

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

The Adjunctification of United Methodist Part-Time Local Pastors
A Case Study of Part-Time Local Pastors in the Mountain Sky Conference of the United
Methodist Church

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to
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by
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CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE ADJUNCTIFICATION OF UNITED METHODIST PART-TIME LOCAL
PASTORS:
A CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS
IN THE MOUNTAIN SKY CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH

presented by Amy Gearhart,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

“Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find a future, and your hope will not be cut off” Proverbs 24:14.

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to all those who have instilled in me a love for learning, a drive for reaching my goals, and a desire to do all I can to the glory of God. It is in this search for wisdom that I find not only my future, but a confident strength that has guided me through experiences of wilderness and desert toward lush pastures of reflection, growth, self-awareness, and service as I’ve navigated my life and ministry.

I am grateful for my first teachers: my parents, siblings, and loved ones who continue to walk with me through life. I am thankful for teachers and professors, especially at Illinois Wesleyan and Duke Divinity School who deepened my love for learning. I am thankful for friends who have forgiven, healed, and nurtured me throughout life, ministry, and this process. I have been so enriched by colleagues and friends whom I’ve met through this Ed.D. process, especially Nicolette. I am deeply indebted to the congregations and church friends who welcomed me and walked with me throughout years and contexts and challenges of ministry. I am so appreciative of my mother, GBHEM, the MSC, and Sally for assisting in funding my doctoral work. I am grateful for The United Methodist Church for providing amazing experiences and opportunities to learn and grow in my leadership as I’ve served the local and general Church in the world. And most especially, I am forever grateful to God for this time to learn and grow, and for giving me my most precious reasons to keep learning and living abundantly, Hannah and Chloe Sage.

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The commitment to and completion of this dissertation marks a transition in my adult ministry career in the United Methodist Church as I have widened the circle of my scholarship and learning beyond the pedagogy of theological and ecclesial education and included the wider discipline of educational leadership and policy analysis. I am grateful for the scholars, teachers, and mentors who have ushered and challenged me through this process, which has extended my capacity to think critically, reflect deeply, and undergird my work with research and best practices from a host of disciplines including leadership, education, policy analysis, and research design.

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ABSTRACT

The issue this dissertation addresses is that the fastest growing population of clergy leaders in The United Methodist Church (UMC) are local pastors who are generally not seminary degreed, ordained, or guaranteed employment. And yet, the employment and effectiveness of these local pastors, primarily part-time, is not researched or understood in the context of leadership needs in the 21st century Church. To address this problem, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the unique professional experiences and labor conditions of part-time local pastors (PTLP's) in isolated, rural, and declining communities within the Mountain Sky Conference (MSC) of The UMC. To gather data, artifact review, demographic surveys, and Zoom interviews were conducted with eight part-time local pastors from the Mountain Sky Conference. The data lead to the following themes: types and unique leadership of PTLP's, unique contextual labor conditions, and professional resources needed. These themes are useful for understanding that many of the professional and institutional benefit systems in which PTLP's operate are forged and framed for full-time, lifelong ordained clergy. They need to be adjusted for the unique types of PTLP's and their unique ministry settings.

SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

**The Adjunctification of United Methodist Part-Time Local Pastors A Case Study
of Local Pastors in the Mountain Sky Conference
of the United Methodist Church**

She teaches in two locations every week, driving 80 miles round trip between the two. Both of her classrooms are in aging buildings that limit the imagination and possibility of ever using the latest technologies for learning. Her student population is a total of adults, mostly much older than she is. And she's making about \$180.00 a week for her teaching along with a full-time job as a county nurse.

This story of Laura Vincent from rural western Kentucky might sound like the story of an itinerant teacher or adjunct professor who is making ends meet while trying to fulfill her goals to further adult learning. Like so many adjuncts, Laura finds herself in a part-time, parceling of teaching jobs to make ends meet. But Laura isn't trained as a professional educator or adjunct professor. Laura is a part-time licensed local pastor in the United Methodist Church.

The landscape of major U.S. social and religious institutions is dramatically changing. There are a variety of factors that researchers and theorists have identified as contributing to these changes, including globalization, diversity, economic shifts, individuation, and technology (Altbach, 2016). One of the major U.S. institutions which is undergoing dramatic shifts in leadership and organization is The United Methodist Church (UMC), the second largest Protestant denomination with a United

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States membership of over seven million members in 32,148 congregations. The website for The United Methodist Church can be found at <https://www.umc.org>. This “mainline” church or institution has seen a dramatic shift in both its influence and impact for several decades. According to a 2017 demographic study by the Pew Research Group which surveyed 2,504 adults about the changing impact of major U.S. institutions, the results concluded that 59% of Americans say churches have a positive effect on the U.S. culture, while 26% say they have a negative effect (Pew Research Group, 2017). These statistics build on previous 2015 Gallup poll findings about Americans’ confidence in major U.S. institutions. From 2013-2015, the poll found that, “Americans’ confidence in all institutions had been the lowest since Gallup began systematic updates of a larger set of institutions in 1993” (Jones, 2015). With dramatic shifts in societal and financial support, the need to appeal to changing generations, and a decline in confidence in formerly significant U.S. institutions, The United Methodist Church faces institutional challenges that affect its finances, leadership, mission, and impact. This is significant as studies from Pew Research Center demonstrate growing U.S. interest in spirituality and existential concerns, topics addressed by mainline churches. Mainline churches have also held significant roles in communities by offering social services, being teachers of moral and civil life, providing pastoral services of counseling and care, and being understood as communities of hope and healing.

Changes in Leadership Demographics in the U.S. United Methodist Church

In understanding changes in the relevance and impact of any institution, it is necessary to study its leadership. For the purposes of this dissertation and related

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demographics, the UMC encompasses only the statistics of the UMC in the United States. Decreasing numbers of UMC church members, the closing of churches, the merging of geographic regions called *conferences*, and the rising and prohibitive costs of ordained clergy and clergy education debt are all indications of the challenges to this major U.S. institution and its leadership (Choi, 2010). According to the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, which studies and reports on UMC clergy changes and statistics, elders, those primarily and historically entrusted with professional leadership of UMC congregations, still make up the majority of professional church leadership, although the numbers of these clergy leaders are declining. Elders are ordained clergy leaders who typically hold master degrees (M.Div), are seminary educated, and are tenured clergy, otherwise known as holding “guaranteed appointment.” Now, the number of elders, aged 35 to 54, is the fastest shrinking group of church leaders in the denomination, falling from 65 percent of all active elders in 2000 to 37 percent in 2016 (Weems, 2016).

Instead, elders between 55 and 72 are the highest percentage in the denomination’s fifty- year history. While the average age of clergy leaders in the UMC remains at 53, the highest in history, “the mode age (the single age most represented) is 61” (Weems, 2016, p. 1). This signifies that a younger generation of elders is not balanced with those closer to retirement age, thus indicating a future reduction in numbers of elders in the church.

With the decline in the numbers of ordained elders in the UMC, there is a growing number of licensed local pastors who are not seminary degreed, ordained, or guaranteed an appointment, or employment. Six regional areas in the United States

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UMC, called conferences, employ more local pastors than elders, and the church is beginning to acknowledge that “they are highly dependent on this growing category of clergy” (Hodges, 2015, p. 3).

According to the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) and other denominational statistics, about 25 to 30 percent of the UMC’s church leaders are local pastors “who pursue church leadership after having successful first careers.” The website for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry can be found at <https://gbhem.org>. Their contracts are contingent year-to-year and their authority is limited to the leadership of the local church, rather than a global mission which is the authority given to elders. According to the Lewis Center, Since at least the 1980’s (sic), there has been a major decline in the number of active elders while the number of local pastors increased dramatically. In 2016, there is a decline in both active elders and local pastors, though the elder decline is greater. The result is that since 1990, there are 6,842 fewer elders and 3,472 more local pastors. In 1990, there were over five elders for each local pastor; today there are two elders for each local pastor. In 2016, there are 14,665 elders and 7,408 local pastors. (Weems, 2016, p. 1)

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Table 1

Trends of Elders 1985-2017

Year	No. of Elders	No. of Elders Under 35	% under 35	No. of Elders 35-54	% 35-54	No. of Elders 55-70	% 55-70
1985	21,378	3,219	15%	12,305	58%	5,854	27%
1990	21,507	2,385	11%	12,678	59%	6,444	30%
1995	20,117	1,312	7%	12,843	64%	5,962	30%
2000	18,576	906	5%	12,005	65%	5,665	30%
2005	18,141	850	5%	9,872	54%	7,419	41%
2010	17,293	946	5%	7,698	45%	8,649	50%
2015	15,019	986	7%	5,746	38%	8,287	55%
2016	14,665	1,003	7%	5,484	37%	8,178	56%
2017	14,152	950	7%	5,273	37%	7,927	56%

Table 2

Trends of Local Pastors 1985-2017

Year	No. of Local Pastors	Local Pastors Under 35	% under 35	Local Pastors 35-54	% 35-54	Local Pastors 55-72	% 55-72
1985	3,804	130	3%	2,212	58%	1,462	38%
1990	3,936	163	4%	2,244	57%	1,529	39%
1995	4,622	290	6%	2,641	57%	1,691	37%
2000	5,571	348	6%	3,109	56%	2,114	38%
2005	6,517	371	6%	3,213	49%	2,933	45%
2010	7,341	426	6%	2,932	40%	3,983	54%
2011	7,353	455	6%	2,790	37%	4,108	57%
2012	7,532	472	6%	2,753	37%	4,307	57%
2013	7,671	522	7%	2,716	35%	4,433	58%
2014	7,395	568	8%	2,597	35%	4,230	57%
2015	7,464	601	8%	2,579	35%	4,284	57%
2016	7,408	597	8%	2,531	34%	4,280	58%
2017	7,512	595	8%	2,544	34%	4,373	58%

The rise of the employment of local pastors in the UMC is not due solely to an “aging out” of ordained elders, however. “While elder retirements are a big factor, more and more United Methodist churches can’t afford the minimum salary and

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benefits required for an elder” (Hodges, 2015, p. 3). Ordained clergy in the UMC are guaranteed a minimum salary, a cash salary which also includes housing or a housing allowance, full health and pension benefits, and professional development funds. Where salary packages range from \$70,000-\$200,000 for a full-time ordained elder, a salary-only package for a part-time local pastor may be less than \$20,000. As congregations age and decline, funding declines, and so too does a congregation’s capacity to pay full-time clergy salaries.

Statement of the Problem

In many ways, the early roots of Methodism, beginning with the lives and ministries of John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother, Charles Wesley (1707-1788), were a movement that organized laypeople (non-clergy) for mission in their rural and urban communities in England during the 18th century Enlightenment. Education was central to the movement “to reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (The United Methodist Church, n.d.). The goal of education was Christian discipleship, and the Wesley’s *method* of education included class meetings, band meetings, and acts of social justice and compassion. Itinerant, uneducated lay preachers carried out this mission in England, and later throughout the new territories of what would become the United States.

Recognizing the need for more formalized education of its leaders, Methodists in the early 19th century created more formalized curriculum for pastoral training. In the early American Methodist Church, this included a Course of Study (COS) which was a series of readings and reflections held in small books which could be carried in saddlebags and read by lay pastors on horseback as they traveled the frontier of the

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growing nation to preach and teach the biblical teachings of Jesus Christ. As late as the 1940's, most pastors in the Methodist Church were Course of Study-trained, but by 1956, the denomination, along with other Protestant Christian counterparts in the U.S., required a seminary degree for those seeking ordination as clergy elders (Hodge, 2015). As a result, COS-trained pastors became licensed and not ordained. While these licensed pastors connected the 19th century church to its 18th century history of being a lay-led movement and brought vocational experience from the fields of farming to the disciplines of teaching, they served mainly small membership, rural churches as those who were seminary-trained and master's-degreed served larger, growing, urban congregations.

Due in part to this history of local pastors providing supply and contingent church leadership, they have been a tremendously under-researched population within mainline Methodism. Even less studied, part-time local pastors (serving less than 40 hours per week) have generally held a bi-furcated and minority status, often serving the poorest, smallest, and most rural areas throughout the nation. And yet, like adjunct faculty in higher education, local pastors now make up the fastest growing professional leadership population of the denomination, in the U.S. and worldwide (Hodge, 2015). By researching this unique ministry leadership group within United Methodism, a greater understanding may emerge of the reasons for their growth in numbers, the unique dynamics and experiences of their work, and the ways by which they can be supported for their leadership effectiveness.

Purpose of the Study

Given the rise of part-time local pastors, the purpose of this qualitative case

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study was to understand the unique professional experiences and labor conditions of United Methodist part-time local pastors in isolated, rural, and declining communities within the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is important to study this subset of the larger clergy leadership in the UMC because PTLP's are the fastest growing population of clergy leaders due to an aging-out of elders, the rising cost of clergy employment, the declining populations and budgets of rural churches, and the demographic shifts within American United Methodism. It is important to research rarely studied PTLP's, not as a monolithic group, but as vital contributors to the spiritual, emotional, social, and relational health of rural, isolated, and declining areas within the general UMC, and specifically, within the Mountain Sky Conference region of the UMC, encompassing United Methodist churches in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Utah. Therefore, the primary research question guiding this study is: What are the unique and contextual labor conditions and professional experiences of part-time local pastors in rural, isolated, and declining communities?

Theoretical Framework

Another major U.S. institution that is experiencing seismic shifts in leadership, employment, and economics is higher education (Kelsky, 2015). One of the significant ways in which higher education institutions reduce costs is through the employment of adjunct, or contingent, faculty (Langen, 2011). For instance, as Cross and Goldenberg (2009) found in their research of the nation's most elite research universities, the cost of employing a tenure-track faculty can range from \$100,000 to \$130,000 in annual salary and benefits, while adjuncts are significantly cheaper as most are employed on a course-by-course contract and without benefits. In addition to being teaching

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instructors, adjuncts are also employed as non-tenure track research faculty and research assistants (DePaola & Kezar, 2018). But there are other reasons for employing adjuncts. Adjuncts can bring specific hands-on work experience in a given field, provide teaching in fields where tenured faculty are predominantly researchers, and provide nimble employment options which align with enrollment, among others (Cross & Goldenberg, 2009).

According to the New Faculty Majority (n.d.), an international higher education and advocacy group “advancing professional equity and securing academic freedom for all adjunct and contingent faculty,” 1.3 million of the 1.8 million U.S. higher education faculty are contingent, having no access to tenure. Over 50% are part-time adjunct, and 73% of minority higher education faculty are contingent (New Faculty Majority, n.d.). Eagan, Jaeger and Grantham (2015) studied 4,169 of those part-time adjuncts distributed among 279 four-year colleges and universities, and they found that 73% of their group were underemployed or involuntarily employed (desiring or seeking full-time academic positions). Of their sample group, 81% self-identified as White, were 53% female, and had an 8.6-year employment average at their institution (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015).

All too often, research reveals that the hiring of adjuncts is reactionary and a result of pressures such as “surges in enrollment, the need to fill positions at the last minute, the need to fill positions for faculty on leave or sabbatical, budgetary constraints, and pressure to meet institutional goals” (Kezar & Gehrke, 2014, p. 8). Additionally, decisions about the use of limited financial resources in higher education are not in sync with the achievement of institutional goals (Ryan, 2004). In his

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Educational Policy Institute report, Raisman (2013) concluded that the 1,669 four-year colleges and universities he researched lost revenue from a decline in enrollment “in the amount close to \$16.5 billion” (p. 4). Far too often, the consequential costs of hiring a cheaper adjunct workforce are linked with the realities of low student retention. While adjuncts improve the personnel bottom line and provide a nimble workforce with temporary contracts and discipline-dependent expertise, there is evidence of costs to student integration and retention (Bettinger & Long, 2004).

The theoretical framework for this case study research was the employment profiles of adjuncts, those part-time, contingent faculty, as defined by Judith Gappa and David Leslie in their research and 1993 book, *The Invisible Faculty: Improving the Status of Part-Timers in Higher Education*. In their quest to understand why and how institutions of higher education hire and use part-time faculty, the researchers explored the professional experiences, roles, resources, and expectations of part-time faculty. In their findings, they recognized “four major clusters of academic background, employment history, and motivations” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 45) which included career enders; specialists, experts, or professionals; aspiring academics; and freelancers. By using these categories as a framework for this research on part-time local pastors, the researcher listened for themes and categories of employment issues and conditions that potentially exposed differences within sub- populations and resisted a monolithic understanding of the experiences of PTLPs (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Table 3 describes the relationship between the four major clusters of Gappa and Leslie (1993) and related categories of PTLPs in the UMC.

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Table 3

Four Major Clusters of Adjuncts from Gappa and Leslie (1993) related to PTLPs

Cluster Name	Characteristics among Part-Time Adjuncts	Characteristics among Part-Time Local Pastors
Career Enders	-Fully retired -Transition from well-established career	-Fully retired from a career in ministry or another career -Transition from well-established career
Specialist, Expert, or Professional	-Primary, full-time career elsewhere -Teaches for the love of it rather than income -Brings unique expertise to the teaching topics/classes	-A full-time career in the local community, such as farmer, teacher, healthcare worker -Ministers for the love of the church and to assist a congregation without pastoral leadership
Aspiring Academics	-Aspiring to be a fully participating, recognized, and rewarded member of the faculty -Part-timers who possess terminal degree and want full-time careers in academia -Those who are fully qualified for full-time work but immobile due to family, geography, other constraints	-Aspiring to be a fully participating, recognized, and rewarded clergyperson through Course of Study completion, Associate Membership, or progressing toward the ministry of an Elder -Those who are fully qualified for full-time, fully credentialed ministry but immobile due to family, geography, other constraints
Freelancers	-Current career is the sum of all the part-time jobs or roles they have -Are part-time faculty in higher education by choice; not aspiring academics	-Supply pastors who fulfill an interim, transitional, or post-conflict role -Some have professional credentials; others do not

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Design: The Qualitative Case Study

The research approach for this study was qualitative, in which the researcher interpreted the meaning made by individuals or groups as they navigated their realities (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is inductive and allows themes to emerge from the particularity of a human reality, which is complex and grounded in one's lived experiences. Context matters as the data is collected from the participant's setting and contributes to a report with a fluid and flexible structure (Creswell, 2014).

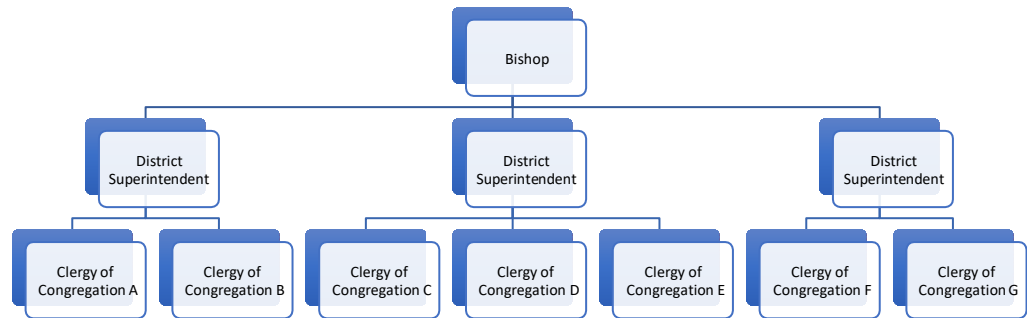
The method for this study was a case study informed by Stake's (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. In case study research, a research question drives inquiry and attention is paid to categorical data within certain contexts. This approach searches for the meaning or knowledge within a bounded case to "catch the complexity" of that case (Stake, 1995). This inductive and reflective strategy was used with the bounded and real-life contexts of part-time local pastors in their ministry environments. This case study was instrumental in that the case was used to understand guiding and categorical issues of local pastor labor conditions and employment experiences (Stake, 1995).

The case was defined as part-time, United Methodist, licensed local pastors (PTLP) who serve in one of the four primary states of the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church and share the unique contexts of serving as spiritual leaders in rural areas of decline and isolation. The case considered their work experiences and labor conditions as contingent employees. The researcher chose the Mountain Sky Conference for the case because it served as a good and typical example of a region, or conference, within the U.S. UMC where local pastors are employed part-

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time and full-time in a variety of settings including rural, urban, and suburban congregations of every size. The Mountain Sky Conference (MSC) encompasses a 460,000-square mile region which includes four primary states: Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Utah, and one congregation in Salmon, Idaho. It has 378 churches in this four-state region, including 70,000 church members, among whom 24 full-time local pastors and 48 part-time local pastors serve, with many of them serving more than one church (*Mountain Sky Conference Journal, 2019*). Each state has its own unique context and region for church leadership, and yet, the goals and responsibilities of pastoral leadership remain the same: to order the life of the church, lead worship, provide discipleship formation, and extend the ministries of the church into community through acts of compassion, mercy, justice, and service. In addition, while part-time local pastors in the MSC serve in a variety of contexts, those to be studied shared circumstances of serving in small rural churches in areas of decline and isolation. In addition to similar roles, responsibilities and contexts, those PTLP's which were studied also shared a common leadership authority as pastoral leaders of a congregation within the UMC conference organization, as described in Figure 1. Clergy leaders are deployed and supervised by a bishop, who gives oversight and spiritual leadership to the entire church, and district superintendents, who are regional missional strategists who function as district managers. The clergy who serve congregations are not limited to part-time local pastors, but also include ordained elders and deacons, certified lay ministers, and full-time local pastors (see Definitions of Key Terms).

Figure 1

UMC Conference Organization

According to Stake (1995), the researcher’s positionality is a type of relativity strong in qualitative case study, which appreciates that “even observational interpretation of those phenomena will be shaped by the mood, the experience, the intention of the researcher” (p. 95). The case location was known to the researcher based on my employment as a lead pastor of a congregation in Arvada, CO in the Mountain Sky Conference (MSC) of the United Methodist Church. My position as a lead pastor and as the former Senior Executive for Transition and Conference Culture for the conference, allowed for my knowledge of both the functions of pastors of congregations in the conference as well as many of the unique opportunities and challenges of pastoral leadership in a region of varied contexts, geographies, and settings throughout the four- state area. This unique positionality is further discussed in the next section: Role of the Researcher.

In addition to the researcher’s contributions to the study of a case, so too were the contributions of the case study subjects and the meanings derived by each reader of the research (Stake, 1995). Each of these levels of insight, interpretation, and observation were essential to understanding the leadership by local pastors and

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developing, “relevant, true statements, ones that can serve to explain the situation of concern or...the causal relationship of interest” (Creswell, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative case study research, the researcher serves as the key instrument as they collect, examine, and draw conclusions from the data (Creswell, 2014). In this qualitative case study research, I operated from constructivist assumptions which guided the “assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research” (Creswell, 2014, p. 5).

I am an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and have worked extensively with issues of pastoral leadership, effectiveness, and education through my own leadership of congregations as well as service on the UMC international Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which is the global leadership development agency of the denomination entrusted with the oversight and stewardship of clergy recruitment, higher education institutions, credentialing, and professional and spiritual development (GBHEM, n.d.). Through my study and advocacy of clergy, I have observed the changing landscape of different statuses of pastors as the economic and professional supply demands have impacted the United Methodist Church and the larger U.S. mainline Protestant Church. As local pastors have increased in their number and impact on the denomination, however, there has been limited scholarship and time dedicated to their unique functions and positionality with other clergy, congregations, communities, and the larger witness of the Church in the U.S.

I am also a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and a former adjunct

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professor at one of the UMC's 119 institutions of higher education in the United States.

While there is a limited body of research and scholarship on adjunct professors in higher education, there is more literature on the complexity of contexts and contingencies of adjuncts which impact student learning. Many of these contexts and contingencies mirror the experience and impact of the licensed local pastor in the United Methodist Church. It is my hope, therefore, that by developing the literature review about clergy leadership in small churches as well as the professional experiences of contingent faculty in higher education, the background for the professional experiences and labor conditions of PTLP's would be better understood. Additionally, my interest and inquiry into this connection may lead to a clearer understanding of how part-time local pastors can use their unique positionality to lead and be more effective in their ministries.

While each of my own professional experiences contributed to a deep institutional knowledge of the contexts for leadership by the part-time local pastors, I also did backyard research which is, as Creswell (2014) explains, "studying a site or people in whom the researcher has a vested interest" (p. 188). I am employed as a lead pastor of a congregation of the Mountain Sky Conference, to which all pastors in the conference, including part-time local pastors, are ultimately accountable. However, each pastor, including me, has a supervisory threshold of their local church personnel committee and their district superintendent, and therefore, other pastors within the MSC are not indirectly or directly supervised by me. Additionally, as Hull (2017) suggests, there were practices employed to ensure that the site-specific inquiries were conducted objectively and ethically. These practices included informed consent by participants,

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IRB review, reflexivity and peer review examination of research, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and clear ownership of the research findings (Hull, 2017).

Data Gathering

Setting and participants.

This research study included eight part-time local pastors serving in local churches in rural communities experiencing decline and isolation throughout the primarily four-state area of the Mountain Sky Conference. According to the UMC General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), the denomination's statistical and record-keeping agency, rural churches are defined as those congregations in counties where there are 200 or less people per square mile. This number is determined by matching churches with county codes from the U.S. Census data (General Council on Finance and Administration, n.d.). This size and context of a U.S. UMC congregation is normative, as Table 4 from the 2009 GCFA statistics demonstrates:

Table 4

U.S. UMC Rural and Non-Rural Congregations

Total number of U.S. UMC churches in 2009	33,500
Total number of U.S. UMC rural churches in 2009	20,000+ (60% of all U.S. UMC churches)
Clergy serving U.S. UMC non-rural churches in 2009	11,600
Clergy serving U.S. UMC rural churches in 2009	13,900 (55% of U.S. UMC clergy)

A local church setting, or appointment, is the location where the pastor is licensed to preach, organize the life of the church, and perform the sacraments, which are holy rituals of the church. The MSC is comprised of 378 churches of which 27 full-time local pastors and 48 part-time local pastors serve (*Rocky Mountain Conference*

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Journal 2017; *Yellowstone Conference Journal*, 2016). Access to these settings for research were through permission from the PTLP and were secured in Spring 2019 for research to be conducted in Summer 2019.

Purposely selected local pastor participants for this study were defined as part-time, licensed local pastors who fulfilled the requirements of the denomination's definition of a local pastor which is outlined in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline 2016* and includes completion of the following:

1. The conditions of candidacy certification;
2. The Orientation to Ministry;
3. The studies for the license as a local pastor as prescribed and supervised by the Division of Ordained Ministry or one-third of their work for a Master of Divinity degree at a school of theology listed by the University Senate;
4. Been examined and recommended by a three-fourths majority vote of the district committee on ordained ministry;
5. Released the required psychological reports, criminal background and credit checks, and reports of sexual misconduct and/or child abuse;
6. Been approved by a three-fourths majority vote of the Board of Ordained Ministry (*Book of Discipline*, 2016).

At least fifteen part-time local pastors were invited to participate for the case study with a goal of securing eight part-time local pastors who represented a variety of personal backgrounds within the context setting of a small, rural church. An online demographic survey of their background and employment history was conducted in order to gather preliminary data about each participant. Participant names and

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permissions were solicited through professional gatherings of local pastors and suggestions from district superintendents, who serve as the direct supervisors to the local pastors in each of their states. Following requirements based on an approval from IRB, an email invitation, followed up by a phone call, was extended to the local pastor participants who either self- identified or were previously identified by the district superintendents. As their supervisors, however, district superintendents did not know the identities of the final eight PTLP's who participated in the study.

Access and permissions.

Stake (1995) provides guidelines for data collection in case studies. A central phase is when the researcher arranges access, secures agreements, and makes arrangements for interviews. Following the identification and invitation of those local pastors to be studied, issues of access, agreements and arrangements were communicated through a consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and presented to the participants. In all these conversations, "opportunity should be taken early to get acquainted with the people, the spaces, the schedules, and the problems of the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 59).

Given my unique positionality as a pastor in the Mountain Sky Conference and a former Senior Executive for Transition and Conference Culture, I had access to the names of part-time local pastors in the Mountain Sky Conference, but did not directly supervise them. Because I served for over thirty years as a pastor of local churches, I was aware of the rhythms of their congregational lives and professional schedules in order to schedule the first and subsequent meetings accordingly. Additionally, access, agreements, and arrangements were direct and not organized through their supervisors.

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The local pastors exercised their own agency in sharing their research participation with their direct supervisors and the extent to which they wished to remain confidential.

Methods of data collection.

I used several qualitative research instruments and procedures, including record-keeping and coding systems, which are outlined in this section. A demographic survey and Zoom interview provided data which was recorded using data recording protocols which I developed myself, driven by the research questions and theoretical framework, and which included space for recording, identification of issues of concern, and allowance for narrative information and commentary. Space allowance also accommodated unintended data and emerging issues, and the data was transcribed and collated for open coding for discovery of themes and categories.

As preparation for data collection continued, I reconsidered any changes to data gathering procedures, outlined plans for findings and reports, and paid attention to different viewpoints and outliers. This process was informed through additional study of emerging institutional documents and trends. It also included the use of a data collection log which was kept and used to explore my reflexivity in relationship with the data and interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection plan.

The first part of the data collection plan was to secure and review any provided documents and artifacts which included resources from ministry activities by the local pastor such as sermon manuscripts, worship bulletins, and newsletters (see Appendix A). Additional information about the participants and settings were provided through the church's website (if one existed) and other written materials (Stake, 1995). These

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materials helped to conceptually organize the study around *issue questions* and *information questions* which contributed to understanding, interpretation, and explanation (Stake, 1995).

The second part of the data collection plan was to provide an online demographic survey (see Appendix B) which was provided to each part-time local pastor to be completed in order to set the demographic and background stage for understanding the complexity of the case (Stake, 1995). The survey contents, as well as the interview protocol, were informed by the research of Gappa and Leslie (1993) related to adjunct faculty employment and literature related to the unique positionality and role of PTLPs as part-time clergy leaders in their congregations. I inquired as to a variety of “other- development” activities and responsibilities such as leading worship, preaching, daily administration, and community development; each of which are functions of ministry in the church (DeShon & Quinn, 2007). This allowed me to experience the unique job duties and functions of the PTLP’s as they further expounded and as I “let the occasion tell its story, the situation, the problem, resolution or irresolution of the problem” (Stake, 1995, p. 60).

The third part of the research included an interview of each local pastor for 60-90 minutes, using Zoom video conferencing access due to the physical limitations of travel throughout a four-state region. These interviews focused on PTLP ministry practices, responsibilities, and job satisfaction in their local church, which was built on the data from the survey (See Appendix C). As Stake (1995) identifies, “The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64), therefore, the interview included open-ended questions, and deep listening beyond exact words.

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Procedures for Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995), case studies provide two ways to analyze data: direct interpretation of an individual instance and aggregation of those instances which can provide organization into issues. Both the researcher and the researched are understood to contribute their own realities and interpretations to the case. Similarly, in what Stake (1995) calls “relativity” (p. 102), the reader also derives their own meaning from the case.

Fundamentally, then, it was important to provide a plan for data analysis and interpretation. As Creswell (2014) outlines, there are basic elements to qualitative data analysis that were used throughout this case study research. As they relate to this proposal, the basic elements were as follows:

1. Data collection was concurrent with analysis and write-up of findings as themes, categories, and threads developed related to the research questions. Using open coding, the findings from the observations, for instance, informed the further development of the interview protocol.
2. Analysis of the data included deductive and thematic coding and aligning the data with categories of employment and experiences of part-time local pastors. These categories were emergent even as they were informed by the employment profiles of part-time faculty in Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) research.
3. Finally, limitations were addressed. As prior research explains, limitations of studying local pastors includes contextual issues such as church size and location (DeShon & Quinn, 2007; Miles & Proeshold, 2011).

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In addition, few researchers have found that individual characteristics of pastors, such as gender, race, education, and life experience, impact their experiences (Choi, 2010). The selection of cases for instrumental purposes were limited in representing other local pastor experiences (Stake, 1995). While the interpretation by the researcher was subjective and integrative, I attempted to “preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening” (Stake, 1995), in the midst of these institutional and individual limitations.

Subjectivity and Validation

“The intent of qualitative researchers to promote a *subjective (sic)* research paradigm is a given” (Stake, 1995, p. 45). As a result of relativity, qualitative researchers have “ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding” and validate their observations (p. 109). While case study research is focused on meaning rather than location, triangulating observation through different lenses and evidence is essential. Stake (1995) provides four protocols for triangulation which include data source triangulation (seeing if the case remains the same among people, places, and experiences), investigator triangulation (have other researchers review observations and interpretations), theory triangulation (reviewing theories related to the case), and methodological triangulation (using prior research and records to increase confidence in interpretation). These forms of triangulation were enacted through reviews by the dissertation advisor and committee, other faculty and experts in the field, as well as a concerted effort at exploring prior research and records about small congregations, rural churches, adjuncts in higher education, and labor conditions of contingent employees. In addition, the research subjects were involved in “member-

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checking,” as they “regularly provide critical observations and interpretations...and review the material for accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

Definitions of Key Terms

This study requires the use of specific vocabulary. To assist the reader(s), the following terms are defined:

Appointment. United Methodist elders and local pastors are appointed, or assigned, by bishops of a geographic area to be pastors of congregations, otherwise known as local churches, or a ministry outside a local church, otherwise known as an extension appointment.

Course of Study (COS). The core curriculum for a licensed local pastor in the UMC, which requires successful graduation from high school and 20 classes, “covering Bible, ethics, preaching, evangelism, worship, and sacraments” (The United Methodist Church, 2015). Most of the classes are taught at a local seminary or online and are mostly taught in the summer. The core curriculum is intended to be accomplished through satisfactory completion of the coursework over a five-year period.

District Superintendent (DS). A regional manager of clergy, including local pastors, who is charged with the responsibility of supervision and accountability of clergy in a given geographical region. A DS is an elder who is the missional strategist for the geographical area made up of UM churches

Elder. An ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church who is seminary trained and graduated with a Master of Divinity degree. They itinerate at the bishop’s request and are guaranteed an appointment.

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Local Pastor. A licensed pastor of a United Methodist congregation who is appointed by a bishop to perform the duties of a pastor, but they are not required to itinerate at the bishop's request, and they are not guaranteed an appointment.

Pastor. A *set apart* person whose "gifts, evidence of God's grace, and promise of future usefulness are affirmed by the community, and who responds to God's call by offering themselves in leadership" of the Church (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 223), who is ordained or licensed.

Expected Impact and Significance of Study

Far too often, large institutions make procedure and policy decisions where the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing (Stone, 2012). This reality exists in social institutions such as religious bodies and higher education as economic and supply realities and decisions can impact, even alter, the desired outcomes. Through intentional qualitative case study research on UM licensed, part-time, local pastors, as informed by the shared issues and research on the contextuality and contingency of adjuncts, there may be a better understanding of their employment experiences and labor conditions, as well as specific needs for specific categories of PTLPs. From this research, strategic employment, professional development, and deployment of local pastors for greater effectiveness and outcomes may be possible, as PTLPs constitute one of the largest and fastest growing clergy populations in the U.S. UMC. In addition, in order to possibly shape policy and practice, I intend to submit and present a PowerPoint presentation to the bishop and cabinet (district superintendents) of the Mountain Sky Conference who are ultimately responsible for the deployment, supervision, and accountability of all clergy leaders, including PTLPs. Finally, the

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implications for scholarly work are prepared in a manuscript for publication to the *Religious Research Association*.

Summary

This proposed research study considers the case of the employment of eight part-time local pastors in each state of the Mountain Sky Conference and their unique work experiences and employment conditions in rural, isolated, and declining communities. While there is little to no existing research in the area of part-time local pastors and the impact of their ministry and leadership, a body of research that has been developing for almost 50 years reveals that the contributions of adjunct faculty in higher education is a significant lever in the achieving institutional and educational goals (Ryan, 2004). Using a constructivist worldview, I sought to reduce the findings of the qualitative case study on the employment and experiences of UM part-time licensed local pastors in order to shape knowledge about how their work and ministry contributed to the goals of The United Methodist Church (Creswell, 2014). The primary research question guiding this study was: What are the unique and contextual labor conditions and professional experiences of part-time local pastors in rural, isolated and declining communities?

Research was conducted using a three-part methodology of case studies: review of documents and artifacts for contextual understanding, online demographic survey of the participants, and an interview of each participant (Stake, 1995). Through hearing the stories of part-time local pastors and discovering a deeper understanding of their

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leadership and ministry-in-context, new wisdom for critical decisions related to their leadership and professional effectiveness emerged.

SECTION TWO:

PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

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According to Stake (1995), case study research is about “placing an interpreter in the field to observe the workings of the case, one who records objectively what is happening but simultaneously examines its meaning and redirects observation to refine or substantiate those meanings” (pp. 8-9). It is essential, therefore, for the researcher to understand the field to explore the ordinary and discover the multiple realities within the case. By analyzing the organizational and leadership settings for the case study, the researcher was better prepared for deep listening and reflection on the complexity of each case. In this section, I provide an overview of the case of part-time local pastors as clergy leaders in the Mountain Sky Conference of The United Methodist Church. I also provide an organizational description of the conference using two frames of organizational analysis offered by Bolman and Deal (2013): the human resource and structural frames. It is through these two frames that the relationship of the institutional context and the employment of local pastors were better understood.

History of Organization The United Methodist Church

The history of The United Methodist Church began during the 18th century Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, both of which shaped the organizational culture of what is now the second largest mainline Christian denomination in the U.S. Begun in England, by brothers John Wesley (1703-1791) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788), as a reformation movement of the Church of England, groups of “Methodists” were educated, gathered, and deployed in service in communities for the purpose of “spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land” (umc.org, n.d.). Influenced by the Enlightenment, Methodists understood the mind, or reason, as a powerful gift and resource given by God,

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in addition to scripture, tradition, and experience. This was evidenced, in part, in the higher education and formation of the brothers Wesley at London's Oxford University. This value would go on to permeate the denomination's future commitments to public education, theological education, formation of clergy and laity, and the development of over 113 colleges and universities in the U.S. alone.

Organizationally, the Methodist movement was also shaped during the Industrial Revolution, which systematized institutions around core missions or tasks in order to produce outcomes. Using a clear *method* of Christian formation, instruction, and deployment, Wesleyan disciples were charged with outcomes of transforming their relationships and communities as they were led by lay preachers who understood the world to be their parish (The United Methodist Church, n.d.).

Morphing from a movement in England to a mainline institution within the newly formed U.S. territories and years beyond, the United Methodist Church now has over 12 million members throughout the world, with over 7 million in the U.S. In the U.S. over 44,000 clergy serve 31,867 churches and ministries beyond the local church, such as military and prison chaplains, educators, non-profit leaders, and other vocations (www.umc.org). In addition to a commitment to public and higher education, the health and welfare work of the UMC includes serving more than 32 million people in 1,555 locations throughout the U.S. and providing more than \$2 billion in charity resources annually. This work emanates from the mission of the UMC, which is to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (umc.org, n.d.), and is carried out through United Methodist churches that are loosely coupled around the core mission and vision (Weick, 1978).

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Organizationally, the UMC can be understood as what Miller and Friesen (1984) termed a stagnant bureaucracy, which is “an older, tradition-dominated organization,” where “structural change is episodic; long periods of little change are followed by brief episodes of major restructuring” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 87). Evidence of this stagnant bureaucracy can be found in the episodic, periodic, and recommended changes to the understanding, theology, and practice of ministry in the UMC by a quadrennial “Commission to Study Ministry” to address new trends, emerging issues, and changing contexts over the last forty years. However, each of these commissions, convened and charged to make a report of innovative changes every four years, finds that its recommendations are rarely accepted by the tradition-dominated General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the central, international legislative body of the denomination.

In such an organization, as Miller and Friesen (1984) identified, stability is preferred over confusion and uncertainty of change, top management is committed to old ways, information technology is too primitive, and the price of this stability “is a structure that grows increasingly misaligned with the environment” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 87). This organizational reality was important to understanding the economic and leadership changes facing the church and, in particular, the increased employment of part-time local pastors in the UMC.

History of Local Pastors

Rooted in a historical, evangelical, and missional emphasis to “spread scriptural holiness throughout the land,” Methodist circuit riders in the U.S. in the 19th century were deployed to teach and proclaim the faith, while they themselves were illiterate and

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uneducated (Hodge, 2015). In these early days, the aspiring clergy were educated on horseback through a simple course of study of readings, sermons, and teachings. By the 1940s, they began attending seminaries for theological and vocational training. This soon resulted in the denomination's requirement of a seminary degree for those seeking ordination as elders in the church. As the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (2016) states,

Those called to the ministry of elder are called to bear authority and responsibility to preach and teach the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to offer the life of the church so it can be faithful in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 227)

The qualifications of the elder now include completion of a seminary education (typically a Master of Divinity degree) and commitment to itinerate between appointments in exchange for guarantee of compensation and benefits, security of employment, and full voting rights within the annual conference where one is elected and appointed to serve (*Book of Discipline*, 2016). The elder's authority and responsibilities of proclamation of the Word (preaching), ordering the life of the church, presiding over the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, and leading disciples of Christ in lives of service extends beyond geographic boundaries and throughout the international church.

In contrast to the ordained elder, the United Methodist Church also licenses local pastors who are not ordained but "who are appointed to preach and conduct divine worship and perform the duties of a pastor" (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 235).

Typically, local pastors do not attend seminary, but are enrolled in a five-year course of

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study; they do not have full voting rights, do not itinerate, and do not have guaranteed employment. Their authority is to serve as pastor of a local congregation, rather than throughout the international church. Instead of a life-long ordination, their license provides an annual permission to conduct their work as a pastor in a local church or chaplaincy.

Within the fellowship of local pastors, there are three main categories or designations. The first category is the full-time local pastor (FTLP) who may be employed by a church or chaplaincy full-time, receive a full-time salary (usually lower than the full-time elder), complete four courses per year in the course of study, or be a full-time student. The second category is the part-time local pastor (PTLP) who does not “devote their entire time to the charge to which they are appointed” (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 239), but whose salary is pro-rated for service hours while completing at least two course of study courses per year. Many part-time local pastors are bi-vocational and supplement their ministry with a second income. The third category is the student local pastor who is licensed to serve as a pastor while progressing in their seminary or graduate level education toward the ministry of an elder or deacon (*Book of Discipline*, 2016).

While there are three main designations of local pastors in the United Methodist Church, many of the course of study-trained local pastors serve mainly small, rural churches, which make up a majority of United Methodist churches in the U.S. However, as economics and clergy supply issues change in the mainline denomination, local pastors are also finding employment in a range of positions and church sizes (Hodge, 2015).

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Bringing skills and experience from former careers, local pastors are found in small, rural churches and, infrequently, leading large suburban churches of over 2,100 in worship. Many are full-time pastors, while others serve part-time. Some serve on large staffs; others in solo roles. As one local pastor shares, “I felt called to ministry, not to school” (Hodge, 2015). For support, advocacy, and professional accountability, this growing group of licensed but not ordained pastors makes up the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors (NFAML), whose purpose since 1968 is to “serve a growing number of licensed pastors who lead congregations but are not ordained ministers” (The United Methodist Church, 2012).

The Mountain Sky Conference

In order to understand the practitioner setting, and as the former conference Senior Executive of Transition and Conference Culture of the Mountain Sky Conference of the UMC, the researcher conducted over 100 one-hour interviews with key stakeholders, including administrators, clergy (including local pastors), and lay leaders. This position was created to facilitate the June 9, 2018, unification of two prior Conferences: The Rocky Mountain Conference, serving churches and clergy in Colorado, Utah, and southern Wyoming; and the Yellowstone Conference, serving Montana, northern Wyoming, and one church in Idaho. Several characteristics of the conference culture of the UM churches and people of this 460,000 square-mile region are outlined in the *Plan of Union* (2018) and are important to understand as a backdrop for this case study.

Organizational mission.

The mission of the Mountain Sky Conference is “to live in God’s grace and

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abundance as we lead a reenergized peaceful and compassionate movement to claim the life-changing love of Jesus Christ for ALL people” (*Plan of Union*, 2018, p. 1). This mission is accomplished by:

1. Renewing and establishing vital congregations,
2. Developing leaders who are gifted and empowering local churches and laity in the church’s mission, and
3. Establishing new faith communities to meet the needs of our unique mission field.

The values that underscore this mission include inclusivity, collaboration, outwardly-focused, simplicity, transparency, diversity of voices and ideas, unity, love, consensus, breaking barriers, and crossing boundaries (*Plan of Union*, 2018).

Doing business differently.

With the successful vote to unite the former Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain conferences into the Mountain Sky Conference, came an expectation for changing the structure and culture of the conference for more effectively accomplishing the mission of the conference. Expecting different outcomes requires doing business differently. Collaboration and communication within the entire organization needs to be improved. Disciple-making has to be a new priority. Human and financial resources need to be deployed to meet adaptive and changing congregational and community contexts (Mountain Sky Conference, 2018).

Pushing out not pushing down.

Instead of top-down hierarchical organizational structure, the vision for the Mountain Sky Conference is laypeople and clergy partnering together to serve local

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communities and congregations with strong, vibrant, flexible, and adaptable leadership. As a core mission document explains, “By focusing on the local level and reducing top-heavy structures, we will free people to move with the Holy Spirit and find resources to support what God is doing among the people and in creation” (Mountain Sky Conference, 2018, p. 8).

Leadership development and education.

The formative document for the newly united Mountain Sky Conference calls for a Superintendent of Leadership Development and a Leadership Development team, “whose general purpose shall be to equip excellence, guide discernment and nurture the call to leadership at all levels of the conference” (Mountain Sky Conference, 2018, p. 10). In addition to overseeing and developing leadership education for clergy and laity, this team is to convene a clergy compensation group that reviews and examines clergy compensation packages for all clergy as well as the financial challenges facing clergy, such as educational debt (Mountain Sky Conference, 2018).

Technology spans geography.

The Mountain Sky Conference spans a geography of Colorado, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, and one congregation in Idaho, and is one of the largest conference areas in the U.S. Connecting people for leadership development, program coordination, and theological education is made more possible through technology such as smart televisions, Zoom video conferencing, and live streaming.

New models for financial development.

Essential to theological education and professional formation of clergy is the increased need for learning new models for financial development and stewardship in

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the churches. No longer can churches rely on direct donations from their members to sustain the financial needs of the churches. Additionally, clergy need financial literacy and financial development training for cultivating planned giving, generating income through building use, reducing personal and church debt, and other non-profit fundraising strategies.

Implications for Local Pastors

The ministry of licensed local pastors, full-time and part-time, is impacted by the Mountain Sky Conference culture in various ways. First of all, by pushing the resources and responsibilities of ministry out to the local churches, local pastors are essential levers in accomplishing the conference mission through new methodologies of collaboration, communication, and use of technology. Each of these new methodologies requires both professional development and education *of* the local pastors and *by* the local pastors to their congregations. Secondly, as part-time local pastors make up the fastest growing professional population in the conference, their satisfaction and full integration into the life of the professional ranks is essential for the successful accomplishment of the conference's missional priorities.

Organizational Analysis

There are a variety of ways of understanding and analyzing organizations such as private sector non-profits, including mainline Christian denominations in the United States. While much organizational research and theory attempts to distinguish between private, public, or nonprofit organizations, Bolman and Deal (2013) state that "all three sectors increasingly interpenetrate one another" (p. ix.). By reframing organizational issues through four lenses, rather than the organizational context alone, an

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organizational analyst can understand similarities and differences that exist among all organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The four lenses or “frames” to which Bolman and Deal (2013) refer are the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame. Each of these frames consolidates the findings of organizational research into a collective of four simultaneously experienced worldviews for understanding how organizations work, major assumptions, and distinct perspectives (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The structural frame focuses the alignment of an organization on “clear goals, focus on the mission, well-defined roles, and top-down coordination” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 43). The human resource frame places human needs and resources as central to the organization’s effectiveness, energy, and outputs. The political frame understands organizations in the context of power, resources, and negotiation between the two. The symbolic frame focuses on the organizational culture made up of myths, values, stories, ritual, and ceremonies, and “forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 248).

This proposal uses the human resources frame to study the relationship between the Mountain Sky Conference and local pastors. This frame “centers on what organizations and people do to and for one another” (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Suggesting that humans and organizations need each other, this frame was chosen to understand the causal relationship between the needs and employment of local pastors by The United Methodist Church in the U.S., which needs their talent and energy to fulfill some of its institutional goals. Consecutively, the structural frame is used to understand the organizational structure the UMC system uses to maintain the

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relationship with local pastors. The structural frame includes the organization's goals, mission, and roles, which provide the structure for employee performance and effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame was chosen to explore how the organizational structure, primarily with local pastors, enhances or impedes the ultimate accomplishment of its institutional goals.

The Human Resource Frame

To begin with, "The human resource frame centers on what organizations and people do to and for one another" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 113). This frame operates on the following assumptions:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs.
2. People and organizations need each other.
3. Organizations and people can suffer if the relationship between the two is poor.
4. Organizations and people can benefit from a synergistic and positive relationship.

The human resource frame is built on the theories of needs, motivation, satisfaction, agency, and autonomy developed by Maslow (1943, 1954), Herzberg (1966), and Hackman and Oldham (1980) among others. (Bolman & Deal, 2013). One of the challenges to relationships between organizations and people is what Bolman and Deal (2013) call "the changing employment contract" (p. 129). The contract between organizations and people has been affected by global trends such as global competition, rapid change and minimization of fixed and expensive human assets (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This reality has resulted in downsizing, outsourcing, and in the mainline church, a change in the way leadership is deployed for service in local churches.

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The Structural Frame

The structural framework provides an underpinning for the relationships between the organization and employees as it provides a skeletal structure by which to achieve established goals and objectives (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Rooted in the work of Frederick W. Taylor (1911), understood to be the father of “scientific management,” the structural frame holds the following key assumptions:

1. Organizations exist to achieve goals and objectives.
2. Organizations are more efficient and effective through division of labor and specialized skills.
3. Coordination and control are required to organize individuals.
4. Rationality must prevail over individual preferences.
5. Solid and effective structures lead to healthy organizational systems (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Further, another contributor to the structural frame was the early 20th century German economist and father of modern sociology, Max Weber. Weber coined the term “monocratic bureaucracy” which outlined the significance of a rational organizational structure, which included a fixed division of labor, a hierarchy of offices, and a set of rules governing performance (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 46). A key assumption in this bureaucratic model was that one was employed for a long-term career, and this structure served not only the organization but the whole of rational society.

The United Methodist Church, with its historical and organizational roots formed in the 18th century Industrial Revolution, has functioned as a monocratic bureaucracy in

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ordering its life around a *Book of Discipline*, which is revised every 4 years and explains the structural ordering of offices, rules and responsibilities of clergy leaders, qualifications for employment, and an assumption that clergy leadership is a life-long calling (*Book of Discipline*, 2016). The challenge, however, is that as the church has become more international, globalism, pluralism, and multi-culturalism have reframed the organization, and thus the identification, development, and deployment of clergy leaders. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that differentiation, or a clear division of labor, is necessary in the structural frame. However, this new reality in the UMC challenges the clear delineation and differentiation of clergy. Instead, the organization is now much more diffuse and less “particular,” causing a challenge to the rigid structures of authority, rules, and policies found in a monocratic bureaucracy (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The circumstances of rising employment of full-time and part-time local pastors in the UMC demonstrates these challenges to the former monocratic bureaucracy of the denomination in two primary areas: the changing context of the local church and the changing demographics of pastors who lead those churches. To begin with, the contexts of local churches has changed dramatically in the past five decades. In their *National Projection Model for the Denomination in the U.S.* report (2014), the UMC General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) cited rapid decline in church attendance since the 1960s. While the global membership of the UMC now exceeds 12.5 million, U.S. membership dropped to 6.95 million in 2016, with average weekly church attendance at a 3.3% decline to 2.66 million (Hahn, 2018). The National Projection Model (2014) continues that by the year 2030 worship attendance will

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continue in decline, total expenditures will increase, and elders appointed to local churches will decrease. These trends are also set against a larger cultural context of growing *unchurched*, *de-churched*, or *none* (no religious affiliation or propensity) populations that are separating or not identifying with spiritual culture or religious organizations in the U.S. (GBHEM, 2014). These shifts in size, age and contexts of the organization have forced the structure of the UMC to become less formal and complex, and more nimble and informal (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The deployment of local pastors, as a result, is a necessary structural remedy to these changing contexts. And yet, because the former monocratic structural bureaucracy is far more complex and inflexible, the employment of local pastors is often seen as an indicator of loss and decline, rather than a vital tool for resourcing new contexts.

A second challenge to the monocratic bureaucracy structure of the UMC is the changes in workforce demographics, represented in the increase of employment of licensed local pastors. The cultural and organizational norms of the UMC are based on the normative, life-long vocation and career of the ordained elder. According to projections from the National Projection Model (GBHEM, 2014), however, those elders seeking appointments in the local church will decrease from 13,012 in 2008 to 4,204 in 2030, representing a 67% decrease. In contrast, the numbers of licensed local pastors will increase. With these changes in the workforce, the structural system will be required to change in its identification, development, and deployment of the licensed local pastor as the growing norm, rather than the exception, for church leadership in the declining denomination (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

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Leadership Analysis

Much like the scholarly evolution of leadership definitions over the past century, the role of licensed local pastor in the United Methodist Church has also evolved. As Northouse (2016) overviews, leadership in the early 20th century was focused on control and centralization of power; a model also lived out in the mainline Protestant Church when the ordained pastor was seen as the educated elite deployed to a frontier community. By the 1950s, leadership was understood as a “relationship that develops shared goals” (Northouse, 2016, p. 3) with the effectiveness of the leader measured by their ability to influence that relationship. Into the 21st century, however, leadership has been understood as a *process* of inspiring, motivating, and equipping followers to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2016). In this leadership analysis of part-time local pastors in the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church, this leadership process framework is used to analyze how these leaders use authentic leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership to practice their spiritual leadership and contribute to adult discipleship formation (Rost, 1991).

Authentic Leadership

While there is no single definition of authentic leadership, there are practical and theoretical approaches that highlight distinct features of this emerging leadership research (Northouse, 2016). A practical approach has been developed by Dr. William (Bill) George, a Senior Fellow at Harvard Business School, and former corporate and government CEO. In his 2003 book, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, George cites five authentic leadership characteristics that have moral dimension and can be developed in leaders over time: passion, behavior,

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connectedness, consistency, and compassion. Northouse (2016) demonstrates how these characteristics lead to behaviors by the authentic leader. These behaviors include clarifying purpose, defining values, building relationships, practicing self-discipline, and operating from the heart (Northouse, 2016).

The ministry of a clergyperson in all United Methodist churches (ordained or licensed) is based on these authentic leadership characteristics, as evidenced in the requirements of the denomination's clergy credentialing process, which are documented in *The Book of Discipline* (2016). These requirements include an exploration of one's faith, values, and core mission as well as fitness for ministry through a licensing protocol which includes psychological evaluations, background checks, and credit reporting (*Book of Discipline*, 2016).

The part-time local pastor is among the clergy who are questioned about their interior, value-driven life as it relates to their outward practices and behaviors of leadership. United Methodist clergy, including part-time local pastors, are held to a standard and expectation of authentic leadership in their teaching, pastoral care, preaching, and organization of the church. This standard is expressed through the *character* of the clergy, which is evidenced in their *behavior*, and is measured and evaluated annually as the part-time local pastor seeks a new appointment as a church leader.

Servant Leadership

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends... You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last... (John

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15:12-15, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1991).

While leadership research and scholarship trace the term *servant leadership* to Robert Greenleaf in the 1960s and his work with the Center for Applied Ethics, for the Christian community, this practice and theory of leadership is also based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Central to the concept of servant leadership is placing emphasis on the followers and ethically empowering them in their leadership for “the greater good of the organization, community, and society at large” (Northouse, 2016). Northouse expounds that there are some key conditions that have an impact on servant leadership: context and culture, leader attributes, and follower receptivity. Each of these conditions is expounded on as they relate to the leadership of the part-time local pastor as clergy in the UMC.

Context and Culture

Each part-time local pastor is embedded in a unique culture and context to which they have been appointed. They are not just seen as leaders of a church, but of an entire community. In fact, frequently a PTLP serves a church in the very community in which they live. A unique attribute of the part-time local pastor is that they are frequently employed in other vocation(s) to supplement income, and can often be found farming, managing, or teaching in the local community where they serve their church (Hodges, 2015). This is seen as a strength for local pastors, as they understand the culture and context of their community and their followers.

Leader Attributes

The unique attributes of part-time local pastors, including “moral development, emotional intelligence, and self-determinedness” (Northouse, 2016, p. 232) shape the

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interaction of the part-time local pastor with their followers, or congregation. As these attributes of the leader are shaped by the common ethics of Christianity, and shared by the followers, they form a collective behavior of mission, formation, social justice, and compassion in the community. These behaviors and outcomes are central to servant leadership and lead to a strong sense of behaving ethically with and for a community. Continued oversight and accountability of the local pastor to a district superintendent and committee of peers is essential to undergird ethical behavior (*Book of Discipline, 2016*).

Follower Receptivity

Inherent to positive outcomes of servant leadership is the followers' willingness to be led by a servant leader (Northouse, 2016). Putting followers first in order to help them grow and succeed must be matched with the followers' desire to be known, helped, and guided by the servant leader (Northouse, 2016). Many times, a part-time local pastor finds themselves appointed to a church that has operated very autonomously as a single cell, *family church*. These family churches are often led by a patriarch or matriarch who is the *de facto* emotional, social, and spiritual leader. Since most Mountain Sky and United Methodist churches are small churches, making up over 50% of all congregations in the denomination but holding only eleven percent of the total worshippers, follower receptivity can be a huge challenge (Key, 2018). Cited in The Congregational Life Study of 2,200 churches all over America from 2001-2009, this challenge emanates from the following obstacles for smaller churches:

1. Decline in funding and financial resources.
2. Supply of clergy.

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3. Christian education resources.
4. People do programming.
5. Resistance to change.
6. Difficulty in assimilation/inclusion (Key, 2018).

Each of these obstacles challenges follower receptivity, and ultimate outcomes for the PTLP as servant leader.

Adaptive Leadership

In his book *Focus: The Real Challenges That Face the United Methodist Church*, Lovett Weems (2011) writes:

A prerequisite for leadership is an accurate understanding of reality; the first task for leaders is to help a group define its reality...New realities demand appropriate responses that fit the current circumstances and, at the same time, advance the mission. (p. 16)

The adaptive leader is one who understands their changing culture and context and leads followers to adapt and respond to those changing environments (Northouse, 2016). Developed primarily through the work of Ronald Heifetz, the adaptive leadership framework shifts the focus from the “leader as savior who solves problems for people” to the “leader as one who plays the role of mobilizing people to tackle tough problems” (Northouse, 2016, p. 257-258). This work is done by the community identifying its adaptive and technical challenges. The former are those challenges that are cultural and organizational. The latter are those challenges that are strategic, set by boundaries, and typically, more easily attainable (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

Adaptive leadership requires time to build relationships of trust, diagnose the

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adaptive challenges facing a congregation and community, regulate distress as the congregation grieves former culture, and manage conflict through learning and growth (Northouse, 2016). Mountain Sky Conference part-time local pastors are often employed 15-20 hours per week, some even less. This challenges their ability to maintain “disciplined attention” to the adaptive work of the congregation (Northouse, 2016). For congregations that are declining in funds, existing in declining communities, and resistant to change, they may not feel safe enough to tackle significant issues of cultural and contextual change, and as a result, resist both the adaptive leader and the necessary adaptive changes (Northouse, 2016). Each of these leadership challenges can impede the core dependence of the church’s mission on pastoral leadership:

The effectiveness of the Church in mission depends on these covenantal commitments to the ministry of all Christians and the ordained ministry of the Church. Through ordination and through other offices of pastoral leadership, the Church provides for the continuation of Christ’s ministry, which has been committed to the church as a whole. Without creative use of the diverse gifts of the entire body of Christ, the ministry of the church is less effective. Without responsible leadership, the focus, direction, and continuity of that ministry is diminished. (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 148)

Leadership is central to the life of the United Methodist Church. Authentic, servant, and adaptive leadership is required of all clergy, including part-time local pastors. With the enormity of the responsibilities, however, comes the time and resource challenges of being a part-time, often bi-vocational, employee. While this analysis demonstrates the range of requirements and responsibilities of clergy leaders in the Mountain Sky Conference and the UMC, it also exposes the challenges of varied contexts, follower

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receptivity, and shifting cultures. Each of these challenges impacts the ability for local pastors to lead.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Given this analysis of the Mountain Sky Conference organization and leadership, there are several adaptive challenges for the part-time local pastor and the impact of their employment on their leadership in the local church and community. This case-study research, that gives attention to the varied contexts, organizational stressors, follower receptivity, and shifting cultures of PTLPs, exposed implications that can improve the employment of PTLPs, and potentially, their effectiveness as Christian leaders. In this section, several implications that may improve the employment of PTLPs are explored.

Implication #1: Spiritual Renewal of Clergy

The MSC mission suggests that the purpose of the re-energized movement is to claim the life-giving love of Jesus Christ for ALL people. This begins, in part, with the spiritual renewal of the clergy to lead a re-energized movement to offer the life-giving love of Jesus Christ for ALL people. Because *people*, not a conference structure, make the movement, they need to be newly convicted, inspired, renewed, and equipped for inviting others to know the life-giving love of Jesus Christ. By understanding the structural and human resource impediments, and changing employment contract of the PTLP, they might be more empowered for focus on their core mission and relational ministry, which can contribute, in part, to their renewal of identity and purpose (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

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Implication #2: Decentralization of Services and Resources

An intentional part of the cultural shift for the MSC is embedded in the structural architecture of “pushing out, not down.” It reflects an inversion of the previously explained “top-down,” monochromatic bureaucracy to a new, flatter and wider delivery system of resources and services to the local churches (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This shift is necessary for authentic, servant, and adaptive leadership to flourish.

This structural shift has been practiced in no longer referring to the “Conference Office” or “Headquarters,” but to regional offices in their respective locations: Denver, Great Falls, Salt Lake City, Casper, and Pueblo, where staff and resources are made available to serve the “customer:” the local churches, clergy, and laity. It is also reflected in the conference’s mission to focus resources and services to the local churches and the leadership development of clergy and lay leaders in congregations. This research further clarified the employment resources and needs of PTLPs and their congregations in declining and isolated communities.

Implication #3: High Tech/High Touch

United Methodists value Christian conferencing as a means of grace and have historically understood God’s presence “as two or three are gathered” as we conference *in person*. However, with the vast geography and limited resources of time and money, the MSC is challenged to live and conference in new ways. Inquiry into the professional experiences of part-time local pastors included how they are connected and resourced through technology, as well as how they use (or don’t) that technology for learner- centered teaching. This inquiry informed potential changes in the experiences of PTLPs in the following ways:

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1. Discovery of technological needs and best practices used by PTLPs;
2. Exploration of connected peer learning that is organic, relational, contextual, and reduces isolation; and
3. Resourcing needed for experimentation and innovation.

Implication #4: Measurable Ministry

Too often, United Methodists have equated *busyness* with *effectiveness* and have not asked the right questions or allowed data to help drive decisions and planning. The consequence of this is creating more busywork for the local pastor and church that ultimately does not produce closer alignment or fruitfulness with mission and values. They forget that data, like vital signs in checking the health of the physical body, can help to understand the organizational health of the church.

While data gathering has been a common practice through year-end and benchmark statistics in the UMC, it has not been used as a tool for guiding and inspiring ministry and mission. Instead, the poor use of data has been used as a punitive tool that engenders shame about leadership and outcomes. This research can help to create a new relationship with data so that it can be a tool for revealing why and how leadership and effectiveness is happening in the context of the employment of PTLPs. Examples of data that can contribute to this building up of the leader and their congregation to meet the needs of a community include Mission Insite demographic data that relates to church outreach and service, U.S. Census data that reveals strengths and gaps in social services, and the use of congregational database systems for membership data management, even in small churches.

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Implication #5: Clergy Support and Accountability

Central to job satisfaction research is the finding that relational support and professional development is vital to job satisfaction and productivity, and it needs to continue to be intentionally tended to through a time of enormous transitions in the MSC, the larger UMC, and our daily society. Two driving inquiry questions were, “How satisfied are you with the professional support and development to accomplish your job?” and “Are there clear expectations and measures of what your professional outputs should be?” This support and accountability are necessary for PTLPs to be authentic, servant, and adaptive leaders in the face of the stressors and challenges of their ministries and leadership.

Conclusion

Jansson (2013) in her work on organizational change states that “over 70 percent of organizational change efforts fail” (p. 1003). She argues that this is because leaders typically try to apply universal change concepts to what is otherwise a particular situation (Jansson, 2013). This case study research roots qualitative inquiry into the unique contexts of each part-time local pastor, while standardizing the inquiry with the previously stated implications for research. Further research into United Methodist local pastors, employment practices, policies and advocacy, and their responsibilities and performance are necessary to understand the balance between the universal and particular. By more fully comprehending this organizational and leadership analysis, deeper listening and reflection of the cases were accomplished (Stake, 1995).

SECTION THREE:

SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

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“People give their allegiance to institutions and other people, not to ideas or doctrine,” according to Richard Griffin (2002) in his chapter on *Understanding Authority in Small Churches* (p. 48). Understanding the unique leadership and expectations of clergy in small churches, as well as the contexts of the small churches themselves, is essential to researching the adjunctification of part-time local pastors in the United Methodist Church. While there is much anecdotal writing about ministry in the small congregation and even less about the professional experiences of part-time local pastors, there is limited research-based literature on these subjects. However, there are some formative research texts from which this review draws on these subjects. The following literature review is segmented into four parts, using research-based materials. The first is an exposition of the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities facing small churches, primarily in rural areas. Second, are the characteristics, challenges and opportunities for clergy leadership in those small churches. The third section provides a bridge of the similarities between part-time local pastors and part-time adjuncts in higher education, which leads to the fourth section which introduces the framework for this research. The framework for understanding the employment conditions and ministry implications of part-time local pastors in the UMC is shaped by the work of Gappa and Leslie (1993) who identified employment profiles of part-time faculty in higher education. These profiles create a matrix for understanding and categorizing the unique employment profiles of PTLPs. From this review, a statement of purpose for my research is reiterated along with further implications and discussion related to PTLPs.

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Characteristics, Challenges, and Opportunities Facing Small Churches, Primarily in Rural Areas

In his introduction to a compilation of essays and articles of research on small U.S. mainline congregations called *Inside the Small Church*, Pappas (2002) recounts that small churches have had a history throughout Christendom. From house church meetings in the New Testament throughout the first century to class meetings in the Protestant revival movements of the 18th century to new church starts in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, small congregations have and continue to be an essential institutional instrument for teaching, sharing, and spreading Christianity throughout the U.S. and globally. In his 2003 book, *Effective Small Churches in the Twenty-first Century*, Dudley, a sociologist of religion, overviews that small churches are found in every community and represent every kind of cultural background. One half of all congregations in the U.S. have less than 100 regular participating adults (Dudley, 2003). In fact, according to Pappas (2002), because small churches occupy an increasing proportion of the ecclesial landscape, “denominations are shifting from an administrative response (to small churches) to a redevelopment model in dealing with small congregations” (p. 3). There is a uniqueness to small churches, regardless of their context, that encourages relationships over institutionalization, uniqueness over uniformity, and often, mission over building.

Research of small congregations in rural settings is narrower, which is why this focus on the ministry of PTLP’s in rural, isolated, and declining communities is important. Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2011) conclude that,

Despite the fact that nearly one-third of churches in the United States are located in predominately rural areas, researchers have paid little attention to

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rural churches and the experiences of their clergy. (p. 371)

In their 2011 research of 1726 active UM clergy in North Carolina, they examined the differences between rural and non-rural settings. They found that 61.8% of the local pastors worked in rural areas and that there was a link between the rural location of the church and lower church income. Additionally, the educational and ordination status of clergy leaders and the financial resourcing of the church were definitely impacted by the rural context of the congregation (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2011).

In their 1986 research of small congregations, Walruth and Walruth (2002) found that small rural churches are not monolithic. Instead, their research revealed congregational types as follows:

1. Dominant: “The” church in the neighborhood that is known by its reputation and prominence in the community,
2. Denominational: Defined by the denominational label it holds in the community and the loyalty of its members to that “brand,” and
3. Distinctive: Best known locally for a single emphasis or strength such as its worship, social action focus, or theology.

In his book, *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry*, Farris (2012), also categorized small towns into four types that are also instructive for understanding small town culture as well as the necessary expectations on clergy leaders of congregations in those towns.

Those types include:

1. Ribbonvilles: Once a separate entity, this small town is increasingly being drawn into an urban center, such as a bedroom community,
2. Agraville: Small towns that are further from urban areas and function as service

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centers for economies based in agriculture, mining or forestry while having several churches and one larger church with influence on the local community,

3. Mighthavebeenvilles: Communities that have lost identity, schools, and self-sufficiency to larger Agravilles and see closed churches with little resources to support clergy leaders, and
4. Fairviews: Small towns that have “created a new identity from whatever first shaped them” (p. 10), such as new focus on recreation, retirement, or artist colonies. Frequently, they face the challenge of two populations that need to be served in different ways, such as snowbirds/residents, campus/locals, etc.

These unique types of small towns address not only the church’s identity in the community but also the pastoral identity for the leader of each type of congregation (which is revealed further in the next section). For all of these rural churches, however, Pastors who serve in rural and small-town churches told us that they are rarely able to function outside the well-defined role and expectations within which they are seen by those with whom they live. The rural pastor is known to be minister to all. Everyone relates to the rural or small town pastor as “the minister” everywhere he or she goes. (Walruth & Walruth, 2002, p. 25)

While Carl Dudley (2003) does not focus his research on small churches in rural settings, his research is probably the most comprehensive in understanding characteristics of small churches that also apply to rural settings. Using the *2000 Report from The Faith Communities Today* (FACT) study, sponsored by the Hartford Seminary Institute for Religious Research, where Dudley is a sociology of religion researcher, he surveyed 14,301 small congregations in 41 denominations. He found

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that, “in practice, the small church is too often defined as deficient” (p. 23) as it is measured and assessed by money. Rather, small churches should be understood by their uniqueness and staying power. Several of his findings help us understand not only characteristics of small membership churches, but also of small, rural churches.

First, Dudley (2003) sees the small church as a “caring cell” where the primacy of relationships is paramount. Second, care for the past is a priority and source of identity, which is measured by time, annual events and personal passages, and history. Third, the small church has to build on that identity to strengthen its relevance in the present and for the future.

Dudley (2003) also identifies types of small churches, of which two apply to rural congregational contexts. The first is the Survivor Church which resides in declining areas that might include both urban and rural contexts:

The Survivor Church tells of storms it has weathered. Often the congregation attracts and sustains people who take pride in their survival, like the endurance on the cross. Survivor churches live on the edge, always on the edge of being overwhelmed by emergencies. They do not expect to conquer their problems, but will never give in. (p. 169)

The second type of small church, relevant to the rural context, is the Servant Church, which is rural, often in stable communities, where the community uses the church building as a community center. The Servant Church goes about the work of helping people in need in quiet faithfulness. These churches are neither threatened nor assertive...servant churches are sustained by servant people-those who visit the sick, take meals to the bereaved, and send cards to shut-ins. (p. 166) These are the churches,

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according to Jung (1996), that are distinguished by their sense of mission to its community of location. The community knows, and often identifies, whether the church's mission is focused inward toward other congregants or outward toward neighbors and newcomers. Regardless of the type of small church, however, Dudley (2003) concludes,

They remain, even while everything else is changing. Small churches are tenacious. Some would call them tough. They do not give up when faced with impossible challenges...In membership participation, the majority of small churches have not varied ten percent in any decade. (p. 25)

Indeed, while most research on small churches is more wholistic, rather than focusing on rural communities, Dudley (2003) sums up the impact and necessity of small churches throughout the U.S., "Small churches will continue to be the quiet majority of Protestant congregations marching to a different drummer" (p. 27).

Characteristics, Challenges, and Opportunities for Clergy Leadership in Small Churches

"Most Protestant clergy and Episcopal priests will be involved in small membership congregations during some portion of their ministry. That is almost inevitable" (Jung, 1996, p. 644). Typically, most UMC small, rural church pastors are local pastors (full-time or part-time) or retired clergy, with some beginning their careers in the small, rural church and others, ending their careers (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2011). What is discovered through research, however, is that there are common issues that face clergy leaders in small rural churches. There are also well-researched attributes that have been identified for effective small church pastors. In Walruth and

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Walruth's 1986 research of small church local pastors, especially in rural settings, the following issues were identified:

Loneliness

Pastors cannot escape their identity, vocation, and expectations upon them as "minister" for the entire community. For practical purposes, they are "on" all the time. If they are not indigenous to the community, they are typically branded as outsiders and newcomers in a rural social culture that typically excludes newcomers (Walruth & Walruth, 2002). Loneliness is also exacerbated as the pastor is typically distanced from their extended family. Additionally, their ministry schedule and limited economic means make it challenging to travel to see family on holidays and weekends.

Geographic Isolation

Transplanted pastors from urban areas to rural communities can "find rural and small town life confining and lonely" (Walruth & Walruth, 2002, p. 28). This is, in part, because the distances in rural communities prevent travel to recreational and cultural events. Additionally, several pastors appointed to rural churches and communities leave their families who reside in different, larger communities for spousal employment, educational or health needs of children, among others.

Spiritual Inadequacies

As rural, small town communities tend to trend more theologically conservative, there can often be an incongruence with a more progressive or liberal perspective by the pastor, based on his or her theological or cultural training. This can cause a spiritual misalignment that is further challenged by physical distance from other clergy colleagues, professional development, and/or spiritual formation experiences (Walruth

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& Walruth, 2002).

Energy of Bridge-Building

Essential to the work of the small, rural pastor, according to Lawrence Farris (1998), is that role of the “pontifex” or bridge builder (p. 56). In a small community where everyone is competing for the same volunteers, resources, and schedules, the pastor has to exude energy of brokering relationships and building bridges throughout the community. This requires time, knowledge, trust, and voracious communication that demands energy and investment by the pastoral leader in the small, rural community. Another challenge of bridge-building is the pastor’s role in modeling and teaching how to welcome newcomers and outsiders, in what is usually a homogenous context. If they are unsuccessful at leading in this work, the church’s relevance and place at the “center of community is in jeopardy” (Jung, 1996).

The Pastor as Generalist

Dudley (2003) reviews an evolution of the pastor’s positionality within a congregation and community, from the *generalist* to the *specialist* at the end of the 21st century. With the growth of suburbs in 1970-1990, mainline denominations shifted their focus onto growth and change. What emerged were larger churches with teams of staff and clergy specialists in the areas of pastoral care, preaching, and Christian education. Throughout this time, and into the 21st century, he observes, “the lowest salary on a staff of specialists is invariably higher than the average income for a small church pastor of the same denominational family” (p. 28). Rather than having the financial resources for specialists, the small church pastor continues to be seen as a generalist who is constantly on-call and called-on to clean toilets, do funerals, print

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bulletins, raise money, and care for the entire community.

Limited Resources

Dudley (2003) also explains that, with the focus on church growth and change in primarily larger congregations, curriculum and resources were oriented to larger congregations and away from small churches, with limited human and classroom resources. Christian education resources, writing and research about pastoral effectiveness, and worship resources involving technology skewed away from the largest population of smaller churches to the churches with the greatest populations of attenders. As mainline denominations understood the power of larger congregations to be more attractive to suburban populations and more lucrative in their ability to fund ministries and mission, resources for the small church became limited and had to be adapted for small numbers. This adaptation work is yet another need expected of the clergy leader.

Change Management Leadership

According to Anthony Pappas (2000) from his Alban Institute research and book, *Entering the World of Small Churches*, Leadership in the small church is an exercise not in rationality but in rationale...It means that by doing, not by discussing, that small church people decide about the helpfulness and faithfulness of changes. (p. 111)

Small church pastors have to be masterful change agents in a culture of history, memory, story, and relationships. From Pappas' (2000) work, it was found that the clergy leader must not be bold with vision but speak quietly about transplanting yesterday's story into today's soil. They have to be "a catalyst, not a champion" (p. 134) in introducing change that must be linked to the story of the community, and not

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made for change's sake.

Pappas (2000) further expounds that, in small churches, there is a difference between *global consciousness* which brings the church to a need and *tribal consciousness* which brings the need to the church, usually through a relationship the church has built with a newcomer or outsider who has related within the congregation and been loved into the community. As relationships are built, needs are understood and welcomed into the church, such as a long-time member who comes out as a gay man in a theologically conservative congregation or a single mother and her children who are embraced by a congregation that espouses that divorce is biblically immoral. Overall, it is as this work is done, and change is made through relationships, that Pappas sums:

The small church is a redemptive presence in society. The small church is often dismissed as quaint, old-fashioned, filled with “characters,” and so on...Powerful things are done in and through small churches for a very few dollars. In the small church people matter more than “success”...People are ends, not means. (p. 7)

Well-published authors such as Lyle Schaller, Roy Oswald, Anthony Pappas, Carl Dudley, and Lawrence Farris have identified keys to effective small church ministry that resonate with the social, political, theological, and geographical nuances of rural communities and churches. These keys were instructive to understanding the working conditions and professional experiences of the PTLP's in this research study. Following are some of the keys of effective small church pastors as articulated by Walruth and Walruth (2002):

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1. Pastors who serve the same church for over a decade “identify with and enter into the lifeways of the people they pastor” (p. 33) as trusted parts of the community.
2. Pastors are not achievement or management oriented but “forge a model of ministry with elements drawn from biblical-theological sources on the one hand and from the culture in which they are practicing in the other” (p. 34).
3. Pastors are highly relational.
4. Pastors know when to facilitate change and how to manage conflict.

Dantley (2005) posits that effectiveness in action and reformation depends on spiritual leadership that is not only technical, however. In his journal article about educational leaders, he posits that adaptive leadership, expounded further in Section Two of this dissertation from Heifetz (2009), needs to include chaos theory, critical race theory, feminist/womanist, and caring perspectives. He refers to this as “critical spirituality” which is,

An amalgam of the tenets of critical theory and spirituality. Spirituality is that influential part of humankind that allows us to make meaning in our lives...A critical spirituality allows for not only a grappling with our individual sense of being and purpose but it also grounds our work in interrogating those social and political contexts within which we find ourselves. (p. 503)

In more contemporary vernacular, critical spirituality could represent a “woke” pastoral leader who functions beyond a technical job to a spiritual identity and calling which motivates people to deep and adaptive change. Dantley (2005) suggests that critical spirituality is manifested through four elements:

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1. Psychology of critical self-reflection: understanding our identity within the learning/serving community,
2. Freedom of deconstructive interpretation: meaning making of how our self-revelation and interests could be challenged and changed toward a new reality,
3. Performative creativity: moving reflection and deconstruction into action, and
4. Transformative action: moving into a “radical reconstruction” (p. 514) of the institution.

The very nature of the calling to be a spiritual leader is to move a congregation toward transformation, evidenced through changed behavior in alignment with the teachings of Jesus Christ. With the exposition of the similarities of contingent employment of PTLP’s and adjunct faculty in higher education in the next section of this literature review, however, the challenges to this work become more evident.

Bridge of Similarities between Part-Time Local Pastors and Part-Time Adjunct Faculty

While there is a minimal amount of research on small, rural churches there is even more limited research on PTLPs in the UMC. As Section Two explored, this is, in part, due to the lower perceived status of PTLPs among other clergy leaders within the UMC. While the fastest growing professional leadership group within the UMC, the Church has not caught up with understanding the unique positionality of PTLPs. Therefore, this research relied on the over 50 years of research on the fastest growing faculty population within higher education, that is also contingent, often part-time, and limited in its access and privilege within the institution-adjunct faculty. According to DePaola and Kezar (2018), contingent faculty is a part of the academic labor force that

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“play a large role in academic production, yet receive little attention from scholars and institutional leaders” (p. 83). In this section, I overview the unique similarities of the UM PTLP and adjunct faculty in higher education in the areas of complexity of terminology, context and content, professional responsibilities and roles, and employment conditions.

Complexity of Terminology

Local pastors.

There are three primary and unique leadership statuses among those who have the pastoral responsibility to lead a congregation, or local churches in the UMC: the ordained elder, the local pastor, and the retired pastor (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2015). However, within each status, there is a complexity of identity and terminology. Local pastors function in a pastoral role as a leader of a congregation, but they are not ordained and, typically, do not attend seminary in order to earn a Master of Divinity degree. Instead, they have earned at least a high school diploma and are authorized to perform pastoral duties with a license as they complete a 5-year, 20-course Basic Course of Study (COS) (GBHEM, n.d.). Local pastors can serve in varieties of congregational settings, church sizes, full-time or part-time, in social service settings, and bi-vocationally. Their employment is “contingent” in that it is not guaranteed year-to-year. Many local pastors are also school teachers, corrections officers, managers, farmers, and other vocations. As a result, terminology within the status of local pastor includes full-time local pastor, part-time local pastor, associate member, local pastor appointed to a charge, local pastor appointed to an extension ministry, supply pastor, student local pastor, and others.

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Adjuncts.

There is also multi-layered complexity in the terminology, identity and contexts of adjuncts in higher education. Not all adjuncts are the same. Jaeger and Eagan (2010) explained that adjuncts, also called contingent faculty, were not a monolithic group of non-tenure-track college teachers, “but also other instructors who lack full faculty status, including full-time fixed term faculty, graduate assistants, and postdoctoral researchers” (p. 2). In fact, Umbach (2007) concluded that teaching behaviors of full-time adjuncts were more similar to full-time, tenured faculty than part-time adjuncts, adding to the complexity of researching adjuncts (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). Eagan, Jaeger, and Grantham (2015) further distinguished part-time adjuncts as voluntary or involuntary as they studied satisfaction of adjunct faculty. Of their 4,169 faculty research respondents, 73% were underemployed or involuntarily employed (desiring or seeking full-time academic positions) versus those voluntary faculty who “choose or prefer to work part- time” (p. 450).

Context and Content

Local pastors.

In 2007, a focus group study on twenty United Methodist pastors was conducted to “represent a comprehensive picture of the local church pastor position and the types of person who would likely provide excellent performance in this position” (DeShon & Quinn, p. 19). In addition to findings about job roles and performance, the researchers concluded that the position of the church pastor is not homogenous and is highly dependent on context and content, including “factors such as church size, rural v. urban, and church age” (DeShon & Quinn, 2007, p. 19) as well as unique proficiencies of the

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pastor themselves. They concluded that logical next steps in research need to include the impact of the context of the church setting on the performance of pastoral tasks and functions as well as to examine the particularities of the pastors themselves.

Additionally, Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2011) found that previous contextual indicators, such as rural or non-rural church settings, which may have formerly distinguished the performance of pastors were now more “accurately attributed to church size or pastor ordination status” (p. 372). Context and content matter and impact the possibility of generalizability of a large group of church leaders who serve in a variety of settings and are credentialed differently for their work.

Adjuncts.

Context and content also determine nuances in the research of adjunct faculty. “Part-time faculty members now account for 49% of faculty at 4-year institutions and 70% of the faculty at community colleges” (Eagan et al., 2015, p. 452). Within those distinct settings, research on adjuncts is discipline and class-size dependent (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011). Content may include online, in person or hybrid curriculum. Johnson (2006) also determined that findings were dependent on student classification including their class year and/or transfer status. Student retention and integration variables also included gender, race, financial aid, credit load, and college entrance test scores, among others (Jaeger & Eagan, 2010).

Professional Responsibilities and Roles

Local pastors.

Research on the professional responsibilities of local pastors, and clergy in general, is very limited in its particularity among the general roles and practices of

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ministers. In DeShon and Quinn's (2007) focus group study on twenty United Methodist pastors, the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics (KSAPs) that contribute to overall effective performance were measured (DeShon & Quinn, 2007). They were organized according to Lehman's (1993) identified functions and tasks of church pastors, and the time investment and importance ratings of activities from his research. Table 4 summarizes the results of Lehman's work.

While DeShon and Quinn's (2007) findings did not isolate the functions and tasks of UM local pastors, but incorporated them into focus groups with all UM pastors, they did identify clusters of tasks that contribute to effective performance. Many functions were clustered into "other-development" which they defined as "activities to teach, train, or mentor individuals and groups to improve their knowledge and skills" (p. 14). Among these activities were teaching Bible study and discipleship classes, staff training and education, spiritual development, and community development (DeShon & Quinn, 2007).

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Table 5

Time Investment and Importance Ratings of Activities

Role Activity	Frequency Hours Spent in Activity		Importance (1-6 scale; 6 = maximal)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sermons	18.0	10.5	5.60	0.69
Administration	14.4	11.8	4.18	1.16
Visitation	11.5	10.0	4.99	0.91
Personal Development		8.5	5.11	0.84
Other Church Structures	6.6	7.1	4.11	1.06
Counseling	5.7	6.5	4.66	1.05
Teaching Classes	5.5	5.2	4.83	0.97
Church Fellowship	5.4	4.7	4.60	0.89
Community Activities	3.8	5.6	4.13	1.06
Funerals	3.3	4.6	5.22	1.02
Social Issues	2.6	4.3	4.45	1.11

Adjuncts.

With variations in the definition and contexts of adjunct faculty, qualitative research on the quality of adjunct teaching has been limited (Bettinger & Long, 2004). While there has been much quantitative research on the statistical relationship between the employment of adjuncts and student retention, there has not been significant qualitative research focused on the quality of education by adjunct faculty that might or might not lead to institutional goals such as academic integration and retention of college students (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011).

We also still know very little about the adjuncts' preparation, motivation and

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experience as instructors from a qualitative perspective (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011). While there is more developed research on full-time faculty teaching and engagement as well as their impact on college student retention and persistence, more research is needed in those same areas with adjunct faculty (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000).

Employment Conditions

Local pastors.

“More and more, the UMC is turning to part-time licensed local pastors...to lead small churches in the United States” (General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, n.d.). While often balancing secular jobs and bringing workplace experience and skills to their leadership, they frequently work for less than full-time ordained elders (GBHEM, n.d.). While full-time ordained elders draw a minimum salary of at least \$40,000, they are also guaranteed health insurance, housing, utilities, and retirement benefits. As local churches increasingly cannot sustain these salary and benefit packages, more small churches request part-time local pastors, which can cost less than \$15,000 with no benefits (Hodges, 2015).

This financial disparity, along with concerns about lack of master’s-level education, contributes to a lower-status identity for local pastors that is evidenced in policy and polity. Local pastors are not elected into the membership of the regional body, the Annual Conference, and they are not guaranteed a non-contingent salary. This can contribute to justice issues of access and representation for the local pastor in the UMC.

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Adjuncts.

Adjunct faculty are also set against a wider background of employment conditions that includes issues of equity and access for adjuncts (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). These institutional issues include full-time faculties' perceptions toward adjuncts, and equitable pay and benefits for adjunct employees (Umbach, 2007). In his 2010 research on the experiences of contingent faculty at extended campuses, Cunningham found that employment conditions that were of concern for adjuncts included respect, academic freedom, equity, collegiality, flexibility to move in and out of contingent jobs, professional growth, and their love of teaching. Each of these areas were translated into the professional experiences of PTLPs and a part of the survey and inquiry of the case study research.

Through this section, the connections between PTLPs and adjunct faculty have been drawn to demonstrate how using research concerning adjunct faculty can assist in forming a framework for researching PTLPs in the UMC.

Research on Adjunct Faculty in Higher Education Informing This Study

In an effort to understand and promote changes related to the growing employment of part-time, non-tenure-track faculty in higher education, and to end “the current bi-furcated system” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 3) between tenured and part-time faculty, Gappa and Leslie set out to research part-time faculty and the conditions by which they conducted their work. Building on the original 1978 research of Howard Tuckman, who first researched and documented the unique employment experiences of part-time faculty, Gappa and Leslie visited eighteen colleges and universities, which were chosen to represent all types of higher education institutions, over a seven-month

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period in 1990-1991. At those sites, they conducted individual and group interviews of part-time faculty and other higher education administrators with two objectives:

“describing the present situation and making recommendations for change” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p xiii). Their findings included both a randomness of institutional systems related to part-time faculty and a commonness between the lived and shared experiences of that faculty.

From their research, key themes of part-time faculty experiences were exposed (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Those themes were as follows:

1. Faculties are bifurcated between high-status (tenured) and low-status (part-time) castes.
2. Part-timers are increasingly responsible for the teaching duties at the lower division of undergraduate classes.
3. The department chairs have a significant role in determining the culture and work environment of the part-time faculty.
4. Substantial numbers of part-time faculty are under-prepared, under-resourced, and overwhelmed in dealing with their employment responsibilities.
5. Many times, the part-time faculty are blamed as the source of the decline in post-secondary education.
6. Frequently, part-time faculty have little to no support at all, and the institution has failed to provide what is needed for their job performance.
7. Often, as part-time faculty are employed, other unintended and unidentified burdens fall to the full-time faculty.

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Though these are experiences found to be lived by part-time faculty, many of these themes resonate with part-time local pastors as well. There is a clear bifurcation of status between full-time appointed elders and part-time local pastors. This is built on the differences in their education, the size of congregations they serve, their tenure status within the structure of the church, and their willingness/ability to itinerate between appointments. The employment of a part-time local pastor also signals that a congregation is unable to afford a full-time elder or full-time local pastor. Their employment marks an often silent but stark reality that the church is in decline, as is the rest of the denomination. Finally, part-time local pastors often express frustration with a system built for life-time, full-time clergy leadership, and therefore not equipped to provide part-time local pastors the support, resources, and continuing education for effective job performance.

Another significant finding of Gappa and Leslie's (1993) research, the focus on this section of the literature review, is the employment profiles of part-time faculty. Building on Tuckman's (1978) typology of seven categories identified in his research of 3,763 part-time faculty members, Gappa and Leslie (1993), broadened the categories into four main employment profiles of part-time faculty. I juxtapose these categories to the case of part-time pastors as detailed in Table 6 in order to guide thematic categories that emerge from the research on PTLP's (Gappa & Leslie, 1993):

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Table 6

Employment Profiles of Part-Timers

NAME	DEFINITION FOR THIS STUDY	FURTHER EXPOSITION
Career Enders	Those who have fully retired from a full-time career or other vocation; and those who are in transition from a well-established career in teaching or other vocation to a pre-retirement or retired status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who seek routine in retirement and love teaching • May impact delay in creating new appointments for newer/younger faculty.
Specialists, Experts, and Professionals	Those who have primary, usually full-time, careers elsewhere, and bring experience from a wide variety of fields and careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed for the love of teaching rather than for the income • Can be specialists rather than generalists • Teaching fulfills a personal, community, or professional commitment • Do not experience conflict with their full-time jobs
Aspiring Academics	Part-time faculty who have a terminal degree and want full-time academic careers/recognition or are ABD doctoral students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be full-time part-timers, carrying larger loads than full-time, tenure track faculty • Qualified to be full-time but may be geographically immobile or limited due to family/other obligations

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential consequences to staying in this category which could delay professional development and research experience
Freelancers	Part-time faculty whose composite career is the sum of all part-time jobs or roles they have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time faculty in higher education by choice; not aspiring academics • May be more separated from institution and departmental leadership • Uninterested in tenure-track appointments

From this categorical conclusion, Gappa and Leslie's (1993) conclusion is apparent:

Part-time faculty come from enormously varied backgrounds and life situations. They need a far more flexible set of options, rewards, incentives, and recognitions for their work....Yet most institutions treat all part-time faculty alike. They see part-timers as marginal, temporary employees with no past and no future beyond the immediate term and give them no incentive to stay and make a commitment. (p. 63)

Indeed, this is where the adjunctification of faculty might diverge from that of United Methodist clergy. While PTLPs also come from various contexts, backgrounds, and motivations, they are called *pastor*, just like any fully-credentialed

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clergy. However, understanding more of the nuances of category and status of PTLPs informs the research questions and inquiry into the lived and shared experiences of the fastest growing professional ministry community within United Methodism.

DePaola and Kezar (2018) suggest the importance of an intentional and ongoing study of policies and procedures for contingent faculty that can also be informative for ongoing data-driven inquiry about the employment and experiences of PTLP's. From their recent research on contingent research faculty, they placed the primary responsibility on administrators and institutions to remain vigilant with the following instructive practices:

1. Collect ongoing employment data on contingent employees,
2. Systematically evaluate the growth of contingent employment and the policies and practices that influence that growth,
3. Set up a task force to understand workers' needs and experiences and construct policies accordingly,
4. Arrange purposive and systemic discussions with contingent workers, and
5. Implement standards for professional development including career path guidance and opportunities (p. 90).

This review of the literature has revealed many of the unique contextual and leadership characteristics of ministry with small, rural congregations. In addition, it explored the employment categories of adjuncts in higher education as they inform PTLPs in the local church. Understanding the employment conditions of adjuncts also informs research on the employment conditions of PTLPs, which impacts their ministry and leadership. Further review of the research reveals how the professional practices of

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adjuncts are impacted by several institutional and contextual obstacles which are outlined below. Many of these technical and adaptive challenges can be informative and may be applicable, based on the organizational and leadership analyses of MSC PTLPs.

1. Time for critical reflection on responsibilities of teaching: As this time is neither afforded or compensated by the institution to adjuncts, this is a challenge to the ability to be an effective teacher (Umbach, 2007)
2. Being an effective teacher takes courage: Implementing a new teaching paradigm can face opposition from department chairs, peers, and even students (Blumberg, 2015). While the adjunct may attempt to be an educational innovator, other contracted and tenured faculty may criticize their practices and end-of-course evaluations might suffer, negatively impacting future contracts and employment (Blumberg, 2015).
3. Lack of institutional support: Adjuncts earn low wages, have little to no contract permanence, receive little professional development, and frequently experience marginalization (Umbach, 2007).

Meixner, Kruck, and Madden (2010) studied 277 part-time faculty through qualitative surveys at a mid- sized, four-year, public university and found that, while these realities did impact part-time teaching, the faculty members were consistent in their appreciation and commitment to teaching and working with undergraduate students. One way to mitigate marginalization and isolation due to a lack of institutional support is cohort-based faculty learning communities (FLC), “to engage and socialize non tenure-track faculty, thereby enhancing their working conditions,

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performance, and the quality of undergraduate education” (Banasik & Dean, 2015, p. 333).

Adjunct teaching practices are significantly impacted by context, institutional setting, and a variety of obstacles that are unique to contingent, part-time employment in higher education. By connecting their experiences and teaching practices to the experiences and practices of PTLPs through archival research, surveys, and interviews, it is more possible to examine the opportunities and obstacles for leadership and ministry in a contingent employment context.

Summary, Implications, and Discussion

A research and literature gap exist in linking the experiences of PTLPs to their ministry and leadership in small, rural, declining communities. There is, however, more research conducted on small membership churches, with a nod to the distinctions between small membership churches in different contexts and representing different cultures. What is completely underdeveloped is research and writing about pastoral leadership in small, rural churches served by a minority pastor in an alternate majority congregation and community such as an African American or Asian pastor serving a white church, or a gay or trans pastor serving a predominantly straight church.

Witherspoon and Arnold (2010), in their educational research on Black American women principals suggest the importance of intersectionality that can be used to “think through all social institutions, organizational structures, patterns of social interaction, and other practices” (p. 221). This is also essential for understanding and exegeting the cross-cultural appointment of PTLPs and other clergy leaders. While their article expanded primarily on the implications for African American pastoral leaders serving

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within a same-cultured or racial church, the glaring gap of research and understanding of a minority pastor serving in a different majority church and community needs to be addressed.

With these gaps in understanding the distinct nuances of the PTLP within the small membership church, it is also instructive to refer to the growing body of research regarding adjunct faculty in U.S. higher education institutions as the relationship between their contingent employment within higher education parallels much of the contingent status and power dynamics of PTLPs.

This review sought to frame research on part-time local pastors in the U.S. United Methodist Church through the lens of small church scholarship as well as higher education adjuncts and their unique contingent employment status. The implications for inquiry into the cases of local pastors and their professional experiences and work conditions may be shaped by similar circumstances which impact adjuncts, namely, the quality of interaction with parishioners, connection with institutional goals, and challenges of being present only part-time. By being informed by the research of the work conditions and professional experiences of both small church clergy leaders and adjunct faculty, and the clarifying of the categories of PTLP employment experiences, it is the hope of the researcher that a more robust understanding of the adjunctification of part-time local pastors can result.

SECTION FOUR:
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

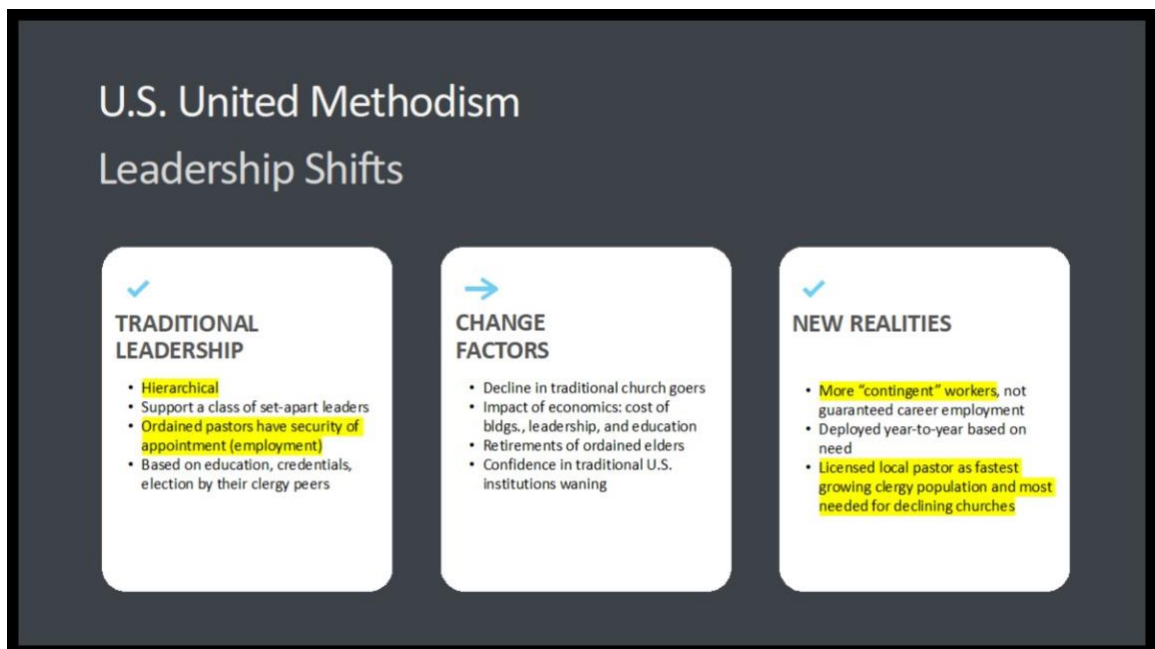
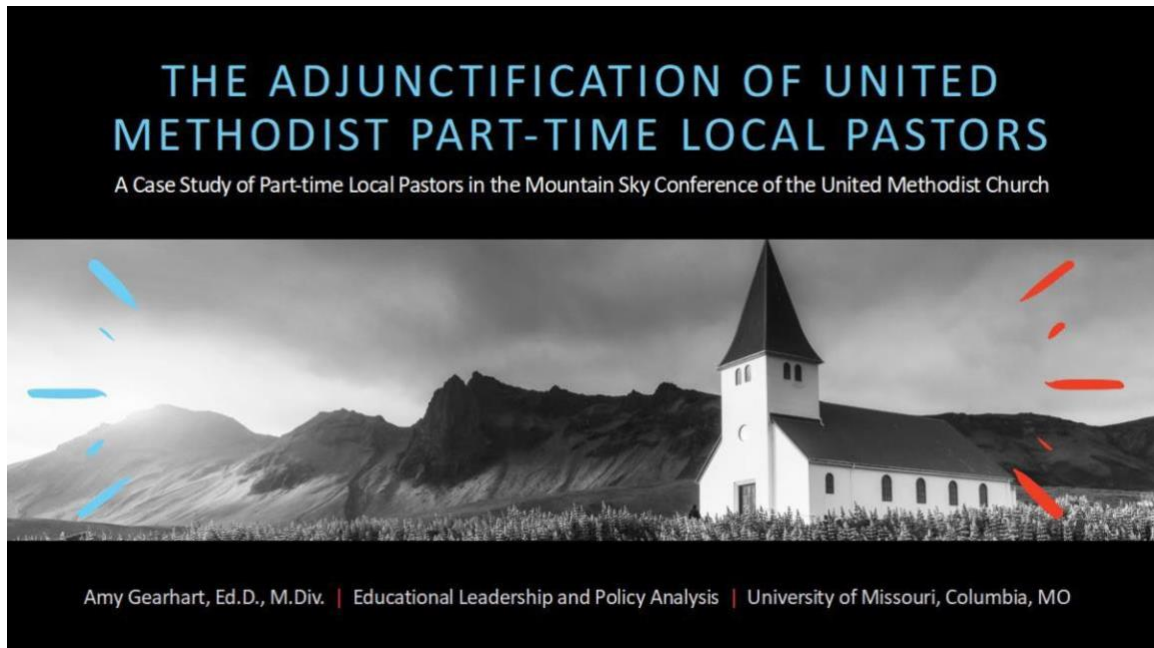
Practitioner Audience and Rationale

The audience for a presentation of this research and findings will be the Cabinet of the Mountain Sky Conference of the UMC. The Cabinet is made up of the bishop, who oversees the spiritual and temporal leadership of the conference, and the seven district superintendents who represent and supervise clergy leaders throughout geographic regions, or districts, throughout the 4-state area. The Cabinet is responsible for the supervision and deployment of clergy, while the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) is the peer review board for all clergy credentialing. An additional or concurrent presentation will be scheduled with the BOM, as the research and findings have implications for clergy preparation and credentialing as well. These presentations will most likely be conducted on a Zoom call with opportunities for further reading and discussion of the dissertation by the Cabinet and BOM.

The outcome goals for the presentation to the Cabinet are to expose them to data about the growing number of PTLPs leading churches; inform them of the working conditions and professional experiences of PTLPs; communicate an urgency for resourcing PTLPs with unique support and professional development; and provide space to plan for more intentional work with PTLPs in the future. While this presentation and conversation will not be exhaustive, it is the researcher's intention to begin the conversation and encourage intentional planning around the research findings. By doing this work, practice could change in elevating the significance of the PTLP in the conference; addressing the unique ways they serve many of the smallest, poorest, and most rural churches while providing essential spiritual leadership to entire communities; and developing resources for professional development and support of PTLPs.

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With these intentional conversations, it is the researcher's hope that there will be a growing interest in studying more of the conference leadership data and trends for the purpose of understanding more about researching and resourcing leadership in the MSC. Far too often, the practice and supervision of ministry and leadership consumes so much time that there is little remaining time for data analysis; critical thinking and evaluation; and realignment of strategies and practices for the new challenges facing the church. This type of presentation and discussion could provide a "door opener" to more of this work in the future of the MSC.



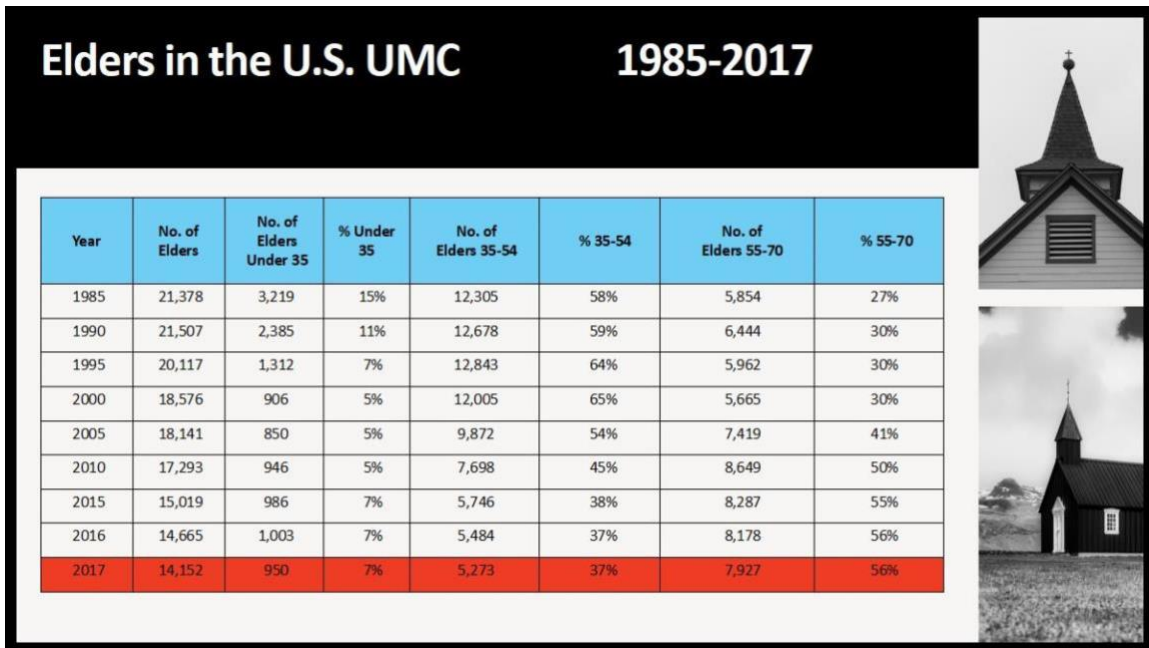
As we know, the UMC has seen a dramatic shift in influence and impact for several decades. Even though Pew Research tells us that US interest in spiritual and existential concerns is increasing, confidence and participation in mainline churches is declining. This has impacted leadership structures, resources, and deployment for the UMC.

Declining Elders in the UMC

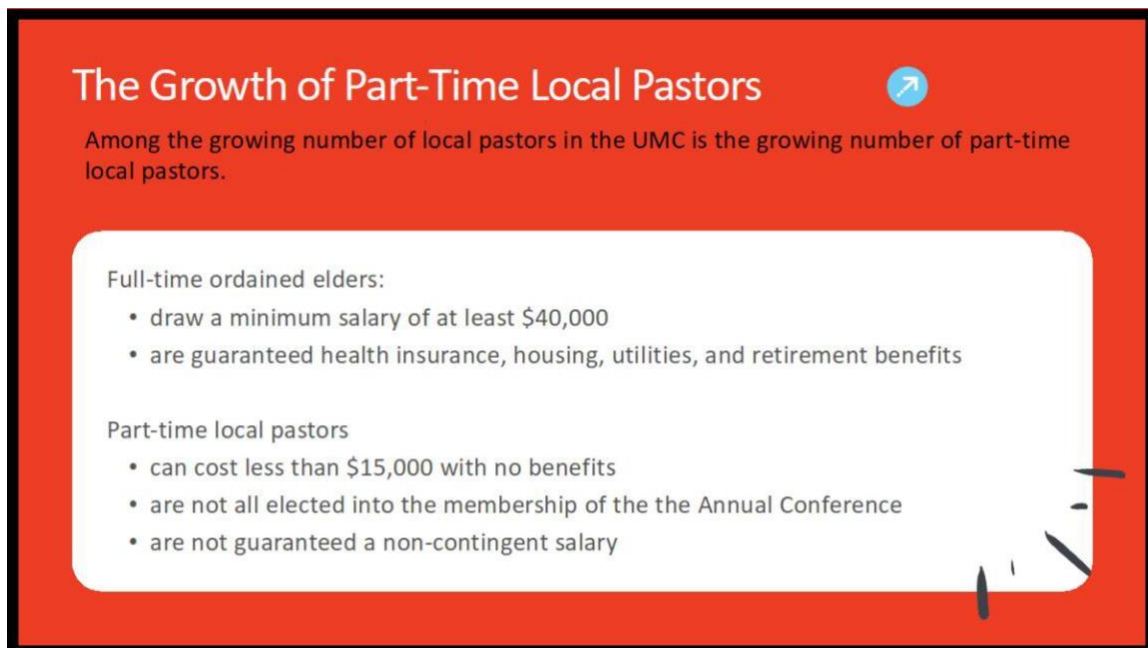
Ordained elders make up the majority of professional church leadership, but have been in constant decline since 1990.



- Elders, aged 35 to 54, is the fastest shrinking group of church leaders in the denomination 65% in 2000 -> 37% in 2016
- Elders between 55 and 72 are the highest percentage in the denomination's 50-year history
- Average age of clergy leaders in the UMC remains at 53, the highest in history
- The mode age (the single age most represented) is 61



Here is a reference of the decline of Elders since 1990.



The Growth of Part-Time Local Pastors

Among the growing number of local pastors in the UMC is the growing number of part-time local pastors.

Full-time ordained elders:

- draw a minimum salary of at least \$40,000
- are guaranteed health insurance, housing, utilities, and retirement benefits

Part-time local pastors

- can cost less than \$15,000 with no benefits
- are not all elected into the membership of the the Annual Conference
- are not guaranteed a non-contingent salary

With the decline in the numbers of ordained elders in the UMC, there is a growing number of licensed local pastors who are not seminary degreed, ordained, or guaranteed an appointment. Six of the US UM conferences employ more local pastors than elders, and the church is beginning to acknowledge that it is highly dependent on this growing category of clergy.

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Local Pastors in the U.S. UMC 1985-2017							
Year	No. of Local Pastors	Local Pastors Under 35	% Under 35	Local Pastors 35-54	% 35-54	Local Pastors 55-72	% 55-72
1985	3,804	130	3%	2,212	58%	1,462	38%
1990	3,936	163	4%	2,244	57%	1,529	39%
1995	4,622	290	6%	2,641	57%	1,691	37%
2000	5,571	348	6%	3,109	56%	2,114	38%
2005	6,517	371	6%	3,213	49%	2,933	45%
2010	7,341	426	6%	2,932	40%	3,983	54%
2011	7,353	455	6%	2,790	37%	4,108	57%
2012	7,532	472	6%	2,753	37%	4,307	57%
2013	7,671	522	7%	2,716	35%	4,433	58%
2014	7,395	568	8%	2,597	35%	4,230	57%
2015	7,464	601	8%	2,579	35%	4,284	57%
2016	7,408	597	8%	2,531	34%	4,280	58%
2017	7,512	595	8%	2,544	34%	4,373	58%



Here is a reference of the growth of local pastors in the US UMC since 1985.

Why is research about Part-time Local Pastors (PTLP) important?

- Local pastors now make up the **fastest growing professional leadership population** of the denomination, in the U.S. and worldwide
- **PTLP's are under-researched** and yet, small, rural churches make up over half of the US UMC
- PTLP's (<40 hours per week) have generally held a **bi-furcated and minority status**
- PTLP's often serve the **poorest, smallest, and most rural areas throughout the nation.**

By researching this group, a greater understanding may emerge of:

- the reasons for their growth in numbers
- the unique dynamics and experiences of their work
- the ways by which they can be supported for their leadership effectiveness.

The impact of this research may lead to greater understanding of the resources needed for the spiritual, emotional, social, and relational health of rural, isolated, and declining communities, congregations, and clergy within the Mountain Sky Conference of the UMC.

Purpose of this Research Study

The purpose of this case study is to study the “adjunctification” of United Methodist part-time local pastors in isolated, rural, and declining communities within the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church and their unique professional experiences and labor conditions.




Research Question

What are the unique and contextual labor conditions and professional experiences of part-time local pastors in rural, isolated and declining communities?

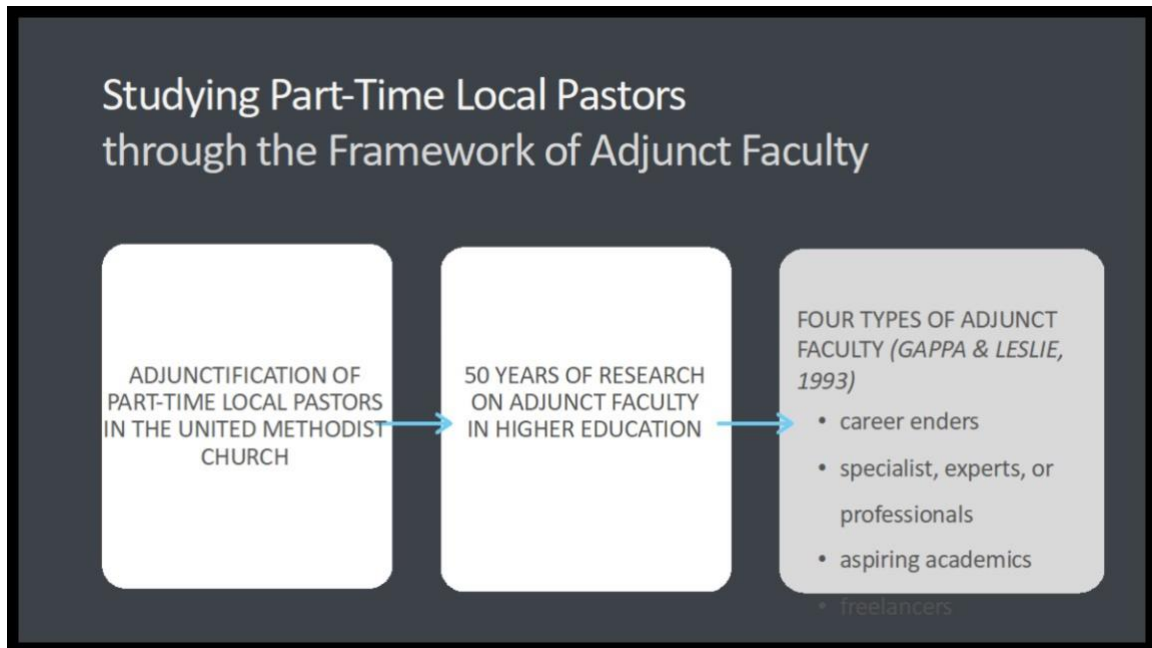


Studying PTLP's through lens of Adjunct Faculty in Higher Education (common systems)

- Higher Education Institutions
 - Hierarchical
 - Support a class of set-apart leaders
 - Tenured professors
 - Power based on education, credentials, affirmation by their faculty peers
- United Methodists
 - Hierarchical
 - Support a class of set-apart leaders
 - Ordained pastors have security of appointment (employment)
 - Power based on education, credentials, election by their clergy peers



Because there are limited frameworks and research from which to draw regarding PTLP's serving in rural, isolated, and declining areas, it is instructive to draw from a similar US institution that employs contingent (adjunct) faculty as it deals with shifts in impact, influence, resourcing and leadership. That institution is US higher education which Greg Kvistad of Denver University suggests, "The American higher education system and the tenure system are based on "centuries-old 'church' and German-research university models" (Flaherty, 2014, p. 1). This slide draws other structural and organizational parallels between higher education and United Methodism.



Using their research findings from 1993, Gappa and Leslie provide four types of adjunct faculty that frame the inquiry about organizing and categorizing types of PTLP's who are serving in the Mountain Sky Conference.

Approach to Research
Qualitative case study

THE CASE

- Eight, part-time, licensed local pastors (PTLP)
- Serve in one of the four states of the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church
- Share the unique contexts of serving as spiritual leaders in rural areas of decline and isolation



My qualitative case study research was informed by Stake's (1995) guide, *The Art of Case Study Research*. In case study, a research question drives the research and attention is given to emergent categories and themes that emanate from learning from the learned and lived experiences of eight PTLPs in the MSC. The case study research was conducted through a three-pronged approach: A review of documents and church website resources, a demographic survey completed by each PTLP, and a 60-90 minute Zoom interview.

Age of Subjects

AVERAGE AGE

64 years (7 respondents)
One outlier was under 60.

Compare to:

US UMC Median age of 57 yrs.

MODE AGE

62 years

Compare to:

US UMC Mode age (single most represented age) of 62

RETIREMENT AGE

No respondent cited that retirement was in their near future.

Compare to:

Avg retirement age for US PTLP's has risen from 67 in 2005 to 69 in 2018

Demographics

ETHNICITY

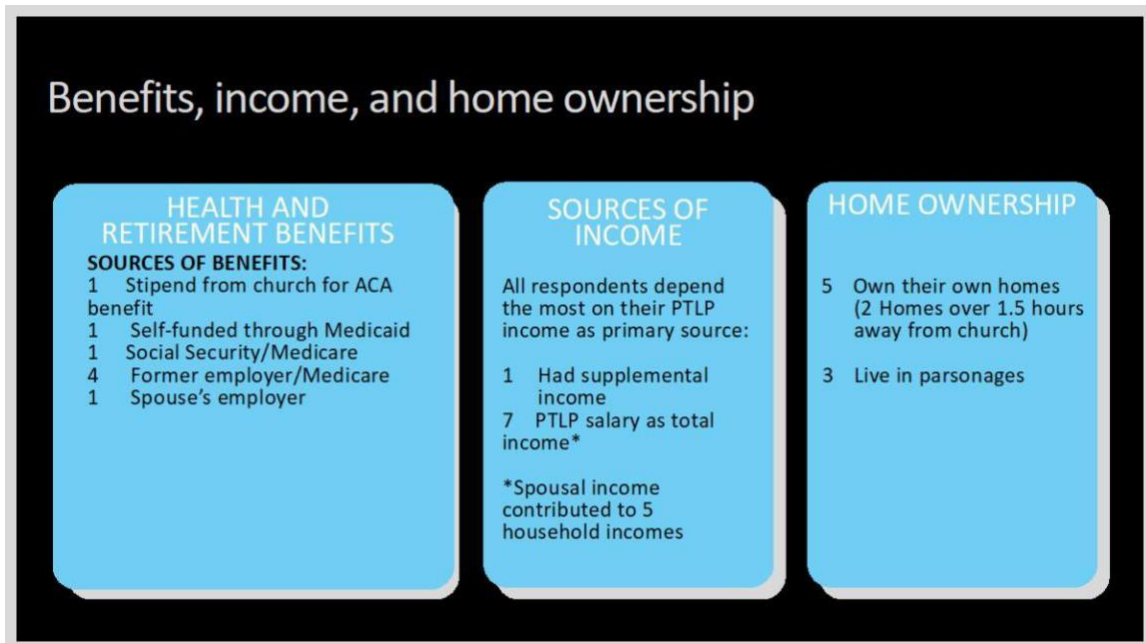
7 White
1 Non-white/Hispanic

SEX

4 Females
4 Males

EDUCATION

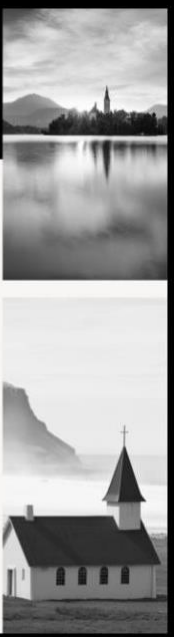
2 Community College Coursework
3 bachelor degree
3 On-track or Completed master degree



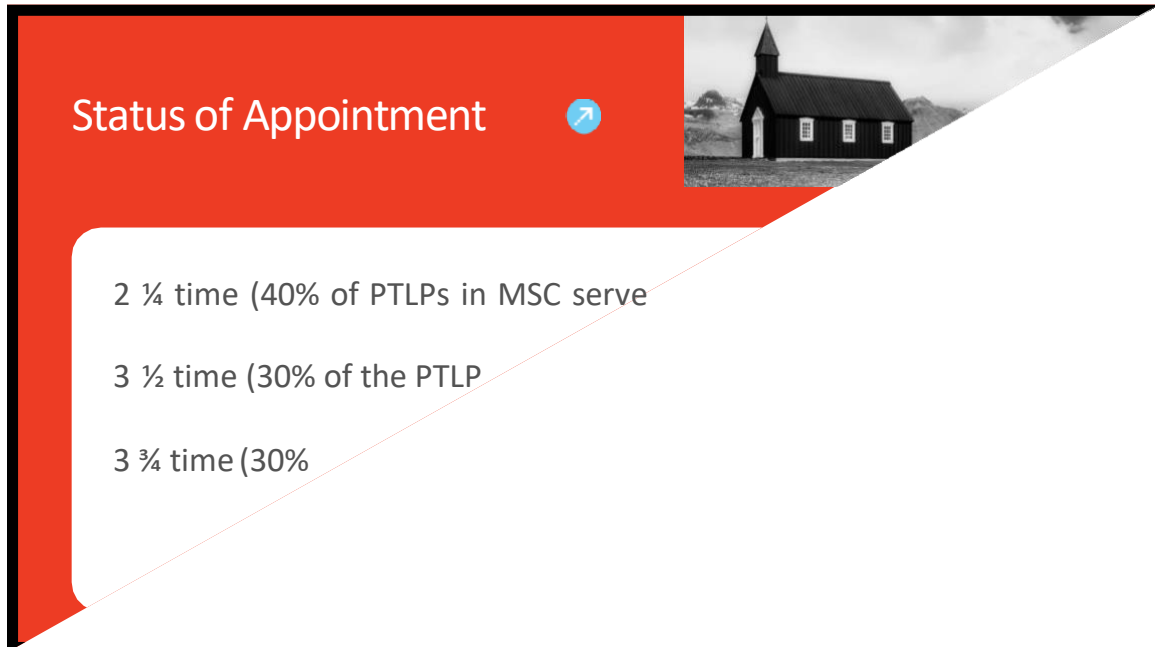
Through the demographic survey, inquiry included sources of income, benefits, and home ownership, as the literature review revealed that these issues are frequently concerns that face pastors of small, rural churches. Related to health and retirement benefits, the source of these benefits was a top three concern for every PTLP, and all concurred that they would not be able to serve as PTLP's without benefits access in some form. With only one outlier who had a second job, all the other respondents depended solely on their PTLP income for their individual income. The majority, however, had supplemental income from their spouses/partners.

**Years of Service &
Average Worship Attendance (AWA)**

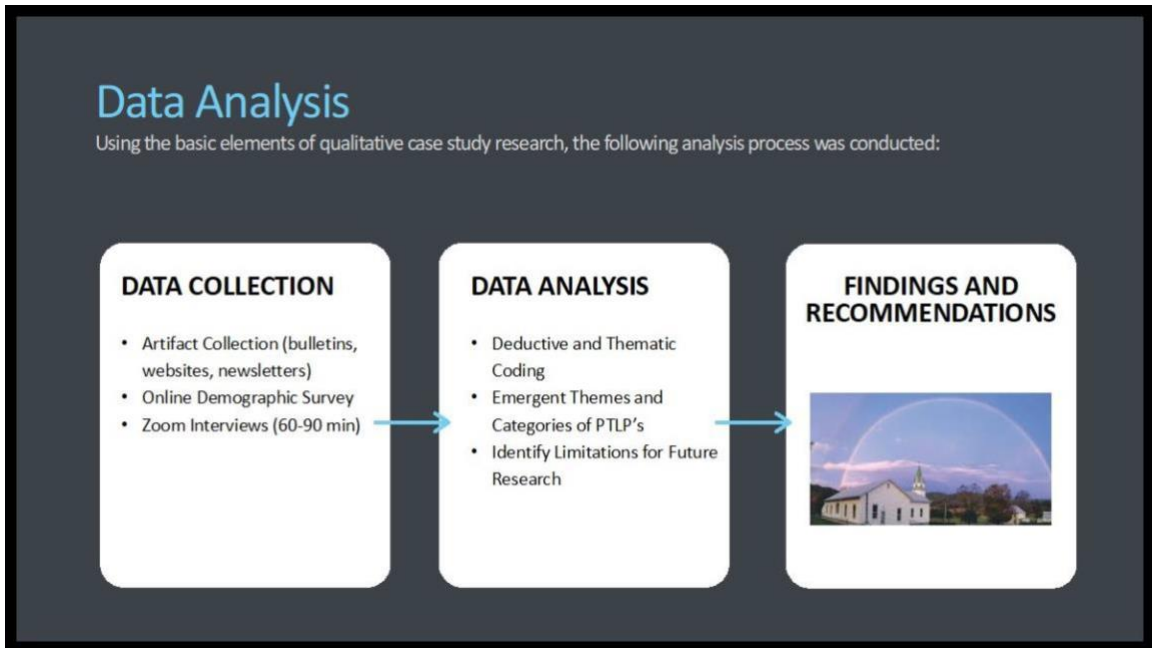
- ✓ Years of Service as a PTLP in MSC 1-4 years with one outlier over 5 yrs.
- ✓ Average decline in the Sunday (AWA) from 2015 to 2018 is 26%, with one outlier church experiencing a 33% increase in that same time frame. With only this exception, as the community declines in population, so does the average worship attendance in each congregation.



The GCFA defines a Rural Church as congregations in counties with 200 or less people per sq. mile. The populations of the communities of the respondents' churches range from 875 to 2,600 people. One outlier church exists in a rural bedroom community outside a metro area where they represent a religious minority among a large demographic of Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS).



- While each PTLP acknowledged that their appointment status set their expected hours and compensation, they all responded that they are working full-time (approximately 40 hours/week).
- Only one of the respondents anticipated the possibility of the church moving its appointment status from ½ to ¾-time in the coming year.
- They all acknowledged that the appointment status (hours paid) was determined by the church's limited budget, not the missional or pastoral needs of the congregation and community.



CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

TYPES OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS	
PTLP Type Name	Characteristics among Part-time Local Pastors
Career PTLP 2 respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call is to the ministry of the local pastor as a career and not a stepping stone to full connection elder/deacon. Education is COS , not M.Div. higher education model. - Final degree attainment might be high school
Transitioning PTLP 1 respondent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Aspiring to be a fully participating, recognized, and credentialed clergy person through Course of Study completion, Associate Membership, or progressing toward the ministry of an Elder
Second Season PTLP 4 respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fully retired from a career in ministry or other career - Transition from well-established career - Frequently rise out of active lay leadership
Occasional Supply PTLP 1 Respondent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could be clergy, LLP, or lay - Supply personnel who fulfill an interim, transitional, or post-conflict role - Some will have professional credentials; others will not - Serves for the love of the church and to assist a congregation without pastoral leadership - Those who are fully qualified for full-time, fully credentialed ministry but immobile due to family, geography, other constraints

Following the framework of Gappa and Leslie (1993) and their types of adjunct faculty, the following types of PTLP's emerged from the case study research. With each of types and characteristic are unique professional development and support needs for each type of PTLP:

Career PTLPS:

- Affirmation of call to ministry of LP/PTLP (not as a stepping stone to elder/deacon)
- Support, accountability, and access to COS coursework/completion
- Access to areas and regions for supplemental income (if PT)
- Access to cost effective health insurance and institutional benefits prior to 67 years of age-even in PT status
- Financial literacy and advocacy in negotiating salary and benefits
- Mentoring by other LP and PTLPs

Transitioning PTLPs:

- Support, accountability, and access to Master's degree institutions
- Clear pathways and expectations for transitioning from LP to FC clergy
- Advocacy with congregation re. clarity of call and expectations of conference relations
- Access to cost effective health insurance and institutional benefits prior to 67 years of age and/or full connection
- Mentoring by those who understand nature of transition to full-connection clergy

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

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Second Season:

- Advocacy and mentoring regarding finding authority in transition from lay to clergy, bringing gifts and experience from first career, ministering among familiar communities
- Financial literacy and ability to negotiate salary, benefits, and health insurance as a retired person
- Educating the congregation on real costs of ministry when health insurance is provided by prior career or Medicare
- Mentoring by advocates of unique ministry of LP and PTLP

Occasional Supply:

- Advocacy for the limited term appointment and unique opportunities for strategic planning, interim leadership, after-pastor healing, long-term knowledge of residential area or congregational culture
- Educating the congregation on real costs of ministry when health insurance/housing is provided by another source
- Intentional assimilation into the circuit/district as a short-time, supply leader

UNIQUE LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN PRIDE, PASSION, and COMMITMENT

"I'm branching out. God's got me doing new things I've never done before; I'm having fun."

"I think LLPs are priceless. I really do because I think we fill a lot of gaps and I think we need more of us for sure."

"I see the numbers nationally too. (Pastoral leadership of small churches) is a huge portion in our conference and in some other conferences too. And as I read the history of the church, it's sort of traditional (to have us); we haven't always had the same name, but it's a part of who we are. For our conference outside the Front Range, it's probably the only way those churches will exist."

For each PTLP, their leadership identity comes from a deep call from God and strong commitment to fulfill their pastoral responsibilities with pride, passion, and commitment. This call and commitment is evident in their expressions of courage, risk-taking, and engaging in new leadership experiences.

UNIQUE LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN PRIDE, PASSION, and COMMITMENT

(continued)

“There’s a class distinction between licensed local pastors (LLP’s) and clergy. To say otherwise is a lie. That’s the ostrich in the sand. And so I think better recognition of LLP’s and the part-timers needs to be given....everything is ‘ordination, ordination.’ But this church didn’t start out with ordination, it was itinerant guys and gals. And they’ve forgotten that; we’ve forgotten that.”


For each PTLP, the common root of their call was their transition from being an active layperson in the local church to their ministry as a PTLP. Some of them transitioned from a lay leader to a clergy leader in the same churches. With this confidence in their call and responsibility as pastoral leaders, however, they also understand that they are often seen as “second-class” clergy by the larger church.

Unique Contextual Labor Conditions of the PTLP

- Housing and Cost of Living
- Access to Educational Opportunities for Professional Development
- Social, Emotional, and Personal Isolation
- External Community Culture: church as community building in depressed community
- Internal Congregational Culture: concerns about decline in attendance, influence and money

"I mean there's really no difference between full-time and ¾ time. I am a full-time pastor, getting paid ¾ time."

"I try not to put the onus on my little congregation; I try to support as much of the cost as I can to save them."



There are many unique challenges and limitations of being a PTLP in a rural, isolated, and declining area that impact labor conditions. These findings are consistent with the research of Dudley (2003), Farris (2012, 2002), and Pappas (2002, 2000), all who have done research on small congregations through the Alban Institute.

- Housing and Cost of Living is usually harder to access and more expensive in rural settings.
- Educational Opportunities: While COS is seen as a reasonable educational alternative to the M.Div., it is still a challenge to juggle time commitments, coordination with the DCOM, and the finances of the education.
- Isolation: Other than bars, there was generally no social life activities up to two hours from the community. For single clergy, it was very hard to make friends or build significant relationships outside of the church.
- External Community Culture: Unique to their labor conditions is the pressure from the external community culture to provide services, care, and buildings for the community, not just the congregation.
- Internal Congregational Culture: Financial burdens, aging buildings, and the demanding schedules of serving multiple churches create other unique dynamics of leadership in the small, rural church.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES NEEDED
ACCORDING TO PARTICIPANTS

- Benefit and Financial Advocacy
- Significant Role of Circuit and Mentor Support
- Clarity of Expectations
- Professional Development



In order to meet the challenges of professional experiences and labor conditions of the PTLP, there are professional resources which are needed, including:

- **Benefit and Financial Advocacy:** There is mutual concern among respondents about the finances needed for benefits and salary and the advocacy that is needed to discuss these difficult issues.
- **Significant Role of Circuit and Mentor Support:** Every respondent shared the importance of the circuit and mentor support for encouragement, support, skill- development, and an antidote to isolation. They expressed preference for being present with colleagues by driving to “in- person” meetings rather than remote, Zoom conferencing.
- **Clarity of Expectations:** The respondents conveyed the importance of clarity of expectations, from their leadership with the local church to their responsibilities to the conference. They would like job descriptions, developed with the congregation, and desire ongoing feedback with coaching and training about setting goals.
- **Professional Development:** Depending on their “type,” ongoing professional development is needed, while also appreciating their previous career experiences.



Further Research Needed
Minority Experience by geography/race/culture

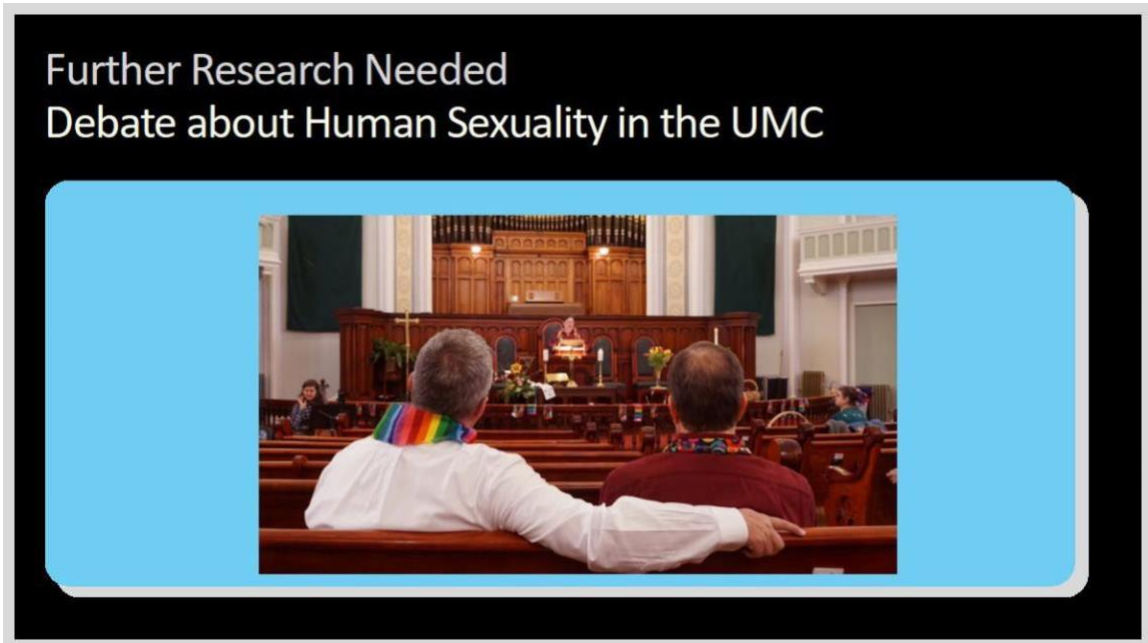
Geography contributes to minority/majority experience as the pastoral leader is seen as an outsider or newcomer.

"There's plenty of walls, plenty of cliques and when you walk into a business you can tell immediately, it's how they react to you when you walk in..."

Racial identity contributes to a minority/majority experience for the pastor and/or congregation, and impacts pastoral leadership.

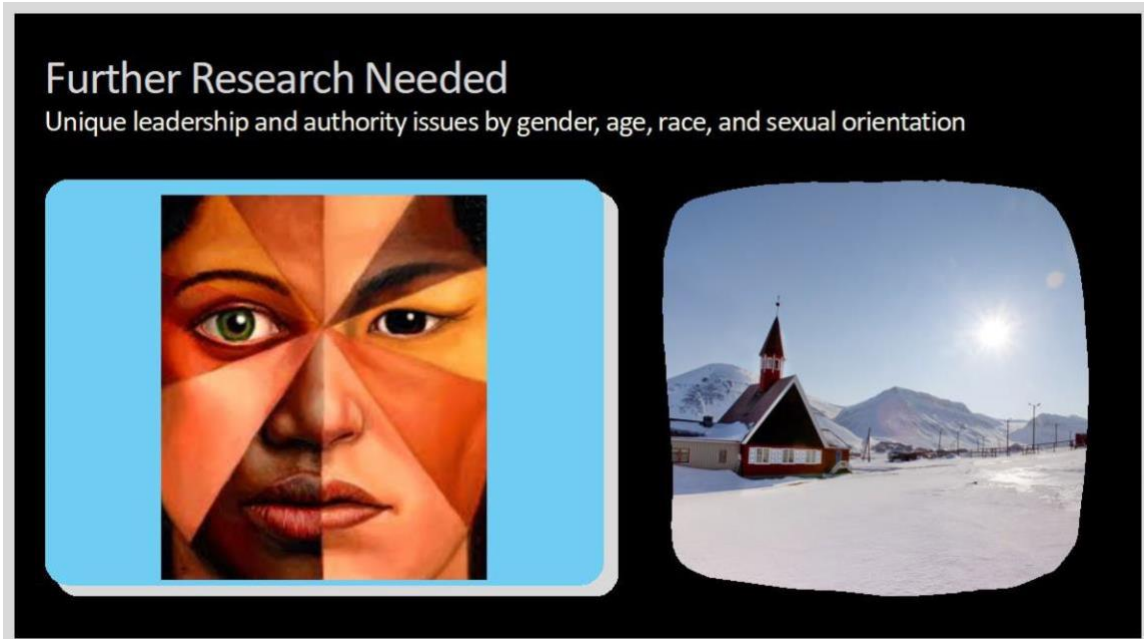
Immigrant status contributes to a minority/majority experience for the pastor and/or congregation and impacts pastoral leadership.

This case study research did not explore the challenges of being or serving in minority/majority racial or immigrant experiences, where isolation might be based more on a minority, outsider, or newcomer status rather than a geographical location.

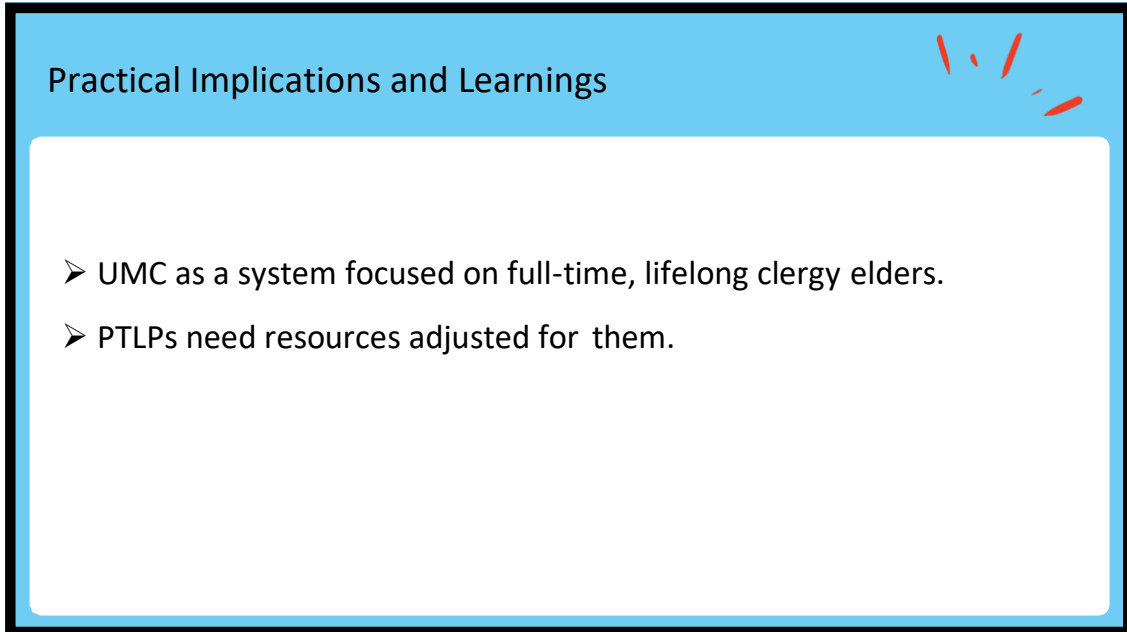


Four of the respondents mentioned that the 40-year debate about human sexuality in the UMC, and recent actions toward schism, have impacted the congregational culture and decline.

Because the scope of this research did not focus on this issue, it requires more research as it potentially impacts the work and leadership of the PTLP and all clergy leaders in the UMC.



Though the respondents represented some diversity in these areas, the scope of the research question and the population of the respondents did not allow for a close investigation into these dynamics as they related to the unique and contextual labor conditions and professional experiences of part-time local pastors in rural, isolated and declining communities.



Practical Implications and Learnings

- UMC as a system focused on full-time, lifelong clergy elders.
- PTLPs need resources adjusted for them.

Many of the professional and institutional benefit systems in which PTLPs operate were forged and framed for full-time, lifelong clergy elders.

Resources for PTLPs need to be adjusted for the unique types of PTLPs and their ministry settings in rural, isolated, and declining congregations and communities. These include changes in credentialing, supervision, insurance, benefits, educational resources, and conference communications.

Practical Implications and Learnings

- PTLPs need education for leadership in “stayed” and “declining” systems
- PTLPs are not monolithic, nor are their congregations and communities.


There needs to be a better awareness and resourcing of PTLP leadership for “stayed” or “declining” systems where “what we were” does not match the realities of “where we are,” such as learning about organizational grief, legacy churches, and transitioning congregations.

Professional development and educational focus need to teach assessing, diagnosing, and leading unique systems in unique areas.

- The role of mentors and circuits is vital to the “staying power” of a PTLP and could be further developed with the input and agency of the PTLPs.
- There is a desire for clergy and congregation financial literacy and advocacy for understanding the real costs of ministry, how to thrive with limited resources, using the church building as an income generator, and developing legacy giving for the future.

Recommendations

Cohort Learning Opportunities



- Continue mentoring and circuits with other clergy
- LLP/PTLP learning cohort should work with a coach to understanding the psychology and emotional depression in communities of decline, community development techniques, financial literacy, boundary setting, congregational life cycles, conflict resolution, and other practical topics
- Consider an affinity district (rather than geographic district) that brings many types of LLPs and PTLPs together for their mutual professional development and supervision

Recommendations

Clarity of Expectations and DS Advocacy

A photograph of a computer keyboard with a small white card on top that says "Job Descriptions". The card is placed on a wooden surface, possibly a desk or a keyboard tray. The keyboard keys visible include "enter", "return", "? /", and "C".

A mutual contract of expectations, feedback, and assessment needs to be drafted between the DS (or PTLP Cohort Coach), congregation and PTLP with expectations of supervision and accountability. This needs to be done annually and include discussions about annual goals, church finances and the PTLPs compensation package.



DCOMs need to understand the unique types of PTLPs and their unique needs for credentialing, education, accountability and advocacy. The core process of credentialing for transitional PTLPs and education for career PTLPs should be standardized across the MSC for clarity and transparency

Recommendations

Financial Benefit Resourcing



Rather than being focused on full-time, life-time clergy, there needs to be a benefits program that is based on more of a “gig” or part-time employment model that PTLPs and their congregations can understand, access, and fund.

PRESENTATION DISCUSSION AND
QUESTIONS



SECTION FIVE:

CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

Target Journal

I will submit a manuscript for publication to the *Review of Religious Research*, which is “an academic social science journal, publishing mainly articles focused on contemporary religious beliefs, practices, and trends, based on empirical research (quantitative and qualitative)” (RRA, n.d.).

Rationale for this Target

According to its website, the Religious Research Association (RRA) is an international and interfaith association of college, university, and seminary faculty; religious leadership, consultants, laypersons, and other professionals who research and work at the intersection of research and application. It publishes its journal quarterly and hold annual conferences with the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Its origins date back to the 1920s in association with the Federal Council of Churches. As this association and journal resources scholars for the intersection of institutional religion, theological education, and community-impact outcomes, it is a suitable candidate for publication of this research on United Methodist local pastors and their impact on learning.

Outline of Proposed Contents

According to the aims and scope guidelines, I will submit the following type of paper, among the three types published by the *Review*:

Original Research Article: This type of article must be a scholarly and methodologically sophisticated empirical study that provides a comprehensive literature review of the relevant topics related to the research question, and it should have a strong theoretical foundation. The final section of the manuscript should be labeled Conclusions

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

and Implications. A 250-350 word structured abstract is also required, which contains the following five section headings: Background, Purpose, Methods, Results, and Conclusions and Implications, especially implications for religious organizations and/or practitioners when appropriate. Submitted manuscripts should be double-spaced and be no more than 10,000 words, excluding the title page, abstract, tables, figure captions, and references.

Plan for Submission

The plan for submission will follow the procedures outlined on the RRA website as follows:

For Authors of Original and Research Note Articles

The 30-40 page Original and Research Note-type articles are both sent to outside reviewers. **If you have a manuscript that fits this general description and would like to submit it to *Review of Religious Research*:**

Your manuscript should be submitted online through the Springer website, NOT to the editor. Please go to <http://www.editorialmanager.com/rorr/> and click the 'Login' button from the menu above and log in to the system as 'Author.' Springer's instructions on the website are clear. Springer notifies the editorial office when a new manuscript has been received, and it is read by the editor, who may make one of two decisions:

1. If the editor does not feel the manuscript is appropriate for *Review of Religious Research*, the editor will notify the corresponding author immediately.
2. If the editor does feel the manuscript might fit with the kinds of articles published in the *Review*, the editor will check to see if the author is a

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

member of the Religious Research Association before reviewers are assigned. If neither the author nor coauthors are RRA members, the corresponding author must pay the membership or manuscript fee – same charge for either – of \$35.00.

The Adjunctification of United Methodist Part-time Local Pastors
A Case Study of Part-time Local Pastors in the Mountain Sky Conference of
The United Methodist Church

She teaches in two locations every week, driving 80 miles round trip between the two. Both of her classrooms are in aging buildings that limit the imagination and possibility of ever using the latest technologies for learning. Her student population is a total of 35 adults, mostly much older than she is. And she's making about \$180.00 a week for her teaching along with a full-time job as a county nurse.

This story of Laura Vincent from rural western Kentucky might sound like the story of an itinerant teacher or adjunct professor who is making ends meet while trying to fulfill her goals to further adult learning. Like so many adjuncts, Laura finds herself in a part-time, parceling of teaching jobs to make

The landscape of major U.S. social and religious institutions is dramatically changing. There are a variety of factors that researchers and theorists have identified as contributing to these changes, including globalization, diversity, economic shifts, individuation, and technology (Altbach, 2016). One of those major U.S. institutions that is undergoing dramatic shifts in leadership and organization is the United Methodist Church (UMC), the second largest Protestant denomination with a United States membership of over 7 million members in 32,148 congregations. The website for The United Methodist Church can be found at <https://www.umc.org>. This "mainline" church or institution has seen a dramatic shift in both its influence and impact for several

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

decades. According to a 2017 demographic study by the Pew Research Group that surveyed 2,504 adults about the changing impact of major U.S. institutions, the results concluded that 59% of Americans say churches have a positive effect on the U.S. culture, while 26% say they have a negative effect (Pew Research Group, 2017).

These statistics build on previous 2015 Gallup poll findings about Americans' confidence in major U.S. institutions. From 2013-2015, the poll found that, "Americans' confidence in all institutions had been the lowest since Gallup began systematic updates of a larger set of institutions in 1993" (Jones, 2015, p. 1). With dramatic shifts in societal and financial support, the need to appeal to changing generations, and a decline in confidence in formerly significant U.S. institutions, The United Methodist Church faces institutional challenges that affect its finances, leadership mission, and impact. This is significant as studies from Pew Research Center demonstrate growing U.S. interest in spirituality and existential concerns, topics addressed by mainline churches. Additionally, mainline churches have held a significant role in communities by offering social services, being teachers of moral and civil life, providing pastoral services of counseling and care, and being understood as communities of hope and healing (Willimon, 2002).

Changes in Leadership Demographics in the American

United Methodist Church

In understanding changes in the relevance and impact of any institution, it is necessary to study its leadership. The focus of this study is on The United Methodist Church in the United States. As such, all statistics and related information used are based in the U.S. context. Decreasing numbers of UMC church members, the closing of churches, the merging of geographic regions called *conferences*, and the rising and

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

prohibitive costs of ordained clergy are all indications of the challenges to this major U.S. institution and its leadership (Choi, 2010). According to the Lewis Center for Church Leadership (2020), which studies and reports on UMC clergy changes and statistics, elders, those primarily and historically entrusted with professional leadership of UMC congregations, still make up the majority of church leadership, although the numbers of these clergy leaders are declining. They are ordained clergy leaders who hold master degrees (M.Div.), are seminary educated, and are tenured clergy, otherwise known as holding “guaranteed appointment.” Now, the number of elders, aged 35 to 54, is the fastest shrinking group of church leaders in the denomination, falling from 65% of all active elders in 2000 to 37% in 2016 (Weems, 2016). Instead, elders between 55 and 72 are the highest percentage in the denomination’s 50-year history. While the average age of clergy leaders in the UMC remains at 53, the highest in history, “the mode age (the single age most represented) is 61” (Weems, 2016, p. 1). This signifies that a younger generation of elders is not balanced with those closer to retirement age, thus indicating a future reduction in numbers of elders in the church.

With the decline in the numbers of ordained elders in the UMC, there is a growing number of licensed local pastors who are not seminary degreed, ordained, or guaranteed an appointment, or employment. Six regional areas in the United States UMC, called conferences, employ more local pastors than elders, and the church is beginning to acknowledge that “they are highly dependent on this growing category of clergy” (Hodges, 2015, p. 3)

According to the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) and other denominational statistics, about 25 to 30% of the UMC’s

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

church leaders are local pastors “who pursue church leadership after having successful first careers” (2012) The website for The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry can be found at <https://gbhem.org>. Their contracts are contingent year-to-year and their authority is limited to the leadership of the local church, rather than a global mission and authority given to elders. According to the Lewis Center,

Since at least the 1980’s (*sic*), there has been a major decline in the number of active elders while the number of local pastors increased dramatically. In 2016, there is a decline in both active elders and local pastors, though the elder decline is greater. The result is that since 1990, there are 6,842 fewer elders and 3,472 more local pastors. In 1990, there were over five elders for each local pastor; today there are two elders for each local pastor. In 2016, there are 14,665 elders and 7,408 local pastors. (Weems, 2016, p. 1)

The rise of the employment of local pastors in the UMC is not due solely to an “aging out” of ordained elders, however. “While elder retirements are a big factor, more and more United Methodist churches can’t afford the minimum salary and benefits required for an elder” (Hodges, 2015, p. 3). Ordained clergy in the UMC are guaranteed a minimum salary, a cash salary that also includes housing or a housing allowance, full health and pension benefits, and professional development funds Where salary packages range from \$70,000-\$200,000 for a full-time ordained elder, a salary-only package for a part-time local pastor may be less than \$15,000. As congregations age and decline, funding declines, and so too does a congregation’s capacity to pay full-time clergy salaries.

Purpose of the Study

Given the rise of part time local pastors, the purpose of this qualitative case study

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

was to understand the unique professional experiences and labor conditions of United Methodist part-time local pastors in isolated, rural, and declining communities within the Mountain Sky Conference, which encompasses United Methodist churches in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, and one church in Salmon, Idaho. It is important to study this subset of the larger clergy leadership in the UMC because PTLPs are one of the fastest growing clergy leader-types due to an aging-out of elders, the rising cost of clergy employment, the declining populations and budgets of rural churches, and the demographic shifts within American United Methodism. It is important to research rarely studied PTLPs, not as a monolithic group, but as vital contributors to the spiritual, emotional, social, and relational health of rural, isolated, and declining areas within The United Methodist Church.

History and Definition of a Part-Time Local Pastor (PTLP)

Rooted in an historical, evangelical, and missional emphasis on “spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land,” Methodist circuit riders in the U.S. in the 19th century were deployed to teach and proclaim the faith, while they were illiterate and uneducated (Hodge, 2015). In these early days, the aspiring clergy were educated on horseback through a simple course of study of readings, sermons, and teachings. By the 1940s, they began attending seminaries for theological and vocational training. This soon resulted in the denomination’s requirement of a seminary degree for those seeking ordination as elders in the church.

The qualifications of the elder now include completion of a seminary education and commitment to itinerate between appointments in exchange for guarantee of compensation and benefits, security of employment, and full voting rights within the

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

annual conference where one is elected and appointed to serve (*Book of Discipline*,

2016). The elder's authority and responsibilities of proclamation of the Word (preaching), ordering the life of the church, presiding over the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, and leading disciples of Christ in lives of service extends beyond geographic boundaries and throughout the international church.

In contrast to the ordained elder, the United Methodist Church also licenses local pastors who are not ordained but "who are appointed to preach and conduct divine worship and perform the duties of a pastor" (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 235).

Typically, local pastors do not attend seminary, but a 5-year Course of Study (COS), they do not have full voting rights, do not itinerate, and do not have guaranteed employment. Their authority is to serve as pastor of a local congregation, rather than throughout the international church. Instead of a life-long ordination, their license provides an annual permission to conduct their work as a pastor in a local church or chaplaincy on a contingent basis.

Within the fellowship of local pastors, there are three main categories or designations. The first category is the full-time local pastor (FTLP) who may be employed by a church or chaplaincy full-time, receive a full-time salary (usually lower than the full-time elder), complete four courses per year in the Course of Study, or be a full-time student. The second category is the part-time local pastor (PTLP) who does not "devote their entire time to the charge to which they are appointed" (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, p. 239), but whose salary is pro-rated for service hours while completing at least two Course of Study courses per year. Many part-time local pastors are bi-vocational and supplement their ministry with a second income. The third category is the student local

CASE STUDY OF PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS

pastor who is licensed to serve as a pastor while making their progress in their seminary or graduate level education toward the ministry of an elder or deacon (*Book of Discipline*, 2016).

While there are three main designations of local pastors in the United Methodist Church, many of the course of study-trained local pastors serve mainly small, rural churches, which make up a majority of United Methodist churches in the U.S. However, as economics and clergy supply issues change in the mainline denomination, local pastors are also finding employment in a range of positions and church sizes (Hodge, 2015).

Bringing skills and experience from former careers, local pastors are found in small, rural churches and, infrequently, leading large suburban churches of over 2,100 in worship. Many are full-time pastors while others serve part-time. Some serve on large staffs; others in solo roles. For support, advocacy, and professional accountability, this growing group of licensed but not ordained pastors makes up the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors (NFAMLP) whose purpose since 1968 is to “serve a growing number of licensed pastors who lead congregations but are not ordained ministers” (United Methodist Church, 2012).

Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizations of Higher Education

Adjunct Faculty

It is difficult to understand the realities and impacts of the leadership shifts in The United Methodist Church and the growing role of the PTLP because of very limited research on this population of clergy leaders. Another U.S. institution undergoing major leadership shifts and, in particular, a rising employment of adjunct leaders is higher education. In many ways, adjunct faculty hold many of the same status and authority

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roles in the academy, as do PTLPs within the UMC. Each group is contingent, an alternative to more costly tenured employees, and being employed more by their respective institutions.

As opposed to the limited research on PTLPs, adjunct faculty and its growing significance in U.S. higher education, has been studied for over 50 years. While there are levers of change which are unique to each institution, there are some shared realities as well. Greg Kvistad, former provost of the University of Denver, argues that the American higher education system and the tenure system are based on “centuries-old ‘church’ and German-research university models” (Flaherty, 2014, p. 1), which are hierarchical, and support a class of set-apart leaders. Another of the shared realities of both institutions is a search to understand what these institutions look like in the 21st century as both experience shifting U.S. demographics and decreases in former sources of funding (Flaherty, 2014). With dramatic shifts in societal and financial support, the need to appeal to changing generations, and a decline in confidence in formerly significant U.S. institutions, The United Methodist Church and U.S. higher education face missional challenges that affect their finances, leadership, and impact. Because there is little research on the rising clergy category of “adjunct” clergy that are employed as part-time local pastors, it is instructive to rely on the frameworks and findings related to adjunct faculty in higher education.

Specifically, the theoretical framework for this case study research was the employment profiles of part-time faculty as defined by Judith Gappa and David Leslie in their research and 1993 book, *The Invisible Faculty: Improving the Status of Part-Timers in Higher Education*. The researchers explored the professional experiences, roles,

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resources, and expectations of part-time faculty. In their findings, they recognized “four major clusters of faculty by academic background, employment history, and motivations” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 45) which included

1. career enders;
2. specialist, experts, or professionals;
3. aspiring academics;
4. and freelancers.

Research Design: The Qualitative Case Study

The research approach for this study was a qualitative case study design informed by Stake’s (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. The primary research question guiding this study was:

What are the unique and contextual labor conditions and professional experiences of part-time local pastors in rural, isolated and declining communities?

In case study research, a research question drives inquiry and attention is paid to categorical data within certain contexts. This case study was instrumental in that the case was used to understand guiding and categorical issues of local pastor labor conditions and employment experiences (Stake, 1995).

The case was defined as part-time, United Methodist, licensed local pastors (PTLP) who serve in one of the four states of the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church and share the unique contexts of serving as spiritual leaders in rural areas of decline and isolation. The case considered their work experiences and labor conditions as contingent employees. The researcher chose the Mountain Sky Conference for the case because it served as a good and typical example of a region, or conference,

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within the American UMC where local pastors are employed part-time and full-time in a variety of settings including rural, urban, and suburban congregations of every size. In addition, while part-time local pastors in the MSC can serve in a variety of contexts, those studied shared circumstances of serving in small rural churches in areas of decline and isolation.

Context for the Case: The Mountain Sky Conference (MSC)

The Mountain Sky Conference (MSC) encompasses a 460,000-square mile region which includes four states: Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Utah, and one congregation in Salmon, Idaho. It has 378 churches in this four-state region, including 70,000 church members, among whom 27 full-time local pastors and 40 part-time local pastors serve, with many of them serving more than one church. Each state is its own unique context and region for church leadership, and yet, the goals and responsibilities of pastoral leadership remain the same: to order the life of the church; lead worship; provide discipleship formation; and extend the ministries of the church into community through acts of compassion, mercy, justice, and service. In addition, while part-time local pastors in the MSC can serve in a variety of contexts, those who were studied shared circumstances of serving in small rural churches in areas of decline and isolation. In addition to similar roles and responsibilities, and contexts, those PTLPs also shared a common leadership authority as pastoral leaders of a congregation within the UMC conference organization, as described in Figure 1. Clergy leaders are deployed and supervised by a Bishop, who gives oversight and spiritual leadership to the entire Church, and District Superintendents, who are regional missional strategists who function as district managers. (Insert Figure 1 here)

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Data Collection Plan

The first part of the data collection plan was to secure and review any provided documents and artifacts that include resources from ministry activities by the local pastor such as sermon manuscripts, worship bulletins, and newsletters. The second part of the data collection plan was to provide an online demographic survey that was provided to each part-time local pastor to be completed in order to set the demographic and background stage for understanding the complexity of the case (Stake, 1995). The third part of the research included an interview of each local pastor for 60-90 minutes, using Zoom video conferencing access due to the physical limitations of travel throughout a four-state region.

Procedures for Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995), case studies provide two ways to analyze data: direct interpretation of an individual instance and aggregation of those instances which can provide organization into issues. Both the researcher and the researched are understood to contribute their own realities and interpretations to the case. Similarly, in what Stake (1995) calls “relativity” (p. 102), the reader also derives their own meaning from the case. As Creswell (2014) outlines, basic elements to qualitative data analysis were used, including data collection with concurrent analysis of themes, categories and threads related to the research questions, open-coding, developing deductive themes as informed by the employment profiles of adjunct faculty from Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) research, and addressing limitations. By using these categories as a framework for this research on PTLP’s, the researcher listened for themes and categories from this study of employment issues and conditions that would potentially expose differences within sub-populations

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and resist a monolithic understanding of the PTLP's (Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

Subjectivity and Validation

“The intent of qualitative researchers to promote a *subjective (sic)* research paradigm is a given” (Stake, 1995, p. 45). As a result of relativity, qualitative researchers have “ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding” and validate their observations (p. 109). While case study research is focused on meaning rather than location, triangulating observation through different lenses and evidence is essential. Stake (1995) provides four protocols for triangulation which include data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. These forms of triangulation were enacted through reviews by the dissertation advisor, as well as a concerted effort at exploring prior research and records about small congregations, rural churches, adjuncts in higher education, and labor conditions of contingent employees. In addition, the research subjects were involved in “member-checking,” as they “regularly provide critical observations and interpretations...and review the material for accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

Collective Case Study Participants

According to Stake (1995), a collective case study can choose several participants to promote a general understanding, of the PTLPs labor conditions and professional experiences in small, rural, and isolated contexts, while maximizing learning from a variety of perspectives. This research study included eight PTLPs serving in local churches in rural communities experiencing decline and isolation throughout the four-state area of the Mountain Sky Conference. According to the UM General Council on

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Finance and Administration (GCFA), the denomination's statistical and record-keeping agency, rural churches are defined as those congregations in counties where there are 200 or less people per square mile. This number is determined by matching churches with county codes from the U.S. Census data (GCFA, n.d.). This size and context of a U.S. UMC congregation is normative as the Table 3 from 2009 GCFA statistics demonstrates. (Insert Table 3 here)

Access to these settings for research were through permission from the PTLP and were secured in Spring 2019 for research to be conducted in Summer-Fall 2019. The research sample was cultivated from invitations to participate in the research by the researcher and district superintendents who recommended candidates for the research.

While 15 PTLPs initially showed interest in the process of the study, seven later made decisions not to participate, primarily due to the timing of the research process in relationship to other professional or educational commitments. As the remaining eight PTLPs could make the time commitment to the research, they further learned that their participation in the study was voluntary, confidential, and that no identifiers would be used in the research report which would make the respondents known to their direct supervisors, the bishop and cabinet.

From the demographic data collected through a preliminary survey conducted with each participant, the average age of seven of the respondents was 64, with one outlier that was younger than 60. This compares to a median (half are older and half are younger) age of 57 of current local pastors in the UMC. Of those local pastors throughout the U.S. UMC, the mode age (single age most represented) is 62, which is more representative of our sample. In addition to these numbers, the Lewis Center for Church

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Leadership also records the average retirement age of PTLPs in the U.S. UMC has risen from 67 years old in 2005 to 69 years old in 2018. Even with two of our respondents being 67 years old, no respondent cited that retirement was in their near future plans. All respondents were White, with the exception of one who listed themselves as non-White/Hispanic, and there were four men and four women respondents. Each respondent indicated their years of professional ministry as a PTLP which ranged from 1-4 years with only one outlier over 5 years.

Role of the Researcher

I am an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and have worked extensively with issues of pastoral leadership, effectiveness, and education through my leadership of congregations as well as service on the UMC international Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which is the global leadership development agency of the denomination entrusted with the oversight and stewardship of clergy recruitment, higher education institutions, credentialing, and professional and spiritual development (GBHEM, n.d.). Through my study and advocacy of clergy, I have observed the changing landscape of different statuses of pastors as the economic and professional supply demands have impacted the United Methodist Church and the larger U.S. mainline Protestant Church. As part-time local pastors have increased in their number and impact on the denomination, however, there has been limited scholarship and time dedicated to their unique functions and positionality with other clergy, congregations, communities, and the larger witness of the Church in the U.S.

While these experiences contributed to a deep institutional knowledge of the contexts for leading and learning by the part-time local pastors, I also did backyard

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research (Creswell, 2014). I am employed as a lead pastor of a congregation in the Mountain Sky Conference, to which all pastors, including part-time local pastors, are ultimately accountable. However, each pastor, including myself, has a supervisory threshold of their local church personnel committee and their district superintendent, and therefore, are not indirectly or directly supervised by me. Additionally, as Hull (2017) suggested, there were practices employed to ensure that the site-specific inquiries were conducted objectively and ethically. These practices included informed consent by participants, IRB review, reflexivity and peer review examination of research, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and clear ownership of the research findings (Hull, 2017).

Characteristics of Participants

Researching the labor conditions and professional experiences of PTLPs in rural, isolated, and declining areas of the Mountain Sky Conference exposed not a monolith of the PTLP ministry but, rather, a shared calling and identity lived out through a variety of individual experiences and contexts. In this section, I provide a characterization of the participants followed by themes that emanated from the analysis, which included: types of PTLPs, the unique leadership of PTLPs, unique labor conditions of the PTLPs, and professional resources needed. While the characterization of the participants was not monolithic, there were participant profiles that emerged in the data collection as salient factors related to the themes that are introduced later.

Education

Education completion varied among the respondents, including two who had completed community college coursework, three who had completed bachelor degrees;

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and three who had completed or were on track to complete master degrees. The reasons and degrees of education factored into the professional experiences of the respondents. For instance, at least half of the respondents stated that the expenses of a master degree (M.Div.) were too prohibitive so, therefore, they chose to remain a PTLP versus pursuing ordination. Others who were taking required COS courses found that the distanced location, travel, and expense of COS was challenging to the execution of daily ministry in the limited weekly hours of the PTLP.

Health and Retirement Benefits

The sources of health benefits varied among the respondents, with only one PTLP receiving a stipend from their church to pay for health benefits through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The other respondents cited that their health benefits were funded as follows: One self-funded through Medicaid, four funded through former employers/retirement, one funded through their spouse, and one through Social Security/Medicare. Of all the concerns about their financial health as PTLPs, the source of health benefits was a top three concern. Each respondent recommended that the UMC find ways to support/sustain the health benefits of PTL's, especially those who do not have access to funding from former employers or Social Security/Medicare. Remarkably, only one of the eight respondents had supplemental income to their work as a PTLP. Each of the other respondents depended solely on their PTLP income for their individual income, while the majority of them had supplemental income from spouses/partners.

Home Ownership

The ownership of one's home is not the singular housing option for United Methodist clergy. The common practice of those clergy serving churches (including

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PTLPs) is that a church-owned home (parsonage) is provided or a commensurate housing allowance is offered to offset the expenses of a home owned by the clergyperson.

Frequently, home ownership is both an issue of clergy financial health and stability (as equity and security is built) and access to the community one is called to serve. Among the respondents, five own their own homes, some in excess of 30+ years, but two of those homeowners own homes that are over 1 ½ hours from their church and require living apart from family members and securing overnight, temporary accommodations in the church community. Of our respondents, only three live in parsonages owned by their churches, and located in the church community. This influences the access to the pastor in the community, the relational and symbolic presence of the pastor in the community, and the stress on pastoral families when not in the church community.

Appointment Status

The appointment status of the respondents ranged from two ¼-time PTLPs, compared to 40% of the PTLPs serving ¼-time in the MSC; three ½-time PTLPs compared to 30% of the PTLPs serving ½-time in the MSC; and three ¾-time PTLPs compared to 30% of the PTLPs serving ¾-time in the MSC. (Mountain Sky Conference, 2018 Business of the Annual Conference). Within each of these time allotments, five PTLP's serve one church, two serve two churches in different communities, and one PTLP serves three unique congregations.

While each PTLP acknowledged that their appointment status determined their expected hours and compensation, they all responded that they are working full-time (approximately 40 hours/week). Only one of the respondents anticipated the possibility of the church moving its appointment status from ½ to ¾-time in the coming year. They all

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acknowledged that the appointment status (hours paid) was determined by the church's limited budget, not the missional or pastoral needs of the congregation and community.

The appointments of each PTLP were defined by hours employed as well as the geographic location of their churches. As was previously stated in designations by GCFA, rural churches are defined as those congregations in counties where there are 200 or less people per square mile. The populations of the communities of the respondents' churches range from 875 to 2,600 people with one outlier church existing in a rural bedroom community outside of a metro area where they represent a religious minority among a large demographic of Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS). Among all but one of the churches, the average decline in the Sunday average worship attendance (AWA) from 2015 to 2018 is 26%, with the outlier church experiencing a 33% increase in that same time frame. With only this exception, as the community declines in population, so does the average worship attendance in each congregation.

Thematic Findings

The themes that emanated from the research revealed the unique leadership role of PTLPs in rural, isolated, and declining communities in both their congregation and community. They were very much pastors to an entire community, not just to their typically small membership congregation. While their initial call to the work and vocation of ministry was varied, their unique professional experiences demanded unique professional development needs for their support, accountability, and continued education. This section outlines the themes of the unique labor conditions and professional experiences of the PTLPs.

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Types of Part-Time Local Pastors

To begin with, there were a variety of “types” or clusters of part-time local pastors. Understanding these types guides a discussion later in this report on responsive professional development/support needs relative to these unique types, rather than a “one size fits all” strategy. Informed by Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) clusters of adjuncts, Table 4 overviews the types of part-time local pastors that emerged through this research, and the numbers of respondents from this research that represented these types: Career PTLP, Transition PTLP, Second Season PTLP, and Occasional Supply PTLP. Corresponding with each PTLP type is an overview of the characteristics of each type as well as the resultant unique professional development and support needs of each type. (Insert Table 4 here)

PTLPs Unique Leadership Rooted in Pride, Passion, and Commitment

For each PTLP, their leadership identity came from a deep call from God and a strong commitment to fulfill their pastoral responsibilities with pride, passion, and commitment. This call and commitment was evident in their expressions of courage, risk-taking, and engaging in new leadership experiences. One respondent shared, “I’m branching out. God’s got me doing new things I’ve never done before; I’m having fun.” They each took pride in their work and understood it as an integral part of the larger mission of the UMC, which is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (The United Methodist Church, n.d.). They understood the vital role and necessity of clergy leaders for rural churches in comments such as, “I think PTLP’s are priceless. I really do because I think we fill a lot of gaps and I think we need more of us for sure.”

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For each PTLP, their unique leadership call and role was born from a common root of their transition from being an active layperson in the local church to their ministry as a PTLP. Some of them even transitioned from a lay leader to a clergy leader in the same church. These experiences brought clarity to the importance of the overall ministry of the church and the pastor's role in equipping and empowering laity for their leadership in the church. These experiences also created an inherent challenge of the leadership transition from layperson to clergy leader:

All of a sudden, I went from "Name" to "Pastor Name." I didn't go to school, I didn't go to seminary, I didn't go to Bible school. I got schooled for six or seven years in the church...it's been the School of Hard Knocks, bad sermons, good sermons, and it just took time.

With this confidence in their call and responsibility as pastoral leaders, however, they also understood that they were often seen as having a "second-class" status by the larger church. One respondent articulated that the Church needed to recognize this,

So the whole culture shift from the ground up is what really needs to be changed.... We are not just hole fillers. We are just, they don't have the money so we can put this licensed local pastor here and just forget...

Another suggested that the Church needed to acknowledge,

There's a class distinction between licensed local pastors (LLP's) and clergy. To say otherwise is a lie. That's the ostrich in the sand. And so I think better recognition of local pastors and the part-timers needs to be given... everything is 'ordination, ordination.' But this church didn't start out with ordination, it was itinerant guys and gals. And they've forgotten that; we've forgotten that.

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Overall, this experienced lower status of the PTLP was rooted in a feeling of systemic bias privileging full-time appointments and full-time clergy.

Unique Contextual Labor Conditions of the PTLP

There were many unique challenges and limitations of being a PTLP in a rural, isolated, and declining area that impacted labor conditions. They included location of housing, the cost of housing and living, access to education, isolation, and the unique community and congregational cultures within which the PTLP worked and served.

Housing and cost of living.

The first was the impact of the location of housing and the potential commute to work. Those PTLPs commuting to their church(es) had over 1 ½ hours of commute time to be with their families who lived in other communities. This situation normally meant that the PTLP was living part of the week in the community where the church was and in housing with their family in another community for another part of the week. If the PTLP lived in the community, there were little to no social outlets within 30 miles of the church/community, so they expressed feeling confined to that community where they were only known as “pastor” and could not escape that role for social, relationship or mental health outlets.

The cost of housing and living expenses was also a challenge in a rural, isolated, and declining area. When many people might conclude that living expenses were lower in small towns, in fact, it was often the opposite. Grocery stores, gas stations, and entertainment might be many miles outside of the community where they resided. One respondent shared, “Even though I live in (the town where the church is), everything else has to be driven to, over 30 miles away. They give me reimbursables and they’ve worked

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with me, but it's cost me about \$2,000-3,000 to be a pastor here.”

Access to educational opportunities for professional development.

Another limitation was the ability to access educational opportunities for professional development. The prescribed educational program for PTLPs is the Course of Study (COS), which is a 5- to 10-year curriculum accessible online or in-person. A common theme was the frustration that an in-person COS program was not easily accessible within the MSC. Most respondents saw the COS as a reasonable educational option given the alternative M.Div. that required much more tuition: “Why would you go and be \$100,000 in debt when you are able to do what you are called to do in both facets of your life?” Among the two respondents who were pursuing M.Divs, they recognized the challenge to juggle all the demands,

I feel there is so much learning to do, my curve is straight up, not like a little bell curve; it's straight up...I always feel a little bit behind the eight-ball, but I don't feel crushed or discouraged, goes with the job.

Social, emotional, and personal isolation.

For most of the respondents, isolation was a major challenge of serving in rural, isolated, and declining locations. This isolation was expressed as social, emotional, and personal isolation. Many respondents shared that, other than bars, there was no social life activities within up to two hours from the communities where they lived and served.

Additionally, if there were other churches in the community, most of the other clergy did not live in the community but commuted to preach on Sundays. For single clergy, it was very hard to make friends or build significant relationships outside of the church. One shared his experience of isolation:

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And they don't want to be known or hang out with other people or go to church. I never see anybody. Other than people coming to church. Nobody is walking around town. There's hardly anything there as well...they're really community oriented, I think with each other, but it's also a closed community.

To combat the isolation, respondents shared the importance of developing affinity groups outside of the small community, such as one respondent who led a prison ministry almost an hour from his appointment, at his own expense. Others underscored the importance of circuit groups and other clergy groups, such as women's clergy groups, who connected by driving hours to be together or by Zoom. The importance of circuit clergy groups is discussed in another theme.

External community culture.

Unique to their labor conditions was the pressure from the external community culture to provide services, care, and buildings for the community, not just the congregation. This impacted the labor of the pastor and the time they spent caring for those concerns. After all, these were limited and depressed communities:

It's a very small, very rural farming community...and there's one school building that houses kindergarten through grade twelve. Of course, there is one bar and there is one convenience store that has a gas pump. There's no grocery store, there's no cultural things, there's no library, no movie house, nothing along that line....

Opportunities are few. Jobs are few. Opportunities for growth are few. So, it's kind of self-limiting. I'd say 80% of people in town don't go to church. But of those 20% who do, here's a huge influence of LDS and Baptists-those are the big

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denominations around here.

Even with these limitations to their unique labor conditions, each PTLP shared how important the church building was to the small, rural community; many times, serving as the activity center in the community. Many of the church buildings were built at the time of the community's establishment and signs of brighter times:

They're connecting to their building. It's been there for a hundred years, literally and this is a town where nobody really leaves and if you leave you're never coming back, so if you are here, you've been here for generations And I think the biggest thing like many churches, is that (the building) reminds them of a better time.

Many unchurched people, or those from other community churches, connected with the church through major community events, that shaped the entire community calendar. For instance, one church averaging 12 people in worship hosted a Halloween party that drew 120 people every year. Another church served as the "coffee spot" every morning, since the local coffee shop closed months ago.

A vital part of existence as a small congregation in a small rural community was work with other denominations for survival. Congregations represented by two respondents were legally yoked through a historical union of different denominations and have blended into one congregation. Other churches had long standing partnerships with other small denominations that were forged decades ago. According to their pastors, the identity of their small churches being "United Methodist" was less significant than being the "town church," in part, because of these historical partnerships. As one commented, "Truthfully, they don't know which (part of worship) is Presbyterian or Methodist

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anymore unless I tell them.”

Internal congregational culture.

In addition to the unique external and cultural dynamics facing PTLPs in rural and declining communities, there were also internal dynamics of the congregational culture.

The first significant dynamic was that, with only one exception, each PTLP saw their congregation needing to shift to paying their PTLP for less time while having the same expectation of full-time work. These financial burdens were, in part, magnified because of aging buildings and rising costs for insurance and upkeep of the physical structure. In fact, as some of the PTLP's served more than one congregation, there were concerns about multiple buildings to be maintained and funded. One respondent talked about this looming issue of whether to repair aging buildings or sell them:

I had a couple folks ask me, “How long can we afford to have two buildings?”
How do we move memories into a new thing? 1959 is not working. And that's what I commonly hear. I hear a lot of we want to go back to where we were. Well it's not 1959; it's a different world.

A second component that impacted the professional experiences of PTLP's was that Sunday crammed schedules were detrimental for the congregational culture, especially when the PTLP served more than one congregation, often driving up to 30 miles between churches on a Sunday morning, and not having the time to connect with peoples' needs and concerns in order to get to another service in another town. With these 'multiple charge churches,' pastors also had to deal with congregations that exercised different autonomy, self-sufficiency, and expectations of the pastoral role. Much like relating to two or three different family systems, the leadership of the pastor was

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culturally unique in each system.

Professional Resources Needed

Benefit and financial advocacy.

Because of declining resources within the congregations due, in part, to the declining economics and populations of these rural and isolated communities, there was a mutual concern among respondents about the finances needed for benefits and salary and the advocacy that was needed to discuss these difficult issues. To begin with, the negotiation of the PTLP's salary occurred primarily between the congregation (through the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee or PPR) and the district superintendent. While this was common practice, it created a triangle of power that most often left the pastor out.

The majority of respondents shared that they knew the church could not pay more than the church did for the salary, but that they wanted more financial advocacy by the district superintendent to interpret salary packages to the PTLP and church, in educating the church about the costs of living, professional reimbursements, and the costs of COS and continuing education, especially to required professional events such as Annual Conference and Orders Retreat. This was evident from one respondent, "They were very much like we will work you full-time and pay you half-time unless you say something." More financial advocacy on behalf of the PTLP was needed, especially as they navigated different financial values and practices between distinct congregations:

The one church I asked (about payment for professional development) would probably say no problem; the other one wouldn't. It's the mindset between two different congregations. One says we'll work it out and the other says we can't do it....

Additionally, advocacy around health and pension benefits was needed. One

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PTLP who retired from a first career shared that it was possible to be a PTLP because of her pension from her prior employment,

That's why I can work for the pittance that they pay me, but it makes me nervous that when I'm ready to retire (from PTLP work), I want to go do other things before I get too old. Where will they get somebody else that they can pay \$500 a month to?.. I want them to understand the cost of ministry... where is the cabinet going to find someone else that will work for that low amount of money unless they, like me, have another source of benefits.

Each of the four second season PTLPs shared that they would not be able to be a PTLP and serve their rural, isolated and declining churches if they did not have health insurance from another source. Regardless of their PTLP type, however, all the respondents shared that they didn't find the conference health insurance program to be affordable, accessible, or even possible for PTLPs, and that there should be an alternative for those serving these congregations.

Significant role of circuit and mentor support.

Every respondent shared the importance of the circuit (the regional gathering of clergy in proximity to their churches) and mentor support for encouragement, support, skill-development, and an antidote to isolation. They each expressed a preference for "in-person" meetings with their circuit colleagues and mentors (and their DS's) over Zoom conferencing. As one shared,

I've watched some of my fellow clergy having a hard time and I think really supporting them and also showing up is important; don't do it from a distance. Show up and be physically present because that matters a lot then you feel like

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you're not doing this by yourself...you know we get these savior complexes and then it hits us in the head, I'm not in this by myself.

One circuit, functioning for over 40 years, was understood to be so strong because the clergy in the circuit needed each other to break out of their isolation in rural settings. Circuits were also recognized for the places where mentoring and professional support came from. As one respondent shared,

We have a pretty active monthly local circuit meeting and so they wanted to limit that to minimize the meetings. And I said I need the opposite. I need the connection and you all have other support systems, but there's no support system for me. I need that regular contact.

Additionally, and without exception, mentor support and advocacy was also vital for each respondent. Even with the challenges of geographical distance, all concurred about the importance of choosing their mentor in consultation with their DS because "we live and die by mentoring." While remote learning and meeting is normative in the MSC, there was a special appreciation for time with mentors "in person," as well as the mentoring support also given by district superintendents. Related to the DS's, over half of the respondents made a specific note of the meaning of the DS presence at their churches, preferred over a remote or virtual experience. One shared, "I love it when (my DS) comes twice a year for the charge conference and his supervisory annual meeting."

Clarity of expectations.

As PTLPs function in unique contexts and from a variety of backgrounds, the respondents conveyed the importance of clarity of expectations, from their leadership with the local church to their responsibilities to the conference. Most respondents

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suggested that they preferred more clarity of expectations of them, even job descriptions, developed with the congregation. They wanted to be proficient in their work and relied on ongoing feedback from the congregation, so they welcomed coaching and training about setting goals and receiving professional feedback. As one respondent shared,

Hopefully, I am not going to make a major mistake and cause a problem between people and such but I am going to make mistakes and I would like to know about them so that I can try and correct them and avoid them in the future.

Additionally, expectations needed to be clarified for their relationship with the conference. For the one respondent who was a transitioning local pastor, those who were pursuing and meeting educational requirements for being full-connection clergy, there was concern expressed about the confusion and lack of clarity with the District Committee on Ministry (DCOM), the credentialing body to which they are accountable. There are seven districts throughout the Mountain Sky Conference, and many of them function differently than the others. There was concern about the continuity of DCOM expectation and information, especially as this respondent anticipated moving to other districts at some time in their career. Because DCOMs are also charged with the oversight of other categories of clergy, the respondents suggested the importance of people on the DCOMs who understood the transitional local pastor and the unique needs and requests they had through the transition and education process. As one respondent commented, “I was a part of one district when I started as an LLP and then I got transferred to a new district to serve the church. The DCOMs changed and I will tell you, it is a little frustrating that the DCOMs are not similar in nature.”

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Professional development.

Depending on the type of PTLP, there was a need and desire for ongoing professional development, from the educational requirements of COS or seminary to the ongoing professional development at Annual Conference and Orders Retreat. For career and transitioning local pastors, there was an ongoing frustration about access to education:

I will tell you the frustration I see the most is not having a COS program reasonably distanced from us. I mean the closest ones right now are Saint Paul in Kansas City, Perkins in Dallas, and Claremont in California, which is moving I believe...I've taken COS courses online but I've been the only student in the Western U.S....I would have expected that we would have had more in here in the Western U.S. but the problem is going to be on-site...

Several of those PTLPs who were second-season also questioned the merits of the entirety of the COS curriculum, given their previous career experience. All the respondents, however, affirmed the significance of Annual Conference and Clergy Orders annual events in contributing to the MSC, connecting with mentors and clergy colleagues, and professionally developing their ministry skills. While each of the respondents said their congregations affirmed their attendance at these events, they were not all funding the full expenses for attendance at these events. The majority of respondents said that they, in some way, financially contributed their personal funds to attend these events.

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Discussion

This study was conducted to contribute to a body of research on the leadership changes and challenges facing the UMC in the 21st century. These institutional changes and challenges were created and impacted by changing sentiment toward mainline religious institutions, changes in funding and finances, and shifting demographics of both congregations and clergy leaders. This study was occasional and particular in focusing on the case of PTLPs serving in rural, isolated, and declining areas within the MSC of the UMC. while seeking to address the research question:

What are the unique and contextual labor conditions and professional experiences of part-time local pastors in rural, isolated, and declining communities?

The case study inquiry for this question was framed by the research of Gappa and Leslie (1993) who organized the categories of adjunct faculty in higher education. Using this framework, the researcher listened for themes and categories of PTLPs, given their unique positionality while sharing similar contexts of rural, declining, and isolated congregations.

By studying a “slice” of a growing leadership population within the church, we begin to understand the ways PTLPs experience their employment and the needs for benefit and financial advocacy, circuit and mentor support, clarity of expectations, and professional development. Following are some practical implications that could contribute to greater leadership effectiveness and vitality that can transform congregations and the isolated communities which they serve. These implications are informed by core learnings from the research which include:

1. PTLPs are not monolithic, nor are their congregations and communities.

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Professional development and educational focus need to teach assessing, diagnosing, and leading unique systems in unique areas.

2. The role of mentors and circuits is vital to the “staying power” of a PTLP and could be further developed with the agency and contributions of the PTLPs.
3. There is a desire for clergy and congregation financial literacy and advocacy that needs to be strengthened for understanding the real costs of ministry, how to thrive with limited resources, using the church building as an income generator, and developing legacy giving for the future.

Practical Implications and Learnings

Many of the professional and institutional benefit systems in which PTLPs operate were forged and framed for full-time, lifelong clergy elders. They need to be adjusted for the unique types of PTLPs and their ministry settings in rural, isolated, and declining congregations and communities. This includes issues such as credentialing, supervision, insurance, benefits, educational resources, and conference communications.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged primarily from the insights and suggestions of the PTLPs along with the researcher’s awareness of the internal systems of professional development and resourcing that may be made available to clergy leaders within the MSC. While some of these systems do exist, these recommendations suggest a focus on the unique challenges and contexts of PTLPs as compared to the resources available to full-time, ordained clergy leaders.

1. Contextual Learning: There needs to be a better awareness and resourcing of PTLP leadership for “stayed” or “declining” systems where “what we were” does not match the realities of “where we are.” This can be accomplished, in part,

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through continuing education, book studies, coaching, and ongoing professional development.

2. **Cohort Learning Opportunities:** PTLPs need each other and the wisdom of their clergy colleagues. In addition to one-on-one mentoring and clergy circuits (which are primarily for professional support), a local pastor and/or PTLP learning cohort should work with a coach to understanding the psychology and emotional depression in communities of decline, community development techniques, financial literacy, boundary setting, congregational life cycles, conflict resolution, and other practical topics that consume much of their leadership energy. Correlating, is consideration of an affinity district (rather than geographic district) that brings many types of local pastors and PTLPs together for their mutual professional development.
3. **Clarity of Expectations and DS Advocacy:** A mutual contract of expectations, feedback, and assessment needs to be drafted between the DS (or PTLP Cohort Coach), congregation and PTLP with expectations of supervision and accountability. This needs to be done annually and include discussions about church finances and the PTLPs compensation package.
4. **Standardization of Credentialing:** DCOMs need to understand the unique types of PTLPs and their unique needs for credentialing, education, accountability and advocacy. The core process of credentialing for transitional PTLPs and education for career PTLPs should be standardized across the MSC for clarity and transparency.
5. **Financial Benefit Resourcing:** Rather than being focused on full-time, life-time

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clergy, there needs to be a benefits program that is based on more of a “gig” or part-time employment model that PTLPs and their congregations can understand, access, and fund.

While these findings contribute to a beginning body of research on the vital and growing role of PTLPs in the UMC, further research is needed in several areas. First of all, this case study research did not explore the challenges of being or serving in minority/majority racial or immigrant realities, where isolation might be based more on minority status rather than geographical location. Additionally, the debate about human sexuality in the UMC and its impact on PTLPs and small, rural, and isolated communities requires more research. A deeper analysis of the unique leadership and authority issues by sex, age, race, and sexual orientation needs to be pursued with a larger and more diverse subject group.

Conclusion

This research on the professional experiences and work conditions of contingent PTLPs in rural, isolated, and declining communities revealed a resonance with the limited, yet significant, research and literature about ministry in small, rural churches. A significant confirmation of prior literature is that communities and contexts were not monolithic, but they evidenced characteristics and qualities of the profiles of small, rural communities. For instance, the majority of the communities in this case study were denominational, based on the research of Walruth and Walruth (2002). With just one outlier, the communities and congregations exhibited characteristics identified by Farris

(2012) of being Agraville or Mighthavebeenvilles. The clergy leaders who responded to the unique challenges and opportunities of these unique contexts and

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congregations were also not monolithic. And yet, they were all concerned with the issues and themes of small, rural pastoral leadership identified by Walruth and Walruth (2002), including loneliness, geographic isolation, stress of spiritual inadequacies, and their roles of being constantly on-call bridge-builders and generalists with limited time and resources. Facing all these challenges, however, each PTLP was passionate in their call to their work, committed to the ministry of their church(es), and self-aware of the personal and professional challenges facing them.

As change management guru, Peter Drucker (1980), says, “The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence-it is to act with yesterday’s logic” (p. 4). The challenges to our historical institutions in these turbulent times require new innovation in the identification, development, and deployment of leadership for the changing missions of these institutions, and their changing constituencies. The United Methodist Church has been known historically and missionally for adapting its ministry and leadership from a saddle-back ministry in rural England in the 17th century to the spread of scriptural holiness through an expanding U.S. frontier in the 18th and 19th centuries to the exponential growth throughout Africa in the 20th century. Now is the time to understand and embrace the changing landscape of ministry, primarily in the U.S., and to develop resources for one of the most resilient and present centers of hope in rural America: the small, rural church (Dudley, 2003). This is especially significant as churches and clergy in rural, isolated, and declining areas are attentive and responsive to an entire community (Dudley, 2003). In these rural communities, this is especially significant as they address existential, practical, and spiritual issues such as immigration, aging, declining industry, loss of prime-age workers, and lower average earnings (Parker et al., 2018). It is now

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time to act with a new logic, wisdom, and innovation in deploying a growing population of part-time local pastors and other creative leadership solutions to meet the demands and needs of ministry in the 21st century.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1

Trends of Elders 1985-2017

Year	No. of Elders	No. of Elders Under 35	% Under 35	No. of Elders 35-54	% 35-54	No. of Elders 55-70	% 55-70
1985	21,378	3,219	15%	12,305	58%	5,854	27%
1990	21,507	2,385	11%	12,678	59%	6,444	30%
1995	20,117	1,312	7%	12,843	64%	5,962	30%
2000	18,576	906	5%	12,005	65%	5,665	30%
2005	18,141	850	5%	9,872	54%	7,419	41%
2010	17,293	946	5%	7,698	45%	8,649	50%
2015	15,019	986	7%	5,746	38%	8,287	55%
2016	14,665	1,003	7%	5,484	37%	8,178	56%
2017	14,152	950	7%	5,273	37%	7,927	56%

Table 2

Trends of Local Pastors 1985-2017

Year	No. of Local Pastors	Local Pastors Under 35	% Under 35	Local Pastors 35-54	% 35-54	Local Pastors 55-72	% 55-72
1985	3,804	130	3%	2,212	58%	1,462	38%
1990	3,936	163	4%	2,244	57%	1,529	39%
1995	4,622	290	6%	2,641	57%	1,691	37%
2000	5,571	348	6%	3,109	56%	2,114	38%
2005	6,517	371	6%	3,213	49%	2,933	45%
2010	7,341	426	6%	2,932	40%	3,983	54%
2011	7,353	455	6%	2,790	37%	4,108	57%
2012	7,532	472	6%	2,753	37%	4,307	57%
2013	7,671	522	7%	2,716	35%	4,433	58%
2014	7,395	568	8%	2,597	35%	4,230	57%
2015	7,464	601	8%	2,579	35%	4,284	57%
2016	7,408	597	8%	2,531	34%	4,280	58%
2017	7,512	595	8%	2,544	34%	4,373	58%

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Table 3

U.S. UMC Rural and Non-rural Congregations

Total number of U.S. UMC churches in 2009	33,500
Total number of U.S. UMC rural churches in 2009	20,000+ (60% of all U.S. UMC churches)
Clergy serving U.S. UMC non-rural churches in 2009	11,600
Clergy serving U.S. UMC rural churches in 2009	13,900 (55% of U.S. UMC clergy)

Table 4

Types of Part-time Local Pastors

PTLP Type Name and Representative Number of Respondents	Characteristics among Part- time Local Pastors	Unique Professional Development/Support Need(s)
Career PTLP 2 respondents	-Call is to the ministry of the local pastor as a career and not a stepping stone to full connection elder/deacon. Education is Course of Study (COS), not M.Div. -Final degree attainment might be high school	-Affirmation of call to ministry of LP/PTLP -Support, accountability, and access to COS coursework/completion -Access to areas and regions for supplemental income (if PT) -Access to cost effective health insurance and institutional benefits prior to 67 years of age-even in PT status -Financial literacy and advocacy in negotiating salary and benefits -Mentoring by other LP and PTLP's

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PTLP Type Name and Representative Number of Respondents	Characteristics among Part- time Local Pastors	Unique Professional Development/Support Need(s)
Transitioning PTLP 1 respondent	Aspiring to be a fully participating, recognized, and rewarded clergyperson through Course of Study completion, Associate Membership, or progressing toward the ministry of an Elder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support, accountability, and access to Master degree institutions -Clear pathways and expectations for transitioning from LP to FC clergy -Advocacy with congregation re. Clarity of call and expectations of conference relations -Access to cost effective health insurance and institutional benefits prior to 67 years of age and/or full connection -Mentoring by those who understand nature of transition to full-connection clergy

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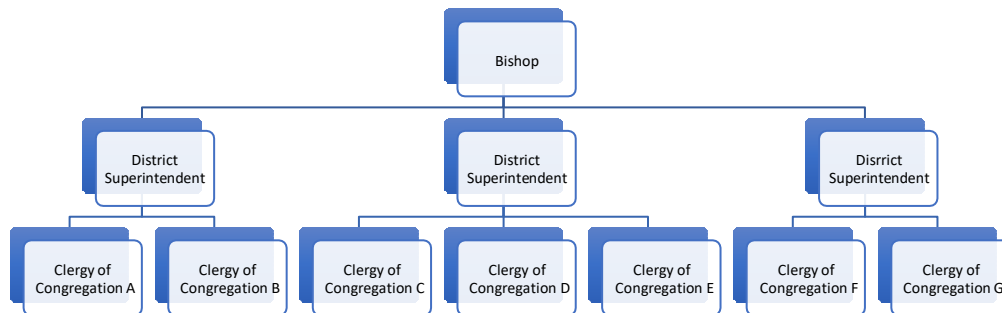
<p>Second Season PTLP</p> <p>4 respondents</p>	<p>-Fully retired from a career in ministry or other career</p> <p>-Transition from well-established career</p>	<p>-Advocacy and mentoring re. finding authority in transition from lay to clergy, bringing gifts and experience from first career, ministering among familiar communities</p> <p>-Financial literacy and ability to negotiate salary, benefits, and health insurance as a retired person</p> <p>-Educating the congregation on real costs of ministry when health insurance is provided by prior career or Medicare</p> <p>-Mentoring by advocates of unique ministry of LP and PTLP</p>
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PTLP Type Name and Representative Number of Respondents	Characteristics among Part-time Local Pastors	Unique Professional Development/ Support Need(s)
<p>Occasional Supply PTLP 1 Respondent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Could be clergy, LLP, or lay -Supply personnel who fulfill an interim, transitional, or post-conflict role -Some have professional credentials; others do not -Serves for the love of the church and to assist a congregation without pastoral leadership -Those who are fully qualified for full-time, fully credentialed ministry but immobile due to family, geography, other constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Advocacy for the limited term appointment and unique opportunities for strategic planning, interim leadership, after-pastor healing, long-term knowledge of residential area or congregational culture -Educating the congregation on real costs of ministry when health insurance/housing is provided by another source -Intentional assimilation into the circuit/district as a short-time, supply leader

Figure 1

UMC Conference Organization



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SECTION SIX

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

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I am grateful that the time and space of a small church allow me to exercise my imagination. Here life's margins are generous enough for me to tromp through the woods and let my mind and spirit prayerfully wander. Here I have enough room to sit in the sanctuary and remember God's people by name. (Willis, 2012, p. 92)

Steve Willis in his 2012 book, *Imagining the Small Church: Celebrating a Simpler Path*, draws insight from the farmer and poet Wendell Berry who contrasts the notions of central culture and peripheral culture. Central culture typically refers to the dominant culture that has power and influence to demand uniformity and often overlooks peripheral, marginalized culture(s) around it. Most small churches, according to Willis, live in a peripheral culture around a central culture. And while mainline Protestantism, like other major U.S. institutions, is finding itself shifting from central to peripheral culture, and struggling with that shift, the small church has always had a clear understanding of being on the periphery (Willis, 2012).

As a product and leader of predominantly large congregational systems and the larger UMC denomination, I know that I have benefitted from the privilege, resources, and confessionally, arrogance, of the central culture of the UMC. However, some of the richest experiences in my career and ministry were the two years I spent in small, rural UMC churches and communities in rural North Carolina, while completing my M.Div. degree. This research provided an opportunity to learn from colleagues about how they live and serve and work in the rich spaces of periphery culture to offer the Gospel of Jesus Christ in these uncertain and shifting times. Willis' assessment is correct, based on my research, that small, rural churches, and their clergy leaders, live and frequently thrive

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in this periphery culture. In this section, I explore further how this dissertation research and process has influenced my practices as an educational leader in ordained ministry and leadership in the UMC and how this process has influenced my experience as a scholar.

To begin with, this dissertation process has influenced my practice as an educational leader in ordained ministry in three major ways. First, this process has given me the space and time for critical thinking about the UMC as an organization and my role in that organization, as one formed by its culture, providing leadership at many levels, and forming other leaders for their participation in the organization. I often say that a critical leader should be one who can stand on the banks of the rushing waters of an active stream of the organization's culture, practices, and outcomes, and do critical reflection. Too often, however, the leader is swept up in the rushing waters of the active stream, only to lose perspective of the adaptive challenges of the organization. This process gave me pause for that critical work, and in that work, I was reintroduced to the issues of access, equity, and marginalization of those clergy leaders who are leading the majority of our mainline, small membership, Christian churches. I intend, from this learning, to be a better advocate for the fastest growing population of clergy leaders in the UMC, and to insist on their place at the table of decision and policy-making.

Second, I have grown in my learning and appreciation for the frameworks and epistemologies out of which research is done, but more significantly, out of which everyone lives and leads differently. One cannot assume that everyone operates out of the same way of knowing and experiencing the world. It takes painstaking time and energy to exegete someone else's epistemology. This is an important step in building authentic relationships in research and ministry and yet, it often gets overlooked in the interest of

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urgency and immediacy, resulting from scarcity. Even with these challenges, however, it is so vital to do this work to understand the nuances of positionality and perspective that truly lead to organizational and individual self-awareness that may lead to change.

Third, though I lead a church that has, for generations, been identified as a model of the central culture expounded on by Willis (2012), it is now finding itself shifting to a periphery culture place within secular American culture, and even within its own community. This is the plight of many mid-to-large churches within mainline traditions. By learning more from those small, rural churches and pastors who have existed for generations in the periphery culture, there may be a transferrable wisdom about flexibility, work within their communities, imagination, and creativity that the formerly central culture churches need to learn.

In addition to the dissertation process influencing my practice as an educational leader, it has also impacted my experience as a scholar. First of all, as I developed my literature review, a prior concern of mine about the church and the role of research was confirmed. Much of the writing about the church as an organization and reflecting on best practices is anecdotal versus research-based. Typically, white male pastors from the central culture of large churches and systems write about their experience in a singular church and transcribe their singular lessons to global models, theories, and transferrable truths. This has been a concern I've had throughout my professional ministry as a clergywoman who has experienced ministry in a variety of settings and cultures. This research process has encouraged me to scrutinize "from where wisdom comes," and practice a skepticism of models, theories, and transferrable truths that are not rooted in the rigor of research. I have appreciated sources such as The Alban Institute, The Lewis

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Center of Wesley Seminary, The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and other research-based Centers for data-driven research outcomes that have informed my work and my development of the research process. I intend to offer my work to a practical audience but also to research-driven bodies such as the Religious Research Association (RRA), Scientific Society for the Study of Religion (SSSR), and even AERA to sustain my own attention to academic rigor and participation within the larger body of research about educational leadership and religious organizations.

A second way that this dissertation process has contributed to my scholarship and leadership is the significance of collaboration with peers and other experts. This has been an emerging awareness throughout my thirty-three years of professional ministry. I was trained through my M.Div. degree to be a “lone ranger” in my leadership of the church. I was trained to prepare sermons, plan organizational strategies, and teach the faith as an expert theologian among laypeople. This, of course, is a flawed approach to leadership that de-legitimizes the wisdom of the laypeople as well as the learning that happens throughout the organization as good leadership is provided. I have enjoyed the privilege of a space to learn, question, develop, and deepen my skills of collaboration with cohort colleagues, advisors, other faculty and experts in the field, as well as those who lead and live in our small, rural churches. This process is a privilege and luxury that those who are not well-resourced, well-paid, or well-appreciated can’t always afford, and that leads to my next learning about my scholarship.

Finally, I hope that my research makes a small, yet important, contribution to the larger discussion about the changes facing the U.S. mainline Church and the issues of deployment of leadership for these changing times. I recognize that I am still an outsider

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as a researcher of small, rural pastors and churches, rather than being a pastor in those settings. Like so much of the research about the small rural church, much of the work is done by outsiders, rather than people who live that truth each and every day. I hope to advocate and teach some of the skills of critical reflection and research to those living in this periphery culture, so they are empowered for shaping policy and practice for the days ahead.

Overall, while this Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) program was designed for a core population of professional educators in PK-12 or higher education, the course curriculum and dissertation process has benefitted me as a clergy leader and educator in the UMC. Primarily, the lessons on leadership, strategies for research, and the requisite reflection for the dissertation have helped me to become a more adaptive and imaginative leader for guiding a church and a denomination from central to periphery culture.

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VITA

Amy Gearhart, M.Div., ACC, grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, the eldest of seven siblings. At an early age, she discerned a call to ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church, after having been mentored by first-generation female clergy in her large-membership, childhood church. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in religion, humanities, and communications from Illinois Wesleyan University, where she was a campus religious life leader and sorority president. She started serving churches at the age of 18, focusing on youth and Christian education ministries. In 1993, she graduated magna cum laude from Duke Divinity School with a Master of Divinity degree, focusing on leadership, history, and pastoral care. Throughout her seminary years, she served small rural churches in rural North Carolina as well as a large suburban congregation.

Following her education, she returned to Missouri, where she was ordained and served six urban, university, and suburban churches from 1993-2015 throughout the state. She was also a leader, teacher and director on several boards, teams, and commissions throughout the general UMC. In 2015, she took a study leave and sabbatical to complete four goals in the next five years: a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, certifications in both college teaching and executive non-profit management, and licensing in professional coaching.

Currently, Rev. Gearhart serves as the Lead Pastor of Arvada UMC in Arvada, Colorado where she enjoys working with the local church, mountain life, coaching other clergy, and crafting. Her inspirations are her two daughters, Hannah and Chloe, with whom she loves spending time and dreaming about the next vacation together.