investigator may need to bracket out of the research by discussing his or her personal experiences with the concept or idea under examination. Bracketing was of particular importance in this study due to the fact that the even though he was over 20 years removed from the profession, the author of the study had 10 years of experience as a youth minister in Churches of Christ.
- The researcher employs a data-collection procedure, typically interviews with those who have experienced the concept or idea under examination.
- Data analysis that progresses through procedural techniques (Letiche, 2006) that allows the data to transition from “narrow units of analysis... to broader units... to detailed descriptions that summarize [the] ‘what’ and ‘how’ [of the lived experience]” (Creswell, 2013, p. 79).
- Ending with an overview that presents the essence of the experience for participants by detailing the “what” and “how” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 79).

**Appropriateness of phenomenology methodology.** This study purported identification of leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ and identification of the challenges those youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies. In addition, the study analyzed how youth ministers in Churches of Christ measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry as well as the recommendations they have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. To fulfill the purpose of the study, a critical component was a deep, rich understanding of the lived experiences (Van Manen, 2014) of long-

term youth ministers. A transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized within this study to attempt to identify the perceptions of lived experiences of youth ministers in Churches of Christ regarding effective leadership traits that may contribute to longer tenure in the profession. The approach was selected because it, “[focuses] less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80)

Although the phenomenological approach was well suited for this study, weaknesses of the approach were acknowledged to safeguard validity. Creswell (2013) acknowledged the importance of broader philosophical assumptions that should be identified by the investigator in his or her study. He also recommended a stringent selection process of subjects who have “experienced the phenomenon in question” (p. 83). Creswell (2013) also reminded researchers to avoid the trap of assumptions one may bring to a study.

### **Research Design**

This study sought to identify leadership traits of a unit of analysis, which for this study was a long tenured youth minister in Churches of Christ. To fulfill identification of those traits, the following characteristics that comprised the unit of analysis were identified:

- Be a male or female between the ages of 30 and 65;
- Be currently employed as a full-time youth minister in a Church of Christ;
- Has served at a church in the role of youth minister for at least ten consecutive years;
- Has completed at a minimum a bachelor degree.

**Sample size.** Fifteen carefully selected participants who met the unit of analysis criteria were selected as the sample for this study. Van Manen (2014) encouraged appropriate use of

the term sample when reminding qualitative researchers to keep in mind that within phenomenological methodology, sample should not refer to an empirical sample as a population subject. The richness of participants contributes to a “saturation point from a relatively small sample size... which means a point where the researcher finds nothing new from his collected data from the respondents, and thus the research finding is analysed [sic] and generated” (Chowdhury, 2015, p. 1137). Creswell (2013) recommended a heterogeneous group that may vary in size from three to four to 10 to 15. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) noted the sample could range from five to 25. Accordingly, this study utilized a sample size of 15 participants whose unit of analysis criteria were rigorously scrutinized via purposeful sampling.

**Participant selection.** Subjects for the study were selected via purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a widely utilized qualitative study approach used to identify and select information-rich subjects who understand the required information, possess a willingness to reflect on the phenomenon of study, and have the time and willingness to be involved (Palinkas et al., 2015; Pan, 2013; Patton, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2013). Creswell (2008) observed sampling identifies target populations for specific situations. “From the perspective of qualitative methodology, participants who meet or exceed a specific criterion or criteria possess intimate (or, at the very least, greater) knowledge of the phenomenon of interest by virtue of their experience, making them information-rich cases” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 539). In order to properly execute purposeful sampling, the study defined the sampling frame to create a master list, and applied inclusion/exclusion, and maximum variation.

**Sampling frame to create the master list.** Developing the sampling frame for this study began by submitting a request via telephone to Dr. Dudley Chancey, Ph.D., Associate Professor



of Youth Ministry at Oklahoma Christian University in Edmond, Oklahoma and executive director of the National Conference of Youth Ministries (<https://ncym.org/about/planning-board/>). Dr. Chancey owns and manages the NCYM database that contains comprehensive contact information of youth ministers in Churches of Christ throughout the United States. Dr. Chancey agreed to the request, which allowed development of the sampling frame via the following progression:

- The initial list was exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and emailed from Dr. Chancey to the author of this study.
- The spreadsheet was saved in a password protected local computer file folder, and backed up in a password protected cloud based file folder. Auto-save was enabled allowing the cloud-based file to be updated as the local file was updated. A copy of the original email was stored in the same format and the original email was deleted for privacy and security purposes.
- The sample for the study was then finalized by application of inclusion and exclusion criteria to create a final list of 19 potential participants. The inclusion and exclusion standards were based on the unit of analysis criteria plus one additional criterion;
- The final list was determined based on subjects who met the criteria and who would also attend the National Conference on Youth Ministries (NCYM) in Daytona Beach, Florida, in January 2017 (<https://ncym.org/register/>). The NCYM conference board is comprised of youth ministry practitioners and educators representing local Churches of Christ and universities affiliated with Churches of Christ. The conference, however, is open to youth ministry professionals regardless of denominational affiliation.

- If the sample size exceeded 15 participants following application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, then criteria for maximum variation were applied.
- Four alternate subjects were chosen if for any reason one or more of the 15 participants could not participate in the study.
- A Pepperdine University International Review Board site permission letter was sent to Dr. Dudley Chancey, requesting permission to conduct semi-structured interviews during the conference (See Appendix A).

**Criteria for inclusion.** The rigorous selection process identified individuals who met the inclusion criteria for the study while providing information-rich cases. Subjects who were ultimately chosen for the study and asked to participate were also asked to verify inclusion criteria prior to participation. The criteria for inclusion for this study included:

- Subjects must be a male or female between the ages of 30 and 65;
- Subjects must be currently employed as a full-time youth minister in a Church of Christ;
- Subjects must have served at a church in the role of youth minister for at least ten consecutive years;
- Subjects must have completed at a minimum a bachelor degree.
- Subjects must be available to interview face to face.

**Criteria for exclusion.** The criteria for exclusion for this study included:

- Refusal to sign or verbally acknowledge informed consent.
- Refusal to verbally acknowledge that he or she meets all inclusion criteria.

**Maximum variation.** The criteria for maximum variation for this study included:

- Individuals from throughout the United States were invited to participate in the study.

- The study was open to males and females and people of all ethnicities.
- Preference for inclusion was given to individuals who had been in the same church as youth minister for the longest periods of time beyond ten years.

### **Human Subject Consideration**

In the beginning of a study, the researcher should process who needs to be contacted and whether it is possible to engage those persons in conversation (Richards & Morse, 2013). Voluntary subjects from an adult population were identified and subsequently invited to participate in this research study. Due to the fact that the project involved human subjects, it was necessary to obtain study review and approval by the Pepperdine Institutional Review Board (IRB). “Researchers should not expose research subjects to unnecessary physical or psychological harm” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 101). The following steps were taken to mitigate harmful risks: All necessary permissions and forms required of an informed consent process were acquired through IRB. An exempt application was submitted to the IRB for review and gained approval prior to recruiting (Appendix B). The application included an informed consent form (Appendix C) and email (Appendix D) and phone recruitment scripts (Appendix E).

Participants were informed of the nature of the study, provided a copy of Pepperdine University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures, and received a copy of interview questions. Subjects were also given an opportunity to accept or decline participation. Those who agreed to participate were given the opportunity to allow their information to be disclosed or to opt for confidentiality. Subjects were allowed to review the final working draft of their responses prior to publication to verify if their input was coded and represented correctly. Additionally, a concerted effort was made to ensure the wishes of all participants

were honored and that the project adhered to the highest legal and ethical standards. These steps included:

- Fully vetting the parameters, processes, and procedures utilized in the study with Pepperdine University's IRB.
- Submitting a Pepperdine University approved site permission letter (Appendix A) to Dr. Dudley Chancey for the purpose of securing permission to identify analysis units who met study criteria.
- Requesting digital copies of all necessary forms as mandated by Pepperdine's IRB and including those in a subject packet that was emailed to each subject's email of choice. The packet included an informed consent form that identified the nature of the study, involvement expectations of subjects, and the researcher's responsibilities.

Specifically, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities form included:

- An overview of the nature of the study.
- A description of subject expectations.
- A voluntary participation statement indicating participants may withdraw at any time without negative repercussion or public disclosure of involvement or withdrawal.
- A list of potential risks that subjects may encounter.
- A list of potential discomfort subjects may experience.
- A guarantee of researcher confidentiality to the fullest degree possible.
- The study author's name and full contact information.
- An offer to receive detailed information on the study upon completion.

- Spaces for subject signature and dating the letter (List based on insights provided by Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 102).

Additional steps were taken to mitigate risks to human subjects. Each subject was contacted via an introductory email from the author's Pepperdine University email account or a phone call from his personal cell phone. Subjects were given the option to physically sign, scan, and email a copy of the informed consent form or opt-in to the study via verbal consent. Even though the consent form stated subjects had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, subjects were verbally reminded of their right to withdraw whether contacted by phone or reminded in the body of the email. Subjects were also informed that the audio from the semi-structured interviews would be recorded. All participants gave verbal consent for their respective interviews to be audio recorded.

Subjects were informed that their given names and places of employment would not be included in any aspect of the study. Pseudonyms such as "Subject 1" were utilized to protect confidentiality. For subjects who agreed to have interviews audio recorded, data obtained through the recording devices (two were used simultaneously in case one unit failed during recording) were stored on micro-SD cards. After each interview was completed, data were downloaded to a local external hard drive with password protected file folders and also uploaded to a secure cloud server in case the hard drive failed.

The author of the study personally transcribed the data, and secured all file, emails, and correspondence in a locked file cabinet in his primary residence. All files related to the project will be securely stored in the locked file cabinet for three years after the date of publication of the study. At that time, the researcher and only the researcher will destroy the data. Dr. Dudley

Chancey has been informed of the location of the files and has committed to destroy them at that time if something should happen to the author of the study prior to that date. Identifying information was removed from all data sources prior to secure storage.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection methods for this study include semi-structured interviews. The goal was to secure data that were, "...rich, thick, and dense, offering enough detail to allow someone to comprehend the situation or understand the setting without asking additional questions" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 122). Purposeful sampling was chosen for this study in order to determine exemplary leadership behaviors of long-term youth ministers in Churches of Christ. Purposeful sampling is a design methodology that is widely utilized in qualitative studies due to the characteristics, knowledge, interest, and willingness of participants to reflect on the phenomena of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015; Pan, 2013; Patton, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2013).

Each participant was contacted via an introductory email from the primary researcher's Pepperdine University email account or a phone call from his personal cell phone. Pepperdine University's IRB recruitment form was used as the primary means of study invitation. Once subjects indicated strong interest in the study, they were emailed an Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities form. Subjects were encouraged to provide full, preferred contact information. This information was stored on one local computer in password protected file folders, on one external hard drive in password protected file folders and on one password protected cloud based server. A tentative interview schedule was developed three days prior to the NCYM conference. Five of the interview times were finalized as the conference progressed.

Subjects were asked to indicate a workable timeslot, and a final version of the interview calendar was created after completing schedule negotiations with latecomers. The schedule was not publicized to protect subject confidentiality.

### **Interview Techniques**

A key advantage of the phenomenological approach is the critical, complementary fit of semi-structured interviews within the method. Other approaches such as unstructured and full interviews were also considered for the study. However, a weakness of unstructured interviews is that the potentially vast differences of responses make it difficult to draw comparisons among interviewees (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Additionally, interviewers may overestimate their ability to effectively listen to interviewees (Richards & Morse, 2013). In a structured interview, “the researcher asks a standard set of questions and nothing more” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 188). Even though a potential challenge of semi-structured interviews involves limiting responses through poorly structured questions (Richards & Morse, 2013), the vetting of interview questions for this study along with the appropriateness of semi-structured interviews as a “stand-alone method” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 124), contributed to the final decision to use the semi-structured interview approach. Regarding the important role semi-structured interview play in phenomenological design, Galletta (2013) observed:

Semi-structured interviews incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research... Each interview question should be clearly connected to the purpose of the research, and its placement within the protocol should reflect the researcher’s

deliberate progression toward a fully in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (p. 45).

Subjects were made aware that the data collection method would utilize in person, semi-structured interviews that last approximately sixty minutes. Subjects were provided an advanced copy of the interview questions (Madjidi, 2016) via email. They were informed that all interviews would take place in a secure, private location in Daytona Beach, Florida, during the NCYM Conference hosted at the Hilton Daytona Beach Resort Oceanwalk Village, January 2-5, 2017. Subjects were made aware that even though interview times would be staggered with a break between interviews, and that even though the location of the interviews would be disclosed only to research participants, that it was possible others could witness subjects entering or exiting the interview location. Nineteen participants who matched study criteria were chosen as the initial pool in the event a participant chose to withdraw from the study or became unable to participate. Sixteen participants were ultimately interviewed, with one serving as a backup in case another participant chose to later withdraw from the study. The 16<sup>th</sup> participant was advised of the nature of this contingency. Responses from 15 participants were ultimately utilized in the study.

The author of the study arrived one day before the NCYM conference began to make sure the meeting room was ready for the interviews. A small alcove with a single entrance was utilized for the semi-structured interviews. Comfortable chairs were placed around a small table to mimic a professional setting and minimize discomfort. The remote location of the space helped minimize distractions. A scratch pad, pen, and pencil were made available to



subjects. As subjects entered the room, they were offered a soft drink, coffee, or water and were invited to sit and make themselves comfortable.

The author engaged in a few minutes of small talk with each subject, explained the purpose of the two audio recording devices, clarified expectations related to time, and reviewed the nature of this qualitative study and the potential, positive impact the findings may have on the future of the youth ministry profession. Subjects were reminded of pseudonym protocol, and provided a final overview of the nature of a semi-structured interview. Subjects were encouraged to take their time as they reflected on their lived experience, and answer according to how things have been or are, not as they wished or wish them to be. Subjects were asked if they had any questions before the official interview began. The official interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each. Once an interview was complete, subjects were asked if they had any questions or observations related to the interview or study. Subjects were asked for permission to follow up with a phone call or email if necessary, were thanked for their time, and walked to the door.

### **Interview Protocol**

The study utilized an interview process form to keep interview procedures congruent from subject to subject. The form was used to take written notes as appropriate, especially when follow up questions or neutral probes were utilized (Galletta, 2013). See Appendix E for a copy of the interview process form.

**Interview questions.** Subjects were asked to share demographic responses related to age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, highest level of education, and anticipated continuing

education plans and timeframe. Twelve additional interview questions were posed in order to satisfy the purpose of the study and study research questions:

- IQ 1: How would you describe your leadership approach?
- IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?
- IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond?
- IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?
- IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?
- IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?
- IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?
- IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?
- IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?
- IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister?
- IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?
- IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

**Relationship between research and interview questions.** RQ1 examined the leadership strategies and practices that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. RQ2 analyzed the challenges that long tenured youth ministers face when implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ. RQ3 explored youth ministers in Churches of Christ measure the success of leadership strategies and practices within their youth

ministries. RQ4 focused on recommendations these youth ministers would make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. The relationship between research questions and interview questions was expressed as:

RQ1: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?

IQ 1: How would you describe your leadership approach?

IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?

IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?

IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister?

RQ2: What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?

IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond?

IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?

IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?

RQ3: How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?

IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?

IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?

RQ4: What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?

IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?

IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?

IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

**Reliability and validity of the study.** Validity and reliability are consistently encountered in research methodology and are generally used in relationship to measurement. From a qualitative research perspective, “The validity and reliability of your measurement instruments influence the extent to which you can learn something about the phenomenon you are studying... and the extent to which you can draw meaningful conclusions from your data” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 28). This study incorporated the two general rules recommended by Roberts & Morse (2013) that “guide research design for validity in all qualitative research projects: (a) Pay attention always to the fit of question, data, and method, and (b) ensure that you can properly account for each step of your analysis” (p. 95). The former impacts areas of the project such as checking the reliability of coding as carried out within the norms of the method and the latter sets up “processes by which you can log each significant decision and the interpretation of each discovery” (Roberts & Morse, 2013, p. 95). The interview process instrument was vetted through three phases of validation to ensure proper pairing of research questions with corresponding interview questions.

***Prima facie validity.*** Prima facie refers to that which is observed at first sight. Prima facie as an adjective means “sufficient to establish a fact or case unless disproved” (Academic, 2014, ¶2). Prima facie validity was achieved by developing a grid that paired research questions and their complementary interview questions. Ten original interview questions were designed

to prompt responses related to specific research questions. The ten questions are outlined below in their prima facie validity form:

RQ1: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?

IQ 1: How would you describe yourself as a leader?

IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?

RQ2: What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?

IQ 3: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?

IQ 4: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?

IQ 5: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?

RQ3: How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?

IQ 6: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?

IQ 7: How do you evaluate success for students in your ministry?

RQ4: What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?

IQ 8: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?

IQ 9: What did you learn in university/seminary that equipped you for your leadership role?

IQ 10: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

**Peer review validity.** Peer review as a content validation strategy provides an external check of the research process (Creswell, 2013). Peer-review validity in this study was achieved through inviting three fellow cohort members from Pepperdine University's Education in Organizational Leadership doctoral program to review and provide feedback on the prima facie validity research questions and the construct of their complementary interview questions. The cohort members who participated in the peer review are highly involved in their respective churches and are familiar with successful leadership characteristics of ministry professionals. They have also successfully completed qualitative research coursework at the doctoral level. The study was contextualized for the cohort members and they were provided a copy of the prima facie validity research questions and the complementary interview questions construct. The cohort members were invited to review the research questions and complementary interview questions and then asked to indicate in writing if corresponding questions should be (a) kept as stated (b) deleted, or (c) modified as suggested. If cohort members checked "c," they were asked to provide alternative wording for the interview question.

Additional peer review utilized to validate reliability of interview protocol was accomplished by conducting a pilot interview with a current youth minister in Churches of Christ who is soon to finish one decade as his current church. He was invited to review not only the nature of the study, research questions, and interview questions, but was also invited to fully engage in a prototype of the semi-structured interview. The individual was invited to provide coaching and feedback on clarity of process, wording, and structure of the interview. Any mixed signals received from the peer reviews were taken to the dissertation committee for direction. The results of peer review validity are outlined in Table 9.

Table 9

*Research Questions and Peer Review Validated Corresponding Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?	IQ 1: How would you describe yourself as a leader? IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church? IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond?
RQ2: What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?	IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church? IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges? IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?
RQ3: How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?	IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success? IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?
RQ4: What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?	IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively? IQ 10: What aspects of your university/seminary experience contribute most to success in your leadership role? IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership? IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

**Expert review validity.** Expert validity review was achieved as dissertation committee members reviewed development of the research questions and corresponding interview questions to (a) assess the prima facie validity research questions and their complementary interview questions and compare the recommended modifications from the peer review, and (b) through an iterative process unique to Pepperdine University's cohort based program. In

both instances, committee members offered coaching and guidance as the study developed and was implemented. The final recommendations that resulted from prima facie validity, peer review validity, and expert review validity are outlined in Table 10. These recommendations also generated the 12 semi-structured interview questions that were ultimately utilized in the study. After discussion with the committee, the following recommendations were made.

Table 10

*Research Questions and Expert Validated Corresponding Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?	IQ 1: How would you describe your leadership approach? IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church? IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges? IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister?
RQ2: What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?	IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond? IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church? IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?
RQ3: How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?	IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success? IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?
RQ4: What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?	IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively? IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership? IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?



## Statement of Limitations and Personal Bias

The potential for bias is present in all research regardless of the chosen methodology one employs and may be even more obvious in qualitative research (Hodges, 2011). It is unprofessional to refuse to identify or admit the likelihood of biased data in a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Several possibilities for bias existed in this study. First, since the phenomenological method relies on memories and perceptions of lived experiences, the study assumed the memories of participating youth ministers were congruent with their lived experience. Another limitation is that subjects are exclusively from Churches of Christ indicating the possibility of niched leadership characteristics within one subset of the greater scope of Christian ministry.

Although it is important to recognize subject and study limitations it is equally important to articulate biases and personal beliefs of the study's author who is a former youth minister in Churches of Christ and, at the time of this study, was employed as a Connections Minister in a Church of Christ in College Station, Texas. The researcher acknowledges his background may have influenced his ability to properly understand and interpret the data. In order to mitigate personal bias from creeping into the study and influencing analysis, the author of the study strictly adhered to the following strategy.

**Epoché.** The term *epoché* is often used interchangeably with the term *bracket* to identify setting aside or suspending presuppositions, preconceived ideas, and prejudices one carry into the study (Conklin, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Epoché was practiced throughout the research process to not force the data to support a personal position. Leedy & Ormrod (2010) observed epoché could be challenging for researchers who have

“personally experienced the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 141). The challenge is substantively minimized however if the researcher stays attuned to his or her own perspectives and recognize their personal lived experience from the lived experience of participants (Williams & Morrow, 2009). To keep the author of the study attuned to his personal perspectives and remain unbiased as subjects shared personal, lived experience, the following interview techniques recommended by F. Madjidi (personal communication, July 2016) were reviewed prior to and consistently employed throughout the interviews:

- Utilize interview protocol with lots of open space.
- Plan for follow up questions.
- Stick to interview protocol questions.
- Practice active listening.
- Do not talk or express opinions.
- Prepare for emotional outbursts.
- Never ask leading questions.
- Plan for interruptions.
- Practice staying on task.
- Avoid interjecting.
- Remain unbiased.
- Never show emotions, approvals, surprised expressions, etc.
- Create an open communication environment.
- Use non-directive probing questions.

## Data Analysis

Creswell's (2013) "Data Analysis Spiral" (p. 182) along with various elements of Kuckhartz's (2014) template for utilizing software for thematic qualitative text analysis created the greater data analysis and organizational framework for this study. The data analysis spiral begins with "Data management, the first loop in the spiral" (Creswell, 2013, p. 182). The principal researcher manually transcribed the data via Microsoft Word. The transcribed files were thoroughly reviewed and contrasted with the original audio files to ensure accuracy. Once accuracy checks were completed, the data were transferred to Microsoft Excel, the software that was used for coding and data analysis for this study. Each individual interview transcript became an individual source of information within Excel and was organized as Subject One, Subject Two, and so on. The following steps in the Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell, 2013) outline the next three stages of treatment of the organized data.

**Reading, memoing.** Once the interviews were uploaded into Excel as 15 individual source files, they were read through four times per Creswell's (2013) recommendation in order to gain insights into the whole database. During the first reading, no memos were added. During all subsequent readings memos, or annotations were added to assist with database exploration (Creswell, 2013). Although generally associated with grounded theory methodology, all qualitative studies can benefit from memoing (Birks et al., 2008). In this study, memoing was conducted for two primary purposes: (a) using brief phrases to annotate key thoughts or ideas discovered during reading through transcripts, and (b) keeping a reflective journal in order to contribute to the validity and reliability of the study.

**Describing, classifying, interpreting (coding).** The third step of the Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell, 2013) is describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes. The simple outline developed by Kuckhartz (2014) offered an excellent template on how to use software for thematic qualitative text analysis and was employed at this stage of the project:

- Initial work with the text
- Develop main thematic categories
- First coding process (using main categories)
- Compile all of the text passages assigned to the main categories
- Inductively define subcategories based on the data
- Second coding process (using the elaborate category system)
- Analyze and present the results Part 1: Category based analysis
- Analyze and present the results Part 2: Relations, visualizations and tables

(Kuckhartz, 2014, pp. 135-136).

Categories were inductively created as the research project progressed. “Constructing categories inductively refers to developing categories directly using the data, meaning that the categories are not derived on the basis of theories or hypotheses or based on a general, thematic structure in the given field” (Kuckhartz, 2014, p. 58). The categories surfaced from the primary research questions, their corresponding interview questions, and subsequent data coding and analysis.

***Inter-rater reliability and validity.*** Leedy and Ormrod (2010) defined inter-rater reliability as, “The extent to which two or more individuals evaluating the same product or

performance give identical judgments” (p. 93). This study utilized a three-phase inter-rater reliability approach to ensure reliable handling of the data:

- Phase One - Interview responses from three subjects were manually and initially coded exclusively by the principal researcher within Microsoft Excel. This coding process identified significant themes that surfaced through the initial reading, subsequent read throughs, and memoing. “Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186).
- Phase Two - Two cohort members within Pepperdine University’s doctoral program in Organizational Leadership were invited and subsequently agreed to serve as co-raters to ensure reliability of the coding methodology. These co-raters were familiar with the theoretical setting of the study, were experienced in qualitative research and coding, and both had experience with Microsoft Excel. The coded results of phase one along with excerpts from three corresponding transcripts were shared with the co-raters. If co-raters agreed on the validity of the initial coding protocol, then coding results were not modified. If co-raters disagreed on the validity of the initial coding protocol, then the co-raters and principal researcher engaged in dialogue to identify a more suitable coding protocol. If the group could not arrive at consensus, the dissertation committee stepped in to break the tie. Coding revision recommendations are included.
- Phase Three - Using the results of phase two, the study completed coding for all 15 interviews. Once coding was completed, the co-raters were asked to review the coding protocol and identify leadership themes that surfaced from their coding. The principal

researcher did the same. The co-raters and the principal researcher compared outcomes to ensure accuracy of data interpretation. Once data gathering and coding were completed, co-raters were asked to delete all files related to this study from their computers.

***Representing, visualizing.*** The fourth and final stage of the Data Analysis Spiral is “representing and visualizing the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). In this study, the results of the data were tabulated and represented visually via bar charts. This visual representation also provided an additional validity check to make sure the phenomenon under study was rigorously represented. Copies of the transcribed notes of audio recordings and data analysis were provided to respective participants. Once each participant approved representation of his or her information, all materials were incorporated into the findings section.

## **Summary**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach that applied a phenomenological methodology to capture the lived experiences of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. The study began by articulating the key research questions and subsequent interview questions that were formed as a result of a comprehensive literature review. A qualitative approach was chosen and the components of why a qualitative approach was chosen were articulated. Purposeful sampling was utilized for subject selection, and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were scheduled with youth ministers from throughout the United States who attended the NCYM conference in Daytona Beach, Florida, January 2-5, 2017. The responses to those semi-structured interviews served as the source of data for the study. All subjects were protected by strict adherence to IRB protocol. Once completed and securely

stored, all interviews were transcribed by the author of the study and uploaded to Microsoft Excel for data organization. Competent co-raters analyzed an initial coding scheme and participated in a final all coding review that established inter-rater reliability. The full evaluation of data is reviewed in chapter four.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

Today's professional youth ministers are experiencing a myriad of cultural and organizational challenges ranging from a growing disinterest in organized religion to political turf wars within denominations and local churches (Devries, 2008; Mueller & McDuff, 2004; Severe, 2006, The Pew Forum, 2012). In recent years, youth ministers within Churches of Christ began asking many of the same questions as youth ministry professionals in churches throughout the United States related to how to respond to changing worldviews, secularization, and best practices that had run their course (Bruner, 2015).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to identify leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ, the challenges those youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies, how they measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry, and the recommendations they have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. Four research questions were crafted to address the purpose of the study:

- RQ1 - What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?
- RQ2 - What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?
- RQ3 - How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?
- RQ4 - What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?



Twelve semi-structured interview questions were posed to 15 long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ to provide data from their lived experiences to answer the research questions. Two qualified inter-rater reviewers and three expert reviewers rigorously validated the interview questions. The interview questions for the study are:

- IQ 1: How would you describe your leadership approach?
- IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?
- IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond?
- IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?
- IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?
- IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?
- IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?
- IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?
- IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?
- IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister?
- IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?
- IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

Study participants have been employed as full-time youth ministers in their respective churches for a minimum of ten years. Throughout the interviews, participants provided insights from their personal, lived experiences as full-time youth ministers in Churches of Christ. The

themes and insights that surfaced from the interviews will provide a wealth of information for youth ministry professionals, youth ministry professors, and church leaders who value mitigation of youth ministry turnover. A summary of participant profiles, an overview of data collection, an analysis of the 12 semi-structured interviews and, results of the study are explored in this chapter.

## **Participants**

Purposeful sampling was utilized within a phenomenological methodology approach to carefully select 15 participants who met the following unit of analysis criteria:

- Be a male or female between the ages of 30 and 65;
- Be currently employed as a full-time youth minister in a Church of Christ;
- Has served at a church in the role of youth minister for at least ten consecutive years;
- Has completed at a minimum a bachelor degree.

Based on Creswell's (2013) recommendation of a heterogeneous group that varied in size from three to four to 10 to 15 and Leedy & Ormrod's (2010) observation that a sample could range from five to 25, this study utilized a sample size of 15 participants. Nineteen participants were invited to participate in the study. After reviewing the unit of analysis criteria with potential interviewees 16 participants were ultimately interviewed, with one serving as a backup in case another participant chose to later withdraw from the study. The 16<sup>th</sup> participant was advised of the nature of this contingency. The 16<sup>th</sup> participant's information was stored with the remaining interviewee materials and will remain secured in a hidden, locked storage location within the researcher's home with the remaining study materials for a three-year

retention period. At that time, all research materials will be destroyed. All 15 participants agreed to remain in the study. Their demographic information is outlined in the following section.

**Gender.** Participants were asked to disclose their gender. The study included 14 males (93.3%) and one female (6.6%). Gender demographic data of the youth ministers who participated in the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

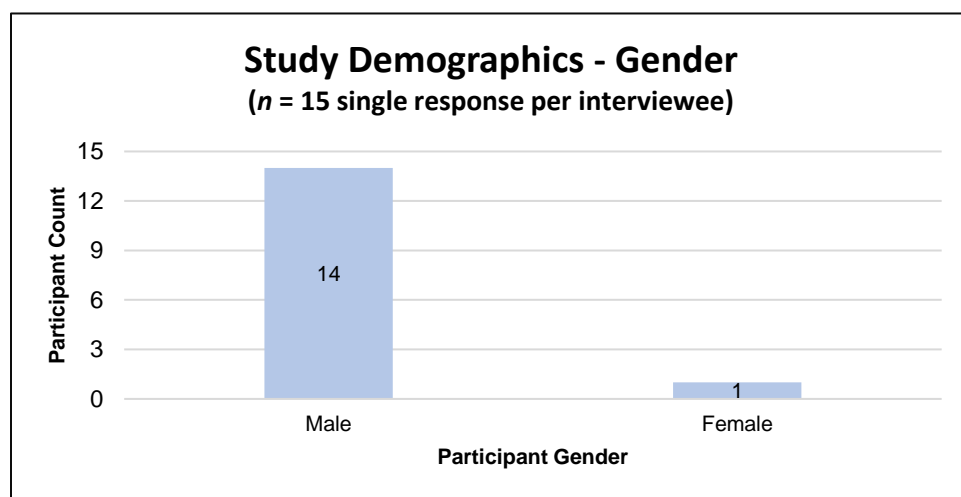


Figure 1. Participant demographics by gender.

**Age.** Study participant ages ranged from 31-57 years. Median participant age was 44 years with 20% within the ages of 50-59 years, 53.3% between the ages of 40-49 years, and 26.6% between the ages of 30-39 years. Gender demographic data of the youth ministers who participated in the study is illustrated in Figure 2.

**Ethnicity.** Fifteen (100%) of participants in the study self-classified as Caucasian. Ethnicity demographic data of the youth ministers who participated in the study is illustrated in Figure 3.

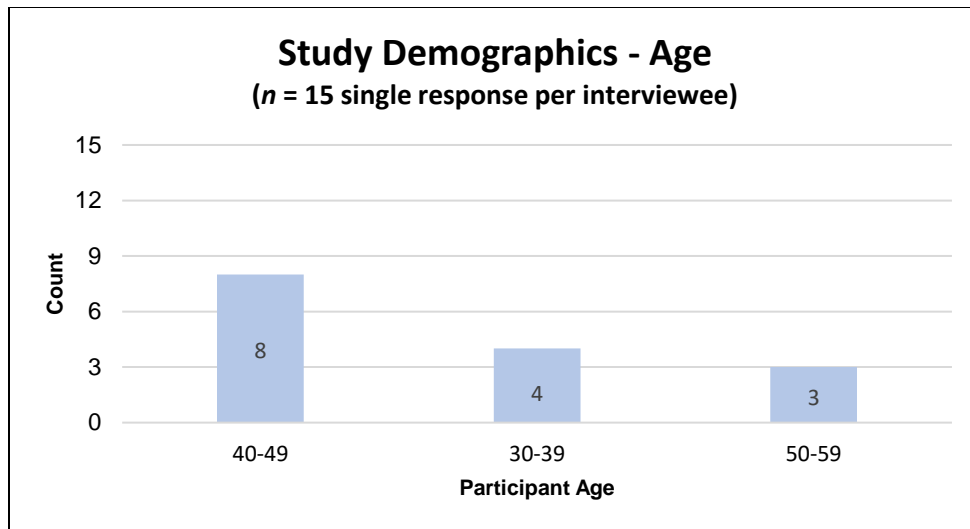


Figure 2. Participant demographics by age.

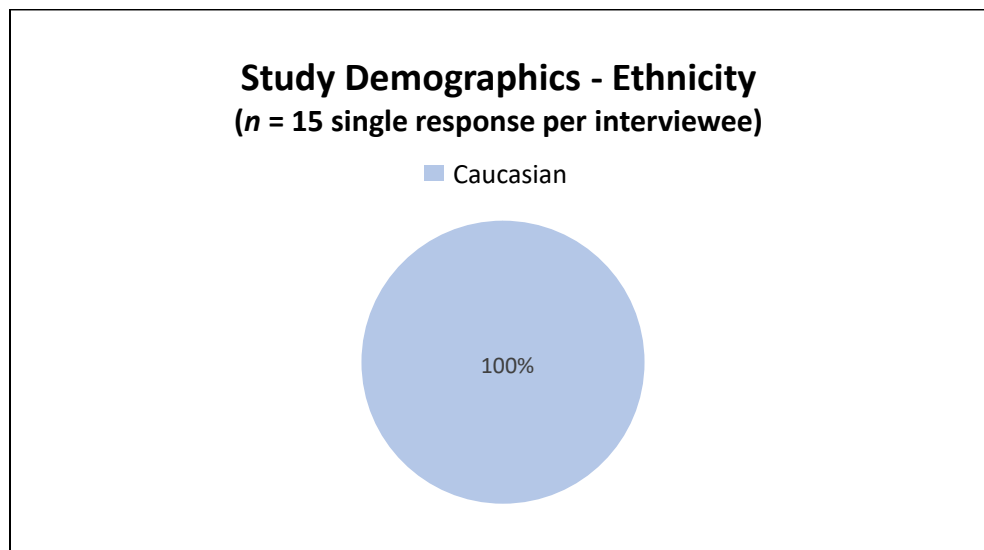


Figure 3. Participant demographics by ethnicity.

**Marital Status.** Fifteen (100%) of the study participants self-classified as married.

Marital status demographic data of the youth ministers who participated in the study is illustrated in Figure 4.

**Highest level of education.** All 15 subjects (100%) had post-secondary degrees. Five (33.3%) had a master degree and ten (66.6%) had a bachelor degree. Highest level of education demographic data of the youth ministers who participated in the study is illustrated in Figure 5.

Two participants indicated they are currently enrolled in graduate school. Nine participants indicated they have no additional plans for continuing education.

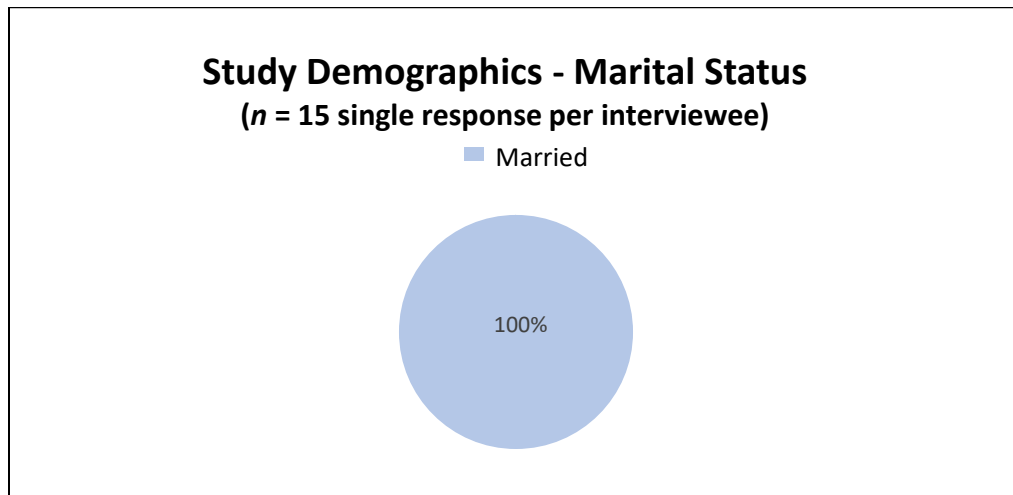


Figure 4. Participant demographics by marital status.

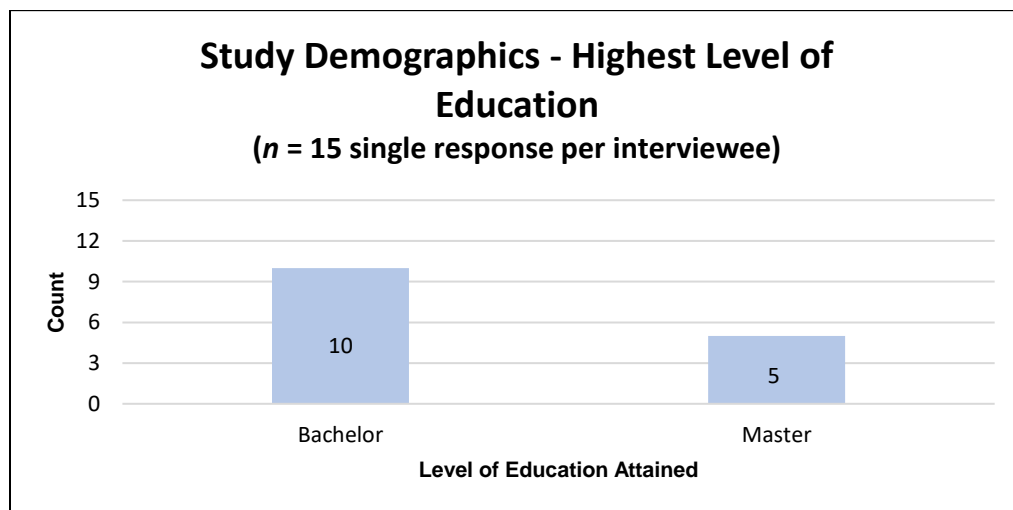


Figure 5. Participant demographics by the highest level of education attained.

## Data Collection

Subjects for the study were selected via purposeful sampling. Study data were collected from 15 youth ministers within Churches of Christ who have been in their current role in the same church for at least ten years. The data was collected via 15 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews one day prior to and during the National Conference on Youth Ministries in Daytona

Beach, Florida, at the Hilton Daytona Beach Resort Oceanwalk Village, January 1-5, 2017. Site permission was granted by conference Executive Director, Dr. Dudley Chancey (Appendix A). Interviews were conducted at various times before and during the conference to accommodate attendees' conference schedules. Interviewees were provided a copy of the nature of the study in advance of the interview. In addition, each participant received a second copy of Pepperdine University's IRB protocol (each participant received a copy in advance via email). Participants were (a) asked for verbal consent to participate in the study, (b) asked if there were any questions prior to starting the interviews, and (c) informed that the interviews would last approximately one hour.

The interviews were conducted in a small alcove at the end of a long hallway out of the main flow of conference traffic. Convention center staff provided a small conference table and comfortable chairs for the interviews. Participants were provided with a scratch pad for notes and were offered a beverage prior to beginning each interview. The shortest interview lasted 37 minutes 15 seconds, and the longest interview lasted 68 minutes 14 seconds. The dates on which interviews were conducted are presented in Table 11.

All interviews were successfully recorded with no conversation loss due to recording device error. Two digital recording devices were used and were securely stored throughout the transcription process. All digital audio files were erased once all interviews were transcribed and participants verbally or indicated via email that the interviews accurately reflected their lived experiences.

Table 11

*Dates of Participant Interviews*

Participant	Interview Date
P1	January 1, 2017
P2	January 2, 2017
P3	January 2, 2017
P4	January 2, 2017
P5	January 3, 2017
P6	January 3, 2017
P7	January 3, 2017
P8	January 3, 2017
P9	January 3, 2017
P10	January 4, 2017
P11	January 4, 2017
P12	January 4, 2017
P13	January 4, 2017
P14	January 5, 2017
P15	January 5, 2017

**Data Analysis**

One of the key components of successful qualitative inquiry is the integration of research questions, data, and data analysis (Richards & Morse, 2013). To ensure a successful study, a rigorous and highly iterative data analysis approach was utilized throughout the data analysis process to transition from “narrow units of analysis... to broader units... to detailed descriptions that summarize [the] ‘what’ and ‘how’ [of the lived experience] (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). The data analysis process for this study began with capturing the lived experience of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ via semi-structured interviews. The data from the interviews were then manually transcribed word for word into a Microsoft Word document by the principal investigator to re-familiarize the investigator with the content of the interviews.

Once successfully transcribed as 15 separate Microsoft Word documents, the author of the study read through each document while listening to the audio recording to ensure an accurate transcription. During the second read through, the investigator began memoing and annotating to identify initial key words and phrases that consistently appeared in the texts. During the third read through, the investigator implemented unstructured coding and underlined specific quotes, observations, and examples that reinforced emerging themes. In the final comprehensive read through, any potential information that may have led to identification of participants was stripped from the transcripts in preparation for inter-rater reliability.

During the next phase of the data analysis process, common themes and potential relationships with the literature were identified. The primary themes were exported from Microsoft Word into a single Microsoft Excel file. Twelve sheets were created within the single file using Excel's insert sheet function. Respective interview questions were placed in row one at the top of each of the 12 sheets within the file. One column for each participant was created below the interview question in each of the 12 sheets for a total of 15 columns per sheet. To protect confidentiality, participant names were not included. Key themes and insights from the memoed, annotated transcripts were used to populate content within the 15 columns. Related data were grouped and color-coded, frequencies were tallied, and the first draft of coded themes for the study was articulated.

Three Pepperdine University doctoral candidates with academic experience in qualitative research provided inter-rater reliability to ensure validity of codes. Raters reviewed each coded theme and contrasted those themes with content from transcribed interviews.



Raters were not exposed to any personal information related to participants. During the inter-rater review, the raters made the following recommendations:

- In interview question 8, “Marginalized Program Outcomes” was changed to “Little Emphasis on Numbers” to emphasize a specific trend of importance to many subjects in relationship to evaluating successful youth ministry outcomes.
- In interview question 9, the theme “Little to No Counsel” was added to summarize one interviewee’s lived experience that did not clearly fit within an existing theme.
- In interview question 10, the theme “Misaligned” was combined with the theme, “Non-Substantive Contribution” in response to success contributors from one’s educational experiences.
- In interview question 11, the theme “Be Ethical” was changed to “Be Authentic” to capture broader data that was congruent with counsel offered to other youth ministry professionals. In addition, “Grow via Spiritual Disciplines” was changed to “Practice Spiritual Disciplines” for more suitable, thematic alignment.
- In interview question 12, the theme “Organizational Investment” was added to distinguish leadership counsel that more specifically addressed church leaders and the role they play in organizational effectiveness.

Once the inter-rater themes were implemented, the final draft of coding was completed. Themes were visually represented via graphs that displayed theme frequency. These graphs are presented in the following section.

## **Data Display**

The four research questions utilized in this study provided the organizational structure for data reporting. Seventy-four total themes were identified across 12 interview questions. The themes are displayed below within the context of their corresponding research question. The data are confirmed by subject quotes from within interview transcripts, utilizing direct quotes whenever possible to reflect the veracity of the lived experience. Participants were referred to exclusively as P1, P2, P3, etc., to protect confidentiality.

### **Research Question One**

RQ1 asked: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ? To answer RQ1, the following four interview questions were posed to all 15 subjects:

- IQ 1: How would you describe your leadership approach?
- IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?
- IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?
- IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister?

**Interview question 1.** How would you describe your leadership approach? Seven overarching themes surfaced in response to IQ 1: (a) self-awareness, (b) relationally oriented, (c) decisive, (d) servant leader, (e) process minded, (f) visionary, (g) empowering, and (h) innovator (see Figure 6).

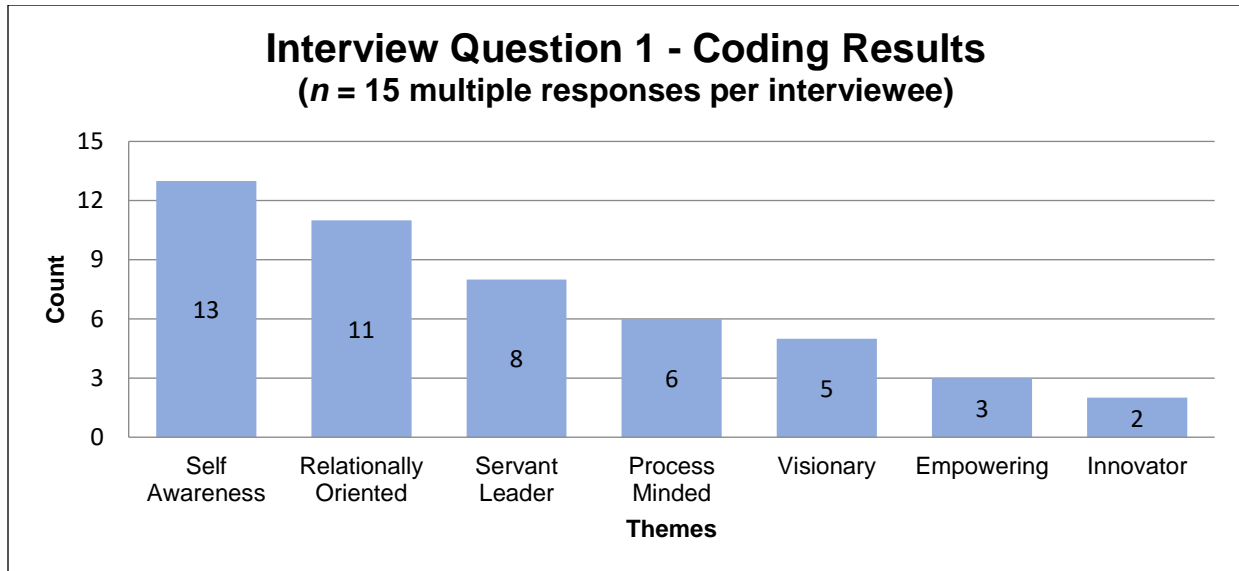


Figure 6. Themes that developed from IQ1: How would you describe your leadership approach?

***Self-awareness.*** Thirteen participants verbalized or indicated a clear understanding of self-awareness when describing themselves as leaders. Participants readily identified the emotions and convictions they experience and how those emotions and convictions are expressed behaviorally. P12 observed, “I try to be very straightforward. I try to be very honest. If we have conflict – I try my best to deal with immediately or as soon as I can because I don’t like losing sleep over it. And then once it’s over it’s over, and we go on” (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017). On the opposite end of the spectrum, P4 noted, “I believe I am pretty laid back. I’m not aggressive. I’m pretty passive” (P4, personal communication, January 4, 2017). The disparate natures of the two leaders are eclipsed by a confidence of knowing how they are wired as leaders. Both express clear expectations and both have experienced long tenure even though their personalities are highly dissimilar. What is similar however is self-awareness of what does and does not work for them as leaders and the implications of that for those within their circles of influence.

**Relationally oriented.** Eleven participants directly or indirectly emphasized a relational orientation or mindset as a key component of their leadership approach. Relationships of various types consistently appear throughout the study. This information will be of key interest to those new to the profession and to those who may be struggling with feelings of isolation or loneliness. P1 emphasized the importance of building relationships with teens and adults. Participants 3, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14 and 15 all mentioned words such as “collaborative” and “team player” to describe relationships they share with teens, parents, volunteers, staff members, and church leaders.

A key relationship that is referenced numerous times in the study is the relationship many youth ministers share with their interns. Reflecting on how mutually important that relationship can be P15 observed:

I have four interns who work under my leadership, and I always tell them that I want them to have a voice at the table because that’s how I was taught. My mentor always let my voice be heard and so that was a big deal for me... I’ve seen how that has played into some success in ministry because people always feel like they have a voice. (P15, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

**Servant leader.** Eight participants spoke the language or described the attitudes and behaviors of a servant leader. When discussing a supervisee for example, P13 observed, “I’ve always tried to treat him as an equal from the very beginning” (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017). P10 and P11 both mentioned leading by example and P11 addressed the importance of exercising humility and compromising when appropriate. P15 described himself as “a coach that is coachable” (P15, personal communication, January 5, 2017). P9 noted, “My

job is to model what I would like to emulate or see” (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017). The characteristics described by these and other leaders who referenced servant leadership qualities were not just limited to the day-to-day job functions of youth ministry. P4 provided one of the most poignant moments of the entire study when he shared the following example of how he exercises servant leadership as part of his personal spiritual journey:

I volunteer at a homeless shelter cleaning the bathrooms. That has been a real blessing for me because I didn't feel comfortable in that. The second thing was washing the feet of the homeless every month, and I've involved the teenagers in that so they like that. And I started that not because I wanted teenagers to wash the feet of the homeless. I did that for myself. I felt like I needed to do this to work with the lepers of the community... I took on the project of a homeless man for three years and he ended up dying but that was very impactful to me personally. That helped to be spiritually more than anything. (P4, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

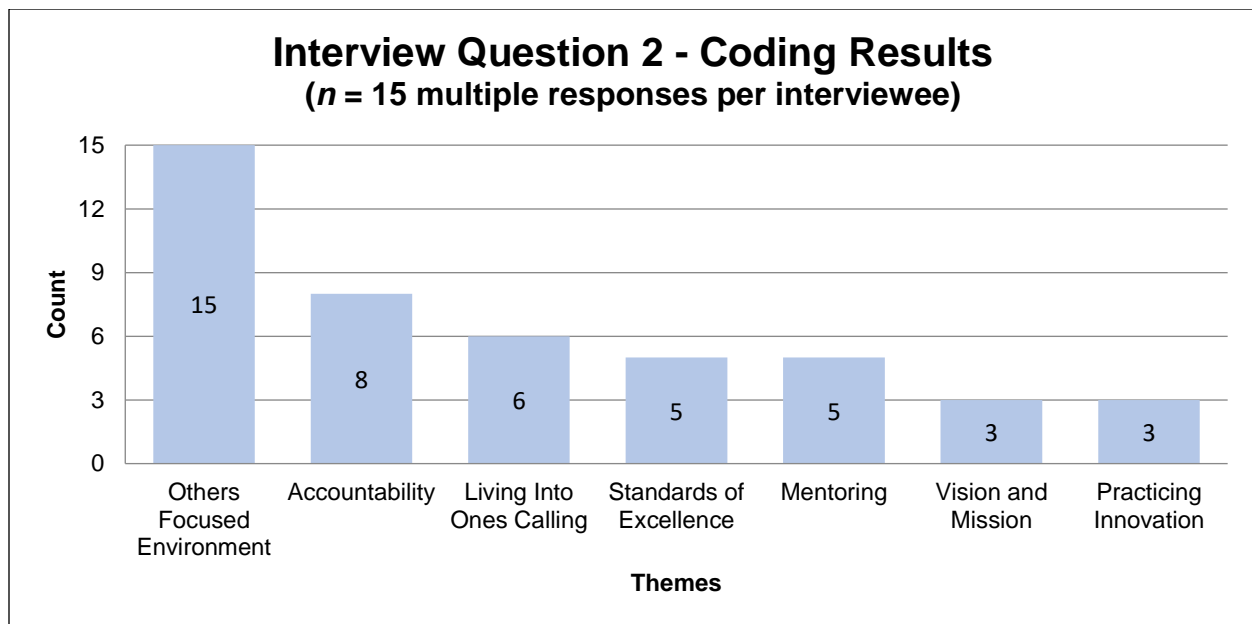
***Process minded.*** Six of the interviewees made observations regarding their ability to organize well via utilization of organizational skills such as organizing, delegating, and planning as characteristics of their leadership approach. One of the clearest examples of being process minded surfaced during the interview with P10. When addressing implementation of his vision for ministry, he shared he:

Would need to architect what that looks like and then bring people into that and start explaining what that looks like and what it is on a limited basis until I created critical mass or synergy in order for them to help me carry it out” (P10, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Visionary.*** Five participants used visionary terms and phrases to describe their leadership style, a critical component of pastoral leadership success since leadership growth is now measured by competencies such as purpose-aligned vision casting (Stroope & Bruner, 2012). Vision casting was also considered a key aspect of conceptualization within servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1997), and vision has also been referenced as a critical quality of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) and Christian leadership (Sanders, 1967). P2 specifically noted how vision plays into his leadership approach. He observed, “I can see the big picture and then I can see all the steps that need to happen for that big picture to work” (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017). P3, P5, P9, and P13 also referenced vision as a key component of their leadership approach.

The themes of *Empowering* and *Innovator* also emerged from IQ1. Three participants noted their leadership approach included “empowering others to lead” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017). Two mentioned they were innovative with P3 noting, “I’m always open to new ideas” and “constantly reforming” (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017).

**Interview question 2.** What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church? Seven overarching themes surfaced in response to IQ 2: (a) others-focused, (b) accountability, (c) living into one’s calling, (d) standards of excellence, (e) mentoring, (f) vision and mission, and (g) practicing innovation.



*Figure 7.* Themes that developed from IQ2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?

***Supporting a mutual others-focused environment.*** All 15 participants directly or indirectly addressed purposefully living into an others-focused environment as a strategy, practice, or personality quality that contributed to their long tenure. Defining the qualifier mutual others delineates that while most of the respondents discussed how they purposefully identify and meet the needs of others, many also noted they are often affirmed and encouraged by their spouses, elders, and volunteers. P11 expressed how mutual support impacted his volunteers and his longevity when he observed:

I have had a lot of encouragement, and I feel like paying that out to our teachers and volunteers and life coaches and small group leaders – you can't do enough of that.

That's a responsibility that I have to the ones who are in some ways really ministering to our students... I just think encouragement is essential. The encouragement I have

received has been a major contributor to my longevity. (P11, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

Numerous supportive relationships were mentioned including “support from other area youth ministers” (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017), “working closely with my elders” (P6, personal communication, January 3, 2017), and “not just ministering to the youth” (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017). Purposefully living into these and other types of mutually supportive relationships was one of the strongest themes referenced throughout the study.

***Accountability.*** Eight subjects directly or indirectly identified accountability as a strategy or practice that contributed to long tenure at the same church. P5, P14, and P15 practiced accountability to their spouses and children by protecting their family day out of the office. P2 practiced accountability by “not being a lone ranger” (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017). Accountability was not just practiced by participants. Three participants indicated their church leaders also contributed to their long tenure by providing a competitive salary package that mitigated the need to look elsewhere for financial support.

***Living into one’s calling.*** Six subjects mentioned understanding of or described characteristics that are consistent with living into their calling as youth ministers. This leadership practice is congruent with the counsel to youth ministry educators offered by Clark (2008) who observed, “In youth ministry education, it is central to our task to produce graduates who recognize that the calling to adolescents and their families in a given context is an expression of the call to be servants of God’s mission in the world” (p. 23). P13’s calling that he was at right church was confirmed from day one. He observed:



From the very beginning I knew I was at the right church. I think that is a big deal because a lot of guys I see who aren't at the same church very long – that's one of the things that happens. They get to a church and realize quickly this was not the right church... I knew what the church believed, and I agreed with that from the beginning... I really love the church. I love the way I've been treated. (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

P1 and P4 described their deep love for students and their passion for ministry. P7 has pushed through doctrinal differences and chose to stay committed to his church, giving much credit to the elders who called him to serve in his role. He also emphasized more important motivators than financial reward noting, "You don't go into ministry for the money. Specifically, youth ministry compared to others – it's usually not your higher paying position" (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Standards of excellence.*** Although varied in application, P1, P3, P6, P7, and P13 described various aspects of their ministries that were consistently evaluated personally or by others as a practice that contributed to long tenure. P1 and P3 both focused on the importance of getting their jobs done well as they practiced a good work ethic. P7 purposefully measures the number of serving relationships teens have with adults in the church. He is also insistent that his teens serve in at least one other area of ministry within the church outside of youth ministry. He noted:

What I explain is – the most important thing in our ministry – you are involved somewhere in the church. We want you as a teen to serve in the church somewhere

aside from the teen ministry. If you miss class because you're in the nursery – awesome.

You're plugged into our church. (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

While many participants invited older adults to volunteer in the youth ministry via teaching classes, leading small groups, serving as mentors, chaperoning trips, etc., this was one of the few examples of sending teens out of the ministry to purposefully engage people in other ministries.

***Mentoring.*** P5, P11, and P18 specifically focused on staying in close relationship with mentors as a strategy that has contributed to long tenures in their respective churches. The same three participants along with P9 and P12 talked openly about the importance of mentoring their interns. The importance of interns, either serving as one or leading one or more currently is a consistent theme throughout the study, but was only mentioned by these four participants as a strategy that contributed to their long tenure. P2 did not mention mentoring in response to this particular question, but it is noteworthy that when responding to IQ1, he mixed a visionary component into his mentoring style when describing his leadership approach. He noted

Mentoring – especially the past 3-4 years has come up a lot in my leadership – not just with students but also with younger parents – like parents who aren't even parents of youth group kids yet. Let's get them involved now so that when they are in youth group they're an established leader. (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

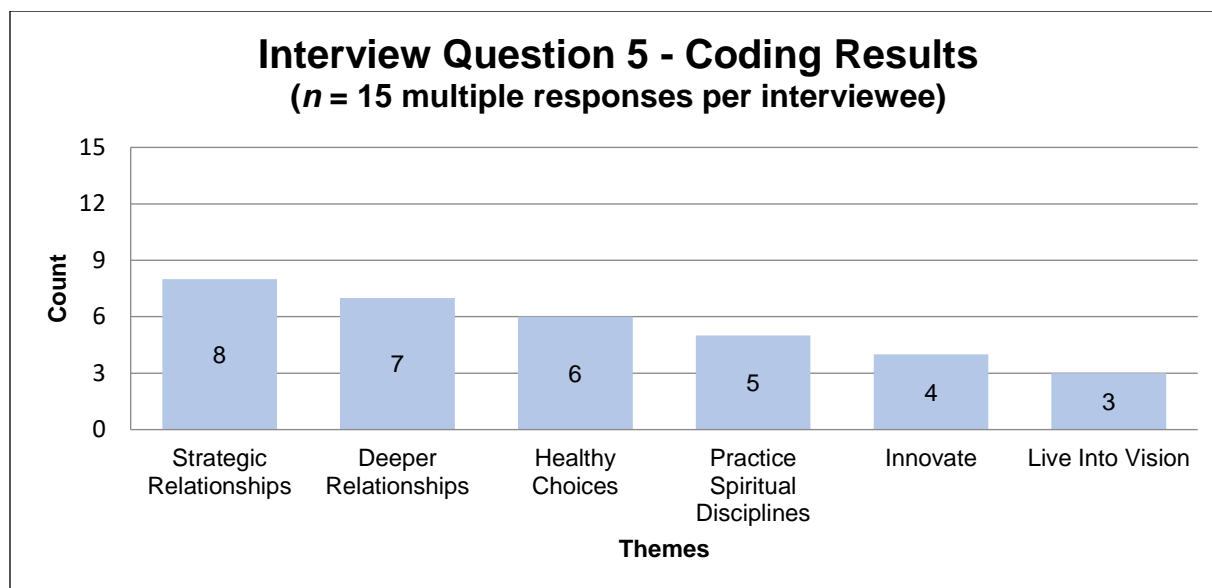
***Vision and mission.*** Three subjects referenced practices that complement or purposefully engage leadership strategies that focus on vision and mission. P2 emphasized the importance of thinking long term with teens that may be struggling in various ways. Similarly,

P6 referenced the importance of having a long-term mentality. P9 was the most adamant supporter of the roles vision and mission play as major contributors to long tenure. He observed:

Being able to have a vision and then being able to articulate that vision and then get people excited about that vision and being able to carry out that vision without me – even though I’m doing it alongside them – has been the secret to my success. Obviously, it’s been God and His will – but – I think the ability to inspire and get other people to grab hold of it and think it’s attainable and cool and fun, and then to be able to make sure that is attached to God’s purpose is a very good thing (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Practicing innovation.*** Three participants specifically address the importance of constantly innovating. P3 emphasized innovation as a contributor to his long tenure, but not just in terms of technology. His innovative mindset also includes purposefully inviting differing perspectives to the conversational mix. It is worth noting that P4 and P15 offered similar insights in response to IQ1 regarding purposefully inviting differing perspectives.

**Interview question 5.** What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges? Six themes surfaced in response to IQ 2: (a) strategic relationships, (b) deeper relationships, (c) healthy choices, (d) practice spiritual disciplines, (e) innovate, and (f) live into vision (See Figure 8). During the interviews, this question was posed as a follow up to IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church? It is purposefully re-ordered in the data report per Pepperdine University expert reviewers’ request to provide deeper insight into RQ1.



*Figure 8.* Themes that developed from IQ5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges? This question was originally developed as a follow up to IQ4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?

***Strategic relationships.*** Eight participants described strategic relationships they purposefully developed in response to some of the major challenges to long tenure. These strategic relationships were formed with various people or groups. P3 attends the National Conference on Youth Ministries (NCYM) to bounce ideas off other youth ministers and ask strategic questions. P4 hires younger interns to help with the ministry, but also to listen to their perspectives and allow himself to be changed by those perspectives. P12 adopted a similar strategy. P6 and P11 began involving and equipping more volunteers to engage in ministry. The term strategic relationships was chosen because the relationships were purposefully formed in response to major challenges.

***Deeper relationships.*** Seven participants described living into deeper relationships in response to various challenges to long tenure. Distinguishing between strategic and deeper is purposeful within this study since a strategic relationship may not necessarily become a deeper

relationship. P1 described living into deeper relationships by getting to know people to “know what’s really important to them” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017). This is true for P1 in multiple scenarios but especially when dealing with conflict. P5, P7, P14, and P15 emphasized mentoring relationships they consistently lean into for direction and support. P1 and P8 addressed building one-on-one relationships with their elders. The highly relational responses closely parallel the relational orientation responses in IQ1, as respondents described themselves as leaders.

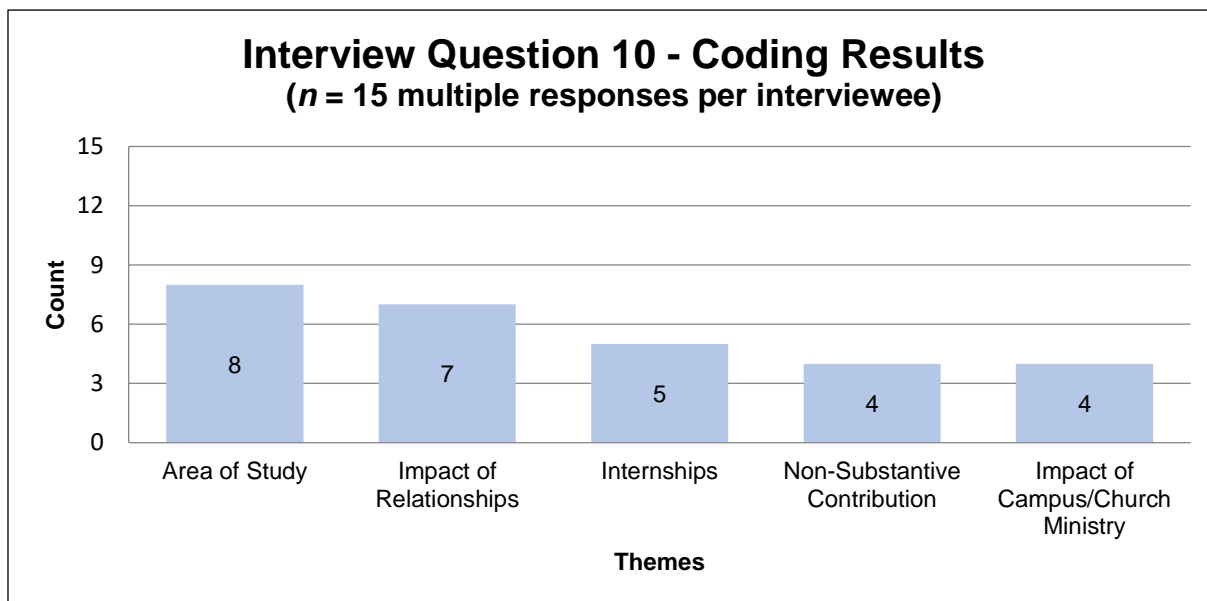
***Healthy choices.*** Six participants began making healthier choices in response to various challenges they faced in their current role. P5 consistently seeks professional counsel during stress-filled seasons. P6 began using organizational skills as an advantage, and P7 noted, “Constantly being able to admit failure has been huge for us” (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P7’s response indicates freedom to operate as one’s authentic self without fear of reprisal.

***Practice spiritual disciplines.*** Although every participant throughout the study directly mentioned or alluded to practicing various spiritual disciplines, five participants specifically mentioned the role spiritual disciplines play in overcoming various challenges of ministry. P5 said, “Prayer is huge” (P5, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P9 described practicing obedience and depending more on God as a consistent response to challenges. P10 described growing in spiritual maturity in general terms and P11 described consciously practicing more specific disciplines such as solitude, journaling, and intentional Bible reading. P15 described a particularly painful season when two students passed away in the same year. Although hurting,

he experienced a profound hunger for scripture that has ultimately proven to be one of the primary sustainers of self and ministry.

Four participants mentioned purposefully finding opportunities to *Innovate* in response to various challenges and three participants continued the now established refraining of *Living into vision*. P3 and P11 observed the importance of remaining fresh and adapting through various life stages and forms of pushback or challenges. P1, P2, and P10 all discussed the importance of looking at the bigger picture and not getting caught up in the events of the moment.

**Interview question 10.** What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister? Five themes surfaced in response to this question: (a) area of study, (b) impact of relationships, (c) internships, (d) non-substantive contribution, and (e) impact of campus/church ministry (See Figure 9).



*Figure 9.* Themes that developed from IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister?

**Area of study.** Eight respondents indicated that their area of study was an instrumental part of their education in relationship to their success as a youth minister. Ironically, much of that success has little to do with coursework in youth ministry. P1 was a business major who observed, “In business, I did have a couple of teachers that suggested as you grow you need to bring others with you... They also taught me to see gifts in others so that I can challenge them. Now, I use that in youth ministry” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017). P6 was an education major, P9’s undergraduate degree was in management, P11 was a business major, P12 had a finance degree, and P15 was a public administration major. Although some of these same participants pursued graduate degrees in ministry or a closely related field, a key finding was that almost half of the long tenured youth ministers in the study did not have an undergraduate degree in ministry. In fact, P9 observed, “My youth ministry professor advised us to not major in Bible. He encouraged us to major in a topic that would complement youth ministry – which is why my undergraduate degree was management” (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P15 echoed a similar refrain when he observed, “Not being a youth ministry major was good for me” (P9, personal communication, January 5, 2017).

The previous observations are not reflective of all participants however. P6 observed courses involving topics such as educational processes, psychology, and interpersonal skills training were an asset. P8 talked about the importance of courses that provided conflict management training. P10 talked favorably about his youth ministry classes but lamented a spirit of individualism that was common throughout his coursework. P13 reported his, “counseling and basic theology classes helped” (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017). The data indicate that one’s undergraduate degree is often not a factor in youth ministry

hiring decision-making processes in Churches of Christ. Additionally, majoring in something other than youth ministry seems to have little impact on long tenure at the same church.

***Impact of relationships.*** The relational theme continued to have a strong emphasis even prior to youth ministers beginning their fulltime careers in youth ministry. P4 mentioned his involvement in a local church during his undergraduate years was one of the highlights of his school experience. Feedback offered by P5, P7, P9, P12, and P14, revealed a deep appreciation for relationships formed with faculty and administrators who took interest in them personally in and outside the classroom environment.

***Internships.*** Five participants noted the importance of their internship experiences. P2 had two internship experiences. During the first, he felt more like an errand boy. The second internship provided a more meaningful experience. He noted, “The second internship I had – that youth minister was teaching me throughout the summer” (P9, personal communication, January 2, 2017).

***Non-substantive contribution.*** Four respondents noted their youth ministry courses made little to no impact on how they do their jobs currently. In response to IQ10, P3 observed, “There wasn’t anything geared toward a lot of practical application in ministry” (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017). P5 was even more outspoken noting:

The reason I went back to get my masters was because I felt like the Christian university did not prepare me for ministry at all, and I was very frustrated with that. There were things that happened right away in ministry, and I was like, “You’ve got to be kidding me. You did not prepare me for this!” So, they sent an evaluation after graduation and I was like, “Boom, boom, boom, no, no! You guys did not prepare me for working with



people! What is your problem? You're dealing with people that are crazy!" (P5, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

P7's evaluation was simply, "Honestly, nothing" (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017). Although P10 considered his youth ministry courses effective, he lamented there was little to no counsel on conflict management or personal finances. The key theme of those who felt their undergraduate degrees were of little use generally observed they needed more practical skills, conflict management skills, and people skills. Almost all attendants indicated they continued to grow in their youth ministry skill set via continuing education that ranged from highly informal (reading a book) to formal (completing a graduate degree).

***Impact of campus/church ministry.*** Four subjects mentioned the importance of campus ministries or churches they were involved in during their undergraduate years. P11 noted that mentoring within the context of campus ministry was a huge benefit to him personally and professionally. P13 observed, "I was baptized through the campus ministry of the church. I have a desire from my campus ministry experience for us to be the most loving church in town" (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017).

**Research question one summary.** RQ1 asked: What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ? Four interview questions addressed RQ1: IQ 1: How would you describe your leadership approach? IQ 2: What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church? IQ 5: What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges? IQ 10: What personal characteristics, traits, or training/education has been instrumental in your success as a youth minister? Four top strategies and practices emerged from the data: (a) practicing self-awareness, (b) creating an

others-focused environment, (c) purposefully living into strategic relationships, and (d) areas of study within the context of university/seminary.

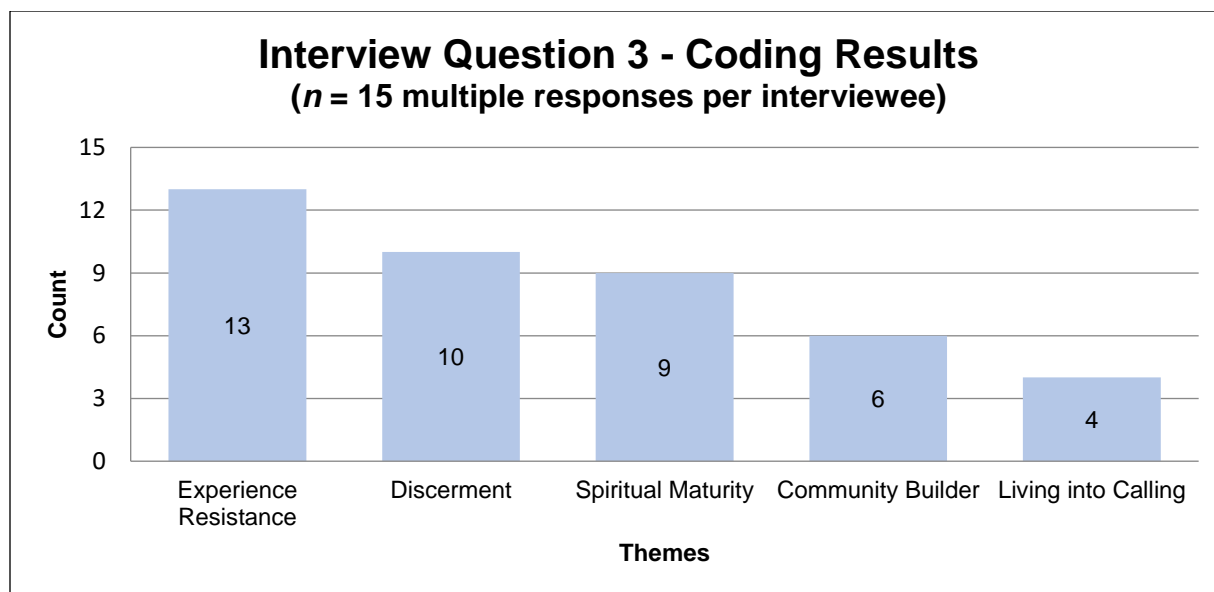
## **Research Question Two**

What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ? To answer RQ2, the following three interview questions were posed to all 15 subjects:

- IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond?
- IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?
- IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?

**Interview question 3.** Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond? Thirteen of the 15 participants (86.6%) indicated they had experienced or continue to experience pushback or resistance to their leadership style. Four response themes surfaced in response to the affirmative responses to the question: (a) discernment, (b) spiritual maturity, (c) community builder, and (d) living into calling (See Figure 10).

**Discernment.** Ten subjects indicated they had grown in their ability to discern a positive course of action in response to push back or resistance. Some of the responses were subtle shifts such as “practice good listening” (P11, personal communication, January 4, 2017) and some involved deeper level boundary work such as, “struggling with when to accept feedback and criticism and make a change and when to say no” (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017).



*Figure 10.* Themes that developed from IQ 3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond? Column 1 represents the number of subjects who indicated they have or continue to experience some push back or resistance to their personal leadership style. Columns 2-5 indicate their responses to the pushback or resistance.

Five (33.3%) subjects mentioned their primary pushback came in the first year or so of their current position. Other key responses related to discernment included:

- Using the strategic question, “Is this something that will help teenagers be more like Jesus?” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017).
- P4 noted the importance of placing a renewed emphasis on clarifying expectations with parents.
- P10 recommended choosing an appropriate medium for conflict resolution.

***Spiritual maturity.*** Nine subjects responded to push back or resistance by growing in spiritual maturity. It is perhaps impossible to measure spiritual maturity in definitive terms, but respondents were able to describe attitude and behavior shifts that are indicative of maturing in Christ. P1, P9, P10, and P15 all addressed the importance of embracing conflict versus

running from it. P1 and P10 specifically addressed the importance of practicing the principles of Jesus's teaching in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 18 related to responding to matters of fault between two people:

If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love.

(Peterson, 2003)

The principles of Matthew 18 were mentioned several other times throughout the study, indicating a desire for dealing with conflict in proactive ways that honor God and people.

***Community builder.*** Six subjects responded directly or indirectly as choosing to proactively build community in response to push back or resistance to their leadership style. P1 contributed to a more engaging environment by "being more open to the input of others" (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017). P2 described in detail what this looks like live out behaviorally as he transitioned to becoming more of a community builder with his governing board:

A lot of times when I bring ideas to the elders... I've been thinking about it six or seven months, and I'm trying to talk to them with one meeting... and so a lot of times I do have some frustrations like, "Why don't you see it the way...?" I have to remember, "Oh yeah, you're just now hearing this." And so that is a comment I get back a lot - that I need to be a little more patient and part of that is just realizing – ok – I've been working on this

for six, eight, nine months – they’re just now hearing it - I need to catch them up some more – and just understanding... that I don’t always have the best idea – or even if it is the best idea it may not be what needs to happen. So – really keeping the whole congregation in mind rather than just what needs to happen in teen ministry.” (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

***Living into calling.*** This theme also appeared in response to IQ2. In response to IQ3, four subjects described attitudes and behaviors that are consistent with understanding and living into their calling as youth ministers. P3 captured the essence of this theme when observing:

Over the years, I've learned to not take things as personally. Early on in Ministry I was all about me - you know do they like me, and my satisfying them, am I making the grade? Once I became comfortable with who I was and my calling and what God had called me to do - it was a lot easier to take that criticism because it was not about me - it was about what I've been called to do. (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

**Interview question 4.** What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church? Five themes were identified when coding responses to this question: (a) intrapersonal leadership issues, (b) interpersonal leadership issues, (c) systemic issues, (d) life transitions, and (e) minimal (See Figure 11).

***Intrapersonal leadership issues.*** Eleven subjects observed intrapersonal leadership issues as a contributor to major challenges to long tenure at the same church. Some of the intrapersonal issues were more practical in nature such as “learning to be a better teacher” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017).

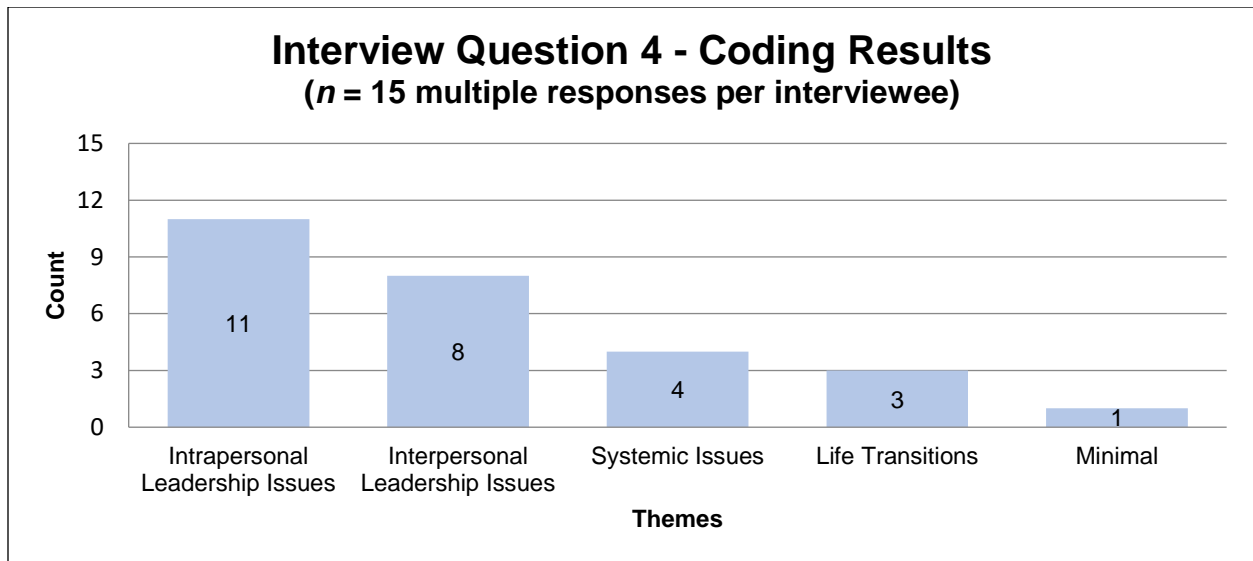


Figure 11. Themes that developed from IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?

Others were more emotionally oriented such as struggling with feelings of burnout (P10) or difficulties adjusting to the new role. For instance, P7 observed, “I was miserable my first year” (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017). The most substantive intrapersonal leadership issue was struggling with complacency. P3, P4, P5, and P12 all discussed wrestling at times with falling into ruts. P4 observed with a laugh, “And I like ruts” (P4, personal communication, January 2, 2017). As noted previously in IQ5 however, these participants lived into proactive ways to remedy this issue, specifically by building broader networks and engaging in learning opportunities with other employees/interns.

**Interpersonal leadership issues.** Eight participants indicated interpersonal issues were substantive challenges to long tenure. P1, P2, and P8 specifically addressed interpersonal issues they sometimes experience with their governing boards. Generally, in Churches of Christ, governing board members are referred to as elders or shepherds. Respondents in this study used those terms interchangeably when referring to their governing board members. P8 described interpersonal leadership issues by observing:

One of the things that has challenged me has been [the elders'] leadership style. They are very much passive-aggressive. So, we make a decision, and it will be a firm decision as long as a lot of people don't complain about it. But then if a lot of people complain about it, then that creates [issues]. So... because of that – their leadership style is to go out and do their own thing and not work together as a team. (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

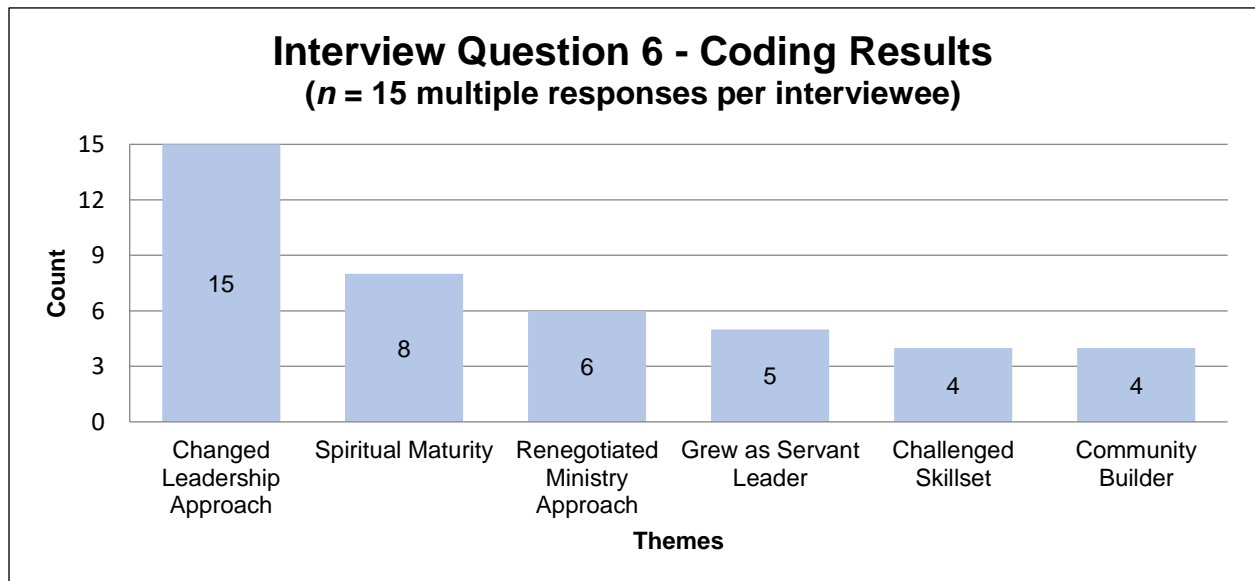
P1 and P6 noted interpersonal issues sometimes arise with parents, and P7, P9, and P14 mentioned occasional personality or staffing issues. This question generated the least amount of data, with seven subjects making no observations regarding interpersonal issues.

***Systemic issues.*** Four participants mentioned systemic issues that sometimes contribute to challenges to long tenure. Elder turnover was mentioned by P1 and P6. Their response was not indicative of dysfunction so much as it was about realigning expectations as original elders retire or resign and new members come on board with different expectations. Multiple times throughout the study, several participants mentioned they have been there long enough that one or two of their elders were former students in their youth ministry.

***Two additional themes:*** Life transitions and minimal challenges surfaced, with three participants mentioning the former and one the latter. P10 and P15 talked through some of the challenges associated with moving several hours away from immediate family, and P9 described some of the challenges he experienced as he transitioned from being single to being married. P13 observed, "I really don't see a lot of negatives to being in the same place. I just see benefits" (P13, personal communication, January 5, 2017).

**Interview question 6.** Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?

All 15 (100%) participants indicated that challenges they had experienced in ministry had contributed to a change in leadership approach. Five themes surfaced in response to the affirmative answers to the question: (a) spiritual maturity, (b), renegotiated ministry approach, (c) grew as a servant leader, (d) challenged skillset, and (e) grew as community builder (See Figure 12).



*Figure 12.* Themes that developed from IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how? Column 1 represents the number of subjects who indicated they have or continue to change their approach in ministry because of challenges they have faced or continue to face. Columns 2-6 indicate their responses to the challenges.

***Spiritual maturity.*** Eight participants indicated they had grown in spiritual maturity because of various challenges they have faced. The answers were congruent with similar responses to IQ5: What strategies did you use to overcome [those major challenges to long tenure]? The following phrases reinforce how spiritual maturity was expressed behaviorally within the lives of various participants:

- P11 shared that he had a realization that God is the author of it all.



- “I’m more forgiving and grace oriented” (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017). Behaviorally for P13, this translated into being less concerned about detailed applications for mission trips to being more concerned about opening doors of opportunity for more people to be involved in mission activity.
- After losing two students in the same year, P15 observed he was, “awakened to the power of the Holy Spirit” (P15, personal communication, January 5, 2017).
- P8 committed to living into the principles of Matthew 18.

***Renegotiated ministry approach.*** Six subjects noted that they renegotiated personal expectations of their ministry approach. The most radical response from P7 who observed:

I had to change everything... I came up through the school of “What you learned in college was how to call the restaurant in advance to get reservations.” And so that’s what I thought youth ministry was which didn’t fit my current church’s model. So, I had to figure out what’s going to work here. And I started digging a little deeper and had to do a lot of things differently. (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

P8 talked about adapting as a leader in the midst of his governing board’s passive-leadership style. P10 observed he, “Led differently based on my audience. Not that I wear different faces, but I wear different hats. Your face changes your person – your hat changes your position” (P10, personal communication, January 4, 2017). P14 observed that he made the transition from an individual leader to a team oriented leader on the heels of a staffing issue which ultimately proved to be a game changer in a highly positive way related to his renegotiated approach to ministry.

***Grew as a servant leader.*** Five participants described growing in behaviors and attitudes that are consistent with characteristics of servant leaders. Specifically, P2 and P12 grew in their listening skills, one of the ten original servant leader characteristics identified by Greenleaf (1977). P4 noted a major emphasis on serving others, and P7 described releasing teens to serve in other areas of church life.

***Challenged skillset.*** Four participants observed that various skillsets were challenged as they wrestled with various challenges. P3 mentioned that conflict could sometimes cause him to “circle the wagons” (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017). P6 noted he had to become more of a delegator; a move that went against his natural leadership tendencies. P8 noted he is more cautious when taking the lead on various projects since he’s been “thrown under the bus a few times” by his leadership (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Community builder.*** This theme was strongly congruent with responses to IQ5. Four subjects described themes of moving deeper into community as a change in leadership approach. P3 observed that on his better days, the challenges he faced made him more inclusive. P4 described how living into relationships with other staff members had proven a blessing to his ministry. P9 balanced his relational style to be more people oriented. P10 began dealing with people where they are.

**Research question two summary.** RQ2 asked: What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ? Three interview questions addressed RQ2: IQ3: Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond? IQ 4: What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church? IQ 6: Did any of those challenges change the way

you lead? If so, how? Thirteen (86.6%) out of 15 respondents indicated that they have experienced pushback or resistance to their personal leadership style with 5 (38.5%) of those 13 noting most conflict occurred in the early years of their current position. Three top themes emerged from the data: (a) Yes – pushback and resistance does occur, particularly in the early years of ministry, (b) one of most prevalent challenges is intrapersonal leadership issues, (c) Discernment (IQ3) and spiritual maturity (IQ6) were the most prevalent changes leaders made to address the challenges they faced.

### **Research Question Three**

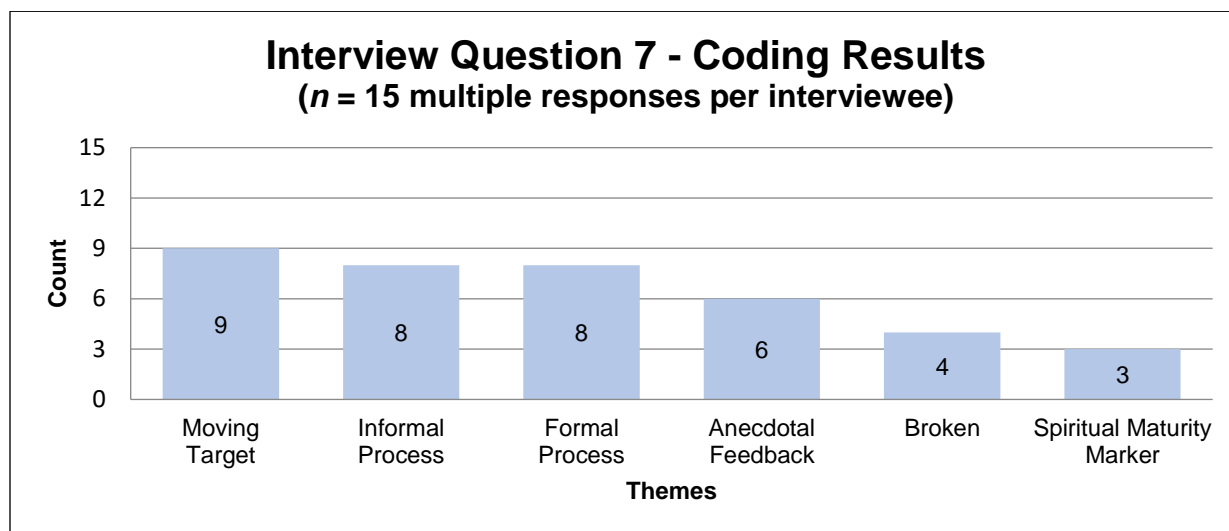
How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ? To answer RQ2, the following two interview questions were posed to all 15 subjects:

- IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?
- IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?

**Interview question 7.** How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success? Six themes surfaced in response to this question: (a) moving target, (b) informal process, (c) formal process, (d) anecdotal feedback, (e) broken, and (f) spiritual maturity marker (See Figure 13).

***Moving target.*** Nine participants directly or indirectly described evaluation processes that are moving targets. These types of leadership success metrics are unpredictable and are identifiable by words like occasional and inconsistent. P8 observed, “I’ve had two formal two evaluations in [10+] years” (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P9 indicated he has

occasional year-end reviews. P12 mentioned 1-2 reviews during his tenure, and P14 observed his evaluation process has changed over the years.



*Figure 13.* Themes that developed from IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?

**Informal process.** Eight participants described an informal process utilized by their respective governing boards to evaluate leadership success in youth ministry. P2 and P3 described self-governing dynamics that were somewhat unique. Both are in high trust level environments. P3 observed that his elders are hands off most of the time and that it is, “My responsibility to be proactive in giving [my elders] information” (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017). Even though some participants like P6 submit reports on a monthly basis, the reports are still informal. However, P6 credits these reports as a contributor to long tenure in the same church:

Every month I have to give a one-page summary to the elders of, “This is what I did this month.” And especially in youth ministry with most of our time either being outside of what we would call normal office time or what they can see – I think it’s especially important. It’s not fun to do... As much time as it takes me to make those reports and to

communicate to the elders – they at least know what’s going on. They know some of the struggles that we have. They know some of the successes.” (P6, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

Informal processes are also represented relationally. P3 keeps his senior minister informed, P11 engages in multiple meetings with various members of the elders and staff monthly and with youth ministry team members on a weekly basis, P13 has two elders who specifically serve as youth elders, P14 spends one hour per week with his executive minister, and P15’s department heads meet once per month as does the church’s staff.

**Formal process.** Eight participants noted their elders utilize formal processes to evaluate youth ministry success. P1, P4, P14 and P15 all participate in formal annual reviews. P6 and P7 also participate in formal annual reviews, but P6’s is an expected, self-generated year-end report, and P7’s is a goals session review. P11 has a semi-formal year-end evaluation.

**Anecdotal feedback.** Six subjects reported various feedback mechanisms that are anecdotal in nature. P1 and P13 noted that their elders have concerns about numbers but do not dwell on them. P2’s ministry is more about quality versus quantity. P8 observed, “If they’re not hearing complaints, then it’s ok” (P8, personal communication, January 3).

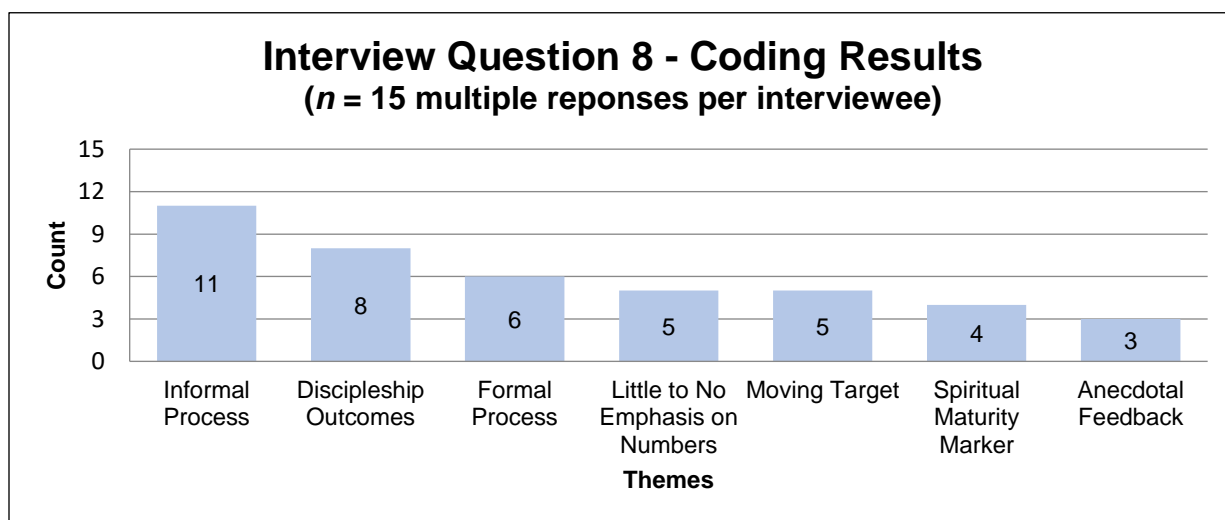
**Broken.** Four respondents described evaluation models that are detrimental. P3 and P5 described their boards’ evaluation methods do not work well. P9 indicated the “very sterile, business type model seems to be more about nickels and noses” (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

**Spiritual maturity marker.** Three participants mentioned spiritual maturity marker language that did not fit cleanly into the other categories. The first is somewhat anecdotal in

nature, but it does involve a Christocentric ethos. “How are our teens growing to be more like Jesus?” is a question P1 engages consistently with his leaders and parent volunteers as they evaluate youth ministry outcomes (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017).

Two of the most intriguing responses came from P14 and P15. P14 reported that his church’s elders “hire people they expect to be awesome” (P14, personal communication, January 5, 2017). In his context, he reports directly to the church’s executive minister and generally engages his elders as partners in ministry. The other intriguing response was from P15 who observed their evaluations are not numbers based. Rather, they are vision based. In essence – is the youth ministry aligned with the vision of the church? His year-end vision based review grows out of quarterly vision based reviews.

**Interview question 8.** How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes? Seven themes surfaced in response to question 8: (a) informal process, (b) discipleship outcomes, (c) formal process, (d) little to no emphasis on numbers, (e) moving target, (f) spiritual maturity marker, and (g) anecdotal feedback (See Figure 14).



*Figure 14.* Themes that developed from IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?

**Informal process.** Eleven participants indicated informal processes are the most common way to personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes. Examples of informal processes and focal points varied. P1 consistently evaluates teen involvement in ministry. P9 and P10 constantly evaluate their ministry success through purposeful relationship building. P5 conducts post-event informal reviews. P15 does the same thing, but with a little more structure. When asked in a probing question to give an example of what a post-event evaluation might look like, P15 responded:

So, on a Tuesday after a retreat, we will sit down together and process whether or not we should do the event again. Why? What went well? What needs to be changed if we do this again? I will also say – I’ve had the same admin for 11 years – I know I want to do that, and I’m going to be tired – but I tell her, “On Tuesday morning – this is your first question” – and we open it up. (P15, personal communication, January 5, 2017)

P13 and P14 loosely track the numbers of adults involved in their ministries. P12 practices constant self-evaluation. He observed:

I put a lot of pressure on my effort and work ethic – how much effort am I putting into this? How deep are my relationships with students and how can I improve? I like to reflect on my own actions and how I can improve constantly – that’s how I self-evaluate. (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

Ongoing informal evaluation is consistent with the relational theme that permeates much of the lived experience of the study participants.

**Discipleship outcomes.** Eight subjects directly mentioned or alluded to discipleship outcomes as a means of personally evaluating successful youth ministry outcomes. Although

somewhat subjective, the responses described observable behaviors and attitudes that are consistent with growing as a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ. P1 evaluates youth ministry success through a teen's readiness to serve in various ministry contexts, paying specific attention to engagement locally or in other churches once they graduate from high school. P3 identified using a similar metric when responding, "When kids graduate, are they moving into ministry within other churches? Are they giving back?" (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017). Other key phrases that were indicative of some level of discipleship outcomes included:

- "Spiritual transformation, and then, [are they] provoking spiritual transformation among their friends who are not believers?" (P9 personal communication, January 3, 2017).
- "I think some of the success comes from their identity being changed from whatever – their car, their home, their status at school – and just to see them hopefully evaluate their life... and to realize that their identity in Christ is so much more important. That's where I think we experience some of those little victories and realize this is what it's all about" (P11 personal communication, January 4, 2017).
- "Seeing kids make that commitment to Christ and take that next step in their faith" (P12 personal communication, January 4, 2017).
- "Are kids being discipled and are they involved?" (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017).

**Formal process.** Six participants indicated they utilize in whole or part a formal process to evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes. P2 implemented a teaching scheme that covers a predetermined set of topics every teen is exposed to. P6 instigated a formal tracking process that spanned almost two decades to determine the trajectory of teen spiritual



journeys. He realizes the approach is not perfect and observed, “But even doing that on paper – it’s tough to tell” (P6, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P13 participates in an annual senior class evaluation, and P15 observed that his church’s adult volunteers evaluate certain areas of ministry focus on an ongoing basis. One of the more creative formal evaluation processes was offered by P7 who shared:

I have every kid’s name up in my office – on big Post-it Note sheets. My interns work on that every summer. I have a system of markings that they do not know anything about – that I constantly remind myself of where every kid is in my opinion. If I see a kid’s name on there, that I know I’m failing – then I know I’m failing. And I know I need to make a little more effort with that kid. So, that’s how I evaluate current success. (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

***Little to no emphasis on numbers.*** One of the more intriguing findings of the study was an intentional aversion to utilizing numbers as a success metric. P2, P3, P6, P12, and P14 indicated directly or indirectly that numbers matter very little to them personally. P14 observed, “I do keep up with who is in my ministry, but that’s not success” (P14, personal communication, January 5, 2017). The concept reinforces the changing narrative of antiquated markers of success being a key determinant of quality leadership in ministry (McKenna, et al., 2007; Reave, 2005).

***Moving target.*** Five participants identified various moving targets as identifiers of youth ministry success. All five included a longer-range evaluative approach of attempting to identify where teens are spiritually once they graduate from high school and ultimately from college. Although somewhat anecdotal in nature, the resolve is concerted and intentional, even though

there is no predictable rhythm associated with the approach. P8 identified a possible right now/future tension that some long tenured ministers may experience when noting,

I used to evaluate based on numbers or the number of baptisms or responses at a youth rally. I think you have to look down the road and see how they turn out when they get into adulthood. And that's very hard for me to do because we live in an instant satisfaction society. I want to know I did a good job right now (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Spiritual maturity marker.*** Four individuals identified various spiritual maturity markers as a means of determining successful youth ministry outcomes. These included observing teens for spiritual growth through changes in attitudes and behaviors as they mature (P1, P2, and P3) and by constantly evaluating how teens are living into the ministry's mission (P14).

***Anecdotal feedback.*** Three participants reported anecdotal approaches to determine successful youth ministry outcomes including "replicating myself in volunteers" (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017), and evaluating verbal feedback from parents (P3 and P11).

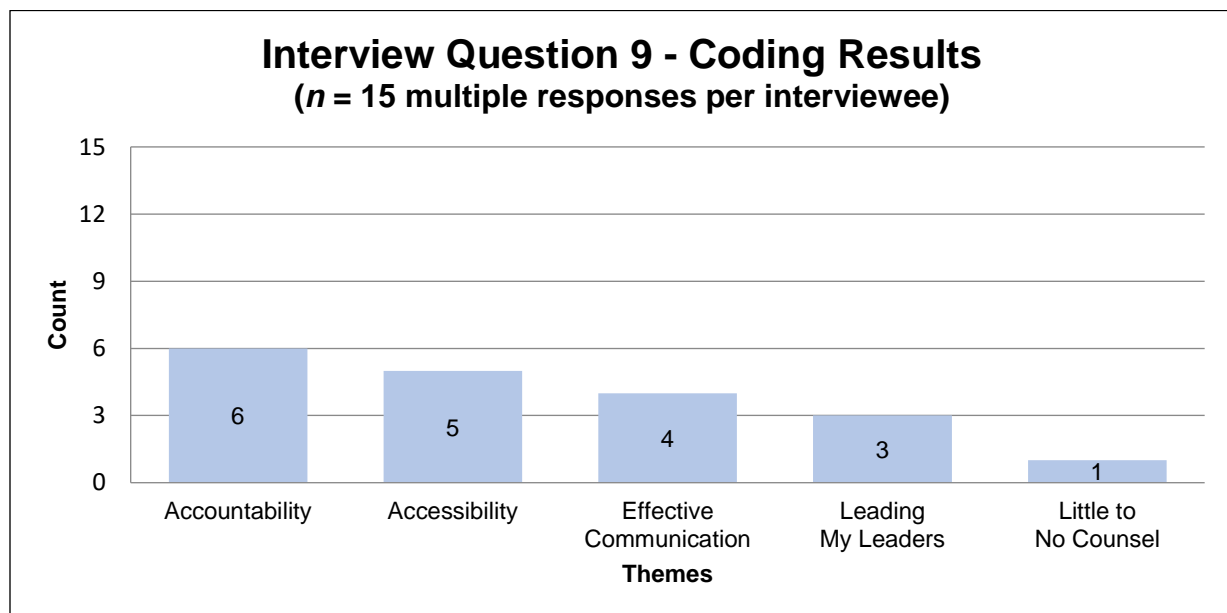
**Research question three summary.** RQ3 asked: How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ? Two interview questions addressed RQ3: IQ 7: How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success? IQ 8: How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes? Two top themes emerged from the data: (a) The top method governing boards use for assessment is moving target (b) The top method of evaluation for youth ministers is an informal process.

## Research Question Four

What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession? To answer RQ2, the following three interview questions were posed to all 15 subjects:

- IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?
- IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?
- IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

**Interview question 9.** What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively? Five themes surfaced in response to this question: (a) accountability, (b) accessibility, (c) effective communication, (d), leading my leader, and (e) little to no counsel (See Figure 15).



*Figure 15.* Themes that developed from IQ 9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?

**Accountability.** Six participants mentioned accountability as the top counsel they offered their governing boards on how to lead them effectively. Responses in this category included feedback such as asking leaders to define success, asking for specifics, asking for the principles of Matthew 18 to be purposefully practiced with one another, and focusing on God's calling for all leadership team members. P12 observed that although it did not happen consistently, he welcomed those times when he and his shepherds spent time together in goal setting. P9 expressed the importance of honesty and respectful straightforwardness in these types of requests when noting:

On a number of occasions, I asked [my elders] to be very specific with me. I feel like... my schedule, my time, my ministry is an open book. You come to me anytime and ask me any question and I promise you I will give you an answer. I have never lied to my elders – not even one time. Whether good or bad, I never lied to them. So, if they ask me a question I'm going to tell them. Whether it's a good answer or bad one, they're going to hear it. That's the way I deal with them and that's how I want them to deal with me. If you have a question, call me. Don't speculate. Don't entertain. Practice Matthew 18 with me. If someone has a problem with me, tell them [sic], "You need to go talk with him." Don't entertain that stuff. (P9, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

It is important to note that even though counsel on how to lead has been offered, it has not always been honored.

**Accessibility.** Five participants directly or indirectly addressed accessibility as a type of counsel they have offered their elders in relationship to leading them as ministers effectively.

This may involve an open-door policy conversationally (P5), or a process that engages elders in various aspects of youth ministry (P9 and P15). P13 described accessibility as:

I do tell them that we need their feedback, their support, encouragement and prayers. I need to know that they have got my back – that they pray for me. I need to know that if I need to help them get something for the youth ministry or to help me deal with a family – that I can call them and that they will be there for me to help give me wisdom in knowing what to do, (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017).

Not everyone in the study reported directly to a governing board. P14 reports directly to an executive minister. The request for accessibility still applied within the dynamics of that relationship and was instigated by the youth minister who requested one hour per week together.

***Effective communication.*** Four participants mentioned coaching their leaders on the importance of effective communication. Whether asking for more information from their leaders (P2 and P3) or asking for more opportunities to share more information with their leaders (P5 and P6), these participants desired more freedom in information exchange.

***Leading my leader.*** Three participants coached their leaders on more effective leadership processes. P2 encouraged his elders to “not micro-manage” (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017), and P8 coached his leaders to work together better as a team. P5 offered some key insights that may help women in youth ministry understand some of the dynamics they may face as they enter into a traditionally male-dominated environment:

It may be different because I am a woman. I feel like the shepherds may be closer to the men on staff. And especially we have [multiple male staff members] and those guys are

regularly in the [elders] meetings... I only go to the elders' meetings a couple of times a year. But I think there's something too – like a little bit of fear with me where I don't want to overstep boundaries. I don't want to keep asking because it's not the only thing in the church and they're shepherding the [entire] church. (P5, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

**Little to no counsel.** One participant observed he has not provided any counsel on coaching his shepherds in leading him effectively. He observed, "I just maintain personal relationships with them" (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017). It is important to note that P7 also reports directly to one of the other ministers on staff.

**Interview question 11.** What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership? Seven themes surfaced in response to this interview question: (a) be intentionally relational, (b) be authentic, (c) be a community builder, (d), establish healthy boundaries, (e) practice spiritual disciplines, (f) be intentionally diverse, and (g) be a visionary (See Figure 16).

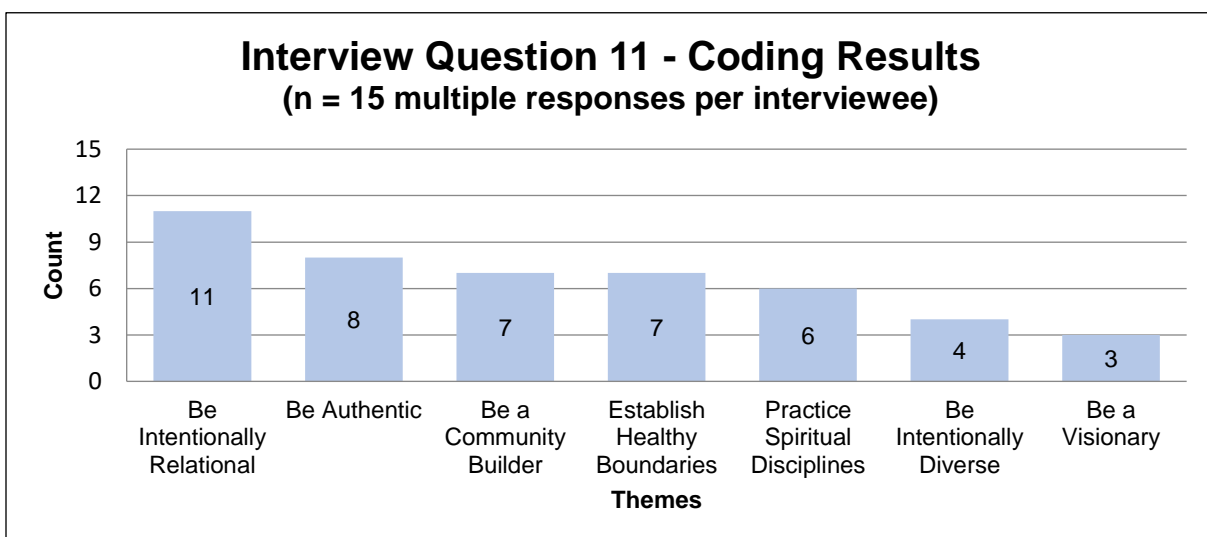


Figure 16. Themes that developed from IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?

***Be intentionally relational.*** Eleven participants indicated being intentionally relational was the top counsel they would offer to others in the youth ministry profession related to leadership. The relational aspect of youth ministry was a consistently strong theme throughout the study. Respondents offered key words and phrases that described being intentionally relational:

- Relationships with other ministers, mentors, elders, older church members who can coach and support you (P2, P4, P5, P12, P14, and P15)
- Listen to others (P3 and P12)
- Pour into others (P5)
- Minister to the whole church (P8).

P7 described what the relational dynamic looks like live out behaviorally when he observed:

Never settle for the relationship being where it is. Always try to improve the relationship. There's no need to say they're a lion and I'm an owl - we're not going to get along. And also learning what makes people tick. Conflict resolution training has been a huge benefit for me in leadership. Working on relationships – I am listening to people all the time. I'm constantly in everybody's office and trying to be everyone's best friend on the staff – not to be political – but because I genuinely enjoy friendships with everyone. (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

P12 offered additional insights on how the relational components can be experienced personally and spiritually. He observed:

Listen first of all. Scripture has plenty to say about counsel – lean heavily on the wisdom of your leadership – your elders, parents, and veteran youth ministers. I’m one of the longest tenured youth ministers in [our city], but there are guys who have been doing it longer than me and I listen to them – but I also listen to the younger guys because they have a different perspective. So – just listen. I learn from the 20 something’s all the time. Listen – mainly to God. Spend time in the word and in prayer – trying to listen to His call. (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

The strong emphasis on relationship building may especially benefit youth ministers who are new to the profession or those who are struggling to find direction in their ministries.

***Be authentic.*** Eight subjects directly or indirectly addressed the importance of being authentic. Multiple words and phrases were used to describe what being authentic looks like lived out behaviorally in the context of youth ministry:

- Be honest (P1, P10)
- “You have to love people” (P4, personal communication, January 2, 2017).
- “Just be you” (P5, personal communication, January 3, 2017).
- “Do your job with all your heart” (P5, personal communication, January 3, 2017).
- Practice humility (P11, P13)
- “Do what you say you are going to do” (P14, personal communication, January 5, 2017).

P13 offered the following insights for others in ministry related to authenticity:

Be yourself. Have integrity. Be humble – there’s nothing worse than a prideful leader.

When I think of humility I try to not care who gets the credit. I think that was harder to do when I was younger, but it’s very easy to do now. When I was younger, I felt like



getting the credit meant I was important and that I was doing the right thing and was getting some of my worth through that... Everyone I know who ruined their lives or someone else's life – they were arrogant at the time or prideful. That scared me as a young minister, and I wanted nothing to do with it. Pray that God will keep you humble – which is a scary prayer. (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017).

The theme of authenticity was consistent throughout the literature and was an element of various leadership styles and assessments including The Servant Leadership Survey (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), moral leadership (Burns, 1978, Canales, 2014, George, 2003), and transformational or legacy leadership (Whittington et al., 2005).

***Be a community builder.*** Seven respondents offered community building as an important aspect of the counseling they offered to others in the youth ministry profession. The theme is also consistent with answers to IQ3 and IQ6. Various responses created the framework for this theme including concepts such as:

- Being a team player (P1)
- Mentoring younger leaders (P2)
- Cooperating with others (P11)
- Gaining expertise in conflict management (P7)

***Establish healthy boundaries.*** Seven participants emphasized the importance of creating and maintaining healthy boundaries in ministry. Some examples of how youth ministers were encouraged to develop such boundaries included:

- P3 emphasized the importance of maintaining balance and a manageable pace within the demands of ministry.

- P5 and P15 emphasized the importance of treating personal time as Sabbath; a time to restore, focus fully on family, and take a purposeful break from the stressors of ministry.

***Practice spiritual disciplines.*** Six participants encouraged others in the profession of youth ministry to practice spiritual disciplines. Many of the participants referred to this practice when responding to IQ5. When offering counsel on the topic, respondents encouraged those within the profession to “study, study, study” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017), practice humility, “team up with God and don’t try to do it all on your own” (P3, personal communication, January 2, 2017), spend time in the Word and in prayer. P9 made the following observation regarding a potential outcome for practicing the disciplines, “Do not start ministry without engaging God to the point that he gives you a dream – a dream that you can’t sit still when you start thinking about it” (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Be intentionally diverse.*** Four study participants counseled others in youth ministry to be intentionally diverse. The reference is not so much about demographic diversity. Rather, the focus was on diversity of thought. For example, P1 noted, “Professionally, rip off every great idea you can... get more adults involved... and involve multiple personality types” (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017). P12 encouraged other youth ministers to listen to older and younger youth ministers. He observed:

I’m one of the longest tenured youth ministers in [our city], but there are guys who have been doing it longer than me, and I listen to them – but I also listen to the younger guys because they have a different perspective. So – just listen. I learn from the 20 something’s all the time. (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

The practice of intentional diversity may also fight against the complacency issue some of the ministers addressed as a challenge in response to IQ4.

**Be a visionary.** Three participants emphasized the importance of being a visionary. P9 and P13 both emphasized the importance of vision in ministry. From P9's perspective, vision sets the stage for identifying a subsequent mission, and its objectives. P13 noted a formative value of wrestling with vision in order to determine its value within your church. Both use vision as a means to a God-honoring, moving people forward end result.

**Interview question 12.** Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study? Six themes surfaced in response to this question: (a) spiritual counsel, (b) practical counsel, (c) emotional counsel, (d) commit to longevity, (e) organizational investment, and (f) find joy in ministry (See Figure 17).

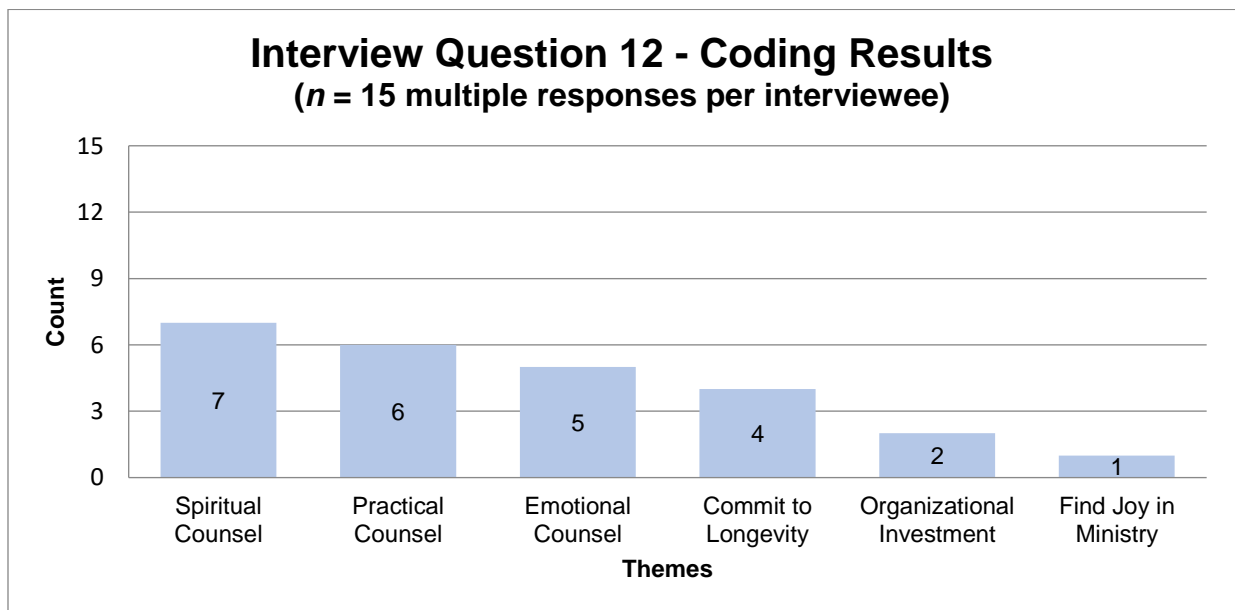


Figure 17. Themes that developed from IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?

***Spiritual counsel.*** In response to the question, “What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?” seven participants responded in terms of living into a healthy spiritual relationship. P2 encouraged others to “serve happily where God has put you” (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017). P9 encouraged youth ministers to “ground everything in prayer” (P9, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P11 challenged others to “keep your ears open for God’s call and listen for God’s wisdom” (P11, personal communication, January 4, 2017). P13 encouraged others to “Remain close to God all the time and be fully present... pray continually... and constantly ask God to lead you” (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017). The spiritual counsel offered by the study subjects is in line with recent movements in the field of youth ministry to focus more intentionally on Christian spiritual leadership (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Cole & Nielson, 2016; Jones, 2001; Root & Dean, 2011; Yaconelli, 2006, 2007).

***Practical counsel.*** Six participants offered practical counsel to those in youth ministry. P2 noted, “Work at your church and with your church.” P3 observed, “Be proactive in communication.” P4 added, “Don’t always think the grass is greener.” This type of wisdom may not revolutionize one’s approach to youth ministry, but it comes from the heart of seasoned veterans who have wrestled with these types of practical issues at various times during their careers.

***Emotional counsel.*** Five participants focused on the importance of taking care of self emotionally. The primary focus was on living your life in such a way that you remain congruent inside and out. For example, P14 observed, “Be honest with yourself, your spouse, and your church” (P14, personal communication, January 5, 2017). P2 offered counsel that could be

extremely helpful to youth ministers who are in smaller fellowships or denominations, or who operate within a smaller district within a larger denomination:

[Churches of Christ] are such a close-knit group, but we are also a closed knit group. The comparisons happen so much and so naturally – what size church you’re at and what size youth group you have. I don’t hear it as much in conversations, but I think it still happens... in our own minds. It happens to me... We’ve got to stop doing that... because we all know each other so well. I think that’s why the comparisons happen so easily... Do what works best for your kids at your church with your families. Just do that and be satisfied with that. I feel like that has helped me with still being at the same place 13 years later. (P2, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

***Commit to longevity.*** Four participants encouraged other youth ministers to make a commitment to staying put. P6 used goal language and P8 observed, “Longevity pays off” (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P7 creatively observed, “2-4 years isn’t enough time to even know. How do you know this isn’t going to work? We need to stop thinking in terms of baseball contracts and start thinking in terms of lifelong relationships” (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

***Organizational investment.*** Two participants called on churches to make a deeper commitment to longevity in youth ministry. P8 offered some insightful counsel to churches and individuals related to that train of thought:

I would say this to churches that think that they have to have a new youth minister or bring in a new bag of tricks every 18-36 months – they are cutting their kids short. They are not thinking long-term and they’re not helping that youth minister either. Because

that youth minister is going to have to learn and grow – and if I’m changing churches every 18-38 months – then I’m just taking my same bag of tricks. You’re not growing. You’re not figuring out how to work with a different group of people. So – longevity pays off in my personal opinion. (P8, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

P15 offered some additional straightforward counsel to church leaders by noting:

I’m excited about how this [study] might inform some churches that maybe it’s not the minister that’s the problem. Maybe it’s the model we have that’s the problem. We know the percentages of youth ministers and how long they stay in. At some point – our leaders have to look in the mirror and ask, “Why have we had three youth ministers in the past six years?” Maybe it’s because our model doesn’t equip them well, and we don’t encourage them well, and no one will succeed... I’m excited about [the study] because in 11 years – more than half the guys I started with are not in ministry. (P15, personal communication, January 5, 2017)

***Find joy in ministry.*** One participant encouraged youth ministers to find joy in their ministry. This one data point could have easily been merged within another theme, but the passion with which it was delivered made it worthy of consideration:

Just love them and get in and have fun with them. My church offered me an involvement position, and I said, “I don’t like teaching adults – it’s not as much fun.” I like what [a mentor] told me when I went into youth ministry – just love them. There’s [sic] enough people who are going to criticize them – enough people who are going to tell them what to do – just love them... The rewards for it are innumerable. You may help them out a little bit – but they make your life too. When the name their kids after

you, or they're wanting you to be involved their wedding and stuff like that – it doesn't get any better than that. (P1, personal communication, January 1, 2017)

**Research question four summary.** RQ4 asked: What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession? Three interview questions addressed RQ4: IQ9: What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively? IQ 11: What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership? IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study? Three top themes emerged from the data: (a) accountability, (b) be intentionally relational, and (c) spiritual counsel.

#### **Chapter Four Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. Additionally, the study sought to identify various challenges those long tenured youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies. The study also sought to identify how youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ and finally, this study sought to identify recommendations youth ministers have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. Fifteen fulltime youth ministers from various Churches of Christ were recruited to participate in the study. Twelve semi-structured interview questions were posed in a face-to-face setting to all participants. The interview questions were developed to discover data that would answer the following four research questions:

- RQ1 - What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?
- RQ2 - What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?
- RQ3 - How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?
- RQ4 - What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?

The principal investigator developed an original coding matrix for the data utilizing Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. Three Pepperdine University doctoral candidates with academic experience in qualitative research provided inter-rater reliability to ensure validity of codes. Analysis for the study completed utilizing a phenomenological method to gather the lived leadership experiences of subjects. Study findings were presented in this chapter in response to the study's four research questions. Seventy themes ultimately surfaced as data from the research and interview questions were coded. The findings of the study, recommendations for future research, and general conclusions of the study are presented in chapter five.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Christian leadership is one small slice of the greater scope of leadership studies (Canales, 2014). As observed in the review of the literature, the slice is substantially smaller regarding leadership studies within professional youth ministry. In order to contribute to the literature in the field of professional youth ministry, this study provided valuable knowledge to assist youth ministers in identifying leadership traits and characteristics that may contribute to extended tenures at the same church. The study also provides opportunity for universities and seminaries to reexamine curricula that will mitigate turnover in the youth ministry profession. The study will also benefit church leaders who serve in the capacity of governing board member or executive minister by providing insight into the importance of leading youth ministry professionals well. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss study findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

This qualitative study was developed to determine leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ, identify various challenges those long tenured youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies, identify how youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry and, to identify recommendations youth ministers have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. The following research questions were developed to gather study data from the lived experience of full time employed youth ministers in Churches of Christ who had served at least ten years in their

current role. As noted in chapter four, each research question was answered via supporting semi-structured interview questions. The research questions for the study:

- RQ1 - What leadership strategies and practices are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ?
- RQ2 - What challenges do long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices within Churches of Christ?
- RQ3 - How do youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ?
- RQ4 - What recommendations would youth ministers make for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession?

### **Summary of Findings**

All 15 study participants were full-time professional youth ministers in Churches of Christ, an American Restoration Movement fellowship of Christian adherents with roughly 1.5 million members in 12,500 congregations throughout the world. The collective youth ministry experience of all study participants is equivalent to 267 years. Fourteen males and one female participated in the study. 100% were Caucasian. 100% were married. 100% had completed an undergraduate degree with five (33.3%) having completed a master degree and ten (66.6%) a bachelor degree.

Data for the study were collected via face-to-face semi-structured interviews that utilized twelve interview questions per participant. A detailed overview of the collection and coding process is outlined in chapter four. Seventy themes developed from the twelve

interview questions. Ultimately, twelve top leadership traits, practices, and strategies emerged from the data:

1. Self-Awareness was the top trait study participants used to describe themselves as leaders.
2. Creating an others-focused environment was the top strategy or practice study participants identified as a contributor to long tenure at the same church.
3. Purposefully living into strategic relationships was the top strategy that study participants used to overcome major challenges to long tenure.
4. Areas of study within the context of university/seminary contributed most to success in study participants' leadership roles.
5. Pushback and resistance to leadership style did occur, particularly in the early years of study participants' ministries.
6. Intrapersonal leadership issues present some of the most prevalent challenges to participants' long tenure.
7. Growing in discernment and in spiritual maturity were the most prevalent changes study participants made to address challenges to long tenure.
8. The top method governing boards use for evaluating study participant leadership success is a moving target.
9. The top method study participants use for evaluating youth ministry leadership success is an informal process.
10. A request for greater accountability is the top counsel study participants offered their governing board on how to lead them effectively.

11. Being intentionally relational is the top counsel study participants offered to others in their profession related to leadership.

12. Seeking spiritual counsel is the top counsel study participants offered in an open category related to anything else participants felt was relevant to the study.

### **Key Findings**

Long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ place significant importance on growing deeply into relationships with God and other people. Their relationship with God contributes to long tenure and significantly impacts how they deal with pushback or resistance to their personal leadership styles. Discernment which is highly influenced by spiritual maturity creates a formidable one-two punch in spiritual terms when responding to criticism, passive aggressive leaders, unexpected shifts in expectations, and moving target evaluation strategies by those in positions of leadership. Having the gift of discernment is also consistent with the literature as it is considered one of nine attributes of Christian spiritual leadership (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Canales, 2014).

Discerning leaders in this study exhibited and described a high sense of self-awareness. They are generally in touch with their emotions and know when they need to reach out to mentors, connect or reconnect with local church leaders, protect their family time, and empower others to serve. Goleman (1998) identified the practice of self-awareness as a foundational personal competency of emotional intelligence. The importance of this competency should not be underestimated. “Understanding ourselves is the first step in putting the world in context” (Hughes, Patterson, & Terrell, 2005, p. 46).

According to Goleman (2000), self-awareness along with self-regulation and motivation determines how an individual manages self. Self-awareness is “knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions” (p. 26), and is comprised of three emotional competencies: (a) emotional awareness, (b) accurate self-assessment, and (c) self-confidence. Throughout the study, participants exhibited characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that are consistent with the first two of three emotional competencies. Although only three participants verbally mentioned self-confidence (P5, P7, and P11), all participants spoke with confidence about who they are and how they operate within the contexts of their respective ministries.

Goleman (2000) observed the second capability related to how an individual manages self is self-regulation. It is defined as the ability to manage the internal states, impulses and resources of self and is comprised of the competencies of self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and innovation. Each competency of self-regulation was directly or indirectly touched on throughout the interviews with innovation surfacing as a key theme in response to IQ1, IQ2, and IQ5. 100% of participants exhibited adaptability behaviors in response to IQ6: Did any of those [major challenges to long tenure] change the way you lead? Such behaviors included not always having to be the person up front (P1), practicing deeper level listening (P2), becoming more inclusive (P3), integrating more service projects (P4), trying various shifts based on feedback from mentors (P5), delegating more (P6), releasing teens to other areas of service (P7), living into the principles of Matthew 18 (P8), changing focus from event driven to community driven (P9), learning to think big picture (P10), moving from individualistic to team approach (P11, P12, & P14), becoming more flexible (P13), and becoming more open to God’s leading (P15).

The third capability of how an individual manages self is motivation, which Goleman (2000) defined as emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals. It includes the competencies of achievement drive, commitment to the goals of the group or organization, and initiative and optimism even in the face of setbacks. Although this particular emotional intelligence capability was not as overtly present as the previous two, optimism in the face of setbacks was a consistent theme that surfaced throughout the study. Generally, participants' love for God, their students, parents, mentors, leaders, and co-workers seemed to be a more powerful force than extrinsic motivators such as positional authority, money, and recognition. With that said, P4, P8, and P13 noted that pats on the back are always welcomed and appreciated.

Goleman (2000) noted the remaining capabilities determine how individuals handle relationships. The first is empathy. The heart of empathy is sensing the emotions of others, understanding their perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns. Wolff, Pescosolido and Druskat (2002) observed empathy was a key aspect of emotional intelligence that enabled thought processes and skills in self-managed teams by providing an understanding of the emotions and needs of others in an organization. Empathy includes the competencies of understanding and developing others, adopting a service orientation, leveraging diversity, and practicing political awareness. Study participants consistently and purposefully use their relational orientation to mitigate lone ranger syndrome from leading to burnout. They consistently mentioned inviting numerous people into their ministry processes to purposefully expose teenagers to a holistic view of God. The service orientation was highly prevalent and is addressed in more detail shortly.

The final capability is social skills, which Goleman (2000) defined as adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. This capability is comprised of influence or persuasion, clear communication, the ability to manage conflict, leadership, being a healthy change agent, networking, collaborating and team building. These characteristics were also manifested through attitudes and behaviors participants used when describing relational orientation within others-focused environments. The most notable capability ingredients observed in the study include a desire to effectively manage conflict, networking with mentors and other youth ministry professionals and collaborating with others in a team-focused environment.

Eight individuals within the study described themselves using servant leader language. There was nothing communicated in the interviews that indicated familiarity with various servant leadership frameworks or assessments, however, the self-descriptors were consistent with servant leader qualities and characteristics as reviewed in the literature. Listening, which Greenleaf (1977) described as intentionally focusing on the thoughts, heart, joys, pains, of others, was referenced directly by seven (46.6%) of participants and every participant directly or indirectly referenced sharing in the joys and pains of others. P12 described personal growth as a listener when observing:

The first couple of times I got pushback when I was younger I just went straight into defensive mode. But now I try to listen... to see their point of view, and then come back with an explanation or work with them. Most of the time – just listening works. (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

Five (33.3%) participants directly addressed vision as an important component of their leadership role. Greenleaf (1977) referred to such visionary servant leaders as conceptualizers,

and described them as, “Conceptualizers at their best are intensely practical. They are also effective persuaders and relationship builders” (Greenleaf 1977, p. 79). Additional servant leadership characteristics that surfaced included commitment to the growth of others, which Greenleaf (1977) described in part as being deeply committed to everyone’s growth, and building up or encouraging others which Greenleaf (1977) described as a desire to build organizational community.

The power of internships as a contributor to long tenure was also a key study finding. There were two sides to the internship coin. First, multiple participants mentioned the role their personal internships played in preparing them for professional youth ministry. Not all internship experiences were positive. P2 indicated that during his first internship he was basically an errand boy for the summer. His second internship however contributed significantly to some of the practices he continues to employ in his current position. His second experience more closely paralleled the experiences of participants who participated in internships prior to beginning their full-time careers. P2, P4, P5, P9, and P15 all indicated their internship experiences were equally if not more important than what they learned in the classroom.

The second side of the internship coin involved utilizing and mentoring interns within participants’ respective ministries. Nine (60%) of participants commented on the positive difference internship programs made for their ministries, and almost all who referenced their interns also mentioned they were a substantial contributor to long tenure at the same church. Some of the interns were so impressive the church leaders offered them full-time positions. At least one participant expanded the scope of his intern program to include high school students:



Another thing that has been helpful is that I hire two [high school] seniors in the fall and spring semesters [and] I pay them minimum wage. They work 10 hours a week so they don't make very much money but it's their first job usually. When they come in to work for me they are excited, but there's a reason why I do that... I can get feedback directly from them... We started that in 1996, but it's been very helpful because in the summer I would have one or two college interns, and then in the fall I needed more [office work] help - bulletin boards - stuff I spend a lot of time on. But the staff said, "Why don't you hire high school kids?" So that has worked out really good I think it keeps me going and keeps me fresh. (P4, personal communication, January 2, 2017)

The bond between youth minister and interns can be incredibly powerful. One of the more poignant moments of the interview process came when P15 reflected on a ten-year anniversary dinner that was put together by the church for the participant and his wife. He observed:

I've always felt like I'm at this incredible place with incredible people – actually – our ten-year anniversary – they had a party for us. I had 40 interns (4 from each of the previous ten summers) who made a video – people presenting – and I said, "I feel like Mephibosheth – sitting at the king's table. [Someone] who has no business there."

That's how I described it. (P15, personal interview, January 5, 2017. The story of Mephibosheth is taken from 1 Kings Chapter 9, and tells the story of how a disabled grandson of a former king was treated equally as a son in the house of King David)

The success of internships can in part be attributed to the first cohort of youth ministers in Churches of Christ (Bruner. 2015). As they began to mature, members of the first cohort began teaching youth ministry at various institutions of higher learning affiliated with Churches of

Christ. Internship opportunities for late second cohort and third cohort youth ministry professionals grew out of that transition (Bruner. 2015).

At least two aspects associated with challenges study participants experienced indicated opportunity for personal and organizational leadership growth. Intrapersonal leadership issues and interpersonal issues were identified as a significant finding within the lived experience of study participants. As observed earlier, youth ministers in the study generally were in touch with their emotions, however, that does not indicate they never struggle. Wrestling with complacency, not making decisions for teens, contemplating offers to transition to another church, and weathering seasons that contribute to potential burnout were mentioned by 11 (73.3%) of the participants.

At least eight (53.3%) participants are experiencing or have experienced interpersonal leadership issues. Parents, elders, and other staff members were noted as the primary relationships where such issues occur. On occasion, the interpersonal issue occurs and is resolved quickly. P11 did not have a ministry degree when he began his job. He observed is caused some initial skepticism, which faded within months of his arrival. There are times however, when interpersonal conflict becomes oppressive. One participant shared he is in such a dilemma now and is unsure how the how or even if the situation will ultimately be resolved. Such interpersonal and intrapersonal issues are consistent with what others in the clergy experience throughout various stages of their careers (Devries, 2008; Mueller & McDuff, 2004; Severe, 2006).

Another organizational learning opportunity finding involved the use or lack of use of consistent evaluation processes to determine successful youth ministry outcomes. Nine (60%)

participants indicated their supervisors utilize a moving target to evaluate leadership success in youth ministry and six (40%) indicated youth ministry success evaluation is anecdotal. P5 seemed to capture the sentiment of several participants when noting:

Basically, what would happen is – every December – two elders would come in and tell you about your raise or your bonus or whatever and just affirm you and tell you how thankful they are – which is great. But there’s always part of me that’s, “They don’t know I’m doing a great job.” It’s very informal – we didn’t even have that conversation this year. (P5, personal communication, January 3, 2017)

Because of the moving target dynamic, two schools of thought emerged when analyzing the data. The first is that youth ministers work *for* their leaders. This dynamic creates the potential for youth ministers to be perceived as “the hired help” which may potentially lead to discounting their insights, throwing them under the bus, micro-managing, and responding in haste to anecdotal feedback offered by disgruntled church members. These participants described more interpersonal leadership issues, specifically in relationship to their supervisors. The second school of thought that emerged is that youth ministers work *with* their leaders. These participants had almost nothing negative to say about their leadership interactions and generally praised their supervisors even if they are not always on the same page. Eight participants indicated their leaders use informal processes for evaluation and eight indicated their leaders use informal processes for evaluation. With that said, the avenue of evaluation was not as important to study participants as was the relationship with their leaders. This concept is reinforced relationally in the literature within application of moral leadership principles in youth ministry contexts (Canales, 2014), and in Christian relational leadership

(Wright, 2000), which is considered by Scarborough (2010) as one of several contributions to Christian transformational leadership.

Another major study finding involved the role education played in preparing participants for success in professional youth ministry. However, a surprising aspect of that particular finding emerged. Namely, almost one-half of participants did not major in youth ministry as undergraduates. Of those who did, only two participants indicated that what they learned in youth ministry coursework while in university contributed significantly to preparing them to enter the field of youth ministry. Fortunately, the overall tenor of participants indicated that is changing as universities continue to receive more feedback on the desperate need for interpersonal relationship and conflict management skills.

These findings align with the literature that indicates the academic landscape is slowly shifting as universities, seminaries, researchers, and practitioners place more emphasis on spiritual, emotional, and leadership development within youth ministry as some of the key contributors to long term sustainability (Canales, 2014; Devries, 2008; Fields, 1998; Heflin, 2009; Jack & McRay, 2005; Mohler, 2004; Myers, 2016). Multiple respondents indicated they participate in advanced coursework via formal or informal education as they continue to grow their respective youth ministry skillsets.

Perhaps the overarching finding that provides the greater lens through which to focus is the overt emphasis on living into relationship with God and others. When asked to describe themselves as leaders, 11 (73.3%) participants utilized terms, phrases, and behaviors that are indicative of being relationally oriented. When asked about any counsel they would offer to others in their profession related to leadership, 11 (73.3%) participants encouraged others to

be intentionally relational. The spiritual counsel that was offered when asked if there was anything else participants felt might contribute to the study was presented in relational terms, primarily with God, but also within the context of God-honoring relationships with others. In the context of their university experiences, relationships emerged only second to area of study as the most important takeaway with seven (46.6%) participants emphasizing the importance of professors, fellow students, and others in their lives during their undergraduate years. In addition, the informal process evaluation approach of successful youth ministry outcomes as utilized by study participants is congruent with a relational approach to ministry.

Another relational theme involves one's relationship with God. Participants placed a significant emphasis on the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines, specifically focusing on the importance of prayer and Bible study. For those who participated in the study, one of the most profound ways God is experienced and expressed is through community. Multiple groups were mentioned throughout the study: teens, parents, elders, interns, volunteers, the church, other staff members, and friends. Individuals such as spouses, key professors, and mentors/mentees were also mentioned numerous times. While the relational approach is consistent with expressions of various models presented in the literature, perhaps the most important literature in the minds of study participants, the Bible, summarizes the ethos of the relational finding best. In Jesus's own words, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

### **Implications of the Study**

The primary intention of this study was to identify leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ in order mitigate turnover in professional youth ministry.

As the study progressed and the major themes began to surface, substantive implications were drawn from the study findings. These implications are presented here:

**Implications for future youth ministers and for those just getting started.** Willimon (2002) counseled young seminarians to wade cautiously through change during their first year in a new place. He qualified his insights by noting, “On the other hand, be sure to change anything that you can get away with” (p. 279). The tongue-in-cheek portion of his counsel is swiftly followed up with the importance of ethical boundaries all in ministry should seriously integrate into their daily practices. The same concepts are echoed by multiple authors who encourage Christian youth ministers to maintain appropriate boundaries and practice holistic, personal, and family care as they continue to grow as believers and leaders (Cole & Nielson, 2016; Fields, 1998, 2002; Robbins, 2004, 2011).

The findings of this study have substantive implications for men and women considering youth ministry as a career or calling. Four key themes emerged from the data that may contribute to long tenure at the same church:

- The importance of a relational orientation. P3, P7, P9, P11, P12, and P15 all indicated the first few years in their current role were some of the most challenging. That is perhaps why P6, P7, P8, and P10 encouraged through their answer to IQ12 that youth ministers remain committed for the long haul. The relational orientation implications align with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities study conducted by Jack and McRay (2005). The authors utilized two primary questions to develop a profile of youth ministry programs: a) “What is the picture of a well-trained graduate of a youth ministry program? b) What type of training is done to achieve this outcome?” (Jack &

McRay, 2005, p. 57). Sub-questions were posed within each primary question. In response to the sub-question, “What qualities of character will be true of them?” (p. 59), being relational surfaced as a key theme. In response to the sub-question, “What ministry skills will they have acquired?” (p. 59), interpersonal skills surfaced as a key theme.

- The importance of internships. If you are a youth ministry student, the data indicate that an internship has the potential to contribute to longevity in ministry. Keep in mind, just because you’re offered an internship doesn’t mean it is the right one for you. You should interview the church just as they are interviewing you. Ask for contact information from previous interns. Review the expectations of the job. If the church does not have a coherent plan, job description, or clear expectations, then you may need to consider looking elsewhere. If you are new to ministry, consider incorporating an internship program. Do your research and speak with older youth ministers who have utilized interns for several years. Invite them to help you map out a proposal and possibly visit with your governing board to explore the pros and cons of establishing such a program. Be very clear about boundaries, responsibilities, and expectations.
- The importance of mentors. The data indicate that mentoring and being mentored contribute to long tenure at the same church. If you do not have an older mentor, find one. Engage in that relationship for several months until you have had healthy mentoring modeled for you and you can replicate it in others. If you enter a mentoring relationship that is unhealthy, do not abandon mentoring, but do abandon the expectations of that particular mentoring relationship. The concept of mentoring is

consistent with the principles of transformational leadership that position leaders to encourage learning, achievement, and individual growth (Harms & Credé, 2010).

- The importance of conflict management training. Multiple participants indicated that conflict management training was a critical contributor to longevity. However, only a few were exposed to conflict management training in their undergraduate years.

Consider postgraduate formal or informal conflict management training. The same counsel applies to deep level listening training. Greenleaf (1977) who defined listening as intentionally focusing on the thoughts, heart, joys, and pains of others listed it as one of the key characteristics of servant leaders.

**Implications for church leaders.** Study findings may be of great use to church leaders who supervise youth ministry professionals. Reframing the relationship from “for” to “with” and giving youth ministers opportunities for their voices to be heard may lead to even more productive work environments. Also, study participants indicated that hearing the voice of their leaders was just as important. The more sterile business approach tends to not work well. The more relational approach is a game changer. The data indicate the “working with” dynamic leads to clearer organizational expectations.

The internship finding may encourage opening doors of opportunity for church leaders who have resisted utilizing such an approach. The study did not dig into the nuts and bolts of how these relationships are structured and homework is recommended before engaging in such an effort. However, the data indicate investigating the possibilities and creating an internship program with clear expectations and thorough vetting processes may indeed contribute to longer tenure for full professional youth ministry staff.



**Implications for universities and seminaries designing curriculum for youth ministry students.** Study participants lamented the absence of practical courses that could have more effectively prepared them for the rigors of ministry. Courses on effective team building, practicing self-awareness, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, moral leadership, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and interpersonal skills will complement courses dedicated to biblical studies and theological formation. The literature indicates such integration could have profound implications (Canales, 2006, 2014; Cannister, 2003; Clark, 2008; Jack & McRay, 2005).

Additionally, universities are encouraged to sponsor youth ministry research to mine valid data for deeper understanding of youth ministry practitioners and those within their circles of influence. Perhaps the youth ministry leadership development void that is readily noticeable in the literature (Canales, 2014; Small, 2011) will begin to fill and the portrait of the ideal youth ministry representative will more fully emerge (Jack & McRay, 2005).

**Implications for day to day best practices within a local church youth ministry context.** The findings of this study may prove of great worth to youth ministers, church elders and future generation leaders as they contemplate the following aspects of day to day best practices within the context of youth ministry:

***Ongoing study of biblical leadership and integration of learning into personal and organizational leadership development.*** Fourteen participants in the study mentioned the Bible at least once during their respective interviews. While some mentioned it in passing (i.e., Bible class), others focused on the formative role of purposeful time spent in deep study of biblical texts. P7 observed, “Sitting down and going through the book of Nehemiah one chapter

at a time was the doorway for what became a vibrant Wednesday night [gathering] for the teens” (P7, personal communication, January 3, 2017). P1 observed the critical role Bible study plays in his personal development as a leader. P12 described reading through the Bible together with his son. As they read, they take notes. He described the rationale as, “So that when I’m not around he can see what dad had to say about this... I will also be able to see what he writes and see what I can learn from him” (P12, personal communication, January 4, 2017). Participant observations align with the emphasis Cole (2016) placed on the importance of gospel-centric youth ministry. Shortly after asserting, “Teenagers lack an accurate understanding of the source of truth” (p. 27), he observed:

Youth ministry with a complete view of the gospel places the cross at the foundation of its missional endeavors. Students do not simply do mission trips and service to the poor because they represent good deeds to which Scripture calls us. A response to the gospel drives them. Youth workers constantly should remind kids that their lives and service are a part of God’s total work to redeem fully the whole world for the sake of Christ” (Cole, 2016, p. 38).

It is difficult if not impossible to have a complete view of the gospel if there is no deep study of the Bible. The implication for church elders and youth ministers is of profound importance. Church leaders and youth ministers will benefit from studying and dialoguing Scripture together and identifying means to gospel ends that have the capacity to outlive fads, trends, and whims. Young professionals or those preparing for youth ministry are cautioned to not hunger so much for practical application that they overlook the importance of solidly grasping leadership

qualities and competencies exhibited throughout the whole of the Bible (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011, Blanchard & Hodges, 2005, Cottrell, 1998).

Implementation of study and dialogue have the potential to assist leadership growth that enhances organizational health. Leadership teams may benefit from studying various leadership frameworks and identifying themes that tie to biblical truths (Canales, 2006, 2014). They may grow as leaders by examining leaders in the Bible who gave in to various temptations, ran ahead of God, or put self before others (Friedman, 2001). Leaders could dialogue “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5) to identify how qualities such as peace, patience, gentleness, and self-control are being lived out behaviorally within their leadership team. Such exercises have the capacity to build greater trust while creating a deeper well of knowledge and wisdom from which to draw. Individual leaders and the organization may simultaneously benefit.

***Growing in spiritual leadership competencies and effectiveness.*** P1, P3, P4, P5, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, and P15 referred to personal spiritual growth or focusing on the spiritual growth of others. In response to interview question 11, “What counsel would you offer others in your profession related to leadership?” six participants encouraged others to practice spiritual disciplines. The counsel is congruent with Christian literature that discusses growing as a spiritual leader through practicing spiritual disciplines (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Foster, 1998; Sanders, 1967; Stott, 2002). Foster (1998) reviewed the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study, the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service, and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Except for meditation, participants directly or indirectly mentioned integration of at least one of those disciplines as a contributor to their spiritual growth. The implication for church elders and

current and future youth ministers must not be overlooked. For aspiring youth ministers, practicing the disciplines early in their careers may contribute to longevity in ministry. For church leaders, the opportunity to engage a leadership team in a spiritual discipline study as a framework for spiritual growth may open the door for increased spiritual leadership competency. For youth ministers, weaving lessons on spiritual disciplines into curricula may prove beneficial to teenagers as they grow into their own personal faith.

It is important to note that the discussion of spiritual leadership within the literature is not exclusively espoused from Christian perspectives. In recent years, secular researchers began empirical studies of spiritual leadership. For instance, Fry (2003) articulated vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith key components of spiritual leadership. Such studies opened the door for exploration of spiritual intelligence that is being examined by some, but has yet to gain widespread attention. Wigglesworth (2012) defined spiritual intelligence as, “The ability to behave with wisdom and compassion, while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the situation” (¶17). While such qualities are admirable and worthy of emulation and while such language or concepts may appear highly applicable, youth ministers, church leaders, and aspiring youth ministry professionals are encouraged to wade cautiously when integrating the secular into spiritual leadership practices. The counsel is offered here since some observe religion and spirituality as concepts of the sacred or divine while others embrace New Age concepts as viable aspects of one’s spirituality (Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008).

***Leadership and management within the context of youth ministry.*** Northouse (2016) observed that while there are some similarities between leadership and management such as

working with people and accomplishing goals there are also numerous differences. Northouse (2016) differentiated historical roots of leadership and management when noting:

Whereas the study of leadership can be traced back to Aristotle, management emerged around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of our industrialized society.

Management was created as a way to reduce chaos in organizations, to make them run more effectively and efficiently (p. 15).

Kotter (1996) offered a more comprehensive differentiation between leadership and management. He described management as, “a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly” (Kotter, 1996, p. 25). Leadership on the other hand is, “a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances” (Kotter, 1996, p. 25). His description of leadership includes a progression of defining the vision, aligning others with the vision, and inspiring others to realize the vision even in the face of challenges or obstacles (Kotter, 1996). Heflin (2009) encouraged youth ministers to consider John Kotter’s leading change model as a framework “as they function as visionary leaders of youth ministry” (p. 128).

Youth ministers are potentially placed in a challenging position organizationally as they lead one ministry that is situated alongside other ministries. In many scenarios, they must lead well *and* manage well. For instance, not only must they effectively manage budgets, equipment, resources, volunteers, and other day to day ministry needs, they must also cast a ministry vision that is aligned with the church’s overall vision. An important implication for this study is that management or the nuts and bolts of youth ministry can be delegated to parents, interns, and volunteers, but vision or the desired future state must be collaborative and will

most likely occur only if the elders and other key stakeholders are on board. P13 expressed how vision and mission are differentiated and lived out behaviorally within his ministry:

I think I'm a visionary. I try to create and cast vision with the people I'm responsible for leading. "Can you imagine if we were this? Or what if we could do this? What if we were known as this?" And then we will take some phrases or whatever that picture we're painting is, and we will repeat it, and praise it, and that's what I try to do. I'm good at the sales end of it. That's my giftedness. That's the big picture perspective. Day to day – I'm pretty hands off. (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

P2, P9, P11, P13, and P15 mentioned the important role vision plays in their ministries. Their observations align with various popular youth ministry literature related to the essentiality of visionary leadership (Devries, 2004, 2008; Fields, 1998; Heflin, 2009; Robbins, 2004, 2011). The implications for church elders and fellow staff members is substantive. Questions such as, "Is the vision of the youth ministry known and supported by all key stakeholders? Are we inadvertently sabotaging the youth ministry vision in any way? Are we confusing managing with leading?" may help leadership team members maintain a vision that is consistent and congruent. This may prove challenging in Churches of Christ since evaluation of ministry outcomes is a moving target. Perhaps that realization will spur leaders to consider leadership consistency throughout all aspects of leading and managing. Additionally, those considering youth ministry as a profession may be able to pose questions during the interview process on leadership and management expectations as a means of gauging overall leadership health.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study is one of the few studies of youth ministry leadership traits and the first study of its kind in Churches of Christ. The study identified strategies and practices that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ, explored the challenges long tenured youth ministers face in implementing leadership strategies and practices, how youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices, and recommendations from study subjects for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession. While these areas were analyzed in depth, the research identified additional areas that could benefit from future research. Specifically, the following seven studies are recommended:

- A study of leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in other denominations with an emphasis on broader ethnic group inclusion. Investigators may find the work of Newkirk and Cooper (2013) who researched leadership preparation of African American women for ministry roles as Baptist ministers a helpful resource in study design and implementation.
- A study of leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers from the perspective of their direct supervisors. Various studies have emphasized the positive impact of healthy supervisor/supervisee relationships within a community of faith (Butler & Herman, 1999; Liden et al., 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Resane, 2014; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). Saks (2011) conducted a study on workplace spirituality and employee engagement that provides a secular perspective template that is also worthy of consideration.

- A study on youth ministers who left the profession in less than five years to identify potential factors that derailed long tenure. Although not specifically examining youth ministers, the work of Mueller and McDuff (2004) on clergy-congregation mismatches and clergy job satisfaction addresses some of the issues related to theological incongruence between clergy and church. This study may be of importance to Churches of Christ since the authors concluded that theology mismatches do contribute to job dissatisfaction. “However, this happens only when the minister is more liberal (not more conservative) than the congregation” (Mueller & McDuff, 2004).
- A study on emotional intelligence and its relationship to long tenure in the youth ministry profession. Whittington et al., (2005) identified ten leadership qualities of the apostle Paul based on the first of his two letters to the church at Thessalonica. In addition to discussing motive patterns and the problem of power the authors address spiritual leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, and emotional intelligence and the relationship of those leadership models have with legacy leadership. Since long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ exhibit characteristics consistent with emotional intelligence, the work of Whittington et al., (2005) provides an excellent starting point for a relational study.
- A study on youth ministry curricula and its relationship to long tenure. The work by Senter (2014) provides an excellent overview of the historical progression of youth ministry curricula and coursework and will be an essential work within a literature review for the proposed study. The work of Butler and Herman (1999) provides a



template for how the study of effective leadership in a local congregation can impact curriculum design at the university level.

- A study on the leadership characteristics of women and long tenure in youth ministry. Although not specifically targeting youth ministers, the success-case research conducted by Small (2011) gives voice to female pastors within the context of their first ministry call. The work of Onwunta and August (2011), provides a rich and theologically insightful construct for gender partnership for development in church and society. The work of LeGrand, Proeschold-Bell, James, and Wallace (2013) also provides insight from female pastors within Methodist Churches.
- A study that validates youth ministry turnover rates within the profession. Such a study could have a tremendous impact on leadership preparation and planning since to date, no empirical research study on youth ministry turnover rates exists. Anecdotal evidence suggests youth ministry turnover averages approximately two years. Cole (2016) noted some regional and denominational studies consistently report tenure averages ranging “between 12-18 or 18-24 months” (p. 23). Popular research data indicate turnover occurs approximately every four years (Lawrence, 2006). A study by Elkington (2013) on why pastors are leaving ministry and what can be done to mitigate the exodus will be an important resource for a literature review for a future study of youth ministry turnover rates.

Any of these studies or studies that investigate similar themes will potentially add to the current research literature while providing value to future research.

## **Researcher's Observations**

The principal researcher observed several trends that surfaced throughout the entire interaction process with study participants: All participants exhibited healthy self-awareness, all participants were highly relational, all participants loved their jobs and the teens within their respective churches, and all have a desire for the next generation of youth ministers to be successful in their careers. Each trend is reviewed below:

All participants exhibited healthy self-awareness. When describing themselves as leaders, participants exhibited confidence in their calling and how, for whom, and why they do their jobs. The confidence they exhibited never flirted with cockiness. If anything, humility was the most prevalent emotion in almost every interview. P11 identified at least one potential source of humility when observing, "In ministry, I think humility is an essential component. I've seen that in lots of people who have been mentors and examples to me" (P11, personal communication, January 4, 2017). Participants were enthusiastic about the study and seemed genuinely appreciative of the invitation to participate. Since many in the study have faced and continue to face the ebb and flow of ministry challenges, it is critical that they continue living into self-awareness as a means of growing in spiritual maturity and emotional intelligence.

All participants were highly relational. The pronoun we was used many more times than the pronoun I throughout the interviews. These youth ministers live for other people. Surely, they enjoy being shown appreciation, but they live for a higher purpose, and it is evident when interacting with them. They were highly transparent with many of them sharing stories of loss, heartache, and dark days. But all were hopeful for the future of youth ministry and all are doing their part to relationally live into the profession.

Many are also trying to bridge the generational gap. P8 took six adults in their 70's on a mission trip last year with his teens. All participants loved their jobs and the teens within their respective churches. Although 13 participants observed pushback or challenges of various types during various seasons of their current tenure, all participants have a genuine heart for their teens. The angst in their tone when they talked about teens they had lost to physical or spiritual death was discernable. The joy in their hearts when they see children of former youth group members entering the youth group was observable. One of P13's favorite recollections was having a mom and dad who were former teens in his youth group on a mission trip with their two daughters. His response was, "That's a good feeling" (P13, personal communication, January 4, 2017).

All participants have a desire for the next generation of youth ministers to be successful. Eleven participants encouraged others in youth ministry to be intentionally relational, eight encouraged others to be authentic, seven encouraged others to be community builders and establish healthy boundaries, and six encouraged others to practice spiritual disciplines. The participants in this study care about the profession, but more importantly, they care even more about those in the profession.

### **Final Thoughts**

There was at least one aspect of the study that was a bit surprising. When asked interview question one, "How would you describe yourself as a leader?" no one described himself/herself directly in spiritual terms. Although easily inferred by many of the responses, God, Jesus, or Holy Spirit were not mentioned in response to question one. In addition, phrases like "a prayerful leader" or "a spiritual leader" were not directly used. The names of God and

such descriptive phrases surfaced as the study progressed, but it is intriguing that in response to the first question in the study, the first response was primarily void of overt, spiritual descriptors. Perhaps this insight will open the door to rich dialogue for youth minister as spiritual leader.

It is unlikely that anyone will ever be able to determine the exact numbers of people whose lives have been impacted by youth ministers. Even though youth ministry is a relatively new phenomenon Senter (2014), a portrait of its ideal representative is beginning to emerge (Jack & McRay, 2005). Youth ministers enter a child's life during a time of transition from little boy or little girl to adolescent. Youth ministers then watch that adolescent grow into young men and women. For those who stay in the same church for an extended time, they often watch those young men and women grow up, return home, and begin the process anew. Youth ministry is a noble calling, a higher calling, and one that has the capacity to initiate trajectories that positively impact the lives of others for a lifetime. With that said, the profession is not without its challenges. Such realities contribute to the importance of this study. If up and coming youth ministers can learn from those who walk before them, then perhaps a new trajectory may just well become a revolution.

The data from this study surfaced several key findings from leadership practices of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. There is still much to learn not just for the sake of one fellowship, but also for the sake of all who are disciples of Jesus Christ. The study concludes with a quote from one of the participants who made an appeal to those who are in or are considering youth ministry as a career:

I know we are in a difficult position because we're not going into a comfortable, easy job. We're going into something that's kind of dangerous, kind of scary at times. I don't want to say get into only comfortable positions, but at the same time – as dangerous and as challenging as youth ministry is – don't set yourself up for an even tougher time because you don't have the support of [other leaders] ... There are many great things about short-term. Jesus had a short-term ministry here – but at the same time – my personal experience tells me everything else in these teens' lives is changing – everything – their personal devices change all the time – the world changes all the time – families unfortunately are changing all the time. They need somebody who is constant; somebody who is there that can see them through all those changes. So, at least to me, I'd say more than any other time – if possible – find a place where you can stay and work for a long time.

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## APPENDIX A

### Site Permission Letter



#### SITE PERMISSION LETTER

October 30, 2016

Pepperdine University  
Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB)  
6100 Center Drive – 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90045

RE: GREGORY ANDERSON  
LEADERSHIP TRAITS OF LONG-TENURED YOUTH MINISTERS IN  
CHURCHES OF CHRIST

To GPSIRB:

This letter is to convey that I have reviewed the proposed research study being conducted by Gregory Anderson intended to recruit subjects at the 2017 National Conference on Youth Ministries and find Leadership Traits of Long-Tenured Youth Ministers in Churches of Christ acceptable. I give permission for the above investigators to conduct research at this site. If you have any questions regarding site permission, please contact:

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Chancey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "D" at the beginning.

Dr. Dudley Chancey  
Executive Director, National Conference on Youth Ministries



## APPENDIX B

### Pepperdine University IRB Approval Notice



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: December 22, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Gregory Anderson

Protocol #: 16-09-381

Project Title: Leadership Traits of Long Tenured Youth Ministers in Churches of Christ

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Gregory Anderson:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Brett Leach, Regulatory Affairs Specialist

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

#### PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

#### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

#### LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS OF LONG TENURED YOUTH MINISTERS IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Greg Anderson and Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. at Pepperdine University, because you are a youth minister in Churches of Christ who has served as a youth ministry professional at the same church for at least ten years. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to determine leadership practices and strategies that are employed by long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ. Additionally, the study seeks to identify various challenges long tenured youth ministers have faced in implementing leadership practices and strategies within Churches of Christ. The study also seeks to identify how youth ministers measure the success of leadership strategies and practices of youth ministry in Churches of Christ and finally, this study seeks to identify recommendations youth ministers have for implementing leadership strategies and practices within their profession.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Review the interview questions that are provided by the principal researcher.
2. Review Pepperdine University's informed consent form.
3. Verbally respond in a face-to-face interview to 12 qualitative interview questions.
4. Review and approve your responses to the interview questions after your responses have been transcribed.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include nothing more than is involved with an hour-long face-to-face conversation. Such risks include:

1. Potential breach of confidentiality.
2. Boredom
3. Negative self-reflection

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include:

One of the goals of this study is to contribute to the void in the literature regarding the continuing leadership development of youth ministers. Accordingly, the study will potentially benefit other researchers who are studying the lived experience of youth ministry professionals. The study may also benefit those who lead churches as paid professionals or as volunteers and the youth ministers who operate under the oversight of these key stakeholders. Others who may benefit from the study include parents of teens and teenagers within Churches of Christ and other communities of faith with similar polity models such as independent Christian churches, community churches, and non-denominational churches and those within their circles of influence. Additionally, the results of the study may potentially lead to a better understanding of why turnover occurs within professional youth ministry and as a result, reduce it. The results may positively impact university curricula, youth ministry conference planning, and local church training programs. Study findings may also help churches recruit, assess, and develop youth ministers in order to sustain long-term youth ministries that contribute to congregational health.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records collected for this study will be confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, it may be necessary to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if disclosed any instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a password-protected computer in the principal investigator's place of residence. The data will be stored in a secure location known only by the principal investigator and Dr. Dudley Chancey, PhD, for a minimum of three years. The data collected will be transcribed and coded by the principal investigator. As the initial coding process begins, numbers will be assigned to participants and names will be removed from data collection materials in order to protect confidentiality. Once the initial coding process is completed for three data sets, two cohort members within Pepperdine University's doctoral program in Organizational Leadership will be invited to serve as co-raters to ensure reliability of the coding methodology. The coded results along with their three corresponding transcripts will be shared with the co-raters. If co-raters agree on the validity of the coding protocol, then coding results will not be modified. If co-raters disagree on the validity of the coding protocol, then the co-raters and principal researcher will engage in dialogue to identify a more suitable outcome. If the group cannot arrive at consensus, the dissertation committee will be asked to review and break the tie.

Once consensus is reached, the principal researcher will complete coding for all 15 interviews. Once coding is complete, the co-raters will be asked to review the coding protocol and identify leadership themes that surface from their coding. The principal researcher will do the same. The co-raters and the principal researcher will compare outcomes to ensure accuracy of data interpretation. Once data gathering and coding are complete, co-raters will be asked to delete all files related to this study from their computers. Copies of the transcribed notes of audio recordings and data analysis will be provided to respective participants. Once each participant

approves representation of his or her information, all materials will be incorporated into the findings section.

### **SUSPECTED NEGLECT OR ABUSE OF CHILDREN**

Under California law, the researcher(s) who may also be a mandated reporter will not maintain as confidential, information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she is required to report this abuse to the proper authorities.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or only completing the items for which you feel comfortable.

### **EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Gregory Anderson at [gregory.anderson@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gregory.anderson@pepperdine.edu), Dr. Farzin Madjidi at [farzin.madjidi@pepperdine.edu](mailto:farzin.madjidi@pepperdine.edu) if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu).

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Recruitment E-mail Script

Dear <Potential participant Name>,

My name is Greg Anderson, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in a private face-to-face interview that will be conducted during the National Conference on Youth Ministries in Daytona Beach, Florida, at the Hilton Daytona Beach Resort Oceanwalk Village, January 2-5, 2017. The interview is anticipated to take no more than one hour to complete. With your permission, I would also like to audio-record our conversation in order to review it as necessary to complete my research. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. To protect confidentiality, I will secure a private room during the conference, will not publish the interview schedule, and will use numbers instead of names on all securely stored notes and audio files associated with your interview.

Are you interested in participating in this study?

(If yes) Thank you for your participation. I will follow up immediately via email to provide detailed information about the nature of the study and include a copy of interview questions. If at any time, you decide you do not wish to participate in the study, you only need to let me know.

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Recruitment Phone Script

Good morning/afternoon <Potential Participant Name>

My name is Greg Anderson, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining leadership traits of long tenured youth ministers in Churches of Christ and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in a private face-to-face interview that will be conducted during the National Conference on Youth Ministries in Daytona Beach, Florida, at the Hilton Daytona Beach Resort Oceanwalk Village, January 2-5, 2017. The interview is anticipated to take no more than one hour to complete. With your permission, I would also like to audio-record our conversation in order to review it as necessary to complete my research. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. To protect confidentiality, I will secure a private room during the conference, will not publish the interview schedule, and will use numbers instead of names on all securely stored notes and audio files associated with your interview.

Are you interested in participating in this study?

If so, I will follow up immediately with an email to provide detailed information about the nature of the study and include a copy of interview questions. If at any time, you decide you do not wish to participate in the study, you only need to let me know. May I continue utilizing this email address or do you have another email address you are more comfortable with me sending this information to?

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Questions Process Form

**Participant Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Gender:** M / F **Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Marital Status:** M / S

**Length of tenure in current role:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Highest level of education:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Anticipated continuing education plans and timeframe:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Question One:** How would you describe yourself as a leader?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Two:** What strategies and practices contributed to your long tenure at the same church?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Three:** Do you experience push back or resistance to your personal leadership style? If so, how do you respond?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Four:** What were the major challenges to long tenure at the same church?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Five:** What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Six:** Did any of those challenges change the way you lead? If so, how?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Seven:** How does your governing board evaluate your leadership success?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Eight:** How do you personally evaluate successful youth ministry outcomes?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Nine:** What counsel have you given your governing board on how to lead you effectively?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Ten:** What aspects of your university/seminary experience contribute most to success in your leadership role?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Eleven:** What counsel would you offer to others in your profession related to leadership?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):

**Interview Question Twelve:** Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is relevant to this study?

Notes:

Follow up question(s):