Exploring the Impact of Leadership Style on Church Growth in MI

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Churches are experiencing a significant membership decline. Leadership style emerged as a possible prevailing reason for this decline. This qualitative descriptive case study explored the perceptions of church leaders regarding leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant leadership) and how these styles impacted membership growth and decline at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. Interviews with 10 church leaders, questionnaires, church documentation review, and analysis generated 4 significant themes. The establishment of these themes contributed to the development of a Leadership Engagement Training Program (LSEP). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the church and senior pastor.

Keywords: leadership style, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez faire leadership, servant leadership, church decline, church membership, Southern Baptist, SBC, full-range leadership model

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a concept existing from the beginning of civilization to the 21st Century (Gautsch & Setley, 2016; Patterson, 2017), with significance also ranging from biblical patriarchs to modern-day leadership theorists (DeLay & Clark, 2020; Gautsch & Setley, 2016; Patterson, 2017). The concept and significance of leadership encompass church leaders and the impact of their leadership style on membership (DeLay & Clark, 2020; Hester, 2020; Keita & Lao,2020). Subsequently, statistics revealed a significant decline in United States church membership over the last two decades (Chappell, 2017; Spence, 2019). From 1937 through the 1990s, church membership was at approximately 70% in the United States (Spence, 2019). The most recent Gallup poll revealed a decline to 50% in church membership across many dominations (Spence, 2019). Among the denominations that experienced a significant decline in church membership was the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) (Loller, 2020).

BACKGROUND

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the nation's largest Protestant denomination, released its 2019 membership numbers in 2020, showing a membership decline of more than 287,000. This brought the total membership down from 14.8 million in 2018 to 14.5 million in 2019. It was SBC's 13th straight year of decline and the largest single-year drop in more than a century, according to the denomination (Bailey, 2020; Loller, 2020; Managing decline, 2017). The possible contributing factors to this membership decline were identified as cultural shifts (Jones, 2019), decreasing commitment (Earls, 2018), clergy immorality

(Bailey, 2020), and leadership style (Fowler et al., 2020). This research study focused on leadership style as a possible contributing factor to church membership decline. Among the Southern Baptist churches that experienced a decline in church membership was the Century Baptist Church, located in Inkster, Michigan. Interviews with Senior Pastor, J.L Century (personal communication, October 26, 2020).

PROBLEM

The problem identified in this research study was the need to explore the perceptions of church leaders regarding leadership styles and how leadership styles may impact declining membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan (J.L Century, personal communication, October 26, 2020; Priester, 2018). Bass' full-range leadership model (transformation, transactional, laissez-faire) and Greenleaf's servant leadership model provided the conceptual framework to address the research problem in this qualitative descriptive case study. An application of the full-range leadership model and servant leadership models provided a deeper insight into the leadership traits that were most effective in addressing the problem of declining membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What are the leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) commonly used by church leaders that may impact declining membership growth at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan?

RQ2. What is the church leaders' understanding of how the implementation of the leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) may influence membership decline at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan?

RQ3. What is the church leaders' understanding of the implementation of leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) to increase membership growth at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan?

This exploration was significant because it revealed leadership practices that leaders at the Century Baptist Church perceived as impacting membership. This study was significant to leadership because the research findings provided deeper insight into the leadership traits that were most effective in addressing the problem of declining membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. This study was unique to the study of leadership because no other study existed to date which focused on leadership styles/traits and the impact of those styles/traits on membership decline in a Southern Baptist Church.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many churches today, no matter the size, are continuing to experience the back-door problem. Members were coming in the front door and leaving out the back door, never to return or provide a reason (Fowler et al,, 2020; Gallagher, 2019; Gautsch & Setley, 2016). Gautsch and Setley (2016) revealed church leaders must be aware of congregant concerns to maintain relationships in this leader-follower dynamic, as emphasized by leadership style. This history of leadership styles started with Kurt Lewin (Malakyan, 2013). Lewin's 1939 Iowa study resulted in the establishment of autocratic or directive, democratic or participative, and laissez-faire or delegative leadership styles (Malakyan, 2013). A review of church leadership literature also revealed that service still prevailed as a vital component of church leadership (Eva et al., 2018; Jenssen, 2018). Servant leadership is needed in the church, as discussed by the Apostle Paul in Phil. 2:3-4, Eph. 6:6, and Cor. 1:23-25 (Jenssen, 2018).

A synthesis of literature review resulted in the ability to trace Lewin's foundational leadership styles back to Basses full range leadership model. The tie back to Lewin's three foundational leadership styles was important because it showed that while the approach to leadership has evolved, the foundational

premise remained relevant. This synthesis also revealed that servant and transformational leadership styles were most aligned with leadership values in the church.

The foundational theories driving this literature review were Basses full range leadership model and Greenleaf's servant leadership model. Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as leadership that "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). As described above, transformational leaders seek to motivate team members to achieve goals that are for the greater good of the organization, as opposed to goals that focus on the self-interest of the follower (Bass, 1997, 2003). The four major components of transformational leadership are idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS, and individual consideration (IC). Idealized influence (II) is a component of transformational leadership that describes leaders who are exemplary role models for team members (Burns, 1978). These leaders are walking the talk (Stafford, n.d.). This positive leader image fosters an increased level of trust and respect among team members. Team members often desire to emulate the behavior and actions of their leader. Inspirational motivation (IM) describes 39 leaders who talk the talk (Stafford, n.d.). Leaders with IM can motivate and inspire followers through words. IM leaders can effectively articulate a vision and expectations, as well as align individual and organizational goals (Burns, 1978). Followers respond to IM by inspiring followers to put forth an extra effort to achieve organizational goals.

Transactional leadership focused less on follower inspiration and more on the management of resources such as budgets and facilities (Stafford, n.d.). According to Burns (1978), transaction leadership "occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things" (p. 19). The major components of transactional leadership are contingent reward (CR) and management by exception. Contingent reward (CR) is a motivation-based system that leaders use to reward followers who meet the goals that have been established (Burns, 1978). CR requires leaders to effectively identify roles and responsibilities, set goals, explain expectations, and establish the system of rewards. Rewards can include performance bonuses, an employee of the year trophies, etc. Followers respond by meeting expectations to receive the established reward(s). When expectations are not met, transactional leaders tend to employ the management by exception (MBE) component of the transactional leadership style.

Laissez-faire leadership translates to *leave well alone* (Malakyan, 2013). Laissez-faire leaders are completely hands-off. Followers are expected to make decisions and complete tasks without leader input. This leadership approach is often effective for self-organizing teams where team members have a high level of expertise and motivation. Some drawbacks to this leadership style include role confusion because of a lack of vision and clarity from the leader. A review of Lewin's authoritative, democratic, and laisse-faire leadership styles revealed his classification of leadership styles as leader-centric. Douglas McGregor, also a well-known leadership theorist, differed from Lewin because he classified leadership styles into two categories based on how a leader views his followers, or follower-centric (Dartey-Baah, 2009).

While Robert Greenleaf (1970) was known for his revitalization of the concept of servant leadership, this is a concept that can be traced back to ancient history. Greenleaf confirmed his invigoration of the concept of servant leadership is based on Judeo-Christian ethic, as described in Matthew 20:26-27. In Matthew 20:26-27, Jesus' disciples are arguing about who would have the honor of sitting next to Jesus in the Kingdom of God. Jesus took this teachable moment to tell the disciples that to achieve a place of elevation, one must first strive to serve. Literature also suggested that Jesus was the first to introduce the concept of servant leadership to humanity (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Sendjaya et al., 2008). Greenleaf defined servant leadership as the natural desire to serve others first. Servant leaders find power and success through the growth and development of others. The servant leadership model consisted of several fundamental concepts, which included: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, stewardship, persuasion, 42 conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Neill et al., 2007).

A historical review of church leadership also revealed research that directly or indirectly drew upon various leadership perspectives that included charismatic (Barnes, 1978), transformational (Druskat, 1994),

transactional (Druskat, 1994), servant (Green, 2001), collaborative (Druskat, 1994), spiritual (Whittington et al., 2005), and strategic (Green, 2001) leadership perspectives. Some of these research studies focused on various elements such as leadership behavior, personality, gender, and education when describing effective church leadership, while other studies focused on the context when describing effective leadership, such as congregation size and organizational culture. This historical review further revealed that servant, transformational, and charismatic leadership emerged as the leadership styles that most aligned with leadership values in a church setting (Grandy, 2013).

Even though limited, literature revealed servant leadership as the predominant leadership style for church leaders (Cooper, 2005). A review of historical and current leadership literature further supported the use of other leadership styles, e.g., transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire in addition to servant leadership. Also, while there is a shortage of literature on the perception of leadership style and how these leadership styles can impact church growth (Priester, 2018), this research study addressed a gap by exploring the perceptions of church leaders regarding leadership styles and how the implementation of these leadership styles could influence membership growth at Century Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. The findings from this research study added to the leadership body of knowledge by identifying leadership traits that promoted church membership growth

DISCUSSION

A qualitative research method was used in this research study to explore the perceptions of church leaders at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan regarding leadership styles and how leadership styles may impact declining membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. The use of a qualitative research method addressed the research problem by allowing research participants to express their perceptions of leadership styles and how those leadership styles impacted membership growth. The use of a descriptive case study research design addressed the research problem by targeting research participants in one specific location to provide deeper insights into their perceptions of leadership styles and how those leadership styles impact membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. The use of a qualitative descriptive case study was further supported through the use of data triangulation. Interviews, questionnaires, and an analysis of administrative church documentation were used during the data collection process. A content analysis was then used to identify themes in the research data.

A limitation of this research study was possible research participant bias in ascribing leadership styles to their former and current pastors. Research participants may have associated leadership styles based on the quality of their relationship with the former and/or current pastor. For example, some research participants revealed a close relationship with the former pastor, while others revealed a close relationship with the current pastor. This bias was mitigated through the use of a Leadership Style Summary document, which provided a summary of each leadership style (transformational, laissez-faire, transactional, and servant leadership) and examples of each style.

DEMOGRAPHICS

An examination of the major ministry areas at Century Baptist church revealed 11 major ministry areas. As a result, the population for this qualitative descriptive case study included the leaders that corresponded with these major ministry areas. The target sample size for this research study was 10 ministry leaders. Participants were selected using probability sampling. Every research participant in the targeted population was selected. The criteria for selection were based on their leadership position. The sample was selected from one population group, so a stratified sample size was not applicable for this research study. The demographics for this research study were limited to active members, serving in leadership positions at Century Baptist Church. These leaders represented male and female participants, representing various age ranges and years of service in their leadership positions, as shown in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
CENTURY BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant Number	Age Range	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Experience
1	25-64	Male	Black	37
2	25-64	Male	Black	2
3	25-64	Male	Black	15
4	25-64	Female	Black	18
5	25-64	Female	Black	40
6	25-64	Male	Black	2
7	25-64	Female	Black	14
8	25-64	Female	Black	20
9	25-64	Male	Black	8
10	25-64	Male	Black	8

As shown in Table 1, the research participants consisted of members who served in leadership roles at Century Baptist Church.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrumentation for this qualitative descriptive case study included the use of interviews, questionnaires, and administrative church documentation. Interviews were the first instrumentation used in this qualitative descriptive case study. The interview questions are identified in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions
1. What are your general thoughts about declining membership at Century Baptist Church?
2. What do you feel is contributing to this decline?
3. What are your general thoughts about leadership in the church?
4. How would you describe your leadership style as it relates to transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, or servant leadership styles?
5. What is your perception of how leadership style may impact declining church membership?
6. What are some strengths of your leadership style?
7. What are some weaknesses of your leadership style?

The second data collection source for this qualitative descriptive case study was a web-based questionnaire, administered via www.surveymonkey.com. The questionnaire included four demographic questions, one qualification question, and twelve open-ended leadership style questions. Demographic information was collected to assist the researcher in describing the people participating in the research study and were reported in a narrative format in the research study. The qualification question was included to confirm the research participant was an active member who served in a leadership position at Century Baptist Church. Should the research participant have indicated they did not meet the leadership qualification, they were not able to proceed with completing the questionnaire. The questions identified in the qualitative questionnaire that aligned with the research questions were shown in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3
QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTION ALIGNMENT

Question	Research Question
1. Describe your perception of a transformational leader	R1
2. Describe your perception of a transactional leader	R1
3. Describe your perception of a laissez-faire leader	R1
4. Describe your perception of a servant leader	R1
5. What is your perception of your dominant leadership style (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant)?	R1
6. What is your perception of how a transformational leadership style may impact declining church membership?	R2
7. What is your perception of how a transactional leadership style may impact declining church membership?	R2
8. What is your perception of how a servant leadership style may impact declining church membership?	R2
9. What is your perception of how a laissez-faire leadership style may impact declining church membership	R2
10. What is your perception of how leadership style (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) can impact church membership growth?	R3

A web-based questionnaire was selected due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in limitations and restrictions on in-person communications and a drastic increase in the use of digital communication methods (Upadhyay & Lipkovich, 2020). The third data collection method was administrative church documentation. The data presented in administrative church documents included church name, date, and attendance counts by category (adults (18+), young adults (13-17), youth (6-12), nursery (0-5), and Wednesday nights (all categories). This documentation provided insight into membership statistics and trends. The period for this data was 2013 – 2019. This data, in addition to the contact information (participant name, ministry title, and email address) identified in the Research Participant Contact Information Request, was included in the Data Access and Use Permissions Form.

PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION

Following IRB approval, the recruitment process started with an email to the Senior Pastor of Century Baptist Church, requesting the names and email addresses associated with the leadership positions identified in the church. The Senior Pastor then emailed the requested information back to the researcher. Following the receipt of names and email addresses of leaders at Century Baptist Church from the Senior Pastor, the participants were sent an email introducing the research study and requested each perspective research participant confirm their agreement to participate in the study by electronically signing, or by printing out, ink signing, scanning, and emailing back to the researcher. Some research participants also chose to ink sign, print out, screenshot, and email or text the Informed Consent Form back to the researcher.

Individual interviews were the first instrumentation used in this qualitative descriptive case study. Interviews were selected over focus groups to mitigate confidentiality risks to research participants, such as members sharing what others said in a focus group setting with other church members, as well as with the Senior and Associate Pastor. The use of interviews further protected the identities of research participants and increased the likelihood that research participants would feel more comfortable in openly sharing feedback. Following the receipt of the research participants' signed and dated Informed Consent Form, a unique identifier was assigned to each research participant's form. These unique identifiers ranged

from LDR_01 to LDR_16. A master research participant list matching the research participant to the assigned unique identifier was then created and stored via Dropbox. This master list also matched the email address associated with the research participants to the assigned unique identified, was password-protected, and only accessible by the researcher.

Interviews with research participants were held via Zoom. Research participants were also emailed a copy of a Research Participant Leadership Style Summary Sheet prior to scheduled interviews, which was designed to assist research participants in their ability to gain a deeper understanding of their leadership traits or styles. Before the start of the virtual Zoom interview, the researcher mitigated confidentiality risks by completing the following steps:

1) Modified the administrative setting in Zoom that prevented research participants from using the video feature during the interview. This modification prevented the display of the research participant's physical identity during the interview. The research participants were allowed to join the Zoom interview using the audio functionality only.
2) Verification of signed Informed Consent Form on file prior to each interview.

At the start of the Zoom interview, research participants were reminded the interview would be recorded. Interviews consisted of 10 research participants who were presented probing questions to explore their perceptions of church leaders regarding leadership styles and how the implementation of these leadership styles may influence declining membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. After interviews were completed, the data was sent to REV Zoom.com for transcription. Following the receipt of the completed transcript, the transcript was downloaded and reviewed for accuracy, and redacted for personal identifiable information to mitigate confidentiality risks. A copy of the transcript was then emailed to each interview participant for review and approval.

The second data collection source for this qualitative descriptive case study was a web-based qualitative questionnaire, located at www.surveymonkey.com. Following the completion of the Zoom interview, the researcher emailed the research participants an invitation to complete the Leadership Style questionnaire using the email address shown in the research participant master list. This master list included the email address that matched the research participant's unique identifier that was also associated with the Informed Consent Form. This cross-reference confirmed the research participant's agreement to complete the questionnaire.

A password was required to access the questionnaire to ensure only the research participant was able to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire included four demographic questions, one qualification question, and twelve open-ended leadership style questions. Following the completion of the survey, an electronic notification was received when the research participant completed the questionnaire. Research participant names, or leadership positions were not included in the questionnaire to mitigate confidentiality risks. The email address of the participant was only associated with the survey responses and was only visible in the questionnaire password-protected design mode, which was only accessible by the researcher. The third data collection method was administrative church documentation. The data presented in administrative church documents included church names, weekly attendance counts, monthly attendance counts, annual attendance counts, dates, and times. This documentation provided insight into membership statistics and trends. The period for this data was 2013 - 2019. This data, in addition to the contact information identified in the Research Participant Contact Information Request, were included in the Data Access and Use Form.

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

The three sources of data triangulation used in this research study were interviews, questionnaires, and administrative church documentation. A content analysis approach was used to analyze interview, questionnaire, and administrative church documentation data. Following the verbatim transcription of all interviews, research participants were emailed a copy of the transcript labeled with their unique identifier for review and approval. The transcript details were shown in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION DETAILS

Participant #	Length of Interview in Minutes	Number of Pages*	Location of Interview	Type of Interview
LDR_02	24	6	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_03	41	10	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_04	36	11	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_07	20	6	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_09	17	5	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_10	24	10	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_11	19	6	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_12	15	4	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_15	20	6	Zoom	Virtual
LDR_16	13	5	Zoom	Virtual

The initial raw data from each interview question was transferred to an Excel Spreadsheet for data analysis. Each interview transcript response was then read three times to identify categories. After a comprehensive list of categories was developed, a numeric code was assigned to each category.

The raw data from the questionnaire results captured in the SurveyMonkey tool were also exported into Excel for data analysis. Each questionnaire response was then read three times to identify categories. Some questionnaire responses fell into categories previously identified during an analysis of the interview data, while some questionnaire responses resulted in the creation of new categories, which were coded. The third data collection method was administrative church documentation. The data presented in administrative church documents included church names, weekly attendance counts, monthly attendance counts, annual attendance counts, dates, and times. An examination of this documentation provided insight into membership statistics and trends for the years 2013 to 2019. These findings were also coded and added to categories previously identified during an analysis of the interview and questionnaire data.

Once all categories were coded, the codes were grouped to identify themes. An Excel Pivot table was then created to assist in the identification of the top common themes. The top themes were then associated with the study research questions. Data analysis revealed four major themes. Table 5 summarizes the four major themes derived from interviews, questionnaires, and administrative church documentation.

TABLE 5
THEME SUMMARY OF DATA FROM INTERVIEWS, QUESTIONNAIRES, AND DOCUMENT REVIEW

Number	Theme	Number of Occurrences	% of Occurrence	Data Source
1	Membership impact due to former pastor's leadership style	27	19%	Interview and administrative church documentation data
2	Leadership styles/traits that contribute to membership decline	43	31%	Interview and questionnaire data

Number	Theme	Number of Occurrences	% of Occurrence	Data Source
3	Membership impact due to current pastor's leadership style	20	14%	Interview and administrative church documentation data
4	Leadership styles/traits that contribute to membership growth	50	36%	Interview and questionnaire data

After completing a content analysis on the interview, questionnaire, and administrative church documentation and transferring this information to Excel for theme identification, no outlier data were present. Because no outlier data were present, only themes that contributed to answering the research questions were coded.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The research participants in this study were all church leaders who were active members of the Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. The sample included four women and six men, all of which served as a leader for at least two years at the Century Baptist Church. Table 6 presented the demographic Information about the research participants, including gender, age range, ethnicity, years of leadership experience, and their perceived ability to identify their leadership style.

TABLE 6
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity	Years of leadership experience	*Ability to identify the leadership style
Male	25-64	Black	37	Very Good
Male	25-64	Black	2	Good
Male	25-64	Black	15	Good
Female	25-64	Black	18	Good
Female	25-64	Black	40	Very Good
Male	25-64	Black	2	Good
Female	25-64	Black	14	Very Good
Female	25-64	Black	20	Good
Male	25-64	Black	8	Acceptable
Male	25-64	Black	8	Good

Scale: Very Good, Good, Acceptable, Poor, Very Poor

As shown in the table above, all research participants indicated an acceptable to very good ability to describe their leadership style, indicating they were able to identify their leadership style. This increased the credibility of this research study.

STUDY RESULTS

This section included a discussion of the results from each data source, including an explanation of how they were connected to the research questions. This section also used examples and quotations from participant responses to provide deeper insight into how leadership styles impacted membership decline at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1. What are the leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) commonly used by church leaders that may impact declining membership growth at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan?

RQ2. What is the church leaders' understanding of how the implementation of the leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) may influence membership decline at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan?

RQ3. What is the church leaders' understanding of the implementation of leadership styles (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant) to increase membership growth at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan?

Table 7 further summarized the alignment of the data sources with the major themes and the research questions.

TABLE 7
ALIGNMENT OF DATA SOURCES WITH MAJOR THEMES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

	Data Sources			
Theme	Interviews	Questionnaires	Administrative Church Documentation Review	Research Question (s)
Theme 1: Membership impact due to former pastor's leadership style	X		X	RQ1 RQ2
Theme 2: Leadership styles/traits that contribute to church membership decline	X	X		RQ2
Theme 3: Membership impact due to current pastor's leadership style	X		X	RQ3
Theme 4: Leadership styles/traits that contribute to church membership growth	X	X		RQ3

Theme 1: Membership Impact Due to the Former Pastor's Leadership Style

The first theme appeared from interview data and administrative church documentation and contributed to answering RQ1 and RQ2. Nineteen percent (19%) of research participants perceived a

decline in membership due to the former pastor's leadership style. An analysis of administrative church documentation revealed a transition in leadership in 2016. This documentation also revealed a 45% membership decrease under the leadership of the former pastor from 2010 to 2015.

An analysis of interview data revealed the former pastor's leadership style as laissez-faire or transactional. LDR_07 stated, "He was transactional. It was very much what benefit can you give me? Kind of if you can help me, I'd give you a position of power." Interviews further revealed the former pastor was very strategic in placing people in leadership positions that were nice, kind, non-confrontational, and less likely to question the decisions of the former pastor or hold him accountable. LDR_10 stated,

> What I did learn from the previous pastor was that you can be friends or befriend the pastor and have his back and support him, but if you don't hold him accountable, you're hurting him more than you're helping him.

Interview data also revealed the former pastor's display of a laissez-faire leadership style contributed to membership decline because his hands-off leadership approach resulted in a perceived lack of concern for the vision of the church. Interview participants felt the primary focus of the former pastor was not on the holistic growth and development of the church, as shown by LDR_16, who stated, "Yeah, that's what I was thinking, because I think it's a combination between a transactional and a laissez-faire leadership style. Where he kind of just gave us the kind of hands-off approach or whatever." Research participant's interview data also revealed the former's pastor's desire to focus more on preaching and less on setting the vision for the church, e.g., LDR_10 stated, "He wanted to focus on the preaching and not so much on the aspects of leadership outside of Sunday morning and Wednesday night." Last, research participants felt the former pastor's leadership style resulted in a lack of accountability, which ultimately lead to inappropriate behavior in the former pastor's personal life and ultimately his resignation.

Theme 2: Leadership Styles/Traits That Contribute to Church Membership Decline
The second theme appeared from interview and questionnaire data and contributed to answering RQ2. Thirty-one percent (31%) of research participants perceived a lack of accountability, associated with the laissez-faire leadership style, as the primary leadership trait that contributed to membership decline. Interview and questionnaire data revealed research participants felt a hands-off leadership approach led to a feeling of being disconnected from leadership. This feeling of disconnection led to a perceived lack of accountability within leadership, as expressed by LDR_10,

> With the laissez-faire piece, I think there were some decisions that he didn't make that I felt he should've made as the leader but he left it to others to make and that didn't sit well with membership as well as with some of the leaders.

While interview and questionnaire data identified transformational leadership as a leadership style associated with membership growth, these research participants also felt that change, a trait often associated with transformational leadership, also contributed to membership decline, specifically as it related to the impact of change on the older generation in the church. LDR_16 stated,

> I would say that as of late the membership has been declining just because we're doing a lot of different changes in the church as far as upgrades and things like that, and I feel that a lot of the older congregation is not really for that…So therefore they're choosing to leave so that they can go to a church that kind of just stays the same.

LDR_12 further supported this perspective by stating,

> I think the biggest thing is change with our older population in our church. A lot of seniors and older people, they don't handle change well, and this age of technology that we're in,

things are constantly changing. There's been changes physically to the church that some of
our seniors don't like, and I think they struggle with that.

Overall, data revealed that changing too quickly negatively impacted membership growth at Century
Baptist Church.

Theme 3: Membership Impact Due to the Current Pastor's Leadership Style
    The third theme appeared from interview data and administrative church documentation and
contributed to answering RQ3. Fourteen percent (14%) of research participants perceived an increase in
membership growth due to a transition in pastoral leadership in 2016. These participants further described
this increase in membership growth due to their description of the current pastor's leadership style as a
combination of transformational and servant leadership. When describing the current pastor as a
transformational leader, all research participants described him as accountable. LDR_09 stated, "We've
had two different leaders over the last 10 years, so I think that our current leadership is quite different than
the previous in that there is more accountability." Other leaders commented on the current pastor's use of
accountability when placing qualified leaders in position. LDR_02 stated,

> For example, if somebody wants to lead the men's ministry, previous to our current
> leadership team, we might have just saw any man who expressed an interest, okay, you can
> do it because we need a men's ministry. Now, I don't see that so much. Whoever is going
> to be the primary ministry leader, I hear conversations going on.

LDR_015 stated,

> He's not just a person where it's just like, "Oh, I just need people. I need to get somebody
> in a leadership position. He's like, "well, I need to see how that person is and if they're
> ready to be in a leadership position.

As shown by the statements above, research participants felt the current pastor was a leader who values
accountability, which is a quality of a transformational leader.
    The current pastor's ability to effectively provide vision was also shared by several research
participants. LDR_15 stated, "…but it's more so serving and transformational. He has a vision…He builds
people up to want to get to that level in the sense where it's just like, he sees something in people.." LDR_04
stated,

> Pastor **** came in with the right mindset. It's almost like the power steering goes out in
> your car and you're trying to turn the wheel and somebody needs to reach over there and
> help turn it with you. The power steering is back and things are going a lot smoother.

LDR_03 stated, "We've been under new leadership, or we've had a new pastor in the last, what, 5 years. He
came in 2016. And I do believe his vision is incredible for what he plans out for ***." As shown by the
comments above the current pastor strongly emphasized the importance of vision, which was also an
important quality demonstrated by a transformational leader.
    Research participants also felt the current pastor's display of servant leadership contributed to
membership growth. Research participants described the current pastor as a pastor who listened,
encouraged, and always had the well-being of the congregation in mind. For example, LDR_10 stated,
"...but he leads from a place of encouraging and not his own interests but the interests and well-being of the
church and the congregation even when someone doesn't see it..." Research participants also felt the current
pastor did not hesitate to jump in and help when needed, and was transparent. LDR_12 stated, "As far as
leadership today and currently, I think we have a leadership team that has the pulse of the church. More
engaging, open, honest, and transparent. " LDR_03 stated,

But now that we have our new pastor, I believe his vision is spot on with the Word, and he's leading us in the right direction. Not only by his words, but also by doing it. His rubber meets the road, you know what I'm saying? We actually see it in his life, not just, do as I say, not as I do, type guy.

As shown by the statements above, research participants felt the current pastor's display of transformational and servant leadership styles contributed to membership increase following the transition of the previous pastor to the current pastor in 2016. Administrative church documentation also supported the view of research participants, as seen by an increase in membership average from 130 to 240 average attendees per week in 2016. This increase resulted in an additional 107 members attending services on average per week at Century Baptist Church.

Theme 4: Leadership Styles/Traits That Contribute to Church Membership Growth

The fourth theme appeared from interview and questionnaire data and contributed to answering RQ3. Research participants identified vision, accountability, and leadership style knowledge as catalysts for church membership growth. Thirty-six (36%) percent of research participants revealed vision, in connection with a transformational leadership style, as vital to membership growth at Century Baptist Church. This data described the need for a vision to give the congregation the direction needed to accomplish the objectives of the church, as succinctly stated by LDR_11, "Here's the vision, here's the plan, here's the model, here's the structure, that's it." Without a vision, chaos would soon follow. All research participants also associated accountability with transformational leadership, and as having been vital to church growth. The data revealed that accountable leaders were leaders who led by inspiration, encouragement, and by example, as shown by LDR_07, who stated, "…when you have a dynamic on-fire discipleship like Jesus that gives us an example with the disciples and training, there's accountability…". The research data also revealed accountable leaders were transparent leaders.

Interview participants also revealed knowledge of leadership style was an important contributor to membership growth at Century Baptist Church. This data revealed that by knowing one's leadership style and having the knowledge to apply it the appropriate situation was key to membership growth. LDR_11 stated, "So as long as the various leadership styles can come together for the common goal of doing what the Bible says, I think we're fine because we need the diversity of people and the diversity of leadership." Interview participants further revealed the importance of using and valuing all leadership styles to achieve the overall goals of the church, as shown by LDR_04, who stated,

One of the things we are doing in the church now, leadership style, there will be no benchwarmers. There will be no spectators. I need you in the game, but the word I need you…it hits the heart differently than me saying, "I'd like you to join this ministry...I want to be able to say, "I need you,"…as humans, we want to be needed.

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussions of Findings

The results of this research study led to the presentation of four themes. The first theme was membership impact due to the former pastor's leadership style. Interview data and administrative church documentation revealed that research participants felt the former pastor's leadership styles of laissez-faire and transactional contributed to membership decline. Alloubani et al. (2019) supported interview and questionnaire data regarding the negative impacts of laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire leadership was described as a leadership style where employees were given the freedom to work independently due to the absence of their leader. Laissez-faire leaders were also described as intentionally being absent, while sometimes avoiding their leadership responsibilities. Luciano and Barac (2018) further described Laissez-faire as *non-leadership*.

On the contrary, Yang (2015) described laissez-faire leadership as a level of non-involvement (not absence) by a leader that encouraged independent thought and innovation. Followers were encouraged to view laissez-faire leaders' non-involvement as a strategic choice, based on the needs, desires, and capabilities of followers. Interview and questionnaire data described transactional leadership as a contributor to membership decline due to the presence of a rewards and punishment system. The data revealed leaders felt the rewards and punishment system was used to ensure minimum accountability for the former pastor. Contrary to this viewpoint, Passakonjaras and Hartijasti (2020) described the contingent reward system often associated with transactional leadership as a method of positive reinforcement to ensure organizational goals and objectives were achieved. Administrative church documentation also revealed a significant decrease in membership under the leadership of the former pastor, further supporting the perception of a membership decrease during the period in which the former pastor served as pastor.

The second theme was leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership decline. Interview and questionnaire data revealed a lack of accountability, associated with the laissez-faire leadership style, as the primary leadership trait that contributed to membership decline. Leaders felt that accountability was often transferred from the former pastor to the leaders. As a result, they felt many important decisions, which should have been made by the former pastor were often delegated to leaders, which left the former pastor free to operate *off the radar*, with little or no accountability. While data from this research study described the responsibility of decision-making as a contributor to membership decline, the literature described the responsibility of decision-making on leaders as a positive element of laissez-faire leadership because this level of responsibility and accountability encouraged independent and creative thinking among leaders (Khan & Saleem, 2021).

Interview and questionnaire data also revealed change, a trait often associated with transformational leadership, as a trait associated with membership decline at Century Baptist Church. Research data revealed that some leaders felt that change was implemented too fast. For example, under the leadership of the current pastor, physical changes were quickly implemented such as church upgrades, e.g., new carpet/color, rearranging of the sanctuary, and purging of furniture from previous years. Some members, specifically the older members who were not very comfortable with change, left due to their inability to accept change. While change in association with transformational leadership was described as a negative leadership trait, literature described change as a positive trait because change gives organizations the ability to meet the new demands in society (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019; Brown & Nwagbara, 2021).

The third theme was membership impact due to the current pastor's leadership style. Interview data and administrative church documentation revealed that research participants felt the current pastor's demonstration of a transformational and servant leadership style contributed to the membership increase. Interview data revealed the current pastor's focus on providing a clear vision for the church contributed to membership increase. The current pastor was very intentional in collaborating with leaders to ensure they understood the vision, supported the vision, and were able to cascade the vision down to members in their ministry areas. The pastor also led in a manner that encouraged transparency and trust. The current pastor's focus on vision setting and collaboration aligned with Murari and Mukherjee (2021) views on the positive impacts of transformational leadership. Murari and Mukherjee (2021) described these positive traits exhibited by the current pastor as authentic transformational leadership.

The current pastor's display of servant leadership also contributed to membership growth at Century Baptist Church. All leaders described servant leadership as a dominant leadership style of the current pastor. These leaders felt the current pastor led by example, was humble and transparent, always willing to *get his hands dirty*, and genuinely cared about the well-being of his congregants. This leadership further described the current pastor's display of servant leadership aligned with the servant leadership model demonstrated by Jesus Christ (du Plessis & Nkambule, 2020; Thomas, 2018). Administrative church documentation also reviewed a significant increase in membership following the transition from the former pastor to the current pastor, further supporting the perception of a membership increase during the period in which the current pastor transitioned into his role as pastor.

The fourth theme was leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership growth. Interview and questionnaire data revealed research participants felt that vision, accountability, and leadership style

knowledge contributed to church membership growth. Vision and accountability were traits often associated with transformational leadership. The interview and questionnaire data revealed vision was critical and without vision, the church could not effectively serve its congregants or its community. Leaders further felt with the establishment of an effective vision came the current pastor's display of accountability to God, its leaders, laypersons, and community. Literature supported the findings of the research data by also revealing the importance of vision in reaching the goals of an organization (Hsu & Chang, 2021). Literature also revealed accountability as a characteristic of effective leadership (Melo et al., 2019).

Interview and questionnaire data also revealed leadership style knowledge contributed to church membership growth. Several leaders felt that the leadership's participation in various leadership conferences and study of leadership materials contributed to membership increase because this knowledge allowed leaders to not only understand their leadership styles but also to understand the leadership styles of others in the congregation. This understanding not only gave them a greater appreciation for the leadership strengths of others but also gave them the ability to identify which leadership styles may be most effective in a given situation (Evangelides & Karfakis, 2019). It was also important to note that interview and questionnaire data also revealed a lack of consistency in leadership style training and development.

Recommendations

Based on the research questions and the results, this section provided recommendations on how leaders and practitioners might mitigate the problem underlying this study. Recommendations included the implementation of a Leadership Style Engagement Program (LSEP) to address the results identified in this research study. To address Theme 1: Membership impact due to the former pastor's leadership style, the USC's Leadership Style Self-Assessment could also be used to assist leaders in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of laissez-faire and transactional leaders. This balanced view could give leaders to ability to maximize the benefits and mitigate the challenges of these leadership styles.
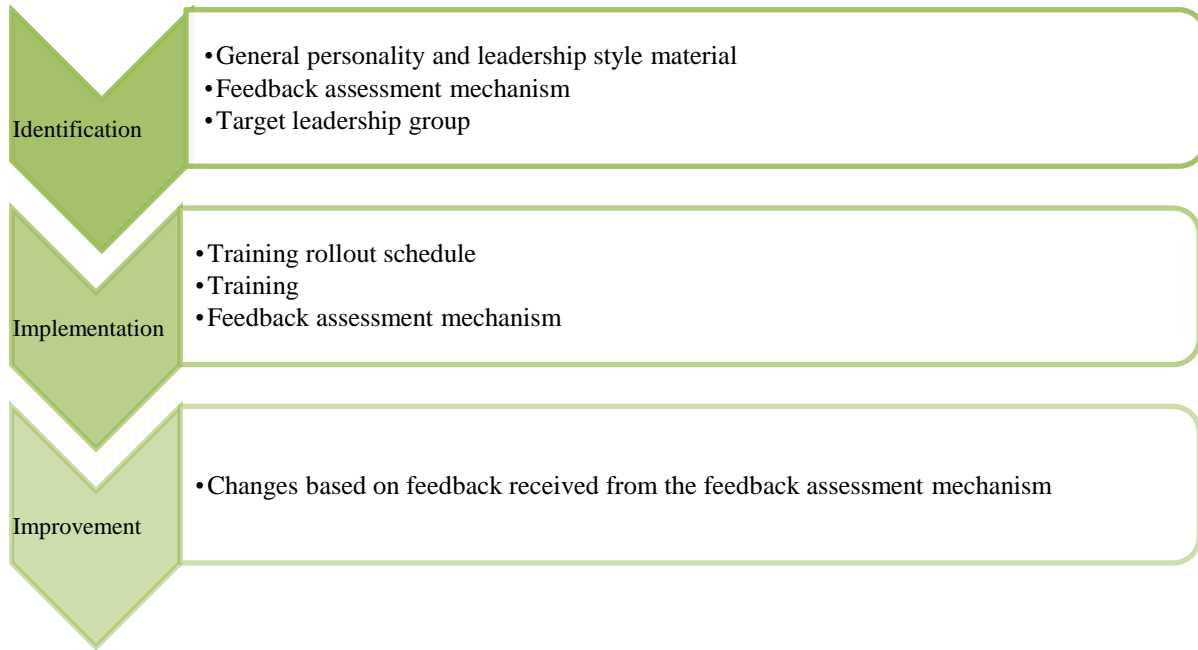
To address Theme 2: Leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership decline, the implementation of crucial accountability training was recommended. Patterson et al. (2013) crucial accountability training material would be recommended because this material focuses on tools for resolving violated expectations, broken commitments, and bad behavior. The use of crucial accountability training materials would provide a foundation for common language that leaders could use and understand to address accountability concerns using a less offensive approach. Most importantly, a crucial accountability training curriculum would help to address the issue of church membership decline due to a perceived lack of accountability by leadership.

To address Theme 3: Membership impact due to the current pastor's leadership style, included a recommendation to implement servant and transformational leadership specific training. The Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) would be an example of an assessment tool that could be used to provide insight into the characteristics of a servant leader. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) would be an example of an assessment tool that could be used to provide insight into the characteristics of a transformational leader. The use of these assessment tools would provide leaders with a deeper understanding of the characteristics of servant and transformational leaders. These assessment tools would also give leaders more insight into those leadership styles they perceived as contributing to membership growth at Century Baptist Church.

To address Theme 4: Leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership growth, the implementation of general leadership training was recommended. This training curriculum would include leadership materials that would first focus on discovering the personality of the leader, such as the Myers-Briggs personality test. The training curriculum would then focus on assessing the individual leadership style of a leader. The USC's Leadership Style Self-Assessment could also be used to assist leaders in identifying their leadership style. The implementation of a general leadership training curriculum would assist leaders in establishing foundational leadership style knowledge.

The implementation of the Leadership Style Engagement Program (LSEP) could be implemented in three phases: identification, implementation, and improvement. Figure 1 summarized these phases:

FIGURE 1
LEADERSHIP STYLE ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM (LSEP)

Identification
- General personality and leadership style material
- Feedback assessment mechanism
- Target leadership group

Implementation
- Training rollout schedule
- Training
- Feedback assessment mechanism

Improvement
- Changes based on feedback received from the feedback assessment mechanism

The identification phase of LSEP would include the identification of training materials needed for each study result. The identification phase would also include the identification of a feedback assessment tool, e.g., Menti survey or formal feedback session that would be used to measure the effectiveness of the LSEP. The final step of the identification phase would include the identification of targeted leaders.

The implementation phase of LSEP would include the creation of a leadership training rollout schedule. This training schedule would be created in a logical sequence, e.g., the offering of personality training, followed by general leadership training, and concluding with specific leadership training, e.g., transformational and servant leadership training. A sample schedule is identified in Table 8 below:

TABLE 8
SAMPLE LEADERSHIP TRAINING ROLLOUT SCHEDULE

Tasks	November	December	January	February
Individual Training (Meyers-Briggs)	▓▓▓			
LDR_02				
LDR_03				
General Leadership Training	▓▓▓			
LDR_10				
LDR_11				
USC's Leadership Style Self-Assessment		▓▓▓		
LDR_06				
LDR_07				
Servant Leadership Training			▓▓▓	

Tasks	November	December	January	February
LDR_09				
LDR_12				
Transformational Leadership Training				
LDR_10				
LDR_11				

The rollout schedule in Table 8 identified the implementation task, required resources, and time frame. Following the rollout of the implementation schedule, general, servant and transformational leadership training could be conducted using online assessment tools or via formal training using a professional leadership coach. The implementation stage would also include the implementation of an engagement feedback mechanism or tool, e.g. survey tool or formal feedback session. The third phase of the leadership engagement model included a focus on continuous improvement. This phase would require an analysis of the data received from the engagement feedback mechanism to determine what worked well, what did not work so well, and what areas should be targeted for improvement.

To conclude, the recommendation for this research study aligned with the research design. Table 9 summarized the results of this research study:

TABLE 9
RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Theme/Description	Recommendation
Theme 1: Membership impact due to the former pastor's leadership style	Implementation of Laissez-faire and transactional leadership style specific training, e.g., USC's Leadership Style Self-Assessment
Theme 2: Leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership decline	Implementation of a crucial accountability training curriculum, e.g., Patterson et al. (2013) crucial accountability curriculum
Theme 3: Membership impact due to the current pastor's leadership style	Implementation of servant and transformational leadership specific training, e.g., the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)
Theme 4: Leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership growth would include a recommendation to implement general leadership training.	Implementation of personality and general leadership style training, e.g., the Myers-Briggs personality test and the USC's Leadership Style Self-Assessment

As shown in Table 9, the recommendations in this research study could assist leaders at Century Baptist Church in developing their leadership style knowledge. This increase in knowledge could combat membership decline and contribute to church membership increase at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study used a qualitative descriptive case study to explore the perceptions of church leaders at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan regarding leadership styles and how leadership styles may impact declining membership at Century Baptist Church in Inkster, Michigan. As one recommendation for future research, future researchers might expand the scope of this research study to include a larger sample

size, such as non-leaders to increase the diverse opinions regarding leadership styles and church membership decline and growth, using a qualitative single case study methodology.

A second recommendation would be to expand this research study to include additional Southern Baptist Churches in different cities and states to enhance the generalizability of the research study results. The recommended methodology would be a qualitative multiple case study. As a third recommendation, future researchers might adopt a quantitative methodology and include a larger sample size of participants, such as non-leader participants. The inclusion of a larger sample size might increase diverse opinions regarding church membership decline and growth. The use of a quantitative methodology and a larger sample size might also enhance the generalizability of the research study results.

CONCLUSION

This study used Basses full-range leadership model and Greenleaf's servant leadership model framework to explore the perception of leadership styles and how the application of these leadership styles may influence membership growth at Century Baptist Church. The three sources of data triangulation used in this research study were interviews, questionnaires, and administrative church documentation. A content analysis approach was used to analyze interview, questionnaire, and archival administrative church documentation data. The content analysis resulted in the development of four major themes: Theme 1: Membership impact due to the former pastor's leadership style, which contributed to the answering RQ1 and RQ2; Theme 2: Leadership style/traits that contribute to church membership decline, which contributed the answering of RQ2; Theme 3: Membership impact due to the current pastor's leadership style, which contributed to answering RQ3; and Theme 4: Leadership styles/traits that contributed to church membership growth, which contributed to answering RQ3. The establishment of the study's results contributed to the development of a leadership style engagement program (LSEP) model.

This qualitative descriptive case study added to the leadership body of knowledge in church leadership by identifying leadership styles and traits that contributed to membership decline and growth at Century Baptist Church. No literature existed before this study that focused specifically on a Southern Baptist Church. These research study findings, coupled with the recommended leadership engagement training model could contribute to the overall sustainability of Century Baptist Church, a church that works every day to provide critical ministry services to its community.

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