

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNSHIP IMPACT

INTERN AND CONGREGANT PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF A UNITED
METHODIST MINISTRY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM IN RURAL MISSOURI

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by

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PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNSHIP IMPACT

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INTERN AND CONGREGANT PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF A
UNITED METHODIST MINISTRY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM IN RURAL
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Your sacrifices on behalf of my learning have been unbelievable, but not unnoticed. I have been blessed by God to have all of you in my life. I love you all.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines a ministry internship program at a rural regional university in Missouri. The study sought to determine the impact of the internship on both interns in the program and on congregants in churches served by the program. Guided by the lens of self-efficacy as identified originally by Bandura (1977), the researcher conducted interviews, focus groups, and examined archival data to ascertain impact.

Completed research helped identify eight areas of impact. The internship allowed for support and transformation of both interns and congregants throughout its duration. Interns were able to gain a realistic understanding of the ministry field. Interns were able to reflect on their practice through differential outcomes. Interns were able to ascertain a potential calling to vocational ministry. Congregants reported an influx of new ideas into their churches. Rural churches were able to stay open. Many interns went on to become young vocational ministers within the United Methodist Church. Both congregants and interns reported the internship allowed them to come closer to God.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION-IN-PRACTICE

Background

The United Methodist Church has long been in decline in terms of the number of people in attendance at services on any given Sunday, while the average age of those people who do attend services regularly has also risen steadily over the last half-century (Hahn, 2016; Hassinger & Holik, 1970; Green, 2008). In the researcher's experience in working and preaching as a lay minister at multiple rural churches in Missouri, many churches are now small enough that they can no longer financially support a full-time clergy presence, although the congregants want a ministerial presence.

These trends in the general population of the United Methodist Church have also been recognized among those clergy persons who lead congregations. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) found that of the approximately 15,000 people ordained as elders in the United Methodist Church as of 2015, only about 6.5 percent were aged 35 or younger. Conversely, elders between the ages of 55 and 72 comprised 55 percent of the group's total number -- the highest percentage in the recorded history of the United Methodist Church. In 1985, over 3200 people under the age of 35 were ordained as United Methodist elders. By 2015, the number had dropped to slightly less than 1000. The average age of a United Methodist elder in 2015 was 53, the highest average ever. This aging clergy population, combined with a smaller number of younger people who choose to become ordained ministers presents a grand challenge to the United Methodist Church in the realm discussed by Colquitt and George (2011).

The process of becoming a professional clergy person within the United Methodist Church is both long and rigorous. The United Methodist News Service notes the difficulty of becoming a clergy person within the church. “Earning a master of divinity degree typically takes three years for a full-time student and longer for part-time. Ordination candidates then must complete two to three years as provisional members of their conferences before being fully ordained. It can take another eight to 10 years for a pastor to become proficient at the craft” (Hahn, 2013).

The structure of entry into organized ministry is an expression of the gravity and importance of listening to a call from God. It is also often an impediment to discerning that call. Bolman and Deal (2013) alluded to this in their discussion of symbols in organizational culture when they lament that “events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced” (p. 248). In light of the purpose of this study, and what we know about declining numbers of clergy and church numbers, this becomes a very important statement. The hurdles one has to overcome to become a member of the clergy often preclude the worthy undertaking of becoming ordained.

A major question that arises from the long and arduous process of becoming a clergy person is how does one test a call to ministry before embarking on a full course of study in seminary? For some, there is no testing of the waters. They simply jump in and completely immerse themselves in the seminary experience. Many times this works out for the best, and a successful candidate emerges, ready for ordination into ministry. Other times, this process of full immersion backfires, and seminarians realize their mistake too late, having wasted much in the way of money and time because their call lay

elsewhere. Alexander Shaia spoke of his disastrous time in seminary, saying that, although he felt God called him in some way, he nonetheless felt constrained and disappointed by his seminary experience before he ultimately dropped out (Bell, 2016).

Feeling they may be called to serve God, but fearful of having an experience like Shaia's, some people struggle with their potential call for years, unsure of whether to pursue ministry as a vocation. One such person was Rev. Mark Whitley, who spent much of his adult life employed by the Red Cross before deciding to pursue vocational ministry at age 43. An article published by the United Methodist News Service explains that "before becoming a pastor despite his career advances, [Whitley] always felt a 'gnawing sense of emptiness'" (Hahn, 2013). Ultimately, Whitley was ordained as an elder in the United Methodist Church in 2011 at the age of 53. One wonders if there had been a way to confront this sense of emptiness and explore his call at an earlier age in a relatively low-pressure environment, if Whitley would have jumped at the chance.

One way this kind of early exploration could occur is through the purposeful practice of ministry by young people during their college-age years in a ministerial internship program. Some specific examples of ministry internship programs exist in Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Carolina (Solomon, 2015). Another specific example of a ministry internship program exists in New York (Sturgis & Graham, 2015). Overall, however, such programs are scarce, as is data on the effectiveness of these programs.

Coco (2000) praises internships as being mutually beneficial for both sponsors and interns. Lundborg (2002) discusses a specific church internship in rural Minnesota. Many benefits were recognized from the program, for both interns and churches served.

Interestingly, congregations served by ministerial interns often came to see those interns as a group to whom they could minister as a teaching church. “Could it be that the presence of a curious, eager, pastoral intern evokes leadership skills from the congregation? Yes” (Lundborg, 2002, p. 16). College-age ministerial interns also recognized the value of these types of internships in helping determine calls to vocational ministry. Said one intern: “As a 20-something and a millennial, I think one of the best things the church can do is create chances for young potential clergy to see what ministry looks like up close, to ask questions and to experience it firsthand” (Sturgis & Graham, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The problem studied in this dissertation is as follows: There is a lack of information about intern and congregant perceptions of the impact of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri. This lack of information exists in areas related both to practice and literature.

Problem of Practice

Part of the problem in terms of ministry internship programs is a problem of practice. As of today, there are few ways for college-age people to explore their call to vocational ministry in an internship program before actually enrolling in seminary. For example, between 2000 and 2007 the Lilly Endowment awarded over \$200 million in grant funding to 88 colleges and universities across the United States to establish vocational exploration programs (Gallagher, 2007). While many of these college and universities used the grant money to establish programs that helped undergraduates

discern their vocational calling, few established actual internship programs where those students could practice within local churches (Gallagher, 2007).

Beginning in 2012, the Lilly Endowment funded specific grants for a Campus Ministry Theological Exploration of Vocation Initiative. The initiative awarded 104 grants to campus ministries across the United States, but grants were discontinued after 2015 (Campus Ministry Theological Exploration of Vocation Initiative). At times, even when internship programs were established by Lilly initiatives, the programs were designed for those already enrolled in seminary. This particular internship arrangement is too late to help undergraduate students in discerning their calls to ministry prior to becoming seminarians.

For some, even without a proper internship program, the call to vocational ministry might become a reality. For many without a way to properly discern that call, however, seminary might be a waste of time and money. In many cases, candidates enroll in seminary unprepared for what is to follow. Put succinctly, “When candidates come in, they can be clueless about our system,” [Rev. Carol] Bruse said. “They come in and spend their life savings on seminary, and they don't want to leave their hometown” (Hahn, 2013). Seminaries, too, feel this problem of practice. At times, these seminaries expend precious resources educating those whose ultimate call might be elsewhere. As one master’s of divinity student declared: “Without that call and the anointing for ministry, seminary doesn’t do you a lick of good” (Witham, 2005, p. 14).

Existing Gap in the Literature

Another facet to this problem in ministry internships is a gap in existing literature. Some internship programs for young people seeking to verify a call to vocational

ministry do exist, but little is known about the overall effectiveness of these programs. Both Ehlers (2004) and Davis (2005) conducted evaluations of specific college ministry internship programs. Aside from these two studies, however, little scholarly knowledge exists. This lack of knowledge concerns how effective such internships are in leading young people into full-time ministry, and also about whether these internship programs adequately serve the various needs of church congregations in the process (Sturgis & Graham, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in research that exists in the intern and congregant perceptions of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a rural regional public university in Missouri. Potential benefits of this study include: expanding the knowledge base about whether the program helps interns discern a call into ministry, while providing information to gauge the program's impact. The study sought to determine whether the program helped interns discern their call into ministry, and also if members of congregations of churches served by the ministry internship program felt the program was effective in meeting their individual and church needs. Through this work, the researcher sought to find out if such programs can be useful on-ramps that help infuse young people into ministry, thus potentially slowing down the overall clergy aging process.

Research Questions

This study revolves around a grand tour research question that addressed program effectiveness from the perspectives of those who have participated in the program as interns, and also those people in church congregations who have been served by the

intern program. The grand-tour question is: What are the intern and congregant perceptions about the United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri? Individual questions asked to interns and congregants are listed below.

INTERN QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience in the ministry internship program. What is your first memory of it?
2. When you first began the program, how confident were you in your ability to be successful as a minister in a church setting?
3. How has your experience in the program impacted your perception of whether or not you can be a successful minister in a church setting?
4. How has the internship program impacted your idea of calling?
5. What other comments might you have regarding the meaning of the ministry internship program?
6. How has this program brought you closer to God?

CONGREGANT QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience with the ministry internship program. What is your first memory of it?
2. Describe your impressions of interns as they began their time with you.
3. Please describe the changes you have seen in interns as they have worked with you.
4. How do you feel interns have impacted your church?

5. What other comments might you have regarding the meaning of ministry internship program?

6. How has this program brought you closer to God?

Theoretical Framework

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative researchers use theoretical frameworks in multiple ways. Theoretical frameworks can be used to address why people act in a certain way, or employed as a ready-made way to gather and test data for a particular hypothesis. Overall, theoretical frameworks “guide the researchers as to what issues are important to examine . . . and the people who need to be studied” (p. 64).

Self-Efficacy

The theoretical framework of this study is self-efficacy as described by Bandura (1977). According to the American Psychological Association, self-efficacy is an “individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments” (American Psychological Association, 2018). In other words, if a person believes he or she has a chance to succeed at a given task, then that person is more likely to succeed than a person who does not believe he or she will be able to accomplish the task.

Cherry (2017) noted that those people who have a higher sense of self-efficacy are more committed and interested in tasks they pursue and more willing to accept challenges in tasks that relate to their interests. Those with a higher sense of self-efficacy are also better able to deal with failures and setbacks concerning tasks that relate to their interests. Cherry (2017) also noted that those people with a lower sense of self-efficacy

approach tasks with less confidence in successful outcomes and, in fact, often avoid challenging tasks altogether.

Self-Efficacy in Relation to this Study

The three foundational pillars of this study, internships, Methodist church staffing, and campus ministry, were filtered through the self-efficacy lens Bandura provides. Bandura (1977) posits that “successful performance is replacing symbolically based experiences as the principle vehicle of change” (p. 191). For the purposes of this study, the previous quote represents exploring a call to vocational ministry through actually doing some aspects of ministry prior to enrolling full-time in a seminary program. One can think about being a full-time minister. One can read about being a full-time minister. One can listen to others speak about being a full-time minister. According to Bandura, there is, however, no substitute for actual experience in determining for oneself what is needed for success in a particular endeavor. Citing Delaney (1968), Bandura says that “by observing the differential effects of their own actions, individuals discern which responses are appropriate in which settings and behave accordingly” (Bandura, 1977, p. 192). The practice of doing ministry as an intern would provide what Bandura called differential outcomes. Outcomes would teach interns the correct set of behaviors needed to function within the profession. In his words:

Viewed from the cognitive framework, learning from differential outcomes becomes a special case of observational learning. In this mode of conveying response information, the conception of the appropriate behavior is gradually constructed from observing the effects of one’s actions rather than the examples provided by others (Bandura, 1977, p. 192).

Callanan and Benzing (2006) took this idea a bit further, helping to form the first pillar of this study, when they noted that one of the foremost measures of “self- and environmental-exploration” is the internship. Internships are “designed to help students develop an accurate self-concept, gain a realistic understanding of various career fields and organizational environments, and allow a check for fit between individual characteristics and the demands of different jobs” (pp. 82-83). Educational pioneer John Dewey recognized the value of actual experience in educational opportunities when he said “what [one] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (quoted in Merriam and Bierema, 2014, p. 105). Dewey’s contemporary, Eduard Lindeman, recognized the value of experience as well, calling it “the resource of highest value in adult education” (quoted in Merriam and Bierema, 2014, p. 105). In a nutshell, this is exploring one’s call to ministry by doing many of the things those called to full-time vocational ministry ought to do.

A second pillar of this study eyed the history of staffing in the United Methodist Church and its predecessors. Gooch (2000), Harmon (1977), and Tucker (1966) all noted that, while Methodism today employs professional clergy from traditional routes such as seminaries, historically there has often been a significant lay presence within church leadership. In addition, many times within the historical record, ordained Methodist clergy members came to their preaching careers via alternative methods. This tradition within Methodism provides precedent and context for the intern program studied in this dissertation.

The third pillar of this study centered on campus ministry and how it might be used as a vehicle to help students determine if full-time ministry is an appropriate vocational choice. Looking over the church landscape in the 1970s and 1980s, Shockley (1989) was prescient when he stated:

Some very enterprising campus ministry unit might develop an internship program in which students are assigned to work with persons who are strong role models for Christian vocation. . . . The potential for building ties with local churches in this way would be another attractive feature of this topic. The program possibilities . . . are many, and the need is demonstrably great (p. 118).

In conducting earlier research on the same campus ministry-based internship program evaluated in this study, Ehlers (2004) found that those who participated in earlier iterations of the program were able to clarify and improve skills and interests while effectively discerning whether they were truly called to ministry. This earlier study focused mainly on the program's impact on interns, and did not fully evaluate how it affected local church congregations served by interns in the program. The desire to explore the dual impact effect on both interns and congregants was the major reason for undertaking this study. This desire influenced the design of the study, as discussed in the next section.

Design of the Study

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. Bennett and Jessani (2011) claim that “qualitative data is needed to determine the interests, behavior, intentions, agenda, inter-relations, and influence of different actors in a particular issue” (p. 84). With this in

mind, research was conducted in a systematic way, using guidelines espoused in Merriam and Tisdell (2016) in an attempt to gather information from all of the internship program's stakeholder groups. The researcher adopted a social constructivist worldview for this project. One goal of this worldview, as explained in Creswell (2014), is that "the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 8). The research design for this study is a bounded case study as described in Merriam and Tisdale (2016), and is evaluative in nature, as data was collected to determine the internship program's "worth or value" (p. 4). Creswell (2014) says that "case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation" (p. 14). According to Rossi, Lipsi, and Freeman (2004), program evaluations study, appraise, and offer improvements for programs in the way such programs are "conceptualized and implemented, the outcomes they achieve, and their efficiency (p. 3). Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015) say stakeholders desire to understand the value of programs they are part of and that they support. The researcher conducted data collection and analysis. The researcher collected data via archival records of an evaluation of the intern program from the district superintendent's office, interviews with current and former interns, and focus groups made up of congregants, in an effort to triangulate any findings (Fink, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Setting

The ministerial internship program offered by a campus ministry at a regional rural university, located in Missouri, was selected for this study. Beginning in 2001, the Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church directed the college ministry to serve two rural churches. Today, that number has grown to four. The college

ministry uses interns to help serve these churches. For the purposes of this study, those churches will be referred to as UMC A, UMC B, UMC C, and UMC D. All four churches are located in rural Missouri. Three of the churches bear the names of the small towns in which they are located. The exception is UMC A, which is not located in any town. Rather, the church is a lone structure on a stretch of rock road, in extreme rural Missouri.

Participants

Participants in the study were ministry interns who were involved with the program, as well as several past ministry interns the researcher was able to successfully contact via email or face-to-face interview. Members of the congregations of each of the four churches served by the ministerial internship program were also asked to participate in the study. All of the members of the congregations that participated in the study were white, and they all lived in rural settings, either in small towns with less than 500 residents, or on farms surrounding those towns. The youngest congregant who participated in the study was in her mid-fifties. Two congregants who participated in the study were in their nineties. The majority of congregants who participated in the study were in their seventies or eighties.

All interns who participated in this study were white, and though their practice of ministry for the program was in a rural setting, the majority of interns grew up in suburban settings. Intern ages ranged from 21 to 26. Three interns were actively involved in the program at the time of their interviews, while two had graduated. Four interns were female. One was male.

Data Collection Tools

In a discussion on data collection, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) cite Dey (1993) when they note that data in a qualitative sense is not simply “waiting [for] collection, like so many rubbish bags on the pavement.” Instead, data must be “noticed by the researcher and treated as data for the purposes of . . . research” (p. 106). The researcher utilized archival records from the district superintendent’s office, focus groups made up of congregants, and interviews with current and former interns to gather data for this study. The researcher used three different methods of data collection to achieve triangulation, as discussed by Creswell (2014), in order to establish themes “based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants” (p. 201). This convergence of sources helped ensure validity of findings. The researcher sought interviews with as many current and former interns as were needed to achieve saturation. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), saturation is reached when the researcher begins “hearing the same responses to [his or her] interview questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations; no new insights are forthcoming” (p. 101). For interviews and focus groups, the researcher sought to do purposeful sampling, specifically maximum variation sampling, as this technique provided “the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies (Seidman, 2013, p. 56).

The researcher sought focus groups made up of members of church congregations. Focus groups had between five and eight members, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2015). The exception to this came during a focus group with congregants from UMC A. Three people were involved in this focus group, though this

number represented nearly 40 percent of the church's regular congregation of eight members.

Archival data consisted of written answers to questions concerning the intern program solicited by the district superintendent during the fall of 2017. These questions were part of an evaluation of the program conducted by the district superintendent, independent from this study. Both interns and congregants from each church served by the program participated in the evaluative discussions and wrote answers to questions. The documents created during this evaluation were compiled and filed in the district office.

Data Analysis

Focus group interviews and individual interviews were recorded and transcribed using the online transcription service www.rev.com. Coding of the resulting transcripts and earlier archival data in the method espoused by Creswell (2014) was used to discern emerging themes. Specifically, the researcher used Tesch's (1990) eight steps in the coding process (cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 198) during analysis of individual interviews and focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2015) refer to this as the classic analysis strategy. "It is low-tech. It isn't elegant or sophisticated looking, but it works" (p. 151). After the researcher identified themes, he compiled a document that matched numerous quotes from interns and congregants to each theme. Per the suggestion of Seidman (2013), the researcher avoided any analysis until all gathering of records, interviews, and focus groups were completed (p. 116).

Limitations

The researcher recognizes several limitations to this study. First, the researcher serves as director of the campus ministry that offers the internship, and thus recognizes the potential of bias based on his culture, background, and history (Creswell, 2014). Second, the intern program, and the churches themselves, were small enough that the researcher had to navigate the problem of easy access, as outlined by Seidman (2013). In addition, because interns and congregants had personal relationships with the researcher, they might not have been completely honest in sharing any negative perceptions they had of the intern program. Finally, in some cases, there was an inability to track individuals who might have been beneficial to the study because of graduation, death, or various other methods of attrition over time.

Delimitations

The researcher conducted individual interviews and focus groups among congregants only within the boundaries of the four churches served by the campus ministry intern program. Interns interviewed for the study served the four churches only during or after 2001, the year the intern program began. The intern program draws only from people connected to a rural, regional public university in Missouri. There is an inability to track every person connected with this study over time because of intern graduation and the movement of congregants from the beginning of the intern program until now. Additionally, many potential study participants passed due to natural causes and were thus unable to take part in the study.

Assumptions

The researcher assumes the complete honesty of those who answer interview and focus group questions. He recognizes, however, that prior relationships exist between the researcher and many interns and congregants. Because of this, there might be temptation on their part to answer questions based on how they think the researcher wants them to answer, rather than based on actual truth.

Definitions of Key Terms

Bishop. The senior clergy person in a Methodist annual conference. He or she is the only one in the conference who can ordain people into ministry (“Frequently asked questions about the Council of Bishops”, 2018).

Call. How God uses who he has made us to be in the lives of people (Bomar, 2010, p. 160).

Congregant. Any member of a congregation of the four churches served by the intern program at a regional, rural public university in Missouri.

District. A governing unit that is subordinate to the annual conference in the United Methodist Church. The Missouri Annual Conference encompasses multiple districts. Each district encompasses multiple churches (“Districts,” 2018).

District Superintendent. The senior clergy person within a district in the United Methodist Church (“Districts,” 2018).

Intern. Any person who has served in the intern program at a regional, rural public university in Missouri in order to explore his or her calling into vocational ministry.

Lay Person. A member of a church or congregation who is not ordained.

Missouri Annual Conference. The governing body of the United Methodist Church in Missouri.

Vocational Ministry. Any work involving pastoral care or the espousing of religion where the minister receives housing or other support or compensation.

Significance of the Study

Scholarship

There are few ministerial internship programs available to provide experience in ministry for undergraduate students prior to their enrollment in seminary in order to help those students discern their calls into vocational ministry. Additionally, for the few undergraduate ministry internship programs that do exist, there is a lack of information available concerning the effectiveness of those programs in funneling younger people into full-time vocational ministry. There is also a lack of information concerning whether or not those internships are effective in meeting the ministerial needs, such as providing weekly church services and faith development, of churches they serve. This comparative lack of research is one reason for the significance of this study.

Practice

A second reason for the significance of this study is rooted in the idea that it seeks to provide data for one particular program that, through its practice, attempts to fill both of those niches. If the ministry internship program offered through a college ministry at a regional university in Missouri proves its worth by placing interns into vocational ministry, and also provides effective ministry in churches where ministry might not otherwise be taking place, there would be value for the United Methodist Church in further supporting the program, and even potentially replicating it in other places. In

addition, as problems and challenges in the internship are revealed through answers offered in archival data, focus groups, or individual interviews, addressing those problems will make the internship program run more effectively, thus providing better service to congregations and better formative opportunities for interns to discern their vocational calls into ministry.

Summary

The United Methodist Church is in decline on several fronts, perhaps most notably in congregation size and the rapid aging of its clergy (Hahn, 2016; Hassinger & Holik, 1970; Green, 2008). Many young people feel called to ministry, but there are few ways to explore that call in depth without actually committing oneself to a long and costly seminary program (Ehlers, 2004; Hahn, 2013). Ministerial internships such as the one offered through a college ministry at a regional university in Missouri, offer younger people a chance to explore the calling of vocational ministry in a no-risk environment. At the same time, new avenues of ministry are opened for congregations as their places of worship become teaching churches (Shockley, 1989; Lundborg, 2002). Bandura (1977) contends that reflecting on one's own actions is a tremendously effective learning tool. Callanan and Benzing (2006) and Coco (2000) posit that perhaps the best way to reflect on one's actions in terms of how they affect performance is with an internship. More information is needed to assess the overall effectiveness of ministerial internship programs and their effect on younger people committing their lives to vocational ministry, and the impact(s) ministry internship programs have on the churches themselves. In the next section, the researcher shares and analyzes the setting for the study of this problem in practice.

SECTION TWO
PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Introduction for this Section

The campus ministry and internship program at the heart of this study are closely affiliated with the United Methodist Church. This section serves to offer a brief history of the Methodist movement, and of the campus ministry and internship program. First, the section will focus on the founding of Methodism. Next, it will explore the rise of Methodism in the United States. Then, the section will trace the rise of campus ministry within Methodism, specifically through entities called Wesley foundations. The section will conclude with an organizational and leadership analysis.

History of the Organization

Beginnings

The United Methodist Church has existed only since 1968 (Mead, 1988, p. 170), but Methodism in general marks a long and storied history throughout the world. The movement started on a college campus. Methodism can trace its beginnings to 1729, when John Wesley organized a group of students at Oxford University into what became known as the “Holy Club” (Harmon, 1977, pp. 9-10). These students, which included, among others, John’s brother, Charles, were devout members of the Church of England, and did not intend to found a separate denomination within the overall Christian church. Rather, the group came together to study and hold each other accountable to lead a better Christian life. Members of the group were habitual enough in their meetings and study to see the derisive nickname of “Methodists” foisted upon them by other students of Oxford. Rather than taking offense, John Wesley seems to have instead latched on rather quickly

to the name, referring often to those who practiced religion like him as “the people called Methodists” (Harmon, 1977, p. 9).

The movement had gone off-campus by 1739, when John Wesley, by now an Anglican priest, founded the first Methodist society in London, England. In London, and all across England, these groups of Methodists grew in size and scope, always within the fold of the Church of England, though Wesley ran afoul of his mother church in many ways. Disagreements between Wesley and other clergy within the Anglican Church developed when Wesley (and other Methodists) dared to preach out of doors, beyond the walls of church buildings. Wesley also preached at locations where, as other Anglican clergy complained, he was not licensed to do so. To this charge, Wesley replied pointedly that he felt that the whole world was his parish (Harmon, 1977, pp. 13-14).

Methodism in America

Bolstered by this “preach anywhere” mentality, Methodism also began to find a foothold in the British colonies in America. The first permanent Methodist chapel in America was built in New York City, in 1768. John Wesley sent the first circuit riders to the colonies in 1769. Francis Asbury, the most influential early Methodist presence in America, arrived at Wesley’s behest in 1771 (Harmon, 1977, pp. 15-16).

It was in America that Methodists finally officially separated themselves from the Church of England. The first Methodist conference in America was held in 1773, representing over 1100 people who claimed the movement as their own. By 1776, the year American colonists declared independence, nearly 7000 Americans called themselves Methodists (Mead, 1988, p. 161). Nearly all of the movement’s clergy were pro-British, however, and many of them fled back to England as the war began. Despite

this, Methodism continued to grow during the American Revolution. By the end of the war, there were approximately 14,000 Methodists spread across the newly minted United States of America. Wesley realized now that the American movement was a separate entity from the Church of England, and so he ordained new ministers specifically for service in the United States. He also appointed the first Methodist bishops (initially called superintendents) in America in the persons of Asbury and Thomas Coke. Under the guidance of these two men, the Methodist Episcopal Church was officially organized in Baltimore, Maryland, in December of 1784 (Mead, 1988, p. 161).

Division

As slavery divided the United States throughout the first half of the 19th century, this split was also reflected in Methodism. In 1844, the General Conference, a quadrennial meeting representing the entire Methodist Episcopal Church, voted to ask that a slave-owning bishop from Georgia not exercise the duties of his office until he freed his slaves. Conference delegates from the South were angered to such an extent that they organized their own church. Beginning in 1845, the main branch of Methodism in the United States split into two churches – the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Mead, 1988, p 162). This split would last for nearly a century before there would again be one main Methodist church (Harmon, 1977, p. 20).

Reunification

In 1939, three separate churches within Methodism came back together to form a single church once again. The Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, which had split from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1830, came together to form a church that was called, simply, the

Methodist Church (Mead, 1988, p. 162, and Harmon, 1977, p. 20). The idea of reunification had floated in the ether since the time of the First World War. Preliminary talks between the churches were initiated as early as 1916, but had stalled by 1919, predominantly over the question of racial conflict and its relation to Christianity (Davis, 2017, p. 1). The 1939 merger coalesced around the ideas that had formed a generation earlier, and placed all the white churches of the merging denominations into Annual Conferences based on geographic location. The problem of race was “solved” this time by segregating black Methodist churches into their own massive jurisdiction, called the Central Jurisdiction (Davis, 2017, p. 2). This Central Jurisdiction lasted until another merger brought about the United Methodist Church (White, 2008).

United Methodist Church

On April 23, 1968, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church combined to form the United Methodist Church (Harmon, 1977, pp. 21-22, and Mead, 1988, p. 170). This unification had been a long time coming, as both churches had always been historically aware of their common heritage with one another. Each church viewed John Wesley as its founder. Preachers in each church filled pulpits for the other. In some places this preacher sharing was made all the easier because congregations actually shared church buildings as well. Both churches also maintained a very similar *Book of discipline* (Mead, 1988, p. 170). No significant doctrinal changes were made as a result of the merger, nor was there any significant restructuring of church government, as each church accepted the other’s annual conferences and bishops (Mead, 1988, p. 171).

Methodism in Missouri

As the United States expanded west across the continent during the 18th and 19th centuries, so too did Methodism. John Clark preached the first Methodist sermon in what is now Missouri in 1798, while the Spanish flag still flew over the territory then known collectively as Louisiana. Clark followed Wesley's open-air preaching model, addressing his congregants from a boat anchored in a creek near present-day Herculaneum, Missouri (Tucker, 1966, p. 14). John Travis was the first Methodist preacher specifically appointed to Missouri. His appointment came in 1806, after the American purchase of the Louisiana Territory. Travis was in charge of piecing together what came to be known as the Missouri Circuit, and many of the earliest Methodist churches in Missouri came about because of his organizational ability (Tucker, 1966, p. 20).

William McKendree was the first American-born Methodist bishop. His jurisdiction included the territory of Missouri upon his election to the episcopacy, in 1808, and he oversaw great expansion of Methodism within the territory as it moved onto statehood (Tucker, 1966, p. 20). The Missouri Conference was formed in 1816, made up of Illinois, Arkansas, and Missouri. In Missouri, McKendree appointed eight preachers, who were expected to traverse the entire territory as circuit riders – itinerating from church to church within their assigned circuit over the course of weeks or months, starting again when all churches had been reached (Gooch, 2000, 8-9). Life as a circuit-riding preacher was tough. Preachers often collected as little as one-fourth of their yearly salary of 80 dollars. With this sum, they were expected to provide their own horse, clothes, equipment, and shelter. Circuits could be anywhere from 200 to 600 miles around, and preachers were expected to make the rounds in anywhere from two to six

weeks (Gooch, 2000, p. 9). Despite the rough life afforded to preachers, it was in these circuits that Methodism found life in Missouri and, indeed the entire western edge of the fledgling nation. As Gooch (2000) states: “It is not an exaggeration to say that the circuit riders transformed the American frontier, winning people to Christ, and, in the process, making the Methodist Church the largest and strongest denomination in America” (p. 11).

Methodism and College Ministry

As was stated earlier, Methodism as a movement had its birth on a college campus during the first half of the 18th century. As Methodism gained a foothold in the United States throughout the first half of the 19th century, the church began to establish colleges of its own. These denominationally supported institutions of higher learning were a further mark of the influence of Methodism within America (Richey, 2010, p. 2, and Gallaway, 2015, p. 152).

With the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 came the rise of state colleges and universities. The Methodist Church did not financially support these institutions. Nonetheless, many students who attended land grant schools identified as Methodists. Despite some initial resistance, a number of people within the Methodist Church felt it was their duty to reach out to these students, who they believed were to be among the future leaders of the denomination (Gallaway, 2015, pp. 152-153). Perhaps the first place where this type of outreach occurred was at the University of Illinois.

Founded in 1868, the University of Illinois was one of the original land grant institutions supported under the Morrill Act. Parks Chapel, of Urbana, Illinois, was the closest Methodist church to the university campus. In 1900, Rev. Willard Tobie came to pastor the church. Concerned that their spiritual needs were not being met, Tobie began

to reach out to University of Illinois students and sought to make them part of his congregation. In 1902, realizing he needed a better location with more space to serve the hundreds of students who were now part of his congregation each week, Tobie proposed to the Illinois Annual Conference the prototype idea for what would eventually become the first Methodist campus ministry in a non-Methodist collegiate setting. Importantly, just as the ministry to university students would encompass many from all different parts of Illinois, Tobie's proposal to fund this collegiate ministry asked for financial support from across the entire state (Galloway, 2015, pp. 152-153).

As part of this plan, Parks Chapel gave way to a newer and larger Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1906. In 1907, Rev. Tobie left the pulpit for health reasons. His successor was Rev. James Baker, who reiterated the call for a campus ministry at the university, supported financially by Methodist churches across the entire state of Illinois (Richey, 2010, p 8, and Galloway, 2015, p. 156).

In 1913, discerning that more churches might be willing to support ministry to college students if the ministry did not originate out of one particular church, Rev. Baker pushed for the creation of a separate organization, called the Wesley Foundation. As Galloway (2015) states: "The organization, of course, was named after Methodism's founder, John Wesley, while the term 'foundation' was chosen because they wanted to allow the campus ministry to evolve organically and wished a name with no limiting restrictions" (p. 157). This Wesley Foundation model quickly became the standard way the Methodist church conducted campus ministry across the country (Richey, 2010, p. 8).

The next section provides an organizational and leadership analysis of one particular Methodist campus ministry, located at a regional rural university in Missouri.

Organizational and Leadership Analysis

Background

The campus ministry at a regional rural university in Missouri is affiliated with the United Methodist Church and is intended to be the church's arm for ministry on and around the university campus. The campus ministry has existed at its current location adjacent to the university campus for over 50 years and was active for several years prior to this while headquartered at the local Methodist church. The campus ministry in fact predates both the United Methodist Church (established in 1968 via a merger of two different church organizations with Wesleyan theology) and the school's designation as a university (which came in 1972).

The overall mission of the United Methodist Church is to "make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (*Book of discipline*, 2016, p. 91). The campus ministry shares this mission and, according to the motto emblazoned in the main lobby of the ministry's on-campus building, also seeks to "enable students to become whole persons in their life and faith journeys" while at the university. To that end, the campus ministry offers programming to better help students understand their relationship with God, their relationships with each other, and their role in bringing God's word to the world. This programming includes a Wednesday evening worship service, called Midweek Worship, which draws an average of between 20 and 30 students. It also includes Bible studies and other small-group activities where students cook, eat, paint, do other craft work, play games, or involve themselves in team-based sporting contests, such as softball, volleyball, or basketball.

For the past several years, campus ministry students have been involved in mission work. This mission work takes place locally, within the United States, and abroad. Student interns help bring Sunday worship to several small, rural communities in Missouri, by leading weekly services. Campus ministry students have also helped many of those same rural community churches put on children and youth programming events by helping to provide organization, infrastructure and manpower at those events. Students from the campus ministry helped clean up and rebuild sites in North Carolina that had suffered hurricane damage. Campus ministry students also spent time in New Orleans, helping that city in its rebuilding efforts in the wake of the infamous Hurricane Katrina. More recently, campus ministry students brought the spirit of mission beyond the borders of the United States. Many members of the campus ministry participated in three different trips to Haiti in order to install water filters to attempt to support local Haitian efforts to eradicate disease and death due to unclean water. Within the past two years, students of the campus ministry have traveled multiple times to the Kansas City area, engaging in mission work with the homeless population there. The collective missional activities support Methodist doctrine of engaging in communities and making disciples for the transformation of the world.

Leadership

The director of campus ministries heads the campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri. This person is known informally as the campus minister. The current campus minister has been on the job since July 2015. The campus minister reports to a Board of Directors, who meet every two months to hear reports on the various campus ministry activities, review budgetary and financial considerations,

discuss facility upkeep, and plan fundraising activities to ensure the continued viability of the campus ministry and support future missional work. The board of directors is officially approved every year by the Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Questions of Organizational Fruitfulness

At one time, the campus ministry studied for this dissertation was one of thirteen different Wesley foundations across Missouri. In 2004, the Missouri Conference administration changed, giving way to a new group led by a bishop who viewed ministry overall, and campus ministry in particular, in a different way.

The new bishop, Robert Schnase, sought to bring light to the most significant problem that faced the United Methodist Church: the precipitous decline in attendance and membership in the denomination. He asked significant questions that revealed hard truths, such as: “If everything is going according to plan, why have we declined by over 162,000 people in worship attendance over the last four years” (Schnase, 2014, p. 8). Fueled by questions such as these, the new administration sought ways to streamline methods of ministry that were viewed as ineffective in terms of the numbers of people that were reached versus the amount of money earmarked for those ministries. Campus ministry was caught in the crosshairs. “Thirteen campus ministries funded by \$920,000 . . . reached only 180 students with worship and 320 in small groups. This was unacceptable and conflicted with the premium we place on fruitfulness and excellence” (Schnase, 2014, p. 113). Eventually, twelve Wesley foundations across Missouri were disbanded and their college-age ministries were either absorbed into local Methodist congregations, or ceased to exist as religious entities. The only foundation that remained

standing was the campus ministry at the heart of this study, though with significant reduction to its operating budget and new metrics to which the foundation was held accountable (Schnase, 2014, p. 113). The remaining campus ministry received a cut of nearly 75 percent of operational resources from the Missouri Conference, yet remained intact and engaged with several rural, community-based churches. These Methodist churches, also struggling with finances and seeking innovative ways to fund ministry, were faced with the dilemma of closing their doors or considering new ministry. They were open to restructuring to avoid closure.

Restructuring in Missouri Campus Ministry

In his role as presiding bishop of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, Robert Schnase could see that his conference, and the church as a whole, faced a huge problem. The number of people who considered themselves United Methodist was in sharp decline. The Towers-Watson Report, released in 2009, painted a grim picture in terms of membership and attendance trends in United Methodist churches in Missouri and across the nation.

Based on the analysis of forty years of statistics for more than thirty-three thousand United Methodist churches in the United States, plus hundreds of interviews with congregations, pastors, and laity across the connection, the . . . report confirms patterns of precipitous decline and long-term financial unsustainability (Schnase, 2014, p. 8).

Something had to change if the church was to remain relevant and viable. The bishop needed a strategy that could energize existing church members, increase church

membership, and maintain the financial stability of the United Methodist Church over time.

A New Strategy for Campus Ministry

As detailed by Mintzberg (1979/2005), it is the role of those in charge at the highest levels of an organization to develop an understanding of [the organization's] environment; and in carrying out the duties of direct supervision, they seek to tailor a strategy . . . trying to maintain a pace of change that is responsive to the environment without being disruptive to the organization (p. 224).

The Towers-Watson Report recommended that the church “give sustained focus on increasing the number of vital congregations. . . . developing more effective systems for starting congregations, reversing trends in existing congregations, strengthening drivers that correlate with vitality, and experimenting with alternative models for forming faith communities” (Schnase, 2014, p. 9). The bishop did his due diligence in ascertaining there were major problems within the environment of his organization, though the pace of changes he intended to bring about ultimately proved disruptive to many groups of people, in particular those people associated with campus ministry.

Very quickly, the bishop and his cabinet zeroed in on campus ministry as a poster child for the church's inefficiency. In the Missouri Conference's view, the Wesley foundations that existed on college campuses throughout Missouri did not really accomplish much of anything and spent a great deal of precious money in the process. According to the conference, the purpose of the church, and therefore the purpose of Wesley foundations, was to move out into a mission field and become an extension of

Christ's love in the world. The Wesley foundations (and many local churches) had instead become clubs for the benefit of those who had already been initiated. "So once you have been baptized, what is the purpose of the church? For the most part, it became fellowship. As if the church is simply a place to hang out, develop friendships, learn moral lessons for life, . . . and wait to go to heaven" (Farr and Kotan, 2015, p. xix).

The New Model

In the bishop's view, the church as a social club was not a workable model. A more mission-based and fiscally responsible focus was necessary. By charter, the Missouri Conference had direct control over all of Missouri's Wesley foundations. The solution to the inefficiency inherent in the Wesley Foundation model was to shut the foundations down. The decision was made to remove campus ministry as a line item in the conference budget, disband most of the Wesley foundations, and place college-age ministry in the hands of local church congregations (Schnase, 2014, p. 113). The campus ministry studied for this dissertation survived the fiscal purge, but its entire allotted budget from the conference was scrapped. Instead, the campus ministry had to apply to the conference for grant funding to continue operations.

According to Levi (2014), "any good solution meets three criteria: (1) It is a prudent agreement that balances the needs of various team members, (2) it is an efficient problem-solving approach that does not consume too much time and resources, and (3) it is a process that fosters group harmony" (Levi, 2014, p. 210). Bishop Schnase and his cabinet adhered to criterion two in eliminating the Wesley foundations, but did not take into account the needs of all of those involved. In fact, representatives for the Wesley foundations were not even directly involved in the decision-making process at all. Far

from fostering harmony, eliminating the budgets and shuttering the doors of Wesley foundations brought about shock, dismay and a lingering atmosphere of resentment and distrust among those who felt they should have had a say in the process.

Bolman and Deal (2013) said “organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives” (p. 45). The overall goals of Wesley foundations and the conference were not stated in the same way, but this situation could have been remedied, and much of the unpleasantness could have been avoided, had Bishop Schnase and his cabinet looked at the problem via the lens of critical thinking as described by Merriam and Bierema (2013). “Thinking critically requires us to check the assumptions that we hold, by assessing the accuracy and validity of the evidence for these assumptions and by looking at ideas and actions from multiple perspectives” (p. 213). It is true that in the conference’s view of the situation through the structural frame, the Wesley foundations in Missouri had room for improvement in their operation. However, the foundations should have been given a seat at the table as solutions to remedy their inefficiency were discussed. For their part, the Wesley foundations could have benefitted from a dose of Merriam and Bierema (2013) as well. Living life almost wholly in the symbolic frame, the Wesley foundations could have been more willing to work with the conference to put a shared model of accountability with benchmark measurements in place.

Filling Mutual Needs

The intern program central to this study was initially created in 2001. The district superintendent of the district in which the campus ministry was located knew of ministry positions in rural areas relatively close to the campus ministry that were open and needed effective ministers. He, along with the campus ministry directors of the time, created the

intern program to both facilitate the influx of younger people into the ministry, and to fill the pulpits of two small, rural churches that otherwise may not have had sufficient staffing to stay open (D. Ehlers and M. Ehlers, personal communication, October 17, 2017). In 2004, as the campus ministry at a regional, rural university in Missouri began to face new budgetary realities, a new church was added to the internship rotation (D. Ehlers and M. Ehlers, personal communication, October 17, 2017). The researcher served as campus ministry director when a fourth rural church was added to the rotation in 2015. Rather than pay the salary of a full-time pastor, the four churches served by the internship contribute a fraction of what they would pay for such full-time services to the campus ministry at a regional rural university in Missouri. These financial contributions help offset the loss of previously guaranteed money in the Annual Conference budget while allowing the campus ministry described in this study to stay open.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Results from this study will allow analysis of whether the intern program is doing more than simply keeping the doors of the campus ministry at a regional, rural university in Missouri open. There is little research about the perceptions of interns and congregants directly affected by ministry intern programs. Per the research questions located in Appendix A, this study seeks to ascertain the impact of the intern program in helping interns determine their vocational call. With the findings of this study will come knowledge of whether the program builds self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (1977) within its interns in terms of their ability and desire to minister to congregants. The study also seeks the impact of the intern program on church congregations. In short, does the intern program move both interns and congregants on a fuller pathway to God?

Summary

The intern program at a campus ministry at a regional, rural university in Missouri is one of several events and programs the campus ministry has to offer. Once one of 13 conference supported campus ministries across the state, in 2004 new administration arrived in Missouri. This new administration reimagined the model of campus ministry, sometimes with great consternation within the campus ministries themselves. As the model for campus ministry changed in the Missouri Annual Conference, the intern program took on added importance for the continued vitality of the campus ministry at a regional rural university in Missouri. This study seeks perceptions of the intern program's impact on both interns and the congregants in churches served by the program.

SECTION THREE

SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Critical Issue

The United Methodist Church has long been in decline in terms of worship attendance, while the average age of those who attend regular services has steadily risen over the past fifty years (Hahn, 2016; Hassinger & Holik, 1970; Green, 2008). Similarly, congregational trends in the United Methodist Church are also prevalent in church clergy. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) found that of the approximately 15,000 ordained elders in the United Methodist Church as of 2015, only about 6.5 percent were aged 35 or younger. Elders between the ages of 55 and 72 comprised 55 percent of the group's total number -- the highest percentage in United Methodist Church history. In 1985, over 3200 people under the age of 35 were newly ordained as United Methodist elders. By 2015, the number had dropped to slightly less than 1000 new ordinations. The average age of a United Methodist elder in 2015 was 53, the highest average ever. This aging clergy population, combined with a smaller number of younger people who choose to become ordained ministers, represents an alarming trend for the church.

Compounding this problem, the process of becoming a professional clergyperson within the United Methodist Church is both long and difficult. One author states:

From the first moment you begin to consider ministry as a vocation up to your ordination ceremony, you'll go through several phases of candidacy. The ordination process isn't for the impatient and can take a few years to complete

depending on your educational background and whether you want to advance beyond a pastor to becoming a deacon or elder (Allen, 2017).

The United Methodist News Service also notes the difficulty of becoming a clergyperson within the church:

Earning a master of divinity degree typically takes three years for a full-time student and longer for part-time. Ordination candidates then must complete two to three years as provisional members of their conferences before being fully ordained. It can take another eight to 10 years for a pastor to become proficient at the craft (Hahn, 2013).

Sturgis and Graham (2015) note that, by 2032, the United Methodist Church will experience a shortfall in the number of ordained clergy in relation to the amount of churches that need to be served across the denomination. The researcher notes that, in his own personal experience, this has already begun to be the case in many United Methodist rural churches. This difficulty in filling church pulpits, combined with the upward trend in clergy age, paints a potential dark picture for the future of the United Methodist Church.

Rationale for Review

Clearly, there is a need to recruit younger people into the ministry. Furthermore, it is advisable to find new and varied ways of recruitment to reach more of those younger people who feel the call to ordained ministry. It is also advisable to allow those younger people to explore their call in the form of an internship, to gauge their true interest in vocational ministry before enrolling in a full-time seminary or other ministry education program.

College ministry can be a crossroads where young people, exploring ministerial calls, internship opportunities, and local church needs might potentially meet. Collegiate ministerial internship programs could allow young people to fill pulpits under the supervision of full-time clergy or other ministers. This would provide an opportunity to practice and build skills for young people while, at the same time, providing lifelines to churches that might otherwise have issues in drawing ministers to serve in a full-time capacity. Through these types of programs, more young people might be funneled into full-time ministry. The question becomes, how effective might such a program be in both helping young people discern careers in vocational ministry while, at the same time, effectively meeting the needs of congregations in churches the interns serve?

Research to be Investigated Through Literature Review

This literature review will investigate whether there is an advantage in seeking input for vocational discernment as a minister by participating in an internship program maintained by a college ministry. This idea will be built around the theory of self-efficacy as first developed by Bandura (1977). The review will also explore the three foundational pillars of this dissertation – internships, program evaluation, and college ministry. Those securing an internship before gaining full-time employment will better prepare individuals for their jobs, as asserted in the work of Knouse, Tanner, and Harris (1999), Callanan and Benzing (2004), and others. The few college ministerial internship programs that do exist would do well to undergo evaluation via the methods espoused in Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004), and Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015). The review will also examine ministerial internship programs such as those discussed by Lundborg (2002), Ehlers (2004), and Davis (2005), and look at the viability of ministry

programs on college campuses to host internships for students who are interested in full-time vocational ministry, building on the work of Shockley (1989).

Gaps in Literature Addressed by Literature Review

Hoge and Wenger (2005), Stewart (2009), McDougall (2010), and others have written about declining church membership and the dearth of youthful clergy members. Coco (2000), Karlsson (2011), and Hoyle and Deschaine (2016) have written about the overall effectiveness of engaging in an internship program before obtaining full-time employment in business and other fields. Very little, however, has been written about ministerial internship programs. Little substantive analysis of ministry internships has been produced by researchers. Less still has been written about the effectiveness of those programs in helping students discern their ministerial calls. This research will attempt to partially fill this gap in knowledge by gauging the overall effectiveness of a specific college ministry internship program in guiding students into ministry as a vocation. The dissertation will also examine the perceptions of congregations in churches impacted by the program and attempt to qualify whether people in those congregations feel their churches have been served effectively by the college interns as the interns attempt to discern their true calling. If the program consistently supports, or produces, young people who devote their lives to ministry while, at the same time, gets good marks from the congregations those young people serve as they learn the basics of ministry, then perhaps the United Methodist Church, or other churches and denominations, might want to further investigate ministry internship programs. If the study reveals a positive impact, perhaps this could be a model to develop other internship opportunities, funneling more

young people into church leadership. In this way, two of the grand challenges (funding and aging) facing the Methodist church might be mitigated, if just a little.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be defined as how confident a person is in his or her ability to achieve the intended outcomes of any given task. Bandura's theory states "that psychological procedures, whatever their form, alter the level and strength of self-efficacy" (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). In other words, an individual begins a task with a preconceived notion as to how successful he or she might be at completing that task with a successful outcome. As the task goes on, "people process and synthesize feedback information" related to events, situations, and patterns concerning the task (Bandura, 1977, p. 192). This information informs the individual how successful, or unsuccessful, he or she has been in bringing about the desired task outcome. Over time, the individual's self-efficacy related to the task increases or decreases in relation to success at achieving those desired outcomes. As Bandura said, "mastery expectations influence performance and are, in turn, altered by the cumulative effects of one's efforts" (Bandura, 1977, p. 195).

Bandura meant for his theory to fit any number of behavioral phenomena, saying simply that, no matter the event, it was "induced and altered most readily by experience of mastery arising from effective performance" (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). It did not take long, however, for researchers to connect Bandura's work to the world of career development. Hackett and Betz (1981) were perhaps the first to apply Bandura's theory to this type of research. Others quickly followed suit, including Taylor and Betz (1983),

Robbins (1985), Lent and Hackett (1987), Taylor and Popma (1990), and many others. More recently, Betz (2000) discussed how self-efficacy relates to vocational interest. Spurk and Abele (2013) detailed results of a nine-year longitudinal study that supported the idea that occupational self-efficacy eventually leads to objective occupational success. Consiglio, Borgogni, Di Tecco, and Schaufeli (2016) found that self-efficacy relates to work engagement over time. Biglan (1987) offered a critique of self-efficacy theory, saying that the “response-response relationships” inherent in self-efficacy theory “do not unequivocally establish that one response cause another” (p. 1). Nonetheless, the obvious saturation in the intersection of self-efficacy and vocation led Betz and Hackett (2006) to state that the use of Bandura’s theory in career development research is now “a widely applicable major approach to the understanding and facilitation of the career development process” (p. 3).

Internships

One pillar of this dissertation is the idea of the internship. The concepts embodied by internships have been around for centuries. Apprenticeships, where those who want to learn a trade bind themselves to another for a specific period of time in return for instruction in the trade, stretch back into the Middle Ages and are still practiced today (Coco, 2000; Evans, 2011). Internships differ from apprenticeships in that they are typically shorter in duration, and they are often unpaid (Finch, 2017). Bacon (2006) said “internships are important to individuals seeking to learn about a particular area, gain experience in a particular field, build connections and have a competitive advantage over those who do not have internships” (p. 68). Coco (2000) maintained that internships are of benefit to employers and students, because “internship programs can reinforce

technical competencies, improve analytical skills, and, most important, foster an awareness of the constant need for adaptability and creativity in a changing world” (p. 41).

Internships inherently use the concept of self-efficacy. McCarthy and McCarthy (2006) noted this by comparing the experiential learning of an internship to studying case studies, another common teaching method. While case studies are useful educational tools, they “cannot substitute for learning that occurs through experiential learning activities, which provide students with a direct, personal encounter” (p. 201). This attitude echoes the work of education pioneer John Dewey, who wrote “I assume that amid all the uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 25). O’Bannon and McFadden (2008) channeled both Dewey and Bandura when they said “an experience can engender future enthusiasm towards new learning through experiences or create an aversion to them, depending on how it is valued by the learner” (p. 23). In this way, internships prove their worth because “these programs integrate students’ academic studies with work experiences in their chosen majors or career fields” (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006, p. 201). Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield, and Joseph (1995) found that feedback received during an internship increased career self-efficacy. Bates, Thompson, and Bates (2013) reported that a work placement during criminology students’ final year at university led to a significant increase in overall work self-efficacy among those students. Botha and Bignotti (2016) also noted a positive relationship between internships and career self-efficacy among students studying entrepreneurship.

Many writers and researchers spanning multiple centuries have recognized the need and usefulness of internships. For as much as we realize this, however, the knowledge about what actually makes a successful internship is less forthcoming, and can change from program to program. Hoyle and Deschaine (2015) said that “although there are a number of common reasons why internships are utilized in each academic area, the requirements for the experiences are substantially different across disciplines and level of coursework” (p. 372). Beard and Morton (1998) lamented that in journalism internships there “was little empirical evidence to assess the quality of internships, to provide schools with predictors for quality internships, or to determine the relative importance of various predictors in assuring successful internships” (p. 42). Karlsson (2011) found that students who participated in the same cohort of a five-week Swedish public health internship had multiple views on whether the program was successful and whether the academic content they had been exposed to before the internship was of relevance to the actual program.

Internships and other experiential learning programs in religious settings experience similar issues. Nonetheless, there is a recognized need for leadership development within the church moving forward. Isner (2015) wrote of the need for developing young leaders in the United Methodist Church, saying that “in an age of complex movement-centered ministry in which denominational loyalty is at a low and a passion to make a difference is high, diverse models of leadership training are needed” (p. 24). The Foundation for Evangelism, affiliated with the United Methodist Church, has presented a Culture of the Call Award to a different experiential learning program each year since 2011. The award “seek(s) to identify, support, mentor, and encourage

young people who are called to Christian service” (Foundation for Evangelism, 2016).

Within that framework, however, each program that has received the award has different methods, opportunities, and measurements of success.

Staffing in the Methodist Church

A second pillar in this study is the history of staffing within the United Methodist Church and its predecessor churches. Included under the aegis of staffing are those people who have ministered, formally or otherwise, to Methodist congregations from the beginning of the movement to the present day. Historically, Methodism has seen people brought into clergy positions in multiple ways (Gooch, 2000; Harmon, 1977; Tucker, 1966). These kind of alternative entries into ministry help form a historical basis for the intern program studied in this dissertation.

English Beginnings

At its start, Methodism was a movement within the Church of England. In this sense, early Methodism had no formal staff apart from those who already served, in some capacity, within the Anglican Church. For instance, both John Wesley and his brother, Charles, were Anglican priests (*Book of discipline*, 2016, p. 12). What set the Wesleys and other Anglican clergy who adhered to Methodism apart from their counterparts was their belief that there was a need to “reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (*Book of discipline*, 2016, p. 12). As Methodism became more popular in England, John Wesley began to recruit lay preachers to both sustain the movement and bring its message to even more people throughout the country (Mead, 1988, p. 161).

America

As Methodism gained a foothold in America, there was at first no formalized staff. Instead, the movement fomented and grew initially in the colonies because of lay people who took the teachings of John Wesley to heart. Among the first leaders of Methodism in America were a farmer, a housewife, and a British army officer (*Book of discipline*, 2016, p. 12; Maxey, ed., 1998, p. 2). John Wesley felt pressure from those who practiced Methodism in the colonies to send a more formalized preaching presence but thought he did not have the manpower to spare on any fledgling colonial groups. In a 1767 letter, Wesley lamented in the 18th century what could well be a common refrain among United Methodist bishops and district superintendents today: “We are so far from having any travelling preachers to spare that there are not enough to supply the people that earnestly call for them. I have been this very year at my wits’ end upon the account” (Kinghorn, 2000, p. 18).

Eventually, John Wesley selected two trusted lay preachers and sent them to America. Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore arrived in the colonies in 1769, becoming the “first regular Methodist preachers on the continent” (Kinghorn, 2000, p. 19). Francis Asbury, destined to become one of the founding bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, arrived in the American colonies as a lay preacher in 1771 (*Book of discipline*, 2016, p. 13).

The American Revolution

Beginning in 1775, the Revolutionary War would turn the world upside-down as the American colonies sought their independence from British rule. The war, along with the passions that it evoked on each side of the conflict, also played havoc with the formal

staffing of the Methodist movement throughout its duration. As a native Englishman, John Wesley was a staunch supporter of the crown, and wrote at least one tract that encouraged his followers in America to remain loyal to the British government (*Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke: The first Methodist bishops*, 2010). This had the adverse effect of agitating many colonists against the British lay preachers that Wesley had sent to them. Because of this, Wesley recalled all of Methodism's British-born preachers back to their home country in 1778. Only Asbury stayed, saying he did not want to leave the American Methodists completely devoid of a formalized ministerial presence (*Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke: The first Methodist bishops*, 2010). On the surface, it might seem that the removal of nearly every formal staff member would halt the Methodist movement in America in its tracks. In reality, the opposite happened, as there were far more people who identified as Methodists after the Revolution ended than were counted before it began. Lay people took charge of the movement in the absence of formal staff and saved American Methodism (Mead, 1988, p. 161).

Methodism and Ministry After the Revolutionary War

With the Revolution's end, and the founding of the United States, John Wesley realized that American Methodism was now truly a separate entity from Methodism in England. He sent Thomas Coke to serve as a superintendent with Asbury shortly after the war concluded. Coke was an ordained priest within the Church of England, just as John Wesley was. Accompanying Coke on the trip to America, however, were two men ordained by John Wesley himself. Wesley believed that, after the war, the Church of England was dragging its feet in ordaining priests for service in America. He felt it

tremendously important that American Methodists have access to the sacraments, something they had not officially had since the war began (Norwood, 1983, p. 91).

In 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church, a separate entity from the Church of England, was formally organized in Baltimore, Maryland. For a more complete history of the various iterations of the Methodist Church in America, see Section Two.

Ministry and Methodist Careers Today

Today, there are a number of routes into formalized ministry in the United Methodist Church. One can claim clergy status as either an elder, deacon, or licensed local pastor. Elders typically serve as church pastors, where they are responsible for leading congregations into the Word of God. Elders are vested by the church with the authority to perform the official United Methodist sacraments – Holy Communion, baptism, and marriage. United Methodist elders itinerate at the resident bishop’s discretion, meaning they often move and pastor at multiple churches throughout their careers (Elders, 2017).

Deacons can serve at individual churches but are more typically found in a mission field. Deacons are often employed as teachers, counselors, chaplains, hospice workers, and many other service-oriented occupations. Unlike elders, deacons are not required to itinerate (Deacons and diaconal ministers, 2017).

Licensed local pastors function somewhat like elders in that they lead congregations and administer sacraments, but unlike both elders and deacons, they are not ordained. This means a local pastor’s authority exists only in the specific church charge where he or she is appointed (Local pastors, 2017). Conversely, elders and deacons are allowed to serve anywhere, regardless of appointment. Ordination as either

an elder or a deacon requires a seminary degree. The path to becoming a licensed local pastor does not require a seminary education, though some licensed local pastors nonetheless possess such a degree.

College Ministry

A third pillar of this study is college ministry. College ministry is what it sounds like – ministry to students who attend college, or who are of age to attend college. College ministry extends back to at least the time of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who organized religious meetings among college students while a fellow at Oxford University during the 1720s. These meetings eventually coalesced into the Holy Club, where students would study the Bible, worship, pray, receive the sacraments, and operate in service to the community at large. From this Holy Club arose the basic tenants of Methodism (Iovino, 2016).

College ministry in America was also active from the early 18th century, a student Christian club having been established at Harvard by 1706 (Shockley, 1989). The Young Men's Christian Association was a fixture in American society by the mid-19th century. While we perhaps think of YMCAs as places to get a good workout in, the original identity of the organization was to reach out to men of college age in order to showcase the gospel. By the early 20th century, the Young Women's Christian Association, or YWCA, was also an American fixture (Shockley, 1989). The first Methodist college ministry, the Wesley Foundation, was founded at the University of Illinois, in 1913 (Gallaway, 2015).

Bomar (2011) suggests that time spent in college helps students transition into adulthood, reevaluate lessons they were taught growing up, and engage in an overall

search for meaning. Westfall (2013) concurs with this, saying that he has conversed with numerous college-age people across the United States.

If any common theme exists from these conversations, it is the reality that young people today are looking for a life with significance—purpose. Though their individual visions of what this “purpose” ultimately looks like varies, they have big dreams (Westfall, 2013, p. vii).

Bomar (2011) warns that churches seeking to connect with college students should be mindful of this transition into adulthood, and not expect college-age people to fall in line with traditional ideas of religious customs and social order. Dickey (2013) says that college is where one naturally questions and evaluates all his or her beliefs to make choices about life moving forward. Dean (2010) contends that faith is very fragile for teenagers after high school, and that it is extremely important to engage college-age people in the real work of the church “by modeling the kind of mature, passionate faith we say we want young people to have” (p. 4).

Lutz (2011) stated that models for how to engage in college ministry today generally fall into two dominant paradigms. One paradigm deems that college ministry should be an outreach from a local church. That local church attempts to draw students from the campus into events scheduled at the church itself, often with mixed results. Lutz contends that “as we move farther into a post-Christian society, it becomes far less likely that an unchurched non-Christian will enter a local church in search of God” (Chapter 12, Section “The Local Church”, para. 5). A second paradigm decrees that college ministry should be practiced by so-called parachurch organizations, religious groups with no official church affiliation. According to Lutz, these groups “arose

because of the void created by churches' collective inability, unwillingness, or ambivalence to reach out to students" (Chapter 12, Section "Parachurch Ministries", para. 1). Parachurch organizations have more success at drawing college-age students than local churches, but the danger in this kind of college ministry is that groups could potentially become "sealed bubbles of Christian culture. . . little more than a haven for people who 'think like me, speak like me, dress like me'" (Chapter 12, Section "Parachurch Ministries", para. 2). Ultimately, Bomar (2010) asserts that neither sealed bubbles nor attendance at church events should be the hallmark on how to measure an effective campus ministry. Rather, "we want to see people move toward Christlikeness with the end result being their living out the call of faith in every aspect of their lives" (p. 28).

One way of living out this faith is to explore a call for vocational ministry. Shockley (1989) was on the forefront of those who realized that college ministry programs might be an effective proving ground for students who are exploring that call, saying that "there are many ways campus ministry can make important contributions to human development and meaning through the concept of vocation" (p. 117). These contributions included the potential establishment of ministry internship programs. Internship programs within college ministries, especially those ministries labeled as parachurch, are not usually designed to gauge a student's vocational call as a minister in the church at large. Rather, the internship is designed so that the student will serve in some capacity on the college campus itself, working directly for the college ministry. "These programs are not typically designed with the primary objective of helping the young adult learn how to incarnate the love of God in the specific cultural context of

Western consumerism; rather, they are often designed for the ultimate purpose of recruiting the student into service for, and financial partnership with, the host organization” (Westfall, 2013, p. 43).

As a counterpoint, however, ministry internships as envisioned by Shockley (1989) would help students discern their call to vocational ministry. These kinds of ministry internships build on the idea of experiential learning offered by Palmer (1993) and seek to be a challenging, yet safe, space in which to learn. These learning spaces have “three major characteristics, three essential dimensions: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality” (Palmer, 1993, p.71). Ehlers (2004) and Davis (2005) evaluated college ministry internship programs of the type predicted and espoused by Shockley’s vision with the three dimensions written of by Palmer.

Bomar (2010) commented on internships through college ministry programs, saying that a ministry internship through a college ministry would allow for self-discovery and increased focus on how to serve God. He also understood the practical applications of an internship, saying “if people get hired at a church, they ought to understand the importance of these things because one day they’ll have to go into another church, assess it, and then determine what to do based on who they are. Internships can be a great preparation for this” (p. 163).

Stephens (2011) discussed the design process of an intern program at Prestonwood Baptist Church. Prestonwood is a church with approximately 42,000 members, spread over three campuses in the Dallas, Texas, area (www.prestonwood.org/about). Unlike the intern program offered by a campus ministry at a regional rural university in Missouri, the intern program at Prestonwood operates

through the church. Thus, the church draws students from colleges and seminaries to itself. This model is somewhat opposite of the college ministry intern program vision espoused by Shockley (1989) and studied for this dissertation, which conducts the intern program on campus and send students out from there to serve local churches.

Overall, there is some literature about establishing ministry on college campuses, and quite a bit of literature on college ministry internships. Most of the literature about college ministry internships is anecdotal in nature; very little of the literature is research-based. Little to none of the available literature describes a holistic evaluation of the entire college ministry internship program, such as is conducted in this dissertation.

SECTION FOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Who: Missouri Next Gen College Ministry Conference

When: November, 2018

How: Via a PowerPoint presentation and executive summary handout. The researcher will conduct the presentation during a breakout session.

Type of Document

Document type will be a visual presentation presented at the November 2018 Missouri Next Gen College Ministry Conference. This visual presentation will discuss intern and congregant perceptions of a ministry intern program at a regional, rural, state university in Missouri.

Rationale for this Contribution Type

The Missouri Next Gen College Ministry Conference seeks to bring those who practice college ministry in Missouri together to build community and share ideas about what is working, and what is not, in college ministry across the state and the nation. The presentation would serve to inform other college ministries and those who administer college ministry in the Missouri Annual Conference about the intern program itself and the perceptions of interns and congregants about the program.

Slide Show with Notes

The Impact of
Northwest Wesley Foundation's
Ministry Internship Program

Purpose of this Presentation

- Make people aware of a ministry internship program offered through Northwest Wesley Foundation
- Discuss reasons why the program began
- Explain some potential benefits of that program
- Explain intern and congregant perceptions of the program

United Methodist Church in Decline

- Some Hard Facts:
 - Average worship attendance at most UM churches has steadily decreased over the last 50 years
 - Average age of UM congregants has steadily increased over the last 50 years
 - Many UM rural churches can no longer maintain a full-time clergy person, while several UM rural churches have closed altogether

Hahn, 2016; Hassinger & Holik, 1970; Green, 2008

This trend was also noted by Bishop Robert Schnase, during his time in Missouri. “Based on the analysis of forty years of statistics for more than thirty-three thousand United Methodist churches in the United States, plus hundreds of interviews with congregations, pastors, and laity across the connection, the . . . report confirms patterns of precipitous decline and long-term financial unsustainability” (Schnase, 2014, p. 8).

Aging United Methodist Clergy

- The jump in average age is affecting UM clergy as well
- In 2015:
 - Approximately 15,000 UM clergy
 - 6.5 percent (approximately 975) were age 35 or younger
 - 55 percent (approximately 8250) were between age 55 and 72
- In 1985, 3200 people under age 35 were ordained as UM elders
- In 2015, the average age of a UM clergy person was 53 (highest ever)

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) found that of the approximately 15,000 people ordained as elders in the United Methodist Church as of 2015, only about 6.5 percent were aged 35 or younger. Conversely, elders between the ages of 55 and 72 comprised 55 percent of the group's total number -- the highest percentage in the recorded history of the United Methodist Church. In 1985, over 3200 people under the age of 35 were ordained as United Methodist elders. By 2015, the number had dropped to slightly less than 1000. The average age of a United Methodist elder in 2015 was 53, the highest average ever.

Ordination in the United Methodist Church

- Long process
- Difficult to get through
- Attending seminary to earn a Master's of Divinity typically takes three years to earn as a full-time student, longer if part time
- Ordination candidates must then complete time as provisional members of their conferences before being ordained
- This can take up to three years

Hahn, 2013

A Big Takeaway

The structure of entry into organized ministry is an expression of the gravity and importance of listening to a call from God. It is also often an impediment to discerning that call.

Bolman and Deal (2013) alluded to this in their discussion of symbols in organizational culture when they lament that “events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced” (p. 248). In light of the purpose of this study, and what we know about declining numbers of clergy and church numbers, this becomes a very important statement.

A Big Takeaway

**Many rural churches are in need of
leaders who can help provide
services on Sunday.**

The researcher has personal experience and knowledge of this problem.

What if there was a way to help fill the leadership void in rural churches with people who have expressed a desire to explore their calls to vocational ministry even before attending seminary?

Some people struggle with their potential call for years, unsure of whether to pursue ministry as a vocation. One such person was Rev. Mark Whitley, who spent much of his adult life employed by the Red Cross before deciding to pursue vocational ministry at age 43. An article published by the United Methodist News Service explains that “before becoming a pastor despite his career advances, [Whitley] always felt a ‘gnawing sense of emptiness’” (Hahn, 2013). Ultimately, Whitley was ordained as an elder in the United Methodist Church in 2011 at the age of 53. One wonders if there had been a way to confront this sense of emptiness and explore his call at an earlier age in a relatively low-pressure environment, if Whitley would have jumped at the chance.

The Ministry Internship Program at Northwest Wesley Foundation

The intern program central to this study was created initially in 2001. The district superintendent of the district in which the campus ministry was located knew of ministry positions in rural areas relatively close to the campus ministry that were open and needed filled. He, along with the campus ministry directors of the time, created the intern program to both facilitate the influx of younger people into the ministry, and to fill the pulpits of two small, rural churches that otherwise may not have had sufficient staffing to stay open (D. Ehlers and M. Ehlers, personal communication, October 17, 2017).

Grand Tour Research Question

What are the intern and congregant perceptions about the United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri?

To answer this main question . . .

- A series of questions was created for interns and congregants
- The researcher interviewed current and former interns
- The researcher conducted focus groups with all four rural churches served by the internship program
- The researcher examined archival evaluative data from the district office concerning the intern program
- The researcher then coded and tabulated data and results based on archival data, interviews, and focus groups

The research design for this study is a bounded case study as described in Merriam and Tisdale (2016), and is evaluative in nature, as data was collected to determine the internship program's "worth or value" (p. 4). Creswell (2014) says that "case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation" (p. 14). According to Rossi, Lipsi, and Freeman (2004), program evaluations study, appraise, and offer improvements for programs in the way such programs are "conceptualized and implemented, the outcomes they achieve, and their efficiency (p. 3). Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015) say stakeholders desire to understand the value of programs they are part of and that they support. The researcher conducted data collection and analysis. Data was collected via archival records of an evaluation of the intern program from the district superintendent's office, interviews with current and former interns, and focus groups made up of congregants, in an effort to triangulate any findings (Fink, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Participants in the Study

- Focus groups from each of the four churches served by the internship program
- 4 focus groups
- 25 total people
 - UMC A = 3 people
 - UMC B = 9 people
 - UMC C = 7 people
 - UMC D = 6 people
- 15 female, 10 male
- Youngest = mid-50s
- Oldest = early-90s
- Interviews of previous and present interns
- 5 total interviews
- 4 female, 1 male
- Ages 21-26

Note that the overall demographics of the church congregants dovetails with the overall data of aging congregations from earlier slides.

Themes that emerged during research

- support/transformation
- realistic understanding of the field
- differential outcomes
- impact on calling
- finding God
- influx of new ideas
- keeping churches open
- producing ministers

Support/Transformation

MAIN IDEAS:

- Interns spoke of the nurturing nature of the congregations they served, and the confidence they had in the support they were getting.
- Congregations took pride in the idea that they had become teaching churches. Their job was to create an environment in which interns were accepted, loved, and built up for ministry.

Westfall (2013) found that most ministry internship programs offered through campus ministries did not include routes to ministry within local churches. Lundborg (2002) and Ehlers (2004), however, discussed the transformative process of ministry internship programs from campus ministries to local churches on both interns and congregants.

Support/Transformation

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

- Congregant: *“For us, I think it’s a win-win. Because they help us out by being here at a time when we needed someone in our church, and then we help them to grow in their spiritual journey and I think as a person as well. It’s a transformation from their first Sunday here as they progress.”*
- Intern: *“I was . . . confident in the support that this program’s leaders gave to the students, as well as the churches.”*

The researcher wishes to note that he believes this reciprocal process of support and transformation is a way that God is present in the ministry internship process. Interns provide a ministerial presence in the churches, and then members of the congregations begin to claim interns as their own and build them up in faith and love. The ministry thus becomes reciprocal, because, in a very real way, interns are built into a new creation through the love and support shown to them by congregants. As the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, “therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here” (5:17).

Realistic Understanding of the Field

MAIN IDEAS

- Working in churches allowed interns to see whether they fit into a traditional ministry role based on the practical demands that role places on them.
- Because they learned the demands of the job, interns were better able to decide if they wished to pursue vocational ministry beyond their undergrad years.

Callanan and Benzing (2006) stated that one of the most important aspects of an internship is to “gain a realistic understanding of various career fields and organizational environments and allow a check for fit between individual characteristics and the demands of different jobs” (p. 83).

Realistic Understanding of the Field

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

- Congregant: *“When they first come here they don’t know who any of us are and once they learn a little bit about us and what our church does and specifically what people do, then they can kind of pick out certain things that hit you. It affects you more that way whenever they can zone in on that.”*
- Intern: *“I feel that I’ve gotten to know some of the unique difficulties that churches can go through while participating in this program. This has helped me to prepare for the good and challenging things that can come with becoming deeply involved in a church.”*

Differential Outcomes

MAIN IDEAS

- Interns learned their job by doing, rather than by observing someone else.
- The learning occurred as interns reacted to their success or failure based on reflection and feedback.
- Both interns and congregants referred to differential outcomes (by concept, not by name) as a positive aspect of the ministry intern program multiple times.

As identified by Bandura (1977), differential outcomes are a construction of schemas needed to perform a job or task based on personal experience at the job or task, rather than just observing what is required.

Differential Outcomes

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

- Congregant: *"When he came in . . . you could obviously tell he was nervous. But, as the time went on, and he left, he was confident. And I think as the internship program itself goes, that was definitely a plus for him because he needed that, because, poor soul, . . . if he'd just gone through the schooling part of it and just stepped into his church without this internship to help guiding training, poor thing. You know it was a great learning process for him."*
- Intern: *"I would say that this program is a very unique program. It's not something that you see at other universities or other schools. It gives people a hands-on experience, and that kinetic learning is so vital to really understanding. So, I think an internship program like this is honestly essential for people who are going into the ministry field."*

Finding God

MAIN IDEAS

- Every intern interviewed for this dissertation mentioned that the internship program has positively affected their relationships with God in many ways.
- As a further consequence of the campus ministry providing opportunities for its students to find God, members of church congregations also recognized opportunities for finding God that were inherent in the internship program.

It is inherent upon a campus ministry to provide routes to explore God's presence for each student who passes through the ministry, as a person's college-age years are crucial in faith formation. Dean (2010) recognized that people in their teens often begin the search for higher meaning in their lives. Bomar (2011) alluded to this as well when he said "the ages of 18 to 25 have become a time of mind-opening opportunities . . . with long-term impacts" (p. 109).

Finding God

- REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
- Congregant: *"I think (the interns') willingness to share, at times, their faith struggles. I think I learn from them (things) you never talk about. Gives you pause for thought later on."*
- Intern: *"The greatest thing that the program has done for me in my relationship with God is put me in a community of people who are also working on their relationship with God. So this community . . . of interns has been a really wonderful experience because any time that I've had questions, any time that I've had doubts or been really flustered, or exasperated, I can just come into a safe place and talk it out with people who are also in the same shoes that I have been in. So I think being able to see God work in other people is something that brings me closer to God every day."*

Impact On Calling

MAIN IDEA

- In their attempts to find out how God wanted to use them, interns consistently made use of the program to help explore their calling to be ministers.

Bomar (2010) said “being a spiritual leader, vocational or not, requires us to understand how God uses who he’s made us to be in the lives of people” (p. 160). This understanding of how God wants to use us comes as close as anything to defining one’s call into ministry.

The impact on calling was strongly reported by interns, but not touched on much by congregants. This is to be expected, I think, as interns seek out the internship program for help in discerning their calls to vocational ministry.

Impact On Calling

- REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES:
- Intern: *“This program has shown me that a ‘calling’ is different for everyone. I believe now that callings come in many different forms, and are flexible towards different backgrounds and walks of life. For myself, I’ve learned that, while my calling doesn’t necessarily change, the way I achieve that calling can.”*
- Intern: *“(The program) has made me strongly consider ministry and preaching in the future.”*

Influx of New Ideas

MAIN IDEAS

- Congregants from each church mentioned the influx of new ideas that came into their churches as a result of their involvement with the internship program.
- All mentions of the theme cast it in a positive light as one of the major benefits of the internship program for the churches served.

While congregants recognized new ideas as a major positive of the program, the theme was not generally recognized among interns, the purveyors of these new ideas, drawing just one mention. This is to be expected as well. While congregants marvel at all the new ideas, to the interns, they are just ideas they have when prepping for worship.

Influx of New Ideas

- REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES:
- Congregant: *"I like the variety. Every one of them has something to offer, in a different way. The way they approach topics and subjects for sermons. It's what do I want to say? Refreshing."*
- Congregant: *"But I think it's a positive, too, that we get so many different ideas and they come from so many different backgrounds, so it's really insightful, I think."*
- Congregant: *"They're not afraid to try something new. They drag us along."*

Keeping the Church Open

MAIN IDEAS

- As congregations age, and decrease in overall membership, many United Methodist churches across Missouri, and the United States in general, have been forced to close their doors.
- The four churches served by the internship program are representative of many rural churches in Missouri, and of the problems rural churches face, yet they have all remained open.
- Congregants credit their involvement with the internship program as the reason why this is so.

Hahn (2016) and Green (2008) spoke of aging congregations in churches throughout United Methodism. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) also noticed this aging trend among United Methodist pastors.

In general, interns do not speak of keeping the church open. For them, they are providing a service on Sundays. They tend not to think about the overall broad scope of their service keeping the church from closing.

Keeping the Church Open

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES:

- Congregant: *"It makes it possible for our small church to continue to have church."*
- Congregant: *"I guess I'd like to say it's only been positive. Without them (interns), we would have nothing."*
- Congregant: *"We could not pay a minister very much. We couldn't pay all his insurance. We couldn't pay the pensions and all that stuff. We'd be just about out of it. So, they've saved us, too. The kids have saved us."*

Producing New Ministers

MAIN IDEAS

- The average age of UM clergy is rising, and the path toward ordination in the church is long.
- The internship program dispenses with much of this symbolism built up around ministry, placing interns immediately in positions of authority within churches.
- In so doing, it becomes a more efficient way for young people to determine whether vocational ministry is an appropriate career path.
- Many people in the congregations served by the internship program have latched onto the idea that, while they are now too small to have a full-time minister, they nonetheless have an integral role in producing young ministers for the overall good of the denomination.

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) documented the average rising age of United Methodist clergy and the overall decline of ordained United Methodist elders under the age of 35. Hahn (2013) noted the relatively rigorous path toward ordination in the church and the sheer number of years it takes to complete the important, yet highly symbolic, process. Bolman and Deal (2013) remind us that, with organizational symbols, “events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced” (p. 248).

In the years since the program began, at least five former interns have gone on to careers in full-time vocational ministry. In addition, two interns who have recently graduated have plans to attend seminary in the future.

Producing New Ministers

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

- Congregant: *"We feel good about helping young people to be involved in ministry."*
- Intern: *"This program has put me in a position to where I can almost test it all out and see it, see it play out, so yeah, it's helped me interpret the fact that vocational ministry is an option for me."*
- Intern: *"It did help me realize I probably am not wanting to do ordained ministry. Student ministry is my sweet spot. That was always the plan that I had known I wanted to do youth ministry. It helped me say, 'Okay, I still want to do ministry, but this is not the avenue of ministry that I want to go down.'"*

Issues and Problems

- “The bulletins are different every Sunday. Sometimes it’s a little sketchy but it’s okay. It’s okay because they don’t have time to get it done
- “I kind of like a bigger church. I do miss the same preacher every Sunday only because of deaths, keeping the bulletin updated, and when you’re in the hospital. I like that.”
- “Sometimes I like the same person up there that just looks out at the congregation and knows everybody and what’s ticking with them.”
- “Just for the fact of not having a full-time ministry, and we’re going to have college kids leading this all . . . what’s this going to be like? Look around the table. We’re not college-age.”

The issue voiced most frequently by congregants in focus groups and archival data from the district superintendent’s office was the lack of a full-time clergy person in residence in any of the communities served by the internship program. It should be noted, however, that the internship program did not cause this issue. Rather, the program was developed partially to relieve this issue, which is more a result of aging church and clergy populations as described by Hahn (2016), Green (2008), Hahn (2013), and the Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016).

Because of the lack of full-time pastoral leadership, some other issues and problems arose in communities served by interns that the internship program, in its current form, has a hard time addressing. Chiefly, those complaints coalesced around the ideas of a lack of consistent communication between churches and the administration of the internship program, and also a lack of pastoral visitation available to members of congregations. Quotes that encapsulate these issues are bulleted in the next two slides.

Issues and Problems

- “And I would say that something we still struggle with is not having the full-time minister that lives and participates in the community.”
- “We have no visitation. We have no way to impact, to go out into the community, talk to anybody to come into church. That’s the job we should all be doing.”
- “That’s kind of where we feel lost sometimes, is that personal leadership that is constant. Nothing negative to the ministers in office. We realize how they’re spread . . . but . . . how do we get everyone together to really do it and really push it?”

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SECTION FIVE

CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

The target journal for publication is the *Religion and American Culture*. This journal is peer reviewed and published by the University of California Press. The journal focuses on how areas of American culture impact the nation's religious settings.

Rationale for this Target

I am intrigued that the focus for this particular religious journal is religion within the framework of culture in America. The churches served by the intern program are all nestled within a decidedly rural setting, as is the university where the campus ministry exists that administers the intern program. I believe that the internship's alternative approach to church staffing and growing ministers within a rural setting that has seen much decline over the past half-century would represent a cultural juxtaposition described in a journal article that *Religion and American Culture* might choose to publish.

Outline for Proposed Contents

Plan for Submission

Who: Editors Tracy Fessenden, Arizona State University; Philip Goff, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; Amy Koehlinger, Oregon State University; Laura Levitt, Temple University; Stephen J. Stein, Indiana University Bloomington; Peter J. Thuesen, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; Judith Weisenfeld, Princeton University

When: Fall 2018

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Background

The U.S. United Methodist Church has long been in decline in terms of the number of people in attendance at Sunday services, while the average age of those people who do attend services regularly has also risen steadily over the last half-century (Hahn, 2016; Hassinger & Holik, 1970; Green, 2008). In the researcher's experience in working and preaching as a lay minister at multiple rural churches in Missouri, many Methodist churches are now small enough that they can no longer maintain a full-time clergy presence.

These trends in the general population of the United Methodist Church have also been recognized among those clergy persons who lead congregations. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) found that of the approximately 15,000 people ordained as elders in the United Methodist Church as of 2015, only about 6.5 percent were aged 35 or younger. Conversely, elders between the ages of 55 and 72 comprised 55 percent of the group's total number -- the highest percentage in the recorded history of the United Methodist Church. In 1985, over 3200 people under the age of 35 were ordained as United Methodist elders. By 2015, the number had dropped to slightly less than 1000. The average age of a United Methodist elder in 2015 was 53, the highest average ever. This aging clergy population, combined with a smaller number of younger people who choose to become ordained ministers, presents two grand challenges to the United Methodist Church in the realm discussed by Colquitt and George (2011).

The process of becoming a professional clergyperson within the United Methodist Church is both long and difficult. The United Methodist News Service notes the

difficulty of becoming a clergyperson within the church. “Earning a master of divinity degree typically takes three years for a full-time student and longer for part-time.

Ordination candidates then must complete two to three years as provisional members of their conferences before being fully ordained. It can take another eight to 10 years for a pastor to become proficient at the craft” (Hahn, 2013).

The structure of entry into organized ministry is an expression of the gravity and importance of listening to a call from God. It is also often an impediment to discerning that call. Bolman and Deal (2013) alluded to this in their discussion of symbols in organizational culture when they lamented that “events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced” (p. 248). In light of the purpose of this study, and what we know about declining numbers of clergy and church numbers, this becomes a very important statement.

A major question that arises from the long and arduous process of becoming a clergyperson is how does one test a call to ministry before embarking on a full course of study in seminary? For some, there is no testing of the waters. They simply jump in and completely immerse themselves in the seminary experience. Many times this works out for the best, and a successful candidate emerges, ready for ordination into ministry. Other times, this process of full immersion backfires, and seminarians realize their mistake too late, having wasted much in the way of money and time because their call lay elsewhere. Alexander Shaia spoke of his disastrous time in seminary, saying that, although he felt God called him in some way, he nonetheless felt constrained and disappointed by his seminary experience before he ultimately dropped out (Bell, 2016).

Feeling they may be called to serve God, but fearful of having an experience like Shaia's, some people struggle with their potential call for years, unsure of whether to pursue ministry as a vocation. One such person was Rev. Mark Whitley, who spent much of his adult life employed by the Red Cross before deciding to pursue vocational ministry at age 43. An article published by the United Methodist News Service explains that "before becoming a pastor despite his career advances, [Whitley] always felt a 'gnawing sense of emptiness'" (Hahn, 2013). Ultimately, Whitley was ordained as an elder in the United Methodist Church in 2011 at the age of 53. One wonders if there had been a way to confront this sense of emptiness and explore his call at an earlier age in a relatively low-pressure environment, if Whitley would have jumped at the chance.

One way this kind of early exploration could occur is through the purposeful practice of ministry by young people during their college-age years in a ministerial internship program. Some specific examples of ministry internship programs exist in Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Carolina (Solomon, 2015). Another specific example of a ministry internship program exists in New York (Sturgis & Graham, 2015). Overall, however, such programs are scarce, as is data on the impact, and effectiveness, of campus-based ministry internship programs.

Coco (2000) praises internships as being mutually beneficial for both sponsors and interns. Lundborg (2002) discusses a specific church internship in rural Minnesota. Many benefits were recognized from the program, for both interns and churches served. Interestingly, congregations served by ministerial interns often came to see those interns as a group to whom they could minister as a teaching church. "Could it be that the presence of a curious, eager, pastoral intern evokes leadership skills from the

congregation? Yes” (Lundborg, 2002, p. 16). College-age ministerial interns also recognized the value of these types of internships in helping determine calls to vocational ministry. Said one intern: “As a 20-something and a millennial, I think one of the best things the church can do is create chances for young potential clergy to see what ministry looks like up close, to ask questions and to experience it firsthand” (Sturgis & Graham, 2015). This study seeks to investigate a rural, campus-based ministry internship program, based on the perceptions of 20-something interns and the congregants, often in their 70’s and 80’s, who are served by the internship program.

Statement of the Problem

The problem studied in this research is that there is a lack of information about intern and congregant perceptions of the impact of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri. This lack of information exists in areas related both to practice and literature.

Problem of Practice

Part of the problem in terms of ministry internship programs is a problem of practice. As of today, there are few ways for college-age people to explore their call to vocational ministry in an internship program before actually enrolling in seminary. For example, between 2000 and 2007 the Lilly Endowment awarded over \$200 million in grant funding to 88 colleges and universities across the United States to establish vocational exploration programs. While many of these college and universities used the grant money to establish programs that helped undergraduates discern their vocational calling, almost none established actual internship programs where those students could practice within local churches (Gallagher, 2007).

Beginning in 2012, the Lilly Endowment funded specific grants for a Campus Ministry Theological Exploration of Vocation Initiative. The initiative awarded 104 grants to campus ministries across the United States, but grants were discontinued after 2015 (Campus Ministry Theological Exploration of Vocation Initiative). At times, even when internship programs were established by Lilly initiatives, the programs were designed for those already enrolled in seminary. This is obviously too late to help undergraduate students in discerning their calls to ministry prior to becoming seminarians.

For some, even without a proper internship program, the call to vocational ministry might become a reality. For many, without a way to properly discern that call, however, enrolling in a lengthy, costly seminary might be an inefficient use of time, talent, money and other precious resources. In many cases, candidates enroll in seminary unprepared for what is to follow. Put succinctly, “When candidates come in, they can be clueless about our system,” [Rev. Carol] Bruse said. “They come in and spend their life savings on seminary, and they don’t want to leave their hometown” (Hahn, 2013). Seminaries, too, feel this problem of practice. At times, these seminaries expend precious resources educating those whose ultimate call might be elsewhere. As one Master of Divinity Student declared: “Without that call and the anointing for ministry, seminary doesn’t do you a lick of good” (Witham, 2005, p. 14).

Existing Gap in the Literature

Another facet to this problem in ministry internships is a gap in existing literature. Some internship programs for young people seeking to verify a call to vocational ministry do exist, but little is known about the overall effectiveness of these programs.

Both Ehlers (2004) and Davis (2005) conducted evaluations of specific college ministry internship programs. Aside from these two studies, however, little research exists. This lack of information includes a lack of information on the merits of internships, differences in program structure and organization, and ultimately the most important question: how effective campus-based ministry internship programs are in leading young people into successful careers as full-time ministers. Moreover, there is no extant research on the extent (or impact) of how ministry internship programs serve the various needs of church congregations (Sturgis & Graham, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in research that currently exists in the intern and congregant perceptions of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a rural regional public university in Missouri. Potential benefits of this study include: expanding the knowledge base about if and, perhaps how, ministry internship programs help ministry interns discern a potential call into ministry, while providing information to gauge the program's impact on people in the pews. The study will determine whether the program helps interns discern their call into ministry, and also if members of congregations of churches served by the ministry internship program feel the program is effective in meeting their individual faith-development and church needs. Through this work, the researcher seeks to determine if ministry internship programs in the Methodist faith can be useful on-ramps that help infuse young people into ministry, thus potentially providing valuable information to and supporting better understanding of a church in an era of reduced membership, financial

challenges and a crossroads of ministry as it grapples with an aging clergy and a need for spiritual rejuvenation and the development of a next generation of ministers.

Research Questions

This study revolves around a grand tour research question that address program effectiveness from the perspective of those who have participated in the program as interns, and those people in church congregations who have been served by the intern program. The question is as follows: What are the intern and congregant perceptions about the United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri? Individual questions asked to interns and congregants are listed below.

INTERN QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience in the ministry internship program. What is your first memory of it?
2. When you first began the program, how confident were you in your ability to be successful as a minister in a church setting?
3. How has your experience in the program impacted your perception of whether or not you can be a successful minister in a church setting?
4. How has the internship program impacted your idea of calling?
5. What other comments might you have regarding the meaning of the ministry internship program?
6. How has this program brought you closer to God?

CONGREGANT QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience with the ministry internship program. What is your first memory of it?
2. Describe your impressions of interns as they began their time with you.
3. Please describe the changes you have seen in interns as they have worked with you.
4. How do you feel interns have impacted your church?
5. What other comments might you have regarding the meaning of ministry internship program?
6. How has this program brought you closer to God?

Theoretical Framework

Self-Efficacy

The theoretical framework of this study is self-efficacy as described by Bandura (1977). According to the American Psychological Association, self-efficacy is an “individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments” (American Psychological Association, 2018). In other words, if a person believes he or she has a chance to succeed at a given task, then that person is more likely to succeed than a person who does not believe he or she will be able to accomplish the task.

Cherry (2017) noted that those people who have a higher sense of self-efficacy are more committed and interested in tasks they pursue and more willing to accept challenges in tasks that relate to their interests. Those with a higher sense of self-efficacy are also better able to deal with failures and setbacks related to tasks that relate to their

interests. Cherry (2017) also noted that those people with a lower sense of self-efficacy approach tasks with less confidence in successful outcomes and, in fact, often avoid challenging tasks altogether.

Self-Efficacy in Relation to this Study

The three foundational pillars of this study, internships, Methodist church staffing, and campus ministry, were filtered through the self-efficacy lens Bandura provides. Bandura posits that “successful performance is replacing symbolically based experiences as the principle vehicle of change” (p. 191). For the purposes of this study, the previous quote represents exploring a call to vocational ministry through actually doing some aspects of ministry prior to enrolling full-time in a seminary program. One can think about being a full-time minister. One can read about being a full-time minister. One can listen to others speak about being a full-time minister. According to Bandura, there is, however, no substitute for actual experience in determining for oneself what is needed for success in a particular endeavor. Citing Delaney (1968), Bandura says that “by observing the differential effects of their own actions, individuals discern which responses are appropriate in which settings and behave accordingly” (Bandura, 1977, p. 192). The practice of doing ministry as an intern would provide what Bandura called differential outcomes. Outcomes would teach interns the correct set of behaviors needed to function within the profession. In his words: “Viewed from the cognitive framework, learning from differential outcomes becomes a special case of observational learning. In this mode of conveying response information, the conception of the appropriate behavior is gradually constructed from observing the effects of one’s actions rather than the examples provided by others” (Bandura, 1977, p. 192).

Callanan and Benzing (2006) take this idea a bit further, and help form the first pillar of this study, when they note that one of the foremost measures of “self- and environmental-exploration” is the internship. Internships are “designed to help students develop an accurate self-concept, gain a realistic understanding of various career fields and organizational environments, and allow a check for fit between individual characteristics and the demands of different jobs” (pp. 82-83). Educational pioneer John Dewey recognized the value of actual experience in educational opportunities when he said “what [one] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (quoted in Merriam and Bierema, 2014, p. 105). Dewey’s contemporary, Eduard Lindeman, recognized the value of experience as well, calling it “the resource of highest value in adult education” (quoted in Merriam and Bierema, 2014, p. 105). In a nutshell, this is exploring one’s call to ministry by doing many of the things those called to full-time vocational ministry ought to do.

A second pillar of this study eyed the history of staffing in the United Methodist Church and its predecessors. Gooch (2000), Harmon (1977), and Tucker (1966) all note that, while Methodism today employs professional clergy from traditional routes such as seminaries, historically there has often been a significant lay presence within church leadership. In addition, many times within the historical record, ordained Methodist clergy members came to their preaching careers via alternative methods. This tradition within Methodism provides precedent and context for the intern program studied in this dissertation.

The third pillar of this study centered on campus ministry and how it might be used as a vehicle to help students determine if full-time ministry is an appropriate vocational choice. Looking over the church landscape in the 1970s and 1980s, Shockley (1989) was prescient when he stated:

Some very enterprising campus ministry unit might develop an internship program in which students are assigned to work with persons who are strong role models for Christian vocation. . . . The potential for building ties with local churches in this way would be another attractive feature of this topic. The program possibilities . . . are many, and the need is demonstrably great (p. 118).

In conducting earlier research on the same campus ministry-based internship program evaluated in this study, Ehlers (2004) found that those who participated in earlier iterations of the program were able to clarify and improve skills and interests while effectively discerning whether or not they were truly called to ministry. This earlier study focused solely on the program's impact on interns, and did not evaluate how it affected local church congregations served by interns in the program.

Design of the Study

Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature. Bennett and Jessani (2011) claim that “qualitative data is needed to determine the interests, behavior, intentions, agenda, inter-relations, and influence of different actors in a particular issue” (p. 84). With this in mind, research was conducted in a systematic way, using guidelines espoused in Merriam and Tisdell (2016) in an attempt to gather information from all of the internship program's stakeholder groups. The researcher adopted a social constructivist worldview

for this project. One goal of this worldview, as explained in Creswell (2014), is that “the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (p. 8). The research design for this study is a bounded case study as described in Merriam and Tisdale (2016), and is evaluative in nature, as data was collected to determine the internship program’s “worth or value” (p. 4). Creswell (2014) says that “case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation” (p. 14). According to Rossi, Lipsi, and Freeman (2004), program evaluations study, appraise, and offer improvements for programs in the way such programs are “conceptualized and implemented, the outcomes they achieve, and their efficiency (p. 3). Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015) say stakeholders desire to understand the value of programs they are part of and that they support. The researcher conducted data collection and analysis. Data was collected via archival records of an evaluation of the intern program from the district superintendent’s office, interviews with current and former interns, and focus groups made up of congregants, in an effort to triangulate any findings (Fink, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Setting

The ministerial internship program offered by a campus ministry at a regional rural university, located in Missouri, was selected for this study. The Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has assigned four rural churches to be served by interns from this college ministry. For the purposes of this study, those churches will be referred to as UMC A, UMC B, UMC C, and UMC D. All four churches are located in rural Missouri. Three of the churches bear the names of the small towns in which they

are located. The exception is UMC A, which is not located in any town. Rather, the church is a lone structure on a stretch of rock road, in extreme rural Missouri.

Participants

Participants in the study were ministry interns who were involved with the program, as well as several past ministry interns the researcher was able to successfully contact via email, phone, or face-to-face interview. Members of the congregations of each of the four churches served by the ministerial internship program were also asked to participate in the study. There were 25 total people who participated in the four focus groups. Fifteen of the focus group participants were female. Ten were male. All of the members of the congregations that participated in the study were white, and they all lived in rural settings. The youngest congregant who participated in the study was in her mid-fifties. Two congregants who participated in the study were in their nineties. The majority of congregants who participated in the study were in their seventies or eighties.

All interns who participated in this study were white, and though their practice of ministry for the program was in a rural setting, the majority of interns grew up in suburban settings. Intern ages ranged from 21 to 26. Three interns were actively involved in the program at the time of their interviews, while two had graduated. Four interns were female. One was male.

Data Collection Tools

In a discussion on data collection, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) cite Dey (1993) when they note that data in a qualitative sense is not simply “waiting collection, like so many rubbish bags on the pavement.” Instead, data must be “noticed by the researcher and treated as data for the purposes of . . . research” (p. 106). The researcher utilized

archival records from the district superintendent's office, focus groups made up of congregants, and interviews with current and former interns to gather data for this study. The researcher used three different methods of data collection to achieve triangulation, as discussed by Creswell (2014), in order to establish themes "based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants" (p. 201). This converging of sources was done to ensure validity of findings. The researcher sought interviews with as many current and former interns as were needed to achieve saturation. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), saturation is reached when the researcher begins "hearing the same responses to [his or her] interview questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations; no new insights are forthcoming" (p. 101). For interviews and focus groups, the researcher sought to do purposeful sampling, specifically maximum variation sampling, as this technique provided "the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies (Seidman, 2013, p. 56).

The researcher sought focus groups made up of members of church congregations. Focus groups had between five and eight members, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2015). The exception to this came during a focus group with congregants from UMC A. Only three people were involved in this focus group, though this number represented nearly 40 percent of the church's regular congregation of eight members.

Data Analysis

Focus group interviews and individual interviews were recorded and transcribed using the online transcription service www.rev.com. Coding of the resulting transcripts and earlier archival data in the method espoused by Creswell (2014) was used to discern

emerging themes. Specifically, the researcher used Tesch's (1990) eight steps in the coding process (cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 198) during analysis of individual interviews and focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2015) refer to this as the classic analysis strategy. "It is low-tech. It isn't elegant or sophisticated looking, but it works" (p. 151). After the researcher identified themes, he compiled a document that matched numerous quotes from interns and congregants to each theme. Per the suggestion of Seidman (2013), the researcher avoided any analysis until all gathering of records, interviews, and focus groups were completed (p. 116).

Limitations

The researcher recognizes several limitations to this study. First, the researcher serves as director of the campus ministry that offers the internship, and thus recognizes the potential of bias based on his culture, background, and history (Creswell, 2014). Second, the intern program, and the churches themselves, were small enough that the researcher had to navigate the problem of easy access, as outlined by Seidman (2013). In addition, because interns and congregants had personal relationships with the researcher, they might not have been completely honest in sharing any negative perceptions they had of the intern program. Finally, in some cases, there was an inability to track individuals who might have been a study participant because of graduation, death, or various other methods of attrition over time.

Delimitations

The researcher conducted individual interviews and focus groups among congregants only within the boundaries of the four churches served by the campus ministry intern program. Interns interviewed for the study served the four churches only

during or after 2001, the year the intern program began. The intern program draws only from people connected to a rural, regional public university in Missouri. There is an inability to track every person connected with this study over time because of intern graduation and the movement or death of congregants from the beginning of the intern program until now.

Assumptions

The researcher assumes the complete honesty of those who answer interview and focus group questions. He recognizes, however, that prior relationships exist between the researcher and many interns and congregants. Because of this, there might be temptation on their part to answer questions based on how they think the researcher wants them to answer, rather than based on actual truth.

Definitions of Key Terms

Bishop. The senior clergy person in a Methodist annual conference. He or she is the only one in the conference who can ordain people into ministry.

Call. How God uses who he has made us to be in the lives of people (Bomar, 2010, p. 160).

Congregant. Any member of a congregation of the four churches served by the intern program at a regional, rural public university in Missouri.

District. A governing unit that is subordinate to the annual conference in the United Methodist Church. The Missouri Annual Conference encompasses multiple districts. Each district encompasses multiple churches.

District Superintendent. The senior clergy person within a district in the United Methodist Church.

Intern. Any person who has served in the intern program at a regional, rural public university in Missouri in order to explore his or her calling into vocational ministry.

Missouri Annual Conference. The governing body of the United Methodist Church in Missouri.

Vocational Ministry. Any work involving pastoral care or the espousing of religion where one is paid.

Significance of the Study

Scholarship

There are few ministerial internship programs available to provide experience in ministry for undergraduate students prior to their enrollment in seminary in order to help those students discern their calls into vocational ministry. Additionally, for the few undergraduate ministry internship programs that do exist, there is a lack of information available concerning the effectiveness of those programs in funneling younger people into full-time vocational ministry. There is also a lack of information concerning how those internships meet, or to what extent they meet, the ministerial needs of churches they serve. This lack of research is a compelling reason for the significance of this study.

Practice

A second reason for the significance of this study is rooted in the idea that it seeks to provide data for one particular program that, through its practice, attempts to fill both of those niches. If the ministry internship program offered through a college ministry at a regional university in Missouri proves its worth by placing interns into vocational ministry, and also provides effective ministry in churches where ministry might not

otherwise be taking place, there would be value for the United Methodist Church in further supporting the program, and even potentially replicating it in other places. In addition, as problems and challenges in the internship are revealed through archival data, focus groups, or individual interviews, addressing those problems will make the internship program run more effectively, thus providing better service to congregations and better formative opportunities for interns to discern their vocational calls into ministry.

Summary

The United Methodist Church is in decline on several fronts, perhaps most notably in congregation size and the rapid aging of its clergy (Hahn, 2016; Hassinger & Holik, 1970; Green, 2008). Many young people feel called to ministry, but there are few ways to explore that call in depth without actually committing oneself to a long and costly seminary program (Ehlers, 2004; Hahn, 2013). Ministerial internships such as the one offered through a college ministry at a regional university in Missouri, offer younger people a chance to explore the calling of vocational ministry in a no-risk environment. At the same time, new avenues of ministry are opened for congregations as their places of worship become teaching churches (Shockley, 1989; Lundborg, 2002). Bandura (1977) contends that reflecting on one's own actions is a tremendously effective learning tool. Callanan and Benzing (2006) and Coco (2000) posit that perhaps the best way to reflect on one's actions in terms of how they affect performance is with an internship. More information is needed to assess the overall effectiveness of ministerial internship programs in regard to its impact on younger people committing their lives to vocational

ministry, and the impact that ministry internship programs have on the churches themselves.

Results

The purpose of this study was to help fill a gap in research that existed in the intern and congregant perceptions of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a rural regional public university in Missouri. The researcher conducted four focus groups, one with congregants at each church location. The researcher also conducted interviews with four interns. Two of the interns were enrolled in the program at the time of their interviews. Two of the interns had completed enrollment in the program. In addition, the researcher had access to archival data from the district superintendent detailing intern and congregant perceptions given during an earlier evaluation of the intern program. Ideas discussed in interviews, focus groups, and archival data were considered to have met theme status when they drew double-digit mentions by congregants, interns, or a combination of both. Using this criteria, eight major themes emerged based on mentions. Those themes were:

- support/transformation
- realistic understanding of the field
- differential outcomes
- impact on calling
- drawing closer to God
- influx of new ideas
- keeping churches open
- producing ministers

The themes uncovered through in this research fit into the three main pillars of this study – internships, campus ministry, and staffing in the United Methodist Church. The researcher collected and tabulated responses by interns and congregants during interviews and focus groups, along with additional information gleaned from archival data of evaluative responses of interns and congregants about the internship program given to the district superintendent. The results are revealed in the three tables below:

Table 1

Internship Pillar Mentions

Theme	Intern Mentions	Congregant Mentions	Total Mentions
Support and Transformation	9	19	28
Realistic Understanding of Field	6	5	11
Differential Outcomes	12	7	19
TOTALS	27	31	58

Table 2

Campus Ministry Pillar Mentions

Theme	Intern Mentions	Congregant Mentions	Total Mentions
Impact on Calling	9	1	10
Finding God	5	6	11
Influx of New Ideas	1	16	17
TOTALS	15	23	38

Table 3

Staffing Pillar Mentions

Theme	Intern Mentions	Congregant Mentions	Total Mentions
Keeping the Church Open	0	13	13
Producing Ministers	5	10	15
TOTALS	5	23	28

Support and Transformation

The theme of support and transformation most closely relates to the internship pillar. This theme coalesced as the single greatest impact of the ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri. Westfall (2013) found that most ministry internship programs offered through campus ministries did not include routes to ministry within local churches. Lundborg (2002) and Ehlers (2004), however, discussed the transformative process of ministry internship programs from campus ministries to local churches on both interns and congregants. Comments from interviews, focus groups, and archival data provided by the district superintendent for this dissertation bear this out. This theme drew the most amount of mentions by congregants, and the second-most amount of mentions from interns.

Interns spoke of the nurturing nature of the congregations they served, and the confidence they had in the support they were getting. One intern appreciated all the “connections and relationships” she was able to be part of through the congregations.

Another intern appreciated that the churches were “so welcoming and are willing to provide feedback and love.”

Congregations, in turn, took pride in the idea that they had become teaching churches in the Lundborg (2002) model. Their job was to create an environment in which interns were accepted, loved, and built up for ministry. In this, a member of UMC D was convinced her church had succeed because,

[interns] all just, every Sunday, they felt received. They felt welcome. At the risk of tooting my own horn . . . we made them feel welcome. We were open. We tried hard to be open to the young, because you know we’re looking at a young generation. How many generations after us?

A member of the congregation from UMC B echoed these welcoming and supportive sentiments when he said, “[the intern program is] an opportunity for young people to associate with the church, with kind and considerate people willing to help in any way that they can.” For another member of the same congregation, one of the best things about the intern program was that it led interns through “a transformation from their first Sunday here as they progress.” A congregant from UMC A was short and to the point: “Most all of [the interns], I think, you see growth in them.”

The researcher wishes to note that he believes this reciprocal process of support and transformation is a way that God is present in the ministry internship process. Interns provide a ministerial presence in the churches, and then members of the congregations begin to claim interns as their own and build them up in faith and love. The ministry thus becomes reciprocal, because, in a very real way, interns are built into a new creation through the love and support shown to them by congregants. As the apostle Paul wrote in

2 Corinthians, “therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here” (5:17).

Interns and congregants reported the transformative effect of the internship program. Both groups also reported the internship program was useful in providing interns with a more realistic understanding of the ministry field. These results are discussed in the next section.

Realistic Understanding of the Field

Callanan and Benzing (2006) stated that one of the most important aspects of an internship is to “gain a realistic understanding of various career fields and organizational environments, and allow a check for fit between individual characteristics and the demands of different jobs” (p. 83). This theme of building a realistic understanding of the field relates to the internship pillar of this dissertation, and interns and congregants saw it as a major theme in the ministry internship program. Working in churches allowed interns to see whether they fit into a traditional ministry role based on the practical demands that role places on them. Because they learn the demands of the job, interns are better able to decide if they wish to pursue vocational ministry beyond their undergrad years.

One intern alluded to the idea that she came to understand the struggles and celebrations of rural churches better because of the time she put in at those churches during her stint in the program. She now knows “some of the unique difficulties that [small] churches can go through. This has helped me to prepare for the good and challenging things that can come with becoming deeply involved in a church.”

Another intern said, based on the time she spent with congregation members, she came to realize that conducting worship was more than just writing out a sermon. Furthermore, she found this realization allowed her to thrive in her intern role, by moving her into emotional connection with the congregations she served.

When you do speech and debate in high school, I write out a speech and I memorize it, and then I deliver it, and it's all in my head, and it's almost like a mechanical recording. But that's not the way that people learn in a church setting. People learn in being able to relate to the person who is talking and a sense of relationability. Being relatable comes from talking conversationally, and so that is something that I have learned throughout this process – being genuine and being authentic, and talking the way I normally talk because people respond to that more because they don't view me as someone who is faking it.

Still another intern came to realize that traditional Sunday adult ministry did not fit her particular characteristics and desires for being in ministry.

[The internship] did help me realize I probably am not wanting to do ordained ministry. Student ministry is my sweet spot. That was always the plan that I had known I wanted to do youth ministry. [The program] helped me say, 'Okay, I still want to do ministry, but this is not the avenue of ministry that I want to go down'. Congregations also recognize the work interns put in to see if they are a fit for the demands the job of being a minister brings.

I think they tailor it to us then, too. Because when they first come here they don't know who any of us are and once they learn a little bit about us and what our church does and specifically what people do. Then they can kind of pick out

certain things that hit you. It affects you more that way whenever they can zone in on that.

The realistic understanding of the ministry field that the internship program helped to create was fueled partially by the experience that interns were able to gain as they did their jobs. Bandura (1977) referred to this type of experiential learning as differential outcomes. This idea is discussed more in-depth in the next section.

Differential Outcomes

Differential outcomes also emerged as a theme related to the internship pillar of this dissertation. As identified by Bandura (1977), differential outcomes are a construction of schemas needed to perform a job or task based on personal experience at the job or task, rather than just observing what is required. Both interns and congregants referred to differential outcomes (by concept, not by name) as a positive aspect of the ministry intern program multiple times in interviews, focus groups, and archival data collected from the district superintendent's office. One intern noted the value of personal experience by saying her time in the program "helped to show me how to be flexible when working in a church setting, which I feel is extremely important for continued success." Another intern noted, "I know now that sermon writing is a discipline and the more you do it, the easier it gets." The same intern mentioned that she sometimes had to learn through mistakes, especially early on in the program.

I have come from . . . a very contemporary-styled background. So then people were like, 'You didn't say this has been the word of God for the people of God.' I'm like, 'I didn't know that was a thing that people do!' So, yeah. I was very, very quickly like, 'These are the traditions and you messed them up.' I'm like, 'I'm sorry!'

Another intern summed up the concept of differential outcomes in the ministry internship by saying the program “is a very unique program. It’s not something that you see at other universities or other schools. It gives people a hands-on experience, and that kinetic learning is so vital to really understanding.”

Congregants, also, made mention of the concept of differential outcomes in their observations of interns over time. One congregant from UMC A mentioned that, for interns, humbling beginnings led to gradual improvement:

Sometimes they didn’t know how to use the mic. And that was maybe our fault. We needed to help them and couldn’t hear them. And they were shy and they weren’t confident, but just like any speaker I’ve watched them and they’ve gotten better and better and better. And that makes me feel good because then they’re ready to go out in the world and spread the good news, too.

A congregant from UMC D noted that the actual act of preaching and being in ministry helped a particular intern learn far more than he ever would have in a classroom setting that did not offer those opportunities.

When he came in . . . you could obviously tell he was nervous. But, as the time went on, and he left, he was confident. And I think as the internship program itself goes, that was definitely a plus for him because he needed that, because, poor soul, . . . if he’d just gone through the schooling part of it and just stepped into his church without this internship to help guiding training, poor thing. You know it was a great learning process for him.

Many people in congregations served by the intern program expressed admiration for interns because they were willing to take chances and fail in order to ultimately find

success and even break some stereotypes along the way. Said one congregant from UMC C:

But just watching them, set themselves into this role, handily, and just . . . something like bravery, the willingness to put yourself into a situation that you're not comfortable. . . . And it's nice to see people do that, young people. Because . . . many people have a cynical view of that age group. They show us that they're just good ministers.

Drawing Closer to God

Christ was present in the transformative process of reciprocal support between interns and congregants. Research revealed that both groups have managed to draw closer to God in other ways as well through their involvement in this program.

The researcher chose to associate the theme of drawing closer to God under the aegis of the campus ministry pillar for this dissertation. He did so because he feels it is inherent upon a campus ministry to provide routes to explore God's presence for each student who passes through the ministry, as a person's college-age years are crucial in faith formation. Dean (2010) recognized that people in their teens often begin the search for higher meaning in their lives. Bomar (2011) alluded to this as well when he said "the ages of 18 to 25 have become a time of mind-opening opportunities . . . with long-term impacts" (p. 109). To that end, every intern interviewed for this dissertation mentioned that the internship program has positively affected their relationships with God in many ways. For some, the relationship came from seeing that God exists for people of multiple backgrounds. One intern mentioned that

this program has brought me closer to God by making me see how God loves people who come from different places than me. By seeing that, and expanding my social circle from just my hometown, this has shown me the deepness of God's love and grace.

For another intern, seeing that her fellow interns and the congregants she served lived relationships with God that were works in progress was a springboard for her faith:

The greatest thing that the program has done for me in my relationship with God is [that it] put me in a community of people who are also working on their relationship with God. So this community . . . has been a really wonderful experience because any time that I've had questions, any time that I've had doubts or been really flustered, or exasperated, I can just come into a safe place and talk it out with people who are also in the same shoes that I have been in. So I think being able to see God work in other people is something that brings me closer to God every day.

As a further consequence of the campus ministry providing opportunities for its students to draw closer to God, members of church congregations also recognized opportunities for drawing closer to God that were inherent in the internship program. One congregant from UMC A said: "For me personally, they have made my belief stronger because I can watch these kids growing in faith and it helps me to grow. So, I kind of like them."

A member of UMC B said the structure of the program spurred congregants into drawing closer to God by placing them in positions of service in the absence of a full-time minister.

I think for so long we were served. The preacher did it. And now it has fallen on us to be a part, a viable part, and I think it's helping. You have to get up out of that seat and put yourself to work.

Other congregants were able to draw closer to God in the messages that the various interns brought with them to the church service. A congregant from UMC B felt intern sermons allowed him to relate to what was happening in ways he had never thought of before.

You know, I think I understand the sermon better. And not to say that I don't appreciate the traditional church setting but I think I understand the Bible way more than I've ever understood it before and I'm older than I should be to be just now understanding the Bible, if that makes sense. So I think they put it in terms I can relate to.

Still other congregants were able to find God simply in the earnestness of the interns who were in front of them on Sunday mornings. That idea is reflected in these words from a member of UMC C, who was impressed by interns' "willingness to share, at times, their faith struggles. I think I learn from them [things] you never talk about. Gives you pause for thought later on." A congregant from UMC D thought similarly when she said, "The thing that amazes me is how excited these kids are about their religion and how sincere they are. You don't see that in the general realm of people. It's just not there."

This sincerity in how they practiced religion is, perhaps, due in part to the seriousness with which interns used the internship program to assess whether they were

called into some type of vocational ministry. The next section explores more on that idea of calling.

Impact on Calling

Impact on calling was another theme that fit into the campus ministry pillar. Bomar (2010) said “being a spiritual leader, vocational or not, requires us to understand how God uses who he’s made us to be in the lives of people” (p. 160). This understanding of how God wants to use us comes as close as anything to defining one’s call into ministry. In their attempts to find out how God wanted to use them, interns consistently made use of the program to help explore their calling to be ministers.

One intern said she enjoyed the internship because she found a community that enjoyed “diving deeper into faith and being able to explore together.” A second intern reported that the internship “has done so much for me. I have wanted to be a pastor my whole life and now I am in a position where I can actually practice and be in a community of people doing the same.” Another intern mentioned that her calling was reaffirmed through the hands-on work she did with congregations through the internship program, saying she was a:

. . . person who is a do-er, and so I think vocational ministry mixed with missions ministry would be the calling that I’m called to, and I think being able to preach to these churches, but also taking these churches on an experience like Urban Plunge (an inner-city mission experience) was a really great thing for me because I think if I could find a way to bring those two together, then I would feel successful.

Another intern reported that the internship was useful to her because it allowed her to expand her definition of what being called to ministry actually meant, saying that:

This program has shown me that a “calling” is different for everyone. I believe now that callings come in many different forms and are flexible towards different backgrounds and walks of life. For myself, I’ve learned that, while my calling doesn’t necessarily change, the way I achieve that calling can.

One consequence of a collection of college-age students practicing ministry in rural churches with aging congregations is the perspective shifts that inevitably occur among congregants. Some of these perspective shifts, and the resulting new ideas that accompanied them, are discussed in the next section.

Influx of New Ideas

Congregants from each church mentioned the influx of new ideas that came into their churches as a result of their involvement with the internship program. Some mentioned it multiple times. Because the congregants reported these new ideas as coming from college students, the researcher chose to place the theme under the campus ministry pillar.

This theme drew the second-most mentions (16) by congregants, trailing only mentions concerning transformation and support (19). All mentions of the theme cast it in a positive light as one of the major benefits of the internship program for the churches served. Interestingly, while congregants recognized new ideas as a major positive of the program, the theme was not generally recognized among interns, the purveyors of these new ideas, drawing just one mention.

Said one congregant from UMC C: “I think it’s a positive, too, that we get so many different ideas and they come from so many different backgrounds, so it’s really insightful.” Another congregant from the same church agreed, saying: “I think it’s just their different viewpoints and experiences. You kind of get caught up in your own, so I think it’s good to hear that youthful experience.” A third congregant from UMC C discussed the new ideas from interns at the church as:

Positive and beautiful. [You] just get a different perspective on things and to hear them talk about their studies that they’re still going through and struggling with, scheduling everything, it’s like, “oh my gosh, how do they do that?” And then still have time for us. It’s touching.

A member from UMC D mentioned he liked having multiple interns conduct services in the church because “it’s like it gives you a different outlook.” Another member of UMC D agreed, saying that having different students “keeps us out of that rut to think differently about things.” A congregant from UMC B mentioned that he liked the variety of experiences each intern brought to his church. “Every one of them has something to offer, in a different way. The way they approach topics and subjects for sermons. It’s what do I want to say? Refreshing.” Another member from the same church agreed, saying the interns were “not afraid to try something new. They drag us along.”

Overall, congregants were grateful for the new ideas and energy interns brought to their churches. Church members also recognized the integral role interns played in keeping their churches open. This topic is discussed in the next section.

Keeping the Church Open

The first theme under the staffing pillar discussed the idea of keeping churches open. Hahn (2016) and Green (2008) spoke of aging congregations in churches throughout United Methodism. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) also noticed this aging trend among United Methodist pastors. In the face of these statistics, and the resulting decrease in overall membership, many United Methodist churches across Missouri, and the United States in general, have been forced to close their doors. The four churches served by the internship program are representative of many rural churches in Missouri, and of the problems rural churches face, yet they have all remained open. Congregants credit their involvement with the internship program as the reason why this is so.

A congregant from UMC D was forthright in his assessment of the financial ability of his church to operate without the internship program: “We could not pay a minister very much. We couldn’t pay all his insurance. We couldn’t pay the pensions and all that stuff. We’d be just about out of it.” Two congregants from UMC A offered a similar assessment while in conversation with each other:

First Congregant: “I think [interns] have given a lot because I don’t know if this church would still be here if we didn’t have the interns.”

Second Congregant: “No, it wouldn’t be.”

A congregant from UMC B lamented the loss of a full-time pastor, but recognized the value of the internship program in keeping his church open: “Would the church still be going if [we] didn’t have the internship? Looking at that, just be grateful even if

sometimes it don't work out exactly as you wanted. I mean it still helps it keep going and they're trying to make it grow.”

A congregant from UMC C also discussed the loss of a full-time minister, but pointed out that, overall, she was pleased with effect the internship program had on her church: “I guess I'd like to say it's only been positive. Without them [interns], we would have nothing.”

A congregant from UMC D summed up her church's relationship with the internship program succinctly when she said: “The kids have saved us.”

While no church in the internship program currently has a full-time pastor, each congregation is nonetheless proud of how their church has helped raise up a number of students who have moved on into vocational ministry as a career. This concept is discussed more in-depth in the next section.

Producing Ministers

The theme of producing ministers also falls under the staffing pillar for this dissertation. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016) documented the average rising age of United Methodist clergy and the overall decline of ordained United Methodist elders under the age of 35. Hahn (2013) noted the relatively rigorous path toward ordination in the church and the sheer number of years it takes to complete the important, yet highly symbolic, process. Bolman and Deal (2013) remind us that, with organizational symbols, “events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced” (p. 248).

The internship program dispenses with much of this symbolism built up around ministry, placing interns immediately in positions of authority within churches. In so

doing, it becomes a more efficient way for young people to determine whether vocational ministry is an appropriate career path. In the years since the program began, at least five former interns have gone on to careers in full-time vocational ministry. In addition, two interns who have recently graduated have plans to attend seminary in the future. Many people in the congregations served by the internship program have latched onto the idea that, while they are now too small to have a full-time minister, they nonetheless have an integral role in producing young ministers for the overall good of the denomination.

A congregant at UMC D expressed pride in raising up young people into full-time ministry, even though their start at the church was rough: “[Those two interns were] pretty close to the beginning. And they’re both ministers, now.” Said a congregant from UMC B: “There have been several [interns] that have become a preacher, or a young minister of some sort.” A comment from a UMC A member sums up the feelings of many congregants: “We feel good about helping young people to be involved in ministry.”

Interns, also, are grateful for the chance to practice their skills and determine their life’s path in vocational ministry or elsewhere. One intern was happy that the program allowed her a chance to see herself being successful in ministry:

This program has put me in a position to where I can almost test it all out and see it, see it play out, so yeah, it’s helped me interpret the fact that vocational ministry is an option for me.

A second intern spoke to the idea that, while the program has produced full-time vocational ministers, it has helped other people realize their service to God could come in different ways: “I believe that this program has not only helped to produce future

ministers and seminary students, but has also produced individuals who work to deeply love and work hard for God.”

The eight themes identified via interviews with interns, focus groups with members of church congregations, and archival data collected from the district superintendent’s office have expressed multiple positive aspects of the internship program. Conversations also revealed some issues and problems people had with the program. While none of those issues or problems reached theme status in the manner described above, the researcher still wishes to highlight them in the vein of full transparency. The next section highlights those issues and problems.

Issues and Problems Affecting Congregants

The issue voiced most frequently by congregants in focus groups and archival data from the district superintendent’s office was the lack of a full-time clergy person in residence in any of the communities served by the internship program. This issue also received voice in previous sections of this paper, particularly in the section entitled “Keeping the Church Open.” It should be noted, however, that the internship program did not cause this issue. Rather, the program was developed partially to relieve this issue, which is more a result of aging church and clergy populations as described by Hahn (2016), Green (2008), Hahn (2013), and the Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2016).

Because of the lack of full-time pastoral leadership, some other issues and problems arose in communities served by interns that the internship program, in its current form, has challenges addressing. Chiefly, those complaints coalesced around the ideas of a lack of consistent communication between churches and the administration of the internship program, and also a lack of pastoral visitation available to members of congregations. Quotes that encapsulate these issues are bulleted below.

- “The bulletins are different every Sunday. Sometimes it’s a little sketchy but it’s okay. It’s okay because they don’t have time to get it done.” (UMC B Congregant)
- “I kind of like a bigger church. I do miss the same preacher every Sunday only because of deaths, keeping the bulletin updated, and when you’re in the hospital. I like that.” (UMC B Congregant)
- “Sometimes I like the same person up there that just looks out at the congregation and knows everybody and what’s ticking with them.” (UMC B Congregant)
- “Just for the fact of not having a full-time ministry, and we’re going to have college kids leading this all . . . what’s this going to be like? Look around the table. We’re not college-age.” (UMC C Congregant)
- “And I would say that something we still struggle with is not having the full-time minister that lives and participates in the community.” (UMC C Congregant)
- “We have no visitation. We have no way to impact, to go out into the community, talk to anybody to come into church. That’s the job we should all be doing.” (UMC D Congregant)
- “That’s kind of where we feel lost sometimes, is that personal leadership that is constant. Nothing negative to the ministers in office. We realize how they’re spread . . . but . . . how do we get everyone together to really do it and really push it?” (UMC D Congregant)

Visitation within the community is not a requirement of interns in the program, as they already have many time commitments as full-time students. It should be noted, however, that many interns do give of themselves above and beyond the time commitment required to attend church suppers, fundraisers, and other events within the church communities they serve. Some of the expectations in terms of pastoral visitation within the church communities naturally fall to the internship program's administrator. The administrator's main job is that of campus minister, however, and he spends much of his work time discharging the duties associated with that office, often leaving little time for his presence in the four communities served by the internship program.

One solution to this visitation problem is for members of each congregation to take it upon themselves to become ministers within the community, but there are problems inherent in this solution as well. Congregants often work throughout the week, and have time commitments related to their main jobs. Other members of church congregations are often quite elderly, and might find it difficult to muster the energy needed to be in visitation with others.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in research that currently exists in the intern and congregant perceptions of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a rural regional public university in Missouri. The researcher wanted to determine whether the intern program was a way to funnel more young people into vocational ministry by helping them explore their potential callings. At the same time, the researcher wanted to know if the intern program was effective in

helping congregants by providing meaningful church services that allowed them to come closer to God.

Based on focus groups with representative congregants from each of the four churches served by the intern program, interviews with multiple current and former interns, and archival data concerning the program provided by the district superintendent, the researcher offers the following observations about the impact of a United Methodist ministry internship program offered through a campus ministry at a regional rural public university in Missouri :

1. The intern program is transformative in nature for both interns and congregants in terms of their relationships with God and each other.
2. The intern program has helped interns gain a more realistic understanding of what is required of them in the field of vocational ministry.
3. The intern program allows interns to learn and attempt to master skills by providing differential outcomes for intern and congregant reflection.
4. Interns feel the intern program has had a significant effect on the perception of their calling into vocational ministry.
5. Interns and congregants believe that involvement with the program has brought them closer to God.
6. Congregants believe their involvement with the intern program has exposed their churches to an influx of new ideas brought to them by interns.
7. Congregants believe their involvement with the intern program has allowed their churches to stay open, even though they are no longer able to afford a full-time minister.

8. The intern program has helped funnel several young people into vocational ministry throughout its existence.
9. Some issues and problems were noted with the intern program. These problems were identified exclusively by congregants. Most problems were related to the lack of a full-time ministerial presence in the communities served by the churches to which the congregants belonged.

Future Research

In conducting future research, it would be of value to interview interns who participated in the intern program in its initial stages. This would potentially establish the transformative nature of the internship program over a longer period of time. Similarly, a continuation of research in the same style as discussed in this study, but by a researcher who is in no way connected to the program, would either confirm or potentially invalidate results of the transformative nature of the intern program gleaned from this study. Finally, this study dealt with only an intern program that served rural churches. If there are similar programs that serve in urban or suburban settings, more useful data concerning the viability of such programs could be uncovered.

SECTION SIX

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

Leadership Theory and Practice

“Weird Al” Yankovic has a song called “Everything you know is wrong.” In part, the song goes like this:

Everything you know is wrong. Black is white, up is down and short is long,

And everything you thought was just so important doesn’t matter.

Everything you know is wrong. Just forget the words and sing along.

All you need to understand is everything you know is wrong. (Yankovic, 1996, track 2)

For the idea of leadership theory and practice, those words sum up quite well how I felt when diving into literature, discussion, and examples of the best practices of leadership, versus many of the things I thought and did as an actual leader. Many of the things I grew up accepting as simple truths, when placed under the lens of understanding this doctoral program, and writing this dissertation, began to provide, were not so simple. In fact, some of those truths were not true at all. That thought was both scary and strangely liberating.

Northouse (2016) says that leadership is a “complex process having multiple dimensions”; therefore, it is a “highly sought-after and highly valued commodity” (p. 1). This speaks to the many different facets of leadership, and also the many different ways one can be a leader within an organization. This program has forced me to really think about my own leadership style. As I reflect, I can say with certainty that I am at my best

as a leader when my decisions are not given top-down, a style Bolman and Deal (2013) term as “vertical coordination.” This style is “often efficient but not always effective More decentralized and interactive lateral forms of coordination are often needed to keep . . . from stifling initiative and creativity” (p. 57). This style of coordination is called “lateral coordination,” and I would posit that this form of coordination could also be described as a team. Certainly, the doctoral program has expanded my definition of just what a team is, what a team is expected to do, and how teams can drive an organization forward, both through how they impact organizational leaders, and through the leadership teams themselves can offer.

Leadership and Teams

In particular, as I have gone through this program and written this dissertation, I had to reexamine many of the ideas I held about being a member of, and leading, teams. Before this program began, I thought teams were, at best, a necessary evil that had to be implemented from time to time, mostly as a deflecting tool for making tough decisions. If a decision regarding an issue happened to stir up controversy, then I could always fall back on the line that we had made the decision as a team. In this way, there was safety in numbers. Very quickly into the program’s first summer, I learned that teams done right were much more than blame-absorbers. Both Lencioni (2002) and Levi (2014) speak to the power inherent in well-designed teams. If built and focused correctly, teams were truly powerful instruments for organizational decision-making.

Another great “aha” moment for me in this doctoral program came when Levi (2014) laid out some basic mistakes teams make when they seek to solve problems. The

most glaring of these mistakes is that teams often fall into the habit of “generating solutions without first understanding the problem” (p. 204).

As I reflected, I realized this has often been an issue for teams on which I have led. In my time as a middle and high school principal in the North Nodaway district, I often developed teams to solve various problems. Almost always, we came up with solutions before fully defining exactly what the problem was we were trying to solve. Though I would like to believe it was not the case, in part, this could have been because of what Janis (1971/2005) termed “groupthink.”

Bolman and Deal (2013) used what I would consider to be an example of groupthink when they discussed the negative aspects of “performance control” during the Vietnam War. “A notorious example was the use of enemy body counts . . . to measure combat effectiveness in Vietnam; field commanders became obsessed with ‘getting the numbers up’ . . . The numbers painted a picture of progress, even as the war was being lost” (pp. 53-54). To bring that idea back to my own frame of reference, the fact that we were engaged in coming up with solutions to our problems at school meant we were making progress, even if the problems themselves remained unsolved because they had never been fully identified in the first place. Almost certainly, our reactions to the knowledge that many of our problems remained unsolved moved us down the slippery slope of groupthink as much of the time group members “remain[ed] loyal to the group by sticking with the policies to which the group [had] already committed itself, even when those policies [were] obviously working out badly” (Janis, 1971/2005, p. 185).

As of this writing, I am now the director of the Northwest Wesley Foundation, a campus ministry. If I am not careful, groupthink and problem-solving could still become

major issues among the ministry's leadership team, comprised of college students in their teens and twenties, and myself, aged slightly older. I am quite literally old enough to be each team member's father, a fact that nets me a certain amount of social respect. Also, the term "minister" holds some sway among the team members as well, as if it somehow means I have a more direct line to God than they do. Perhaps all of this is why a team member once said to me: "You're the adultiest adult I know." I told him he should hang out with more adults.

I use humor to make light of what could be a potentially serious problem: just because I am older than other team members, those team members naturally assume I know what I am doing. Taylor (1916/2005) said that, for maximum efficiency, there should be a complete division of labor between management and workers. It has been my experience with college students that, for whatever reason, they naturally fall into this system. They view me as the manager and themselves as the workers. But, as a leader, I do not wish for this kind of divided hierarchy. For me, there is a difference between efficiency and effectiveness, as I alluded to earlier, courtesy of Bolman and Deal (2013). In speaking about what makes an effective executive, Drucker (2011) mentions eight essential characteristics. Leaders ask what needs to be done and what is right for the enterprise. Leaders develop action plans and take responsibility for communicating, and for decisions. Leaders focus on opportunities over problems, run productive meetings, and think and say "we" rather than "I" (pp. 23-24). Goleman (2011) contends that many organizations flourish based on a leader's emotional intelligence, which includes such skills as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. My experience in this program is that all of these tremendously important individual

leadership characteristics written about by Drucker and Goleman can be enhanced if they are filtered through a team. Gill (2010) says that “team learning means leveraging collective knowledge and wisdom of a small group of people” (p. 75). Therefore, I intentionally take steps to try and make sure that as we discuss issues that affect our ministry, all voices are heard. This idea of drawing participation out of all team members so that we can reach better decisions is challenging, but it is imperative for any lasting success.

Leadership Style

If I am remembered for any brand of leadership, my hope is that it would be servant leadership. Robert K. Greenleaf, in 1970, was the first to write specifically about servant leadership, but as the author himself noted throughout his work, the concepts of servant leadership extend back to the time of Christ and before. For Greenleaf, servant leadership starts with the “natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1991, p. 7). Northouse (2016) says that “servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities” (p. 225). An essential part of Northwest Wesley’s mission is to “help students become whole persons on their faith journeys” while they are at the university (Northwest Wesley Foundation). I believe this dovetails nicely with the servant leadership concept. Of course, Northouse (2016) also says that servant leadership is “an approach to leadership that runs counter to common sense” (p. 225). Collins (2011) speaks to this concept when discussing what he calls Level 5 leadership, mentioning that such leadership is “counterintuitive” and “countercultural” (p. 117). Perhaps this is true in some ways, but when one considers the true role of a leader,

especially a leader in a team setting, then I think it becomes imperative to empower followers, rather than hold them subservient without say to the whims of the leader. This empowerment can help coalesce the individuals into a true team, which in turn serves to move an organization forward. Lencioni (2002) would appear to agree when he says “a functional team must make the collective results of the group more important to each individual than individual members’ goals” (pp. 217-218).

As I have transitioned into the dissertation process, I am surprised at how much this team concept still motivates me. When I think of all the other members of Cohort X, and in particular, those with whom I was teamed throughout my coursework, I realize that I am writing this dissertation not just because I want to feel a sense of accomplishment, but also because I want to join them in what they are accomplishing. I have realized yet again in this dissertation process what a gift a well-functioning team can be. Even after its stated work is completed, the relationships built in that team can continue to motivate one for years to come. I am grateful for this realization.

Content and Context of Learning

Who I Am as a Learner

According to my StrengthsFinder results, I am a very introspective, reflective, and contextual learner who enjoys creating schemas by looking back at what has already happened in order to gain insight about how to move forward. Breaking down things in this way helps motivate me to learn more and process my learning in ways that make sense to me. This fits into how Merriam and Bierema (2014) choose to define intrinsic motivation. I enjoy learning because I love the “intellectual challenge” and want to “achieve mastery of a topic or practice for the satisfaction” it brings to me (p. 147).

Before I started this program and began writing this dissertation, I would have said that I preferred learning by myself and was not as comfortable with group or team learning. Immersion in this particular program has helped give me a deeper appreciation of what it means to be a team, and how teams can learn together. I appreciate the role each person on the team plays in all of us learning together. In this sense, my individual learning no longer ends up being solely for my personal benefit, but provides part of the foundation by which the team can begin to scaffold its collective knowledge, as described in Gill (2010). In essence, my transformation in this process is summed up by Bruffee (1999) as he detailed his metamorphosis from a lone professor who taught English to students who struggled to learn in their new context, to an essential part of a team that sought new, varied, and better ways to make material come alive for students.

Don't get me wrong: I still love my little pet learning projects, and I definitely do not mind finding knowledge for its own sake. Nonetheless, the idea of being a learner in and amongst other learners has been deeply ingrained within me over the past two years. For that, I am very grateful.

Who I Am as a Leader of a Context Where Adults Learn

Who am I as a leader of a context where adults learn? That is a great question, the answer to which has changed several different times over my leadership career. These changes have been made based on an increase in knowledge concerning the differences between how adults learn versus how children learn. Changes have also occurred as I have shifted jobs. When I was a principal, I led an organization of adult professional learners that had an age span ranging from new teachers in their early-twenties, to veteran educators in their mid-sixties. As director of a campus ministry, I

preside over a volunteer group of young adults in their very-late-teens to their early-twenties. Many of these volunteers do not even consider themselves “full adults.” Rather, they recognize college as a training ground for things they will need to do upon full adulthood.

A college seeks to graduate its students. Northwest Wesley Foundation, the organization I direct, is built around college students. Therefore, turnover of membership is a constant issue. Because of this, and a host of other reasons, it is easy to be plagued by some of the barriers to learning culture as discussed in Gill (2010). Of these issues, we at Northwest Wesley tend to fall most into the idea of program focus. That is, we do our best to offer a number of different programming options for patrons, but traditionally have not worried that much about organizational improvement. The days spent by college student volunteers with us at Northwest Wesley are inherently numbered. Lip-service is paid to organizational improvement, but putting on a program like a Bible study or a worship event is a much more tangible way to achieve a sense of satisfaction in the short-term. The trick becomes to build a forward-thinking culture even in the midst of the constant turnover. This is, of course, very hard to do. One way that it might be accomplished is to embrace the idea of transformational learning as described in Merriam and Bierema (2014). At Wesley, our vision for students is that they become whole persons on their faith journeys while at the university. To emphasize this mindset among our young adult volunteers above any individual programs is a way to integrate transformational learning into our culture – hopefully for long-term, lasting, change.

Who I Am as a Change Agent

When I was a building principal, I had a reputation among my peers, colleagues, and within the community I served as an administrator who was a real “change agent” – as in: “Wow. Now that Dimmitt’s in charge, things are really gonna change around here.” For a time, I even believed that about myself. My inner monologue often ran thusly:

IDEALISTIC ME: Yes, indeed! I am finally in a position where I can effect positive change on things!

REALISTIC ME: Congratulations! What things are you going to change?

IDEALISTIC ME: You, know. Things.

REALISTIC ME: Yes, but what specific things?

IDEALISTIC ME: You, know. The culture!

REALISTIC ME: Yes, but what specific things about the culture?

IDEALISTIC ME: Don’t bother me with trivialities! We are in the midst of wholesale change!

And so, over time, I learned a great lesson. An attitude toward change, without a specific plan to enact, track, and monitor these changes, will not bring about any actual change (or improvement) over the long term. Who knew? Well, Peter Drucker, as it turns out. In a conversation on leadership, Drucker said a leader should “make sure the people with whom you work understand your priorities. Where organizations fall down is when they have to guess at what the boss is working at, and they invariably guess wrong. So the CEO needs to say, ‘This is what I am focusing on’” (Karlgaard, 2004). As a leader, I had a lot of visions for change, but often did a poor job of communicating that vision to others.

In seeking to bring about change, I also ran into people within my organization who were resistant to any change that came down the pike. Some of these people had become jaded for good reason – so many of the previous changes enacted from on high had not achieved desired results. They were simply “changes for the sake of change” in the standard dissenting parlance.

Gill (2010) has good insight on this change resistance as well when he mentions that, when it comes to change, people “fear losing what they have. At least the known is a situation they understand and can control, and over which they have a level of power and influence” (p. 21). Because I did not effectively convey my vision for positive change, many people with whom I worked developed an adverse reaction to it. They feared the idea of leaping into the unknown. A failure on my part was that the vision for positive change should not have been unknown to faculty and staff.

And so, it would seem that my reputation as a change agent was at least slightly overblown. I think that, overall, I am mostly okay with that. Failure is often said to be the best teacher. If this is true, then in the idea of change, and in many, many other things, I have been taught exceedingly well.

In terms of writing this dissertation, I have become less idealistic about what I need to accomplish. This is a good thing. In my job as principal, the idealistic view I had of the job I was supposed to accomplish, and the unrealistic expectations I foisted upon myself because of my idealism, eventually ate me. In writing the dissertation, I have taken those lessons learned and done my best to just push forward through the process. I have attempted to produce the best overall work that I can, with the knowledge that the work I do will never be perfect. The neat thing about writing the dissertation is that I

have learned that my work does not have to be perfect. Instead, I get to stand on the shoulders of giants and add my little piece to the collective knowledge of the world. I am very grateful for this opportunity.

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VITA

Travis Dimmitt was born in Iowa, and lived there throughout his childhood and early-adult years. He graduated from Clear Creek Amana High School, in Tiffin, Iowa, in 1994. Dimmitt studied as an undergraduate at Northwest Missouri State University, in Maryville, Missouri, graduating with degrees in history and journalism, in 1998.

After putzing about in graduate school for awhile, Dimmitt left to become a middle school and high school social studies teacher. He earned his alternative teacher certification in the evenings, while teaching during the day. Altogether, Dimmitt was a classroom teacher for about 10 years. During this time, he was selected to participate in the Missouri Select Teachers as Regional Resources (STARR) program. Dimmitt was one of only 21 teachers across Missouri selected to serve in his cohort.

Dimmitt finally earned his Master's in Secondary Administration from Northwest Missouri State, in 2009. After a one-year stint as an educational consultant for Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, he became a middle school and high school principal. He served for four years in that role, before embarking on a new calling as a campus minister. While involved with campus ministry, Dimmitt was able to finish his Ed. D in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri.