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Equipping And Motivating
Rural Local Pastors For Ministry: A Call to Action

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Abstract

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The local pastor in the rural church wears many hats in their servant leadership roles. Many are also bivocational, balancing pastoring, school, family, self, and work. Therefore, they must be motivated to meet their educational requirements and clergy responsibilities. Local pastors cannot ensure that the church carries out the great commission without the proper training, tools, and resources. Many rural churches are in decline; pastors suffer burnout and lack confidence. This study aims to determine how a local pastor in the North Central District Rural Church Network acquires the tools and motivation they need to work effectively in ministry.

Equipping And Motivating
Rural Local Pastors For Ministry: A Call to Action

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Introduction

In 2018, after being asked to lead one of the district's mission teams, which allowed networking opportunities with several local pastors in the district. One conversation with the local pastors revealed that one pastor received a mere \$250 monthly for his ministerial duties. Having difficulty believing this was possible, I met with the pastor one-on-one to discuss this matter further.

Pastor Tom¹ is a bivocational pastor who works for the church but also maintains a secular job to support his family. It took about two weeks to get on Pastor Tom's calendar, and the best we could do was to set up a Zoom call during his lunch break.

Pastor Tom was about seven minutes late for our meeting; he said he had forgotten about our meeting until he noticed two missed calls from me. He confessed that his 12-hour-per-day secular job is so demanding that he usually works through lunch. He is the primary breadwinner for his family, but due to the minimal church salary, this type of schedule is necessary. Listening to his conversation, I learned Pastor Tom has a wife and two children. His family has the exact basic needs as most families: food, mortgages, utilities, medical bills, and clothing. His pastoral salary is insufficient to cover the food for his family for a week.

My first question to Pastor Tom was, "Have you asked your church for a raise?" He replied, "He was not sure if the church could afford to pay him more," and stated, "He does not receive the church's monthly financial statements."² He conveyed that his church is rural and has limited resources, and he feels guilty asking them for more money. I shared with Pastor Tom that

¹ Pastor Tom, personal interview, April 2018. I have changed the names of my research partners to protect their anonymity.

² Ibid.

it is his responsibility, per the United Methodist policies and procedures, to know the church's financial health. Also, he should not feel guilty about seeking sustainable compensation.

Pastor Tom also stated that his average week consists of working twelve-hour days at his secular job, doing ministry work, and spending whatever time he has left with his family. He confessed the two jobs allow minimal time for family and self-care.

After talking with Pastor Tom, I spoke with three other bivocational pastors, and the same response was given whether they were male or female local pastors. They were appointed to a church part-time, but they work for the church full-time because they feel called to ministry; there is no such thing as a part-time pastor. Therefore, they work full-time for less than a part-time salary. This is widespread, and whether it is by choice or not, "it is feared that clergy in a part-time arrangement will be exploited to provide full-time service for less than full-time pay."³ Regardless, the position of a pastor comes with a job description, and even though it is a calling from God, if the pastor has been hired to take on the responsibility of pastoring a church, they should be compensated to do the job they have been hired to do.

When addressing the issue with the District Superintendent (DS), her investigation revealed that many of these local pastors were Lay Supply Pastors without the education and training to qualify for equitable compensation. They have the same responsibilities as a full-time clergy, with a few exceptions. However, the unfortunate and concerning part of this situation is local pastors who accept their appointment in the United Methodist Church (UMC) must accept whatever compensation the local church offers or can afford to give them. In contrast, full-time clergy have a set salary and other benefits set forth by the conference's equitable salary guidelines. A full-time clergy's salary can be increased and can only be decreased under

³ Anthony G. Pappas, ed. *Inside the Small Church*. (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2002), 67.

extenuating circumstances, and if this should occur, they can apply for equitable compensation through the conference.

Upon receiving a response from the DS, the problems to be addressed were even more significant than equitable compensation. First, many of the local pastors of concern lacked proper training and had been pastoring for years in a temporary position. How could they be left to pastor independently without a mentor and with limited training? They had been assigned as the pastor in charge, which required them to preach the gospel, visit the church members in the hospital and at their homes, officiate funerals, lead the worship, teach, and complete charge conference reports. Many local pastors have never participated in the licensing school program to learn how to carry out these responsibilities successfully. They are also prohibited from presiding over baptism and Holy Communion sacraments. However, due to their churches' rural location, many can carry out these tasks without an ordained full-time clergy (active or retired).

Somehow, these Lay Supply Pastors had been overlooked and were not in compliance with the guidelines of their position nor accountable to the DS or the policies and procedures of the Annual Conference.⁴ An excellent example of an overlooked local pastor is a pastor who had been pastoring for over 20 years without having received the education or proper training.

Pastor Smith⁵ was a 27-year-old active layperson in his church, and when the DS could not find a pastor to fill that church, he was asked to fill the position until a pastor could be identified and appointed. The church was a rural church in an old farming community, and its membership was about thirty people. Pastor Smith stated that "his only qualification for the

⁴ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶205.4.

⁵ Pastor Smith, personal interview, February 28, 2019. I have changed the names of my research partners to protect their anonymity.

ministry was based on the experience he gained when he stepped in to assist the pastor when he became ill.”⁶ Pastor Smith was told that his position was temporary until a pastor could be found, but he is still the pastor thirty years later. Pastor Smith felt that if my inquiry about the local pastor’s adequate compensation had not occurred, he would not have been pressured to attend the Course of Study (COS) program. He was confident in his skills and assured me he did not need to attend any classes because he had successfully pastored his church without schooling.

The Problem

With all the reports that the DS and clergy must complete each year, it is surprising how this area of accountability was not identified earlier or left unaddressed. The problem is that these local pastors were identified by someone within an executive leadership role, appointed and allowed to serve a church, preach, teach, provide leadership and support to their congregation, and oversee the sacraments without the proper training or support to be effective in ministry. This paper focuses on understanding the historical, ministry, and educational contexts of this problem and identifying what opportunities exist for pastors in rural areas to receive the level of education that qualifies them for ministry and equitable compensation.

Definition of Terms

Bivocational Pastor:

Bivocational pastors are clergy who pastor a church and work full-time because their church cannot offer them equitable compensation—dividing their time between ministry and working full-time to care for their families.

⁶ Pastor Smith, personal interview, February 28, 2019. I have changed the names of my research partners to protect their anonymity.

Rural Church:

Rural Churches are local churches that are the pillars of the rural community in urbanized areas. Many rural churches are in areas where the population continues to decline due to the increased closure of many local businesses. Rural churches are known for their rich history but also as places of limited resources.

Effectively—Functioning:

Functioning effectively as a pastor of the UMC is demonstrated in the pastor's ability to successfully carry out the church's fourfold ministry responsibilities and duties as described in the Book of Discipline. The fourfold ministry is identified as Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order. To meet this objective, the local pastor must have a clear vision and understanding of the purpose of the church and its role. Also, as stated in the Bible, Jesus commissioned the disciples to "therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."⁷ The pastor's obligation as the disciple-making leader is to guide and teach the members the disciple-making process.

Clergy -- Training of:

The clergy training involves preparing the local pastor by implementing mentorships, offering training and skills, and providing resources for ministry. This means meeting the educational requirements outlined in the Book of Discipline to prepare new local pastors for the ministry's work. When these elements are combined, a local pastor is better prepared and equipped for the ministry.

⁷ Matthew 28:19-20, (NIV).

Motivation:

Motivating adult learners (local pastors) empowers them with the required resources and programs to appeal to their desire to learn without anxiety, addressing time constraints and the challenge of adjusting to returning to school. This motivation is achieved by the learner understanding the need for the training; it is aligned with their future pastoral goals, support from the conference and district leadership, and training that will allow them to experience, practice, and share what they are learning.

Historical Context

To address the problem, in 2019, the Florida Annual Conference voted to allow these local pastors to continue to pastor as they simultaneously work on completing their education and licensing requirements.⁸ So, not only am I concerned about guidelines being set for these local pastors to be appropriately compensated for the work that they are doing in the church, but there is also a need for pastors to be equipped for the ministry and receive the proper training and support to do their ministry work. These decisions were both necessary and provided signs of hope.

It does not matter where the church is located. Whether in the inner-city, suburban community or down a rural dirt road, the essential leadership responsibilities and skills of the church pastors are the same for all United Methodist local pastors. There may be contextual differences and concerns to be addressed, but the basic skills needed are the same. Even though the UMC is clear about its educational requirements as outlined in the Book of Discipline, these pastors have been overlooked. Some have pastored for 10-30 years without a license to preach, nor have they completed the COS, which is the required denominational program.

⁸ United Methodist Church Florida Annual Conference. *Clergy Session*. June 5, 2019.

Revisiting The Purpose of The Church and The Role of the Local Pastor

The body of Christ is the Church. The church consists of all who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Therefore, every Christian is an essential part of the body of Christ. The function of the church is to minister to the needs of others, which means the church plays a vital role in meeting the spiritual, social, and economic conditions. The local churches also provide a significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.⁹ In the Bible, Jesus commissioned the disciples to “therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them.”¹⁰ All church members are responsible for making disciples for Christ.

In my experience, the church membership has become accustomed to and comfortable sitting in the pews and being entertained on Sunday mornings. Therefore, it becomes the obligation of the pastor as the disciple-making leader to guide and teach the members the process of disciple-making and how to carry out their responsibilities. Unfortunately, very few local pastors are comfortable leading their congregation in making disciples for Christ.¹¹

The local pastor in the UMC is called to servant leadership.¹² The local pastor is called and equipped with spiritual gifts and graces by God, but the District and Conference Office is responsible for ensuring that they have the needed tools for the ministry’s work.

Pastors Wear Many Hats

⁹ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶120.

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19-20, (NIV).

¹¹ Assessment Questionnaire Survey conducted on October 21, 2021.

¹² United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶136.

I know from experience that pastors today wear many hats in their servant leadership roles in the church and community. Most pastors enter the ministry understanding that they are called to preach the gospel, evangelize the lost, help with the revival of God's people, feed and clothe the homeless, and visit the sick and homebound members, but over the years, the pastor's responsibility has evolved, particularly within the rural church. Pastors are also expected to assume the responsibility for church administration, leadership, strategic planning, non-profit management, and the skill to address social justice issues in their community.

It is also true for the rural church, "our location narrates what we struggle against, whom we are struggling to become, and whom people expect us to be."¹³ Unfortunately, this means the congregational makeup of most rural churches does not have skilled staff or volunteers to assist with the day-to-day functioning, thus placing the pastor as the responsible person for carrying out the various tasks. This created a struggle for many local pastors. They became overwhelmed when called to work beyond their skill set as they were expected to perform the tasks but lacked training.

Getting to know these local pastors, I realized that many "have been raised to think that they can make a difference."¹⁴ Therefore, they take their calling to ministry seriously because they understand the commitment and self-sacrifice required. Since there is always a risk of compromise, parishioners often do not understand a clergy's particular unique calling to ministry or the context in which they were called. Because of this, the clergy never want to compromise

¹³ Tim Conder and Daniel Rhodes, *Organizing Church: Grassroots Practices for Embodying Change in Your Congregation, Your Community, and Our World* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2017), 106.

¹⁴ Anthony G. Pappas. *Entering the World of the Small Church*. (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2000), 73.

their beliefs. By succumbing to various forms of compromise, they endure sleepless nights seeking God for the ministry because they want to be the pastor God called them to be.¹⁵

As a mission team leader, I have watched many pastors yearn to be Jesus's hands and feet in their community. By being the functioning extremities of Jesus, clergy endeavor to bring healing to the broken, care for the hurting, offer hope to the helpless, and make disciples for Christ.

Other Professions Need Education

We live in a time when many people wear the title of pastor and hold a pastoral position in a church but lack the skills to do a pastor's job. Many of these individuals lack ministry and business skills.

In every profession, there is a list of necessary skills to do the job successfully. Surgeons have to have theoretical knowledge, hands-on practice, and supervised training before they are allowed to cut and stitch a patient. A professional baseball player must know catching, fielding, hitting, throwing, and base running. Being a pastor should be no different. The Bible even gives qualifications for pastors and church leaders.¹⁶

The scripture of the New Testament outlines the job of a pastor "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ,"¹⁷ they must receive the necessary training, practical tools, and resources to meet these requirements.

For a pastor to equip the church for the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ, training has now become a critical element of the foundational spiritual development of

¹⁵ Glenn Packiam. *The Resilient Pastor: Leading Your Church in A Rapidly Changing World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 48.

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 3 & Titus 1(NASB).

¹⁷ Ephesians 4:11-13 (NASB).

the congregation. It is a need for both the pastor and the congregation. Most pastors have the motivation to equip their congregations but become frustrated when trying to establish a meaningful program to accomplish the task.¹⁸ Like a pastor, when Jesus called the disciples to “Come, follow Him, and He would make them fishers of people,”¹⁹ the disciples were trained to minister to and serve the people. They were taught to communicate with others, connect people to God, and minister to those in need. During Jesus’s time with the disciples, He used various practical methods to train the disciples. He communicated and connected with the disciples by using stories with imagery and illustrations they could relate to,²⁰ parables and questions to make them think,²¹ discussions, debates, lectures,²² and object lessons.²³ Even though God may have previously gifted the disciples, it is evident by some of their responses to Jesus that they also needed to be taught to grow to be spiritually mature. Jesus also modeled a life of leadership for them to follow, especially in making disciples.

Ministry Context

North Central District Rural Church Network

The North Central District Rural Church Network (NCDRCN) is a newly organized ministry designed to address the ministry needs and potential of thirty-four churches located

¹⁸ George P. Kimber. Called to Equip: A Training and Resource Manual for Pastors. *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 18, no. 1 (April 1995): 134–37. <https://search-ebscohostcom.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000298666&site=ehost-live&scope=site.,134>.

¹⁹ Matthew 4:19, (NASB).

²⁰ Matthew 5:13, (NASB).

²¹ Luke 11:5-7, (NASB).

²² Matthew 19: 3-9, (NASB).

²³ Matthew 14:13-21, (NASB).

between Ocala and Gainesville, Florida. This ministry was officially established on February 25, 2021, to connect, collaborate, and cultivate the rural churches in the North Central District of the Florida United Methodist Conference.

The NCDRCN aims to develop strategies to help churches become vital and healthy local churches in the areas in which they are located by creating a more essential and coordinated connection among the churches identified.²⁴ This ministry comprises five network teams overseeing each local pastor and church assigned to their mission field. The Network Team is designed to help local pastors understand the uniqueness of the rural church ministry and identify ways to build connections and relationships with other pastors and congregations in the district. The Network Team is also designed to ensure that rural churches become healthier and more viable through collaboration by offering support, training, and resources.

Five team leaders were selected to provide oversight, training, and strategic missional planning to this network's thirty-four churches and pastors.²⁵ Each team leader is an Elder in full connection with the UMC. Four team leaders have a two-point charge, and one team leader has a three-point charge.

As a Network Team Leader, in networking with the mission field, I realized that some local pastors did not want to participate in the NCDRCN. At first, I thought it was because I held the Order of Elder, and many local pastors felt Elders looked down on them. However, during our conversations, it did not take long to realize that the local pastors' hesitancy was based on their lack of knowledge, adversely affecting their confidence level in many ministry areas. I

²⁴ North Central District. *The North Central District Rural Church Network guidelines*. Gainesville, FL 2021.

²⁵ Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church. In the District. *North Central District Newsletter*, July 2021 <https://www.flumc.org/ncd-july-2021-newsletter>. Accessed 3 December 2021.

assured them we could learn from each other because there was concern about many of them pastoring a church with limited skills and knowledge of how to do the work of effective ministry.

The NCDRCN consists of primarily rural churches and some inner-city churches, and a large percentage of these churches are pastored by bivocational local pastors. Because of this, some local pastors in the UMC are not ordained but are licensed to preach, conduct worship, and perform the duties of a pastor. To intentionally ensure that our local pastors receive the much-needed training, practical tools, and resources for the work of the ministry, I feel God is calling us to be in closer partnership with all of our churches that make up the Rural Church Network, which has been created for this purpose.

The Rural Church Vital to The Community

The narrative told of the rural church is simple to understand in its context. Most rural churches are not located near any major interstate, so they find themselves isolated from everything and everybody. The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as “all population, housing, and territory not included within an urbanized area.”²⁶

Anthony G. Pappas believes that the rural church has experienced at least six significant shifts that have caused it to wonder who they are, what church is, and how the world operates. However, even with these shifts, the rural church does not have to worry because “God is inside the small church.”²⁷

This issue is seen as a problem of proximity and economics for Elders ordained in the UMC. From this viewpoint, staffing these churches with academically prepared or seminary-

²⁶ “Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau,” accessed October 30, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/acs/acsgeo-1.pdf>

²⁷ Anthony G. Pappas, *Inside the Small Church*, 8.

trained pastors is difficult. The narratives being told about the local rural church are often generalized in this way, neglecting to appreciate what the rural church has to offer and diminishing the rural church's worth in the community.

Looking at this problem, we can now see why it is not easy to adequately staff our rural churches with properly prepared clergy instead of staffing them with those who have not been through the rigor of a seminary education. With such opposing views and some of the complexities of the rural church, most of our rural churches are staffed with certified lay leadership, lay supply, or licensed local pastors.

White Rural and Black Rural Church

Whether the church was a white or black rural church, the church was the one place that would bring everyone together, whether a person believed in God or not. Rural small-membership congregations are deeply relational places.²⁸ Every event that occurred in our small town took place at the church. Growing up in Louisiana, our rural church became the heart of our community, and everyone pitched in, the young and the old. If there was a need in the community, the people supported each other. "Our identity was never a personal choice."²⁹ Being a part of the community and part of church activities was a birth rite and an expectation.

For the white rural and black rural church, "congregation health is a difficult thing to measure."³⁰ Many of our white and black rural churches face the same challenges in the

²⁸ Allen Stanton. *Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021), 20.

²⁹ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Who Do We Choose To Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 1st edition, 2017), 66.

³⁰ Anthony G Pappas. *Entering the World of the Small Church*, 95.

NCDRCN: declining membership, many functioning part-time, and trying to make their churches vital in their communities.

In working with and talking to the pastors of the NCDRCN, it was apparent that the significant difference between the rural white and black churches is their resources. Even though all our rural churches are under-resourced, there is a higher level of poverty in many of our black churches.

Many of our white rural churches live with the stigma of poverty because of their location, but the black rural churches experience the daily trauma of poverty. Therefore, in white rural churches, their resources are not as limited as they may appear, and many of these churches can pay a pastor not necessarily what they are worth but enough to ensure that their pastor has some education. However, it is a different story for the rural black churches; many of these churches are struggling financially to stay afloat, and therefore, they cannot afford a pastor with a formal education. The only requirement for the pastor is to show up on Sunday morning and offer a message, and it does not matter if it was biblically accurate, if it made individuals feel good. Many churchgoers want more than a message to make them feel good; they want to be taught the Word of God and for the pastor to lead them in the church's work, but they settle for what they can afford.

The Educational Context

Like Ordained Elders, local pastors in the UMC are called to Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order.³¹ However, the local pastors' authority and ministerial duties are limited to the church in which they are appointed.³²

³¹United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶ 316.

³² *Ibid.*, ¶317.

The UMC is committed to preparing new local pastors for ministry by offering a multifaceted learning process. During this preparation time, the local pastor should receive the essential tools to pastor a church effectively. Along with meeting some educational requirements, some local pastors gain hands-on experience by pastoring in the local church.

After a local pastor is licensed in the UMC, they have eight years if they are full-time or twelve years if part-time local pastor to complete 20 courses of COS. A United Methodist licensed local pastor should receive a mentor while attending the COS and be required to participate in a Licensed Local Pastor Mentoring Group.

The UMC has educational options to ensure pastors are adequately prepared for the work of the ministry. The academic requirements per our Book of Discipline of the UMC for a local pastor are a License to Preach School, a Licensed Local Pastor Mentoring Group (LLPMG), and a Course of Study (COS).

License to Preach School

Most local pastors' first educational experience in the practice of ministry comes through the License to Preach School. "All persons not ordained as elders appointed to preach and conduct divine worship and perform the duties of a pastor shall have a license for pastoral ministry."³³ "A certified candidate is eligible for appointment as a local pastor upon completion of License for Pastoral Ministry."³⁴

The program consists of at least 80 contact hours, which provides mentoring and an assessment to evaluate basic skills, classes in pastoral skills, and the Methodist tradition. This curriculum, created at Candler School of Theology, is based on the General Board of Higher

³³ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶ 315.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ¶ 311.

Education and Ministry's (GBHEM) guidelines, which involves understanding and skill about the Methodist tradition, public worship and liturgy, preaching, leadership and administration, spiritual formation, educational ministries, pastoral care, mission, and evangelism.

Licensed Local Pastor Mentoring Group

The Licensed Local Pastor Mentoring Group (LLPMG) aims to provide opportunities to build life-long collegial relationships as a source of support. The LLPMG is a four-session mentoring course. The curriculum for this group covers Theology of Grace, Sacraments Marks of a Methodist, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship, Worship Design and Sermon Planning, UMC Polity, Church Structure, Staff and Lay Leadership, Maintaining Healthy Boundaries, Outreach, Fresh Expressions, Inclusivity and Cultural Awareness.

Course of Study

Per the Book of Discipline of the UMC, a primary theological education should be provided for local pastors and is offered by the GBHEM and Ministry.³⁵ The COS is a five-year program that trains and educates persons interested in becoming full or part-time local pastors.³⁶ This program offers in-person and online training. This denominational program helps prepare each local pastor by giving them classes on the Bible, Theology, Congregational Life, and Pastoral Identity.

Assessing the Problem

The Reflexive Process

³⁵ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶318.1, 2 & ¶1421.3d

³⁶ General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Accessed December 2, 2023. <https://www.gbhem.org/clergy/licensing-course-of-study/>

Qualitative methodology was used to determine the local pastor's effectiveness in carrying out the responsibilities and duties of the UMC's fourfold ministry. Using the reflexive process in qualitative research helped me gain an understanding of why pastors in The NCDRCN are not receiving the tools they need to work effectively in ministry. As a part of the reflexive process, the research tools used were social identity mapping, participant observations, focus groups, surveys, and structured and unstructured Interviews.

Social Identity Mapping

The research started with developing a Social Identity Map to give guidance in reflecting and being reflective on the community and district I serve. Danielle Jacobson and Nida Mustafa contend in "*Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research*"³⁷ that "a Social Identity Map is a tool that allows individuals to learn how they fit within society." As I mapped out my identity, I agreed with Jacobson and Mustafa on how one's identity could influence how others view them, how a person can view and understand those they serve, and how their life experience could impact research.

Regarding the NCDRCN, because of our life experience, values, and personal interests, I have more things in common with the rural local pastors than differences. In the areas where our experiences differ, it was important to be mindful of biases and assumptions as I interacted with the participants.

In looking at the Social Identity Map, concerns came when my voice was not being heard, especially when I expressed concerns for the local rural pastors. Knowing that these pastors are financially, physically, mentally, and emotionally struggling in these demanding

³⁷ Danielle Jacobson and Nida Mustafa. Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Volume 18 (2019), 9.

ministries, it is a concern when the District and Conference Leaders attempt to convince me that this group of pastors has the same opportunities as everyone else and that there is no legitimate problem. The question is, how can they have the same opportunities when these pastors are bivocational, working over forty hours a week and pastoring a church, and if they are pastoring churches without adequate training skills and resources? Their churches consist of people who are economically depressed and cannot liberally contribute money to the church; their churches are filled with members who do not want to embrace change, and there is constant conflict, and these rural local pastors are not trained or equipped to help the members of their congregations to overcome these obstacles. I find myself confronting multiple and intersecting forms of structural discrimination in these moments. In these moments, it is easy to understand Kimberlé Crenshaw's point in the Ted Talk video on *The Urgency of Intersectionality* when she argues that when we have a problem that we have not named, people in society will not be able to see individuals affected by this unnamed problem.³⁸

Participant Observations

Utilizing participant observation ensured that the reporting was accurate; I gained first-hand knowledge and a deeper understanding of the local pastors' behavior, attitudes, and motivation.

The first participant observation³⁹ was conducted on June 2, 2020. This first meeting was following the killing of George Floyd. The DS suggested this gathering to connect with the local pastors to offer support and see how they processed what had occurred and how this incident

³⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw. *The Urgency of Intersectionality*. October 2016, YouTube video, 9:50, https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en

³⁹ Participant Observation was conducted on June 2, 2020.

impacted the local pastors and their churches and communities. Another African American elder and I were asked to meet with the African American local pastors in our areas, hoping they would feel more comfortable and thus speak more freely with fellow African American colleagues about this sensitive topic.

Since we could not meet in person because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we met on an innovative video conferencing platform, Zoom. After logging in on Zoom and before our meeting started, each participant was informed that attendance and notes would be taken to share our concerns with the District Office. We started our first meeting by asking questions regarding the African American rural local pastors' concerns about the George Floyd killing. Future meetings were dedicated to discussions about themselves and their churches. Listening in the first meeting reminded me of Natalie Wigg-Stevenson's suggestion in *Making Theologians Deploying a Theological Habitus*, "in which she insisted that gaining insight into an individual's behavior can not only be achieved through observing them in their environment but that it can also be attained by them telling their story."⁴⁰ Hearing these local pastors' stories, they face many challenges in their ministry. I detected a great deal of distrust, feelings of isolation, lack of support, and a lack of tools and skills to function effectively.

From their conversations, this distrust expressed and displayed by these African American local pastors seems to have developed over many years. The NCDRCN has the most significant number of African American part-time rural local pastors, and even though, for over a year, the DS had done all she could to extend support to their ministries, many of these local

⁴⁰ Natalie Wigg-Stevenson. *Making Theologians Deploying a Theological Habitus. Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge*. (2014) New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. Accessed January 21, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central. Created from Emory on 2022-01-21 18:21:15.

pastors did not trust her motives. They felt that she was gathering information to validate closing their churches.

These challenges in ministry have led many of the pastors in the NCDRCN, during participant observations,⁴¹ to acknowledge that they are struggling in their ministries because they lack the essential tools to meet their job requirements. They admitted they lacked the skills to run a church, the resources to do ministry, knowledge of biblical and Methodist theology, church doctrine, and support from other pastors, the district, and the conference.

The other participant observation⁴² was via Zoom at the NCDRCN meetings. Again, the speaker and participants were made aware of me as a participant observer. Again, everyone consented to notes being taken.

In these meetings, observation determined a need to develop strategies to revive the rural church, which means the local pastors of the NCDRCN must develop or acquire the skills to revive their churches. As Dara Frimmer reminds us, “What we care about is deeply connected to who we are: our life experiences, our pain, and our disappointment, as well as our greatest joy,⁴³” and this was evident in the number of pastors who gave up their evening after a long day of work to find ways to address their concerns of the rural church. When listening to local pastors, they voiced their concerns about the importance placed on defining themselves as a rural church, their faith, their worth, population and church membership decline, and nostalgia.

Focus Group

⁴¹ Participant Observation conducted on June 2, 2020.

⁴² Participant Observation was conducted on June 16, 2020, July 7, 2020, July 21, 2020, and August 28, 2020 February 28, 2022.

⁴³ Dara Frimmer. *Inspiring social change through community organizing*. July 9, 2015, YouTube video, 1:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DtILpmsCcA>

Focus groups comprising six pastors of different ages, races, and genders were formed.⁴⁴ The meetings were via Zoom, and the participants were informed that the event would be recorded. During our discussions, using the reflexive process, I asked a series of questions and gained a lot of helpful information from the participants. The questions were structured to determine how much the local pastors knew about what was expected of them, the educational requirements, and the local pastor's process. Some of the questions were: Would you like to remain anonymous? What did you like or dislike about the Local Pastor process? Did you receive a mentor? Do you feel you were well informed, or did anyone share Paragraph 340, Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Local Pastors? Did you find License to Preach School and COS helpful to you as a pastor? What motivated you to complete the process? Some of these questions were answered in the survey, but in these focus groups, I also received some helpful tips and information I had not thought to ask to help them experience success.

Some helpful tips on what tools local pastors would need included many participants wanting to remain anonymous because of fear of reprisal. Pastor John wanted to make sure the local pastor process is the same for every local pastor; "he stated that when he started the process, he was appointed a group mentor, but when it became time to complete the process, no mentor was appointed."⁴⁵ With no support, the paperwork was overwhelming, and at the District Committee on Ordain Ministry (DCOM), he felt a high level of embarrassment because much of his paperwork was not up to the level of being approved."

⁴⁴ Focus Group, interviewed by author, Zoom, November 21, 2023.

⁴⁵ Pastor John, personal interview, November 21, 2023. I have changed the names of my research partners to protect their anonymity.

Pastor City Girl stated that “no one shared with her Paragraph 340 Responsibilities and Duties of a Local Pastor.⁴⁶ “Even though Pastor Joann Brookins stated that the License to Preach School is a valuable part of the Local Pastor’s Process, she was licensed seven months before her first appointment,⁴⁷ while other interviewees stated that they pastored for a year or more before they were licensed. The interviewees who completed the COS Program stated it was rigorous. Pastor Milford Griner pastored several churches over 35 years and stated “that he never completed the COS Program and retired this past year. Pastor Griner was reappointed to pastor another church.

The information I had not thought to ask to help them experience success was how they were treated in the process. Pastor Brookins stated, “She disliked the openly noticeably unfair treatment a few black candidates experienced at the DCOM.⁴⁸ This unfair treatment caused several black candidates to stop the process and leave the UMC. I also never considered asking how the local pastors got through the process with limited or no resources. Pastor Brookins and Pastor Griner shared how their church supported and encouraged them.⁴⁹ The other interviewees did not receive that same level of support and encouragement from their churches.

Surveys

The use of surveys helped determine how much the pastors knew or did not know about their responsibilities. Local pastors from the five Network Ministry Teams were asked to

⁴⁶ Pastor City Girl personal interview, November 21, 2023.

⁴⁷ Pastor Joann Brookins, personal interview, November 21, 2023.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Pastor Milford Griner and Pastor Joann Brookins, personal interview, November 21, 2023.

complete a Confidence Assessment Questionnaire Survey.⁵⁰ To ensure that the local pastors feel comfortable and are forthright in completing the survey, I asked them to complete the assessment and that they would remain anonymous. It was important for the pastors to feel comfortable identifying and assessing areas for improvement in ministry opportunities and offer ideas for possible training. Of the pastors who filled out the questionnaire, which ranged from two months to thirty years of experience on the job, I am unsure if they have attended any of the required training offered by the UMC. The survey revealed three significant areas where training or resources are needed; out of the 46 questions asked, 41.3% identified that resources are needed, 23% need resources that are not offered, and 15% do not know things they should know.

This survey offered critical information to determine the specific training and tools needed and was job-specific. It was also presented in a way that allowed the local pastors to be open and honest and not feel singled out.

Structured And Unstructured Interviews

Experts and local pastors were interviewed in their areas of ministry to gain more knowledge of the processes and educational programs the UMC provides. The interviews began with unstructured phone interviews with the coordinators of various training programs and structured interviews with the local pastors to better understand the current training process. Each of these program structures has changed a lot over the years. In-person and online courses are now offered.

Amy Walker, Associate Director of Methodist Studies at Emory University, who oversees the COS School and Licensing School, was interviewed. Amy informed me that not

⁵⁰ Assessment Questionnaire Survey conducted on October 21, 2021.

every local pastor attends License to Preach School because some local pastor positions are filled with Lay Supply or Certified Lay Minister.⁵¹ The guidelines for a lay supply are:

“When a pastoral charge is not able to be served by an ordained or licensed minister, the bishop, upon recommendation of the cabinet, may assign a qualified and trained layperson, lay minister, or lay missionary to do ministry work in that charge. The layperson is accountable to the district superintendent or another ordained or licensed minister appointed to oversee the charge, who will make provision for sacramental ministry and provide guidance and mentoring to the layperson assigned. The layperson assigned is also accountable to the policies and procedures of the annual conference where assigned.”⁵²

After learning more about the License to Preach School from the Associate Director of Methodist Studies, structured interviews with several local pastors to get their perspective on the matter were conducted. Pastor Christopher Worlds, a forty-seven-year-old black male, is a bivocational pastor.⁵³ Pastor Worlds works a full-time night job where he stocks medical supplies at a hospital. He has been in the ministry for over five years, and his highest level of education is that of a high school graduate.

Speaking with Pastor Worlds, he appeared disappointed and frustrated with the local pastor process. He stated, “When he attended the License to Preach School, most of the information he received went right over his head, and the only information he could retain was the conversations their class had with some retired Bishops.”⁵⁴ As the conversation continued with Pastor Worlds, it became evident that the License to Preach School was academically too

⁵¹ Interview with License to Preach Coordinator, October 13, 2021.

⁵² United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶ 205.4.

⁵³ Christopher Worlds. Personal interview by author, Gainesville, FL. October 13, 2016.

⁵⁴ Christopher Worlds. Personal interview by author, Gainesville, FL. October 13, 2016.

advanced for him. He stated, “Many of his classmates were frustrated and struggled because they were also high school graduates and had limited exposure to theological studies.”⁵⁵

In 2010, when I attended the License to Preach School after completing seminary, we met on the Florida Southern College campus in Lakeland, Florida. We lived in the dorms for two weeks. Unfortunately, I had to take a two-week vacation from work to attend. I enjoyed the classes and gained a lot of knowledge that prepared me for ministry, but the convenience of online courses would have been preferred since I was bivocational at the time.

The overall finding was the problem with local pastors obtaining the tools to serve as leaders is not because of the License to Preach School or the school’s curriculum. The United Methodist License to Preach School is an effective program. The concern is whether it offers the needed ministry tools for those with limited academic exposure and preparedness.

The next interviewee was the LLPMG coordinator, Pastor Will Clark, who shared that “his responsibility is to facilitate discussions and encourage accountability among Licensed Local Pastors as they navigate the early years of ministry in the local church.”⁵⁶ As the facilitator, his responsibility is to coordinate participants, facilitate communications, and secure the meeting space. “The United Methodist Conferences are encouraged to assign local pastors to clergy mentoring groups whenever possible.”⁵⁷ The keyword here is “whenever possible.” Pastor Will confirmed that “not all local pastors attend his mentoring group.”⁵⁸ Listening to Pastor Will

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Interview with Licensed Local Pastor Mentoring Coordinator, October 26, 2021.

⁵⁷ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶316.4.

⁵⁸ Interview with Licensed Local Pastor Mentoring Coordinator, October 26, 2021.

share his passion and concerns for local pastors; it appears that he is going above and beyond to ensure they have the resources and support to do their ministry.

Reflecting on the purpose and mission of this mentoring group, I realized that it provided training and some tools to help the local pastors in ministry. When it comes to the responsibilities of the local pastor to do the church's work, this program can be beneficial. Still, there are concerns that it supports some local pastors but fails to provide some needed tools and skills for all local pastors. This concern was confirmed when several local pastors were interviewed. Pastor Shannon Harris, a local pastor, stated, "Having a mentor has been crucial to my growth as a pastor and has also helped me avoid many landmines of ministry."⁵⁹ Every interviewee stated the importance of having a mentor in the local pastor process. Some received an individual mentor during the local pastor process, others were part of a mentoring group, and others acknowledged that they had never had a mentor even though it was required.

During an interview with Rev. Sara McKinley, the Director of The Office of Clergy Excellence, she shared that not all local pastors have attended all 20 courses of The COS program. Their District Committee on Ministry (DCOM) holds local pastors accountable for completing the COS.⁶⁰ Many persons functioning as local pastors are categorized as Lay Supply Pastors or Certified Lay ministers. Lay Supply Pastors and Certified Lay Ministers are lay persons assigned to lead a local church temporarily. These people do not attend License to Preach School unless they become certified candidates, and then when they are approved as licensed local pastors, they are eligible to attend the COS.

⁵⁹ Shannon Harris, interviewed by the author. Micanopy, FL, November 21, 2023.

⁶⁰ Interview with the Director of The Office of Clergy Excellence, October 25, 2021

The COS program provides primary theological education that will equip local pastors with the necessary education to meet the theological requirements, which will help them fulfill the church's mission. However, the problem with this program is the local pastors making or finding the time to attend the classes.

A common phrase I heard the experts use referred to the "Warm Body" syndrome. This means any warm body will do if no one else is available.⁶¹ Several local pastors were also interviewed to assess their attitudes, feelings, and concerns. Unfortunately, their concern with the "Warm Body" Syndrome makes their work difficult because the local pastors who fit this description are only local pastors in name only. They are typically opposed to training, cannot afford the training, or are bivocational and are unable to participate.

This research also revealed that the UMC is meeting all the educational requirements outlined in the Book of Discipline and is doing all it can to prepare new local pastors for the work of the ministry. However, some pastors have served churches for two or more years before receiving this training.

In looking at the local pastor process, for the most part, most of the local pastors interviewed enjoyed the local pastor process. Pastor Griner said he "found it informative, educational, and spiritually enlightening as he began his journey."⁶² Others were grateful that we have a local pastor process. In contrast, others shared their frustration with the local pastor process. For example, Pastor Kathy Moore stated that she had "to call and ask others for guidance, was given a lot of wrong information, and felt lost in the process."⁶³ Even though the

⁶¹ Interviews with United Methodist Church educational programs experts, October 25, 2021, and October 26, 2021.

⁶² Pastor Milford Griner, personal interview, November 21, 2023.

⁶³ Pastor Kathy Moore, personal interview December 5, 2021. I have changed the names of my research partners to protect their anonymity.

UMC sets forth a standard local pastor process, it is not always followed. Pastor City Girl stated that she never went through the local pastor process and was assigned a church. She referred to her process as a default process.⁶⁴

There are many loopholes in the local pastor process that allow inconsistency, lack of support, and unfair treatment that result in pastors being overlooked. The biggest concern is that many of these pastors know that they are not working to their full potential but do not feel that they have a safe place to address their concerns or have tried to address them and were ignored or felt they would face retaliation.

Many of the local pastors in The NCDRCN are struggling because there are some vital things they should know and are expected to know but were never taught. For the rural local pastor to do the work of the ministry successfully, they need the essential tools to do the job.

Results of the Problem

Church Decline

With churches across America declining, the rural church is also included in that downward spiral. “Traditional family life, once the backbone of small church social networks, has been undermined by both parents being unemployed, rise in divorce rates, single parent homes, blended families, and multiple locations their children call home.”⁶⁵ Our rural churches are still filled with its rich history, but many still hold on to the good old days. This holding on to the past has made it difficult for the church to move forward, and some rural pastors do not have

⁶⁴ Pastor City Girl personal interview, November 21, 2023. I have changed the names of my research partners to protect their anonymity. This pastor is now a Provisional Elder in the United Methodist Church.

⁶⁵ Carl S. Dudley. *Effective Small Church in the Twenty-first Century*. (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 2003), 9.

the tools or the resources to bring about the needed change. Many of the pastors in The NCDRCN have stated that some rural church members would rather die than change. This attitude is suspected to represent a microcosm of the broader spectrum of religious life in contemporary American culture. On that same note, in responding to the Confidence Assessment Questionnaire Survey,⁶⁶ many pastors acknowledged that they do not have the skills to convince their members to commit to a more vital ministry or to help them confront the many problems the community and church face. In a recent training webinar, a local pastor acknowledged that “the primary cause of our rural churches being in decline is that pastors are not trained to handle many of the church’s concerns and are unable to meet the community’s needs.”⁶⁷

When the local pastor does not receive the training needed for the work of the ministry, the local churches will continue to decline, and the church will also be adversely affected in other ways.

Pastors No Longer Influence the Community

The church no longer influences the community as it once did. There was a time when the church made a difference in people’s lives spiritually and through social contributions and economic empowerment, and it challenged the people to live better lives, but that has changed significantly. “Threatened by socially divisive forces, small-church leaders appreciate resources to strengthen a community and congregational sense of belonging, purpose, and unity.”⁶⁸ Therefore, a local pastor must be trained and equipped with the tools to order the church’s life and guide and care for their congregation and community members.

⁶⁶ Assessment Questionnaire Survey completed on October 21, 2021.

⁶⁷ Allen Stanton. *Rural Church Ministries Summer Webinar Series*, August 3, 2021.

⁶⁸ Carl S. Dudley. *Effective Small Church in the Twenty-first Century*, 12.

Pastors Cannot Ensure the Church Carries Out the Great Commission

The Great Commission Jesus gave to His followers was the most significant directive ever given to anyone in the history of the world.⁶⁹ Therefore, the pastor's responsibility is to share their understanding and theological knowledge to ensure that the church members carry out the great commission to make disciples to build God's Kingdom. While working with these rural local pastors, their training deficits became apparent, as did the discomfort they experienced while attempting to lead their congregation in making disciples for Christ, but they expressed that they were doing their best.

Pastor Burnout

It has been observed in various denominational settings that pastors have been walking away from the ministry or experiencing burnout because they have too many tasks or little training.⁷⁰ This is evident by the social pressure their church setting placed on them and their work within the community. When combining these external dynamics within the context of the totality of their ministry, the picture of the potential, or leading to the certainty of burnout, becomes easier to see. We gather a much clearer picture as we look at a biblical model of how Paul brings this to our attention by "becoming all things to all people."⁷¹ If we look at clergy as carpenters as Jesus was, not having the proper tools severely impacts capacity building within congregations. Not being trained to equip the saints, these pastors singlehandedly take on the

⁶⁹ James R. Eby. *World Impacting Churches: 10 Essential Characteristics for Changing the World and Finishing the Great Commission*. (Mustang, Oklahoma: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2007), 43-44.

⁷⁰ C. J. Adams, H. Hough, R. J. Proeschold-Bell, J. Yao, and M. Kolkin. "Clergy Burnout: A Comparison Study with Other Helping Professions." *Pastoral Psychology*, (66(2), (2016). 147-175. doi:10.1007/s11089-016-0722-4). 4.

⁷¹ Corinthians 9:19, (NASB).

majority of the church's responsibilities, which nearly kills them and their ministry. Equipping their congregation becomes challenging when the local pastors are not equipped themselves. This fosters a feeling of inadequacy and can lower one's self-esteem. When adding all these ingredients into a pot being stirred constantly, one can see how these negative dynamics can become a recipe for disaster. If not addressed in its earliest stages, a disaster of this type can be complex, if not impossible, to overcome. Not only does the clergy suffer, but the church suffers as well. We see this self-perpetuating scenario being played out repeatedly in the local church by continuing to place ill-prepared clergy in churches that never seem to grow or progress from where they were three years prior.

Fosters Distrust and Lack of Confidence

When a pastor lacks the skills, resources, and training to do the ministry work effectively, they will develop distrust and suspicion that stems from a lack of confidence in their ability because of limited skills and knowledge of operating effectively as pastors. To be effective in ministry is to thrive in ministry.

Thriving is not an outward expression of success or reward. It is our daily survival. Thriving, for those on the brink of survival, is celebrating those moments when love overcomes the threat of oppression, and freedom of the mind and body take hold for even just a moment. To create conditions for people to thrive is thus to expand and multiply those times and spaces where this love can abound. Moreover, there are ways to cultivate more of these moments, regardless of socioeconomic position.⁷²

We change the clergy culture when local pastors develop confidence, learn to trust, succeed in ministry, and they and their ministries thrive.

Recommendations

⁷² Patrick Reyes. What Does Daily Thriving Look Like? in *The Purpose Gap* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 182.

Motivating Local Pastor

Adult learners need motivation. Motivation is essential to our survival.⁷³ Most rural local pastors are bi-vocational; returning to school seems like a waste of time to already stressed-out and overworked pastors. For many local pastors, educational training is considered helpful in the long term but is not considered essential to meeting their daily pastoral duties. Encouragement is needed to help them overcome all the obstacles before them.

Many Local Pastors have not been in a place of learning since high school; they have forgotten many academic habits they once possessed, and for many of them, taking classes is behind them. Therefore, education must be appealing.

Motivating pastors is no different than motivating any other adult learner. They want their learning to be accessible and visually compelling, bi-vocational consideration, micro-learning, different learning preferences, accountability, feedback, and reward. This means tools should be accessible, adult learning considerations, and assessment and reward.

Accessibility

Technological Devices

For the local pastor, courses must be as accessible as possible. Some working local pastors spend more time online and on their phones, so creating a learning environment for technological devices would be helpful. Learning technology has been proven to increase the importance of learning.

eLearning Course

⁷³ Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg. *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults* 4th Edition. (Place of publication not identified: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 2.

“eLearning is the use of information and computer technologies to create learning experiences.”⁷⁴ eLearning makes learning opportunities available on online platforms that local pastors already frequent, like social media and mobile phones, so we do not have to reinvent the wheel. They can use tools they are familiar with and comfortable with to learn.

Micro-Learning

Several local pastors requested the possibility of being offered a learning structure that would consist of bite-sized pieces of training. With Micro-learning, the local pastors can “schedule learning on their own time, use the learning assets to develop over time, to resolve an immediate need or as part of an overall curriculum, be motivated to learn, be more engaged in actual learning.”⁷⁵ Micro-learning Training consists of short videos or infographics that can be easily consumed. This is where local pastors can learn a new skill or understand the information they can obtain on their lunch break, while traveling, or while waiting.

Adult Learning Considerations

Visually Compelling Training

Many local pastors have lost motivation because their learning courses lack visually compelling material. Learning must be designed to meet all types of needs. Research shows that “83% of learning occurs visually.”⁷⁶ Therefore, online learning courses cannot be predominantly text-based, setting students up for a loss in student achievement.

⁷⁴ William Horton. *e-Learning by Design 2nd Edition*. (San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 2011), 1.

⁷⁵ Elise Greene Margol. *Microlearning to Boost the Employee Experience (TD at Work)*. (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press 2017), 5.

⁷⁶ Morris A Graham and Kevin Baize. *Executive Thinking: From Brightness to Brilliance* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse 2011), 99.

Interactive Opportunities

Local Pastors may not always remember to associate what is learned with its application at the workplace. Sometimes, they might need reminders and a clue to help them make that connection. Interactive opportunities create an exchange of learning through debate and collaboration. Interactions include chats, discussion forums, video conferences, discussion forums with immediate responses, and social network chats.⁷⁷ Social interaction has proven to be successful in adult learners.

Bivocational Considerations

Bivocationalism is not unusual. According to the 2021 report of the Jackson Carroll National Congregations Study, one in three congregational leaders (35%) is bi-vocational, and one in five (18%) serves multiple congregations.⁷⁸ Many local pastors are bi-vocational for economic or personal reasons. Typically, when the list for the COS classes is announced, they are at work, and when they can check the list, the classes they need are filled.⁷⁹ There needs to be a plan in place to accommodate and ensure that bi-vocational pastors have the same opportunities, and consideration should be given to how much class work they are given.

Different Learning Preferences

When it comes to motivating local pastors to learn, individual preferences for bi-vocational pastors are a way for pastors to learn. For visual learners, graphics, presentations,

⁷⁷ Anna Arinushkina, Alexander Morozov, and Irena Robert. *Contemporary Challenges in Education: Digitalization, Methodology, and Management*. (Hershey, Pennsylvania: Information Science Reference 2023), 69.

⁷⁸Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser. *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times (Critical Cultural Communication, 21)* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2012), 153.

⁷⁹ Christopher Worlds. Personal interview by author, Gainesville, FL. December 20, 2022.

real-life workshops, or videos will keep them engaged for longer. Some local pastors stated that “they learn better through problem-solving activities, and others learn better on their own time and pace.”⁸⁰

Assessment and Reward

Accountability and Feedback

Regarding training, a culture of accountability empowers local pastors by helping to build trust and motivates them to seek feedback and grow. In American adult education, educational feedback is often neglected.⁸¹ Feedback is essential because it will help local pastors identify and reflect on areas where they are strong and where they need to pay extra attention. This feedback can be through facilitators, self-assessments, mentors, and tailored to the individual learner.

Reward Learning

Many local pastors view the COS Program and any other required training as a joyless grind. Even though they receive recognition from a small group of their peers, this is a significant accomplishment for a bi-vocational pastor that practically goes unnoticed. Local pastors make great sacrifices to complete their training. Anything an individual uses to inspire, encourage, motivate, or compensate a learner can be a reward or incentive.⁸² Like any adult learner, local pastors will be more motivated, knowing they will receive special recognition for their accomplishments after meeting their required training.

Learning Platform

⁸⁰ Focus Group, interviewed by author, via Zoom, November 21, 2023.

⁸¹ Oitshepile Mmab Modise. *Cases on Leadership in Adult Education* 1st Edition. (Hershey, Pennsylvania: Information Science Reference 2015),16.

⁸² Robert W. Lucas. *The Creative Training Idea Book: Inspired Tips and Techniques for Engaging and Effective Learning*. (New York, New York: Amacom Publishing, 2010), 364.

Since the research revealed that the local pastors of The NCDRCN are not adequately prepared for the work of the ministry and that there is a need for additional training and resources, the goal now is to search, define, or develop the best methods to offer the needed training and resources. Books, seminars, videos, podcasts, and leadership conferences are great at dispensing information, but transformation springs from learning, insight, experience, and the implementation of effective tools administered by proven leaders.

I imagined a platform to motivate the local pastor to complete the required training by making it accessible and visually compelling. The courses will consist of the required theological courses offered by the UMC and courses on conflict resolution and running a non-profit. This platform would also be designed to build community, consider the bivocational pastor, and offer micro-learning options, different learning preferences, accountability, feedback, and rewards. Since this training method will consist of online training, a training manual with videos, and a mentoring experience, the local pastor will receive a monthly progress report showing the courses they have taken, the courses they have completed successfully, and the courses that need to be completed. This data will also be accessible to the conference, district office, and the local pastor's mentor to ensure accountability. The DCOM will review the progress report with the local pastor each year during their recertification process to ensure the courses are being completed. When the local pastors are trained, our churches will become more vital.

Conclusion

In getting to know the local pastors in the NCDRCN, they want to be more productive, but without the necessary resources, they face obstacles and are ineffective in completing their responsibilities. They struggle to be the leaders they want to be in meeting the expectations placed upon them as a local pastor. All because “when a Christian leader feels under-resourced,

not allowed to focus on what they believe their calling is and isolated, the result is weariness, frustration and what feels like a long, slow slide into somewhere or something they never wanted.⁸³

Many of these pastors knew that pastoring meant managing the church's daily operations, but very few had skills or knowledge in church management. Therefore, they had no idea how to plan, organize, and supervise the tasks and practices necessary to develop an active church ministry. Without staff or skilled volunteers, most of these churches had outdated paper-and-pencil methods for handling their finances and did not know how to prepare a budget. Many churches had become stagnant because the pastors had never been taught how to establish a vision and mission or develop long-term plans for their ministry. The standard-established leadership model was ineffective because the church leadership or the pastor did not know Robert's Rules of Order, and the churches were recycling the same members in leadership roles because of the limited number of members and the lack of their desire or commitment to take on leadership roles. To that end, the pastors experienced difficulty motivating their congregations.

Pastoring a rural church comes with the knowledge that there is a good possibility that the resources will be minimal. "Often money is tight, trained workers scarce, musicians weak, and maintenance deferred"⁸⁴ because limited resources affect almost every aspect of the ministry. For example, "well-maintained facilities are attractive to visitors and are a valuable tool as we make disciples."⁸⁵ For these rural churches to thrive, they know the importance of having

⁸³ *DoingMoreTogether.Pdf*, Google Docs, accessed December 19, 2023. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rZZOxogL4t_U8chh0YEtNMz9NKJ6rPCW/view?usp=sharing&usp=embed_facebook&usp=embed_facebook.., 9.

⁸⁴ Gary E. Farley. *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Being A Smaller-Membership Church*. Inside The Small Church. Anthony G. Pappas. (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2002), 99.

⁸⁵ John H. Tyson. *Administration in the Small Membership Church: Ministry in the Small Membership Church*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2007), 69.

the proper resources to minister effectively, attract visitors, and make disciples. This becomes difficult because many church buildings are inadequate and antiquated and lack proper classroom space. It was also determined that the local pastors lacked the skills and knowledge to start a capital campaign and access resources to renovate their buildings. There is a lack of technological resources. Technology helps in church, connects the church to the community, supports the church's mission, and enhances worship.

With church conflict being forever present in the church, conflict resolution resources are needed. "By nature of a pastor's leadership, they are going to stir up conflict because conflict is created when a person gives up where they are and what they have for a mission greater than themselves."⁸⁶ Most pastors try to ignore the problem, hoping it will eventually disappear.⁸⁷

Many of our rural churches do not know or understand Methodist theology or the doctrine of the UMC because they have never been taught. Since many of these pastors did not grow up in the Methodist Church, they do not have enough knowledge to teach others about Methodism. Therefore, many churches' doctrines can be described as Pentecostal and Baptist with Methodist on the church sign.

Not only are these churches seriously under-resourced, but the pastors expressed a feeling of isolation from each other and other churches in the district and from the conference.⁸⁸ This inaccessibility for added support and mentoring made many local pastors feel alone without friendships or alliances. There is also distrust due to the need for a relational connection between the district and conference leaders.

⁸⁶ David E. Woolverton. *Mission Rift: Leading through Church Conflict* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 39.

⁸⁷ Participant Observation conducted on July 7, 2020

⁸⁸ John H. Tyson. *Administration in the Small Membership Church: Ministry in the Small Membership Church*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 69.

The research asked how a local pastor in the NCDRCN acquires the tools and motivation they need to work effectively in ministry. The details outlined in this paper set the framework that equipping and motivating local pastors are attainable. These essential tools will allow the local pastors in the NCDRCN to acquire the skills they need that will motivate them to work effectively in the ministry. If the local pastors of the NCDRCN acquire the tools and motivation needed to work effectively in ministry, they will grow as individuals and grow their congregations. They will add value to the district by expanding their ministry reach into the larger community. And we will witness the expansion of the kingdom of God because their leadership will influence the generations to come.

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APPENDIX

List of needed resources or training (ranked in the order of most selected)

1. Understanding of Robert Rules of Order
2. Designing and managing a website
3. Preparing a Mission and Vision Statement
4. Leading people in discipleship and evangelistic outreach
5. Knowledge of 941, 1099, and other IRS Forms
6. Setting up and managing social media
7. Counseling
8. Addressing conflict
9. Giving pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership, equipping them to fulfill the ministry to which they are called
10. Training in Microsoft Office (PowerPoint, excel, word, etc.)
11. Preparing a budget
12. Performing marriages and burials
13. Basic accounting systems and principles
14. Developing a church newsletter
15. Preparing parents and sponsors before baptizing infants or children and instructing them concerning the significance of baptism and their responsibilities for the Christian training of the baptized child.
16. Writing a job description
17. Caring for all church records and local church financial obligations
18. Encouraging people baptized in infancy or early childhood to make their profession of faith after instruction so that they might become professing members of the church
19. Seeking out opportunities for cooperative ministries with other United Methodist pastors and churches

Confidence Assessment Questionnaire

Some responsibilities and duties of a pastor for this fourfold ministry within the context of their appointment.

Please rate your current level of confidence:

1. I am not at all confident.
2. I am somewhat confident.
3. I am confident

1. How confident are you in preaching the Word of God?	1	2	3
2. How confident are you in leading in worship?	1	2	3
3. How confident are you in reading and teaching the Scriptures?	1	2	3
4. How confident are you in engaging the people in study and witness?	1	2	3
5. How confident are you in leading people in discipleship and evangelistic outreach?	1	2	3
6. How confident are you in counseling persons with personal, ethical, or spiritual struggles?	1	2	3
7. How confident are you in performing a marriage ceremony and conducting funeral and memorial services?	1	2	3
8. How confident are you in visiting the sick, aged, imprisoned, and others in need?	1	2	3
9. How confident are you in maintaining all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law?	1	2	3
10. How confident are you in administering the sacraments of baptism and the Supper of the Lord according to Christ's ordinance?	1	2	3
11. How confident are you in preparing the parents and sponsors before baptizing infants or children and instructing them concerning the significance of baptism and their responsibilities for the Christian training of the baptized child?	1	2	3
12. How confident are you in encouraging reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant and renewal of baptismal vows at different stages of life?	1	2	3
13. How confident are you in encouraging people baptized in infancy or early childhood to make their profession of faith after instruction so that they might become professing members of the church?	1	2	3
14. How confident are you in explaining the meaning of the Lord's Supper and encouraging regular participation as a means of grace to grow in faith and holiness?	1	2	3
15. How confident are you in selecting and training lay members to serve the consecrated communion elements?	1	2	3
16. How confident are you in encouraging the private and congregational use of the other means of grace (worship, bible study, communion, prayer, and fasting)?	1	2	3
17. How confident are you in being the administrative officer of the local church and ensuring that the organizational concerns of the congregation are adequately provided for?	1	2	3
18. How confident are you in giving pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership, equipping them to fulfill the ministry to which they are called?	1	2	3

19. How confident are you in overseeing the educational program of the church and encouraging the use of United Methodist literature and media?	1	2	3
20. How confident are you in being responsible for organizational faithfulness, goal setting, planning, and evaluation?	1	2	3
21. How confident are you in administering the provisions of the Discipline?	1	2	3
22. How confident are you in providing leadership for the funding ministry of the congregation?	1	2	3
23. How confident are you in ensuring membership care, including compliance with charitable giving documentation requirements?	1	2	3
24. How confident are you in providing appropriate pastoral care?	1	2	3
25. How confident are you in modeling and promoting faithful financial stewardship?	1	2	3
26. How confident are you in caring for all church records and local church financial obligations?	1	2	3
27. How confident are you in certifying the accuracy of all financial, membership, and any other reports submitted by the local church to the annual conference for use in apportioning costs back to the church?			
28. How confident are you in seeking out opportunities for cooperative ministries with other United Methodist pastors and churches?	1	2	3
29. How confident are you in leading the congregation in racial and ethnic inclusiveness?	1	2	3
30. How confident are you in your understanding of Robert's Rules of Order?	1	2	3
31. How confident are you in addressing conflict?	1	2	3
32. How confident are you with basic accounting systems and principles?	1	2	3
33. How confident are you in assisting with a capital campaign/fundraising?	1	2	3
34. How confident are you in explaining to the congregation the purpose of apportionments?"	1	2	3
35. How confident are you in articulating the importance of the practice of giving (time, talent, tithe) with the congregation?"	1	2	3
36. How confident are you in writing a job description?	1	2	3
37. How confident are you in designing and managing a website?	1	2	3
38. How confident are you in your knowledge of 941, 1099, and other IRS Forms?	1	2	3
39. How confident are you in preparing a budget?			
40. How confident are you with Microsoft Office (PowerPoint, excel, word, etc.)?	1	2	3
41. How confident are you in developing a church newsletter?	1	2	3
42. How confident are you with setting up and managing social media?	1	2	3
43. How confident are you in developing a meeting agenda?	1	2	3
44. How confident are you in embodying the teachings of Jesus in servant ministries and servant leadership?	1	2	3
45. How confident are you in giving diligent pastoral leadership to order the life of the congregation for discipleship in the world?	1	2	3
46. How confident are you in building the body of Christ as a caring and giving community, extending the ministry of Christ to the world?	1	2	3