A Phenomenological Study and Meta-Analysis of Declining Membership and Participation in the Church

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DM Dissertation Proposal

Dean Finley
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to a Mother and Father who were not able to live long enough to see it. Retired Specialist 5th Class Clifford E. Jones Sr. and his wife, Bernyce W. Jones, my parents, dreamed of raising a child who could stand on his own two feet. The successful completion of this work is the credential proving they accomplished their mission. This study, and all stemming from it, is a result of the dedication, love, and greatness of their effort. I further dedicate this effort to the special people who saw potential in me at every stage of my life, and I thank them for their persistent encouragement, drive and direction because this accomplishment is due in large part to their dedication to my needs and wellbeing.

For the benefit of my only son and grandson, and all others whose paths I cross, this work is dedicated to their ambition. I wish to remind them of all the possibilities available when one makes the effort, no matter what the circumstance, no matter what the condition, no matter what the obstacles. This accomplishment is theirs to have…. not mine to possess. Finally, this work, and the effort to produce I dedicate to the glory of God, through whom all things are possible.
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Abstract

Previous study (McLeod, 2007, Bivins, 2008) on the phenomenon of declining membership and participation in the church has shown both positive and negative fluctuations over time. However, the phenomenon reveals an extraordinary association with the declining trend. The problem of declining membership and participation in the church suggests weaknesses in the very foundations of religious belief. The phenomenon also reflects varying decision processes and reasoning’s, often taken as separate causes of the phenomenon rather than contributing factors to a larger paradigm. This study seeks to establish a multifactor approach to the problem of declining membership and participation that allows a broader defense against the negative effects of separate causalities. A meta-analysis of past and current study into the phenomenon investigates currently recognized causalities, and forms a grounded basis for the study questions, while personal interviews from a sampling of churches, church leaders and church members provides additional quantitative data for review, comparison, weighting and analysis of the phenomenon. The conclusions developed from this study will provide a structural basis for the formulation of multifaceted practices to stem the trends of declining membership and participation in the church.
A recent "Religious Congregations and Membership" study, published in 2000 (conducted each decade), by the Glenmary Study Center (Adamczk, 2008), provides evidence of the gradual decline in membership of the church in America. This study gives a statistical account of modern churches, progressing it seems, ever closer to oblivion (Adamczk, 2008). Lindsay (2006) notes, the importance religion and religious institutions have played in shaping American society (Lindsay, 2006), particularly since the events of 9/11/2001.

Religion has always been an integral part of American public life, representing itself in society as a source of conflict, violence and corruption, as well as a source of personal strength, civic management, creative solutions, and social changes (Chaves, 2004, Jordan & Boix, 2004). There are a number of debates surrounding religion, religious institutions, and their activities, yet religion is also a source of hope in the community providing leadership, counseling and guidance, while making congregations key partners in community-wide efforts (Chang, 2006a, Thumma, Travis, & Bird, 2006).

The problem of declining membership creates lower treasury revenues, decreased charitable abilities, and an observable decrease in the moral fiber of communities served by the church. Declines in membership exacerbate the church's basic inability to meet its self-imposed objective of helping those in need and providing social interaction for the poor, grounded in faith.

The purpose of this study is to reveal the interactivity of causative factors in order to develop a multifactorial but single-minded approach to reversing declines in church membership. The use of a mixed method phenomenological and meta-analytical approach examines the developmental nature of the decision processes governing declines in membership and
participation. The lucrative business of church administration becomes much less attractive with the inability to expand and sustain membership. The Phenomenological study proposed here, has the potential to provide workable solutions, which address both "attitude" and "practicality" within troubled congregations, and help ministers and families, find their way through the conspiracies impeding membership and operations in the organized church.

Declining membership is intriguing to all religious organizations (regardless of denomination or theology), Baptist Ministers, labor unions, and other voluntary organizations witnessing general declines in membership. Businesses, clubs and other organizations including the church, relying on constituencies, customers, and all other forms of membership for financial support, have a stake in the perpetuation of membership. Despite its nonprofit status, without members the church will die. Those churches and communities interested in the "Faith Based Initiative" will also find value in this study because membership has a direct exponential bearing on funds availability.

The nature of the study involves a two-fold interest in declining membership and retention practices. The answers to the study questions, within the theoretical framework of leadership, game theory, decision theory, and church theology, are expected to reveal the specific concepts associated with declining membership and difficulties in recruiting. The conclusions developed will provide a structural basis for the formulation of practices to control or reverse trends in declining membership.

An analysis of this dangerous phenomenon based on qualitative responses from personal interviews will help determine the interconnected causal factors involved. This study will also provide a significant countermeasure to mitigate the phenomenon within the church and other nonprofit organizations. In terms of doctoral study, this investigation expects to reveal the
interactivity of causative factors forming a multifactor but compartmentalized approach to declines in church membership.

The church is seeing its membership base dwindle and erode because of economic and cultural change. Business trends reflect changing buying habits and shrinking customer support while loyalty increasingly reflects changes in cultural mores and other specific issues similar to those plaguing the church. Thus, the value of study into the causative factors surrounding declines in membership and activity may be appreciated by reporting organizations like *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology, The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* and *The Christian Century*.

This study further serves the purpose of specifically defining decision mechanisms involved in membership retention for the church. By first developing a meta-analysis of studies into the issues of attendance and participation, this study will correlate the impact of declining membership with a qualitative investigation into the motivations of members within the local church environment. A *subjective analysis* (searching for attitude constraints and provocations) and a *value analysis* (giving weight to importance), will be used to make determinations about best practices and recommended actions. This will further the knowledge of membership building and customer attraction by illuminating workable action paths to alleviate losses in membership, while identifying the systemic problems generating the loss of said membership.

**Reasons for Going to Church**

Spirituality is a complex, condition involving the ultimate personal truths individuals hold as inviolable (Howard, 2002). Religious organizations have operated with voluntary membership for more than 2,000 years (McManners, 1990), and congregants have come to expect a certain unchangeable structure, doctrine, and operating outcome. Some of the more
common reasons given by individuals for going to church are (a) worshiping God, (b) finding a social connection with the local community, (c) networking, (d) continuing tradition, (e) self-renewal, (f) becoming involved in advocacy groups, and (g) community outreach (Bruce, 2006). Bruce (2006) notes the two main reasons for going to church are involvement in community service and outreach programs (Bruce, 2006). In a survey of 300 thousand worshipers in 2,000 congregations, Bruce (2006) found 77% of the church going population to be involved in community service and outreach programs.

Congregational shifts from small denominations and churches to larger ones can limit the amount, type, and quality of services provided by smaller churches. Decreased membership in turn will lead to decreased services provided to congregants (Chaves, 2006).

Americans exposed to cultural changes since the 1980s, including technology changes, and the cultures of bigness, have expected a higher quality services. Leaders who cannot address the variables determining declines in membership experience shifts in their customer, client, supplier, and stakeholder bases. One obvious trend of leaders who do not provide quality of service in the form of worship, music, community outreach, and local presence is the continuing loss of members to larger congregations and mega-churches (Chaves, 2006). Consequently, subjective analysis may determine attitude constraints and provocations, and value analysis can make determinations concerning best practices and recommended actions.

This study examines the differences in doctrine, acceptable activities, and cultural makeup for various congregations in terms of race, sex, and age through using interviews to determine the reasons for variances in membership and attendance between adults, children, men, and women. This mixed method phenomenological study also investigates the mechanics of membership building and customer attraction by illuminating and creating workable solutions
and action paths to aid in the alleviation of losses in membership while identifying the systemic problems generating membership losses.

**Background of the Problem**

The recent "Religious Congregations and Membership" study mentioned earlier, published in 2000 by the Glenmary Study Center, tells the statistical story. Progressive churches have shown the following declines in membership:

- The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. with 11,106 churches, has experienced a decline of 11.6 percent over the previous ten years;
- The United Methodist Church with 35,721 churches, was down 6.7 percent;
- The Episcopal Church with 7,314 churches, lost 5.3 percent of its membership;
- The United Churches of Christ with 5,863 churches, declined 14.8 percent;
- American Baptist Churches USA were down 5.7 percent.

(Shiflette, 2005, Lundmark, 2008).

Declining membership is a subject of interest to Baptist Ministers in particular and clergy in general. Like labor unions, the church, in many denominations and creeds, is witnessing a steady and general decline in membership and participation. Like any other business, club or organization, the church depends on its constituency for financial support to continue its activities. Despite its general nonprofit status, without members, as without sales, the church will die.
As an institution, the church needs to address the question of, "Why church membership is declining and, how this shrinkage can be dealt with?" Those churches and communities interested in the "Faith Based Initiative" must necessarily value this study because membership has a direct bearing on the availability of these funds from these programs and their functional effectiveness. An interview process based on a random sample taken from the local telephone directory, is used in this study to detail the general status of church membership within the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC).

The problem of declining membership is often propagated by, lowered revenues in church treasuries, decreased charitable capabilities, and an observable decrease in the moral fiber of communities served by the church. Other negative consequences could reveal symptomatic shortcomings such as, teen pregnancy, substandard scholastic performance, and possibly increased gang activity, as well as higher divorce rates, drug activity, and increased instances of domestic violence and juvenile crime.

Statement of the Problem

This mixed meta-analysis and phenomenological study researches the problem of declining membership and participation among children and families in local churches. Despite efforts at progressiveness and recruiting, substantial losses in membership are continuing. This problem produces a negative effect on individual churches, startup congregations and local communities because reductions in membership produce reductions in revenues, which in turn create reductions in beneficial church activity within the community.

Disillusionment with church doctrine, insistence on ambitious fund raising, interfamilial strife and extracurricular political activity are solvable systemic problems of probative issues and causalities. This study investigates and analyzes church organization to describe and evaluate the
consequences of specific actions and altitudes, through a combination of specifically targeted interviews delving into historical conflicts between the church, state, individuals, and family.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed method meta-analysis and phenomenological study is to explore and identify the causes of declines in membership and participation within churches located within the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC). Additionally the study seeks to identify correlations between these causes in an effort to explore the possible existence of a multifactor paradigm governing these declines.

With qualitative interviews and a descriptive/correlational approach backed by a quantitative meta-analysis of previous studies, this mixed method study will explore circumstances, motivations, and environmental factors involving declines in membership. A representative sample taken randomly from the church listings contained in the local phone directory to obtain at least five subjects from each representative organization is used. The study seeks to enlist the aid of historical records, presiding Ministers, designated officers, and an inclusive sample of the respective congregations to describe the historical fluctuations of membership, the specific conditions within churches, and the opinions of church participants.

In terms of dependent and independent variables, levels of membership are dependent on several factors, including the physical size of the church, charisma of the Pastor, and the ability of the church to provide aid to members. Other dependent variables involve membership status, participation, and economic status, while independent variables include age, sex, race, position, and attitude. Additional independent variables seem to revolve around general church doctrine, specific church policy, position in regional or national associations, and location.

**Significance of the Problem**
Declining membership and participation in the church is a problem because current study suggests family problems, the lack of education, and doctrines have adverse effects on issues concerning economics and society. These issues are explored through qualitative analysis, while past, present, and projected membership can be measured statistically through church records. Despite the idea of business and church considering themselves genetically different, they are in fact generically the same. The question therefore, of why current attempts to increase church membership are failing suggests a distinct difference in the leadership methods needed for nonprofit and for profit organizations. In terms of the body of knowledge, the value of this distinction lies in its relationship to the need for membership support.

Business trends reflect changing buying habits, shrinking customer support and loyalty are tied to changes in cultural mores and other specific issues similar to those believed to be plaguing the church. Hundreds of religious organizations, journals, and periodicals have an interest in the revelations of the proposed study because few solutions have evolved over time. Failure to discover new methods of retention could represent the end for the organized church. The church, as it is understood to exist today, will either devolve into non-existence or evolve into something unrecognizable as Christian (or any other) religious faith. Failure to address the questions posed by this study will certainly result in a detriment to the organized church.

The business of operating a church, though lucrative, becomes less attractive with the inability of churches to increase and maintain church membership and revenues. This study explores workable solutions for addressing both "attitude" and "practicality" within troubled congregations and some of the conspiracies impeding membership and operations.

Significance of the Study
The significance of a study of this type lies in its potential to identify the symptomatic and systematic ills of the church and its operations. The study will illuminate church conduct and priorities providing a more focused approach to the issue of declining membership as it relates to varying issue groups. Additionally, the investigation focuses on both the cumulative and collaborative effects of interrelated factors in identifying declining membership and explores the possibility of these trends not being rooted in single causes, but rather the result of multiple factors working in varying combinations and degrees.

*Significance of the study to Leadership*

Many aspects of leadership and behavior can be explained through theory, in terms of their effect on declining membership. However, good leadership is an attractive commodity because of differing theoretical variances explored over time. Leaders require sound knowledge of leadership theory and good communications strategy to create a positive and continually evolving church environment (Mitroff, 2004). Church leaders choose from many varied definitions of ambiguous leadership with overlapping contributions to confusion (Bass, 1990) including:

- Ideas concerning group processes, personality, compliance, influence, behaviors, persuasion, power (Lundmark, 2008), reflect one direction of leadership beliefs.

- Relation, goal orientation, interaction, roles, structure, and even combinations of these definitions (Bass, 1990), suggest a second and even third direction for leadership attributes.
Additionally, Martin suggests leadership is designed to influence an individual or group toward the accomplishment of a goal (Martin, 2007).

Those leaders possessing varying degrees of transactional and transformational qualities (Bass, 1990), given a new paradigm of causality, have the opportunity of transforming moral leadership and raising the level of human conduct for both leaders and followers, thus affecting both” (p. 153). Kouzes and Posner (2002) also suggested leadership styles provide a better understanding of leader follower relationships as well as behavioral explanations of why decisions augment efforts to control the outcome. This study seeks to provide a new paradigm by exploring the relationship of causalities to one another and discovering the level of impact when multiple factors occur simultaneously.

The leadership styles reviewed in the literature display relation-orientation, describing the association between what a leader does, and how employees react, both emotionally and behaviorally (Bass, 1990, Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). They include Transformational leadership, Situational Leadership, Charismatic Leadership, Inspirational Leadership, and relate to satisfaction and effectiveness, which increases followers’ trust, satisfaction, and citizenship (Barbuto, 2005). Thus, an understanding of multiple factors involving the decision to leave or not participate in activities can be addressed more effectively.

Contrary to recent studies, local churches cognizant of transformational leadership may experience membership growth. Recognition of the transformational leader’s ability to inspire employees’ behavior (Barbuto, 2005) and his role as a motivator provides meaning and challenge for workers, resulting in high employee satisfaction, extra-effort behavior, commitment, and an effective working environment (Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005). Furthermore, transformational
leadership theory supports different follower behaviors leading to better follower performance, increased productivity and follower innovation (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007).

Situational leadership provides managers the use of different leadership styles, depending on the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Situational leadership theory allows the leader to analyze the situation and use the most appropriate leadership style based on the competence and commitment of workers. This suggests leaders may lead one way on one occasion and another way on a different occasion for better organizational results. Situational leadership styles are tailor made for understanding the benefit of a multifactor approach because weight can be given to combinations of factors to produce differing outcomes.

Charismatic leaders, being inner-directed and identifying with objects, symbols, and ideals, choose members on the basis of social privilege (Bass, 1990), and are connected with attitudes or ideas (Bass, 1990). With no system of formal rules and no legal principle, charismatics have three core components: envisioning, empathy, and empowerment. A charismatic leader promotes the followers’ needs to develop clearer perceptions of roles, improved performance, greater job satisfaction, more organizational citizenship behaviors, and stronger self-leadership (Choi, 2006). Ministers and church leaders, who are necessarily charismatic, will find value in paradigms addressing the multiple factors involved in a decision because perceived reasons are often not the most important reasons for decisions to leave the church.

Inspired leaders who create and sustain positive environments achieve excellent performance (Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005), in their pursuit of the inner greatness of individuals (Adair, 2003). These leaders will also benefit from paradigms displaying the observation of multiple reasons for conduct. In pointing out the possibilities of participative leadership, as cited
in Bass, 1990, "the possibilities of drawing others out, listening actively and carefully, and gaining acceptance through engaging colleagues in the planning or decision-making process," (Berlew and Heller, p. 436) can be observed.

Participative leaders foster open dialogue, which helps in the gaining of consensus within given boundaries. However, the weakness of participative leadership becomes apparent when the leader has the final say on the decision taken. The critical qualities of facilitation rather than authority exhibit an understanding of complex tasks requiring input from people with differing expertise. From the perspective of leadership, the leaders of nonprofit organizations such as the church face an ever more difficult problem in satisfying the needs of stakeholders and constituents, increasing exponentially the need for the identification of relationships between differing causalities.

Organizational leaders must gain input and buy-in from important stakeholders. Those who study these problems often overlook the interrelated nature of issues doing damage to stakeholder equity in favor of single causative events. As we have found, multiple leadership styles, traits, and characteristics must come into play in given situations. We also must consider the need for addressing multiple causative factors simultaneously, as single issues. This study will help begin the effort toward composite solutions to complex problems, and shortening the time necessary for addressing larger issues within minimal periods.

**Nature of the Study**

As noted by Cherry (2005), in reference to the Milgram experiments, Ordinary [people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part can become agents in a destructive process (Cherry, 2005). Even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they need to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of
morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority (Cherry, 2005, Milgram, 1974). The conflict with authority produces trends both positive and negative because it expresses itself in a confusion of causes for specific phenomena. This study investigates negative trends affecting organizational operations with qualitative interviews to gain insight into the personal and organizational causes of declining membership. This study will further attempt to categorize clusters of causative factors in terms of their integral relationship to one another with the use of a meta-analysis of the applicable study literature to solidify the individual identities of specific factors.

Overview of the study Method

This study proposes the use of a two-fold approach to consider qualitatively what factors are involved in the decisions reflecting declining membership in the church. The first approach involves a meta-analysis of the relevant literature for defining currently recognized causes of the phenomenon of declining membership. The second approach employed by this study involves a phenomenological approach to the lived experience of the phenomenon of declining membership as seen through the eyes of those who have experienced or witnessed it.

A Meta-Analysis of studies and writings involving attendance, membership, participation, and declining membership in the church will be conducted. Concurrent with this investigation, interviews will be arranged with local churches, in person and by telephone, within the GRMC based on a random sampling of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Telephone Directory church listings. Primary, and when necessary, secondary personal interviews will be conducted with members and leaders of the selected churches to gather qualitative data, which will be subsequently analyzed, coded, and recorded. After coding and statistical analysis, conclusions will be drawn and the dissertation report completed.
In terms of Analysis, data collected by personal interview, mail, and library study will be analyzed to discern patterns and trends. This data will be collected via organizational records as well as personal taped recollections from the officers and congregants involved. By comparing two or more situations, similarities and differences in membership will be monitored. This comparison will arise as data is collected from differing church organizations and analyzed.

Finally, qualitative data from personal interviews will be collected to interpret the behaviors, beliefs, and observations of specific groups and individuals to determine attitudes, trends, and perceptions.

**Overview of the Design Appropriateness**

*Study Questions*

This study will examine four questions concerning current the reasons for declining membership and participation in the church, in particular. The focus of membership trends will involve the question of increase or decline and the causative basis for each. The focus of questions concerning demographics will be sex, age, race, location, and denomination, in terms of dependent variables. The evidence of conspiratorial perceptions will be used to question the motives, whether personal or organizational, driving specific decisions for movement into or out of the church. This study will qualify these latter questions with implications from the fields of game theory and decision theory.

- The first question raised by the current study concerns the issue of whether or not there is, in fact, an ongoing decline in church membership, attendance, or participation and how extensive it might be.
• The second question raised by the study concerns the often subjective reasons for declines and increases in church membership and church activity and the efficacy of the decisions made. Additionally, the study is forced to address the phenomenon of membership multiplying by division within the extended church body.

• A third question involves the demographics of declining membership, associated with age, race, sex, economic condition, or political orientation.

• The movement of members over the broad base of religious organizations suggests the specter of declining membership may, in reality be an illusion produced by poor record keeping or internecine competition.

Theoretical Framework

Worker/Employee (Retention)

Worker or employee retention is becoming more of a problem as qualifications become broader and competition for jobs becomes more intense. The unmistakable relevance emerging from the observation of daily experiences (Foote, 2000) demonstrates the delicacy of balanced ecosystems, where there are no isolated incidents, but rather consequences resulting from other actions (Foote, 2000). The ecosystem metaphor (Foote, 2000) forms part of the basis for the contention of multiple factors governing declines in church membership. This paradigm may provide a method for successfully managing congregants in today's more competitive religious market. What Foote (2000) calls the "human infrastructure-ecosystem," may provide an
understanding of what separates mega churches and "store front" churches. This qualitative phenomenological study examines the identity of relational and intertwined dependencies within the church (Foote, 2000). Positive data will allow church leaders to address the issues of personal gain and performance--and the messages, members receive concerning how to become successful in the church (Foote, 2000).

Reflexively leadership will connect activities to the aspirations of members (Foote, 2000), enabling the church to develop and assist in member retention (Foote, 2000). A new and different approach to integrated selection can be formed with a nonintrusive assessment of skills (Foote, 2000). The retention of members is the frontline of defense against declining membership in the church.

Adam Smith (Smith, 1776) stated human capital is, "The acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society." Smith further notes, "The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expense, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person. Those talents, as they make a part of his fortune, also form part of the society to which he belongs" (Smith, 1776). The retention of members within the church serves this same function. The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade, which facilitates and abridges labor, and which, though it costs a certain expense and repays expense with a profit" (Smith, 1776). Therefore, human capital, when paraphrased to fit the needs of the church (as defined by Smith, 1776), functions as a representative of both a cost and a revenue.

In conjunction with a discussion noted by Malik (2011), Arthur Cecil Pigou (1928) suggests the distinction in economics between economy and consumption reveals consumption
as a function of personal productive capacity. The point being, we have descended a certain
distance along the scale of wealth to a point where a check to personal consumption is also a
check to investment" (Pigou, 1928, Malik, 2011). This suggests any check on the consumption of
religion becomes a check on the investment in religion, and vice versa (Pigou, 1928). This point
of view, as it relates to this study suggests a decline in attendance and participation represents a
decline in the church itself.

**Religious theory**

Stark (2007) notes Religious theory has evolved into a theoretical economy concerning
the economics of religion (Stark, 2007). This development applies rational choice to religion to
produce a supply and demand model for use in the development and success of organized
religions. A possible consequence of this view allows this study to examine the effect of a
competitive free market on religious consumers (Stark, 2007). This view of religious pluralism
provides a religious economy where the competition for followers is virtually commercial and
very similar to other business entities. This theory takes into account the disparity between small
religious markets and faith-based monopolies, which is significant to this study because of the
gravitational pull of mega-churches (Wortham, 2004). Stark (2007) also, notes several other
conditions in the discussion of religion including:

*Monopoly* – where state enforcement on a public scale creates monopolistic trends where
Andrew Chesnut points out "believers are culturally, but not necessarily spiritually connected, in
a situation in which the church does not have to rely on members for resources, they are not
forced to provide adequate or marketable religious products (Chesnut), due to lack of
competition."
Prohibition - where some states may categorically ban religious observances, and attempt to sanction those who persist in displaying religious conviction. 

Disestablishment - where disestablishmentarianism results from state withdrawal from an organization originally established under the state. 

Religious Pluralism - In a free market, or pluralistic religious market, many religious organizations exist and seek to appeal to certain segments of the market Stark (2007). Chesnut also suggests, a determined multifaceted religious society positively affects participation within churches while H. Richard Niebuhr, in his book The Social Sources of Denominationalism, discusses churches and sects in terms of the cycles they follow. Originating as sects, religions serve the poor.

As religions flourish, Stark (2007) suggests they increasingly serve the interests of the middle and upper classes through their transformation into churches (Stark, 2007). This ties into a concept already presented concerning the ability of the church to "grow by division" (Reverend Paul Mahue). Scholars of religion, like Steve Bruce (1999), suggest modern religion could erode the church entirely from Earth due to the decline in religious belief and observance. Bruce and others theorized restrictions of religion causes drops in religiosity (Bruce, 1999). "If nothing is shared, nothing is shunned, and there is thus a loss in the observance of modern liberal traditions" (Bruce, 1999). Other issues could conceivably be investigated including cults, revivals, strict or orthodox religions, different national or foreign religions. . 

Leadership theory

This study makes the philosophical distinction between management and leadership overridden by the value of results. Burns (1978) noted the distinction between transactional leadership, which emphasizes, procedures, contingent reward, and management by exception, and
Transformational leadership, which is associated with charisma, personal relationships, and creativity. Burns also discusses the understanding of academic attempts to pontificate about their differences are generally unnecessary (Burns, 1978).

Transactional leaders have the power to perform certain tasks and reward or punish performance (Burns, 1978). The leader evaluates, corrects, and trains subordinates when productivity is not the desired level and reward effectiveness when expected outcomes are reached (Burns, 1978). The transformational leader motivates efficiency and effectiveness (Burns, 1978).

**Neo-emergent theory**

The Neo-emergent leader (from the Oxford School of Leadership) espouses the creation of leadership through emerging information rather than through the true actions of the leader himself (Marle, 2010). The contention is leader perceptions do not reflect the qualities of leadership.

**Environmental Leadership theory**

Environmental Leadership derives from a group dynamics perspective, incorporating a group psychology, which nurtures the circumstance of self-sustaining group dynamics, and emotional satisfaction (Madhlangobe, 2009). Psychologically, a structure is created by the leader for the attainment of this gratification through work or activity (Madhlangobe, 2009).

**Kurt Lewin's Leadership styles**

Leadership style refers to a leader's behavior. The result of the philosophy, personality, and experience of the leader (Lewin, K., Lippitt, R., 2002, White, R.K., 1939, Bibliographie, 2004) distinguishes the leader. Lewin and others identified differing styles of leadership (Madhlangobe, 2009) such as:
• *Autocratic or authoritarian*, which provides decision-making powers, are in the hands of the leader, who does not entertain suggestions from subordinates (Maciariello, 2009).

• *Participative or Democratic*, which favors group decisions, winning cooperation, and positive motivation through member participation (Madhlangobe, 2009).

• *Laissez Faire or Free Reign*, which leaves the group entirely to itself, allowing maximum freedom to subordinates (Madhlangobe, 2009).

• *Leadership performance*, which Lewin, et al. (1939) have argued is overrated as a measure of leader influence and romanticized (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987, Lewin, et al.) but they recognize the importance of leadership and study supporting the notion (Day & Lord, 1988, Kaiser (1939, Hogan, & Craig, 2008).

No one has consistently defined leadership performance (Yukl, 2006), but many, like Lewin, et al. (1939) have lumped together a vision of leadership performance, which includes effectiveness, advancement, and emergence (Kaiser et al., 2008).

**Management theory**

Follett (1868–1933), said management is the art of doing through people (Barrett, 2003), while Frenchman Henri Fayol (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy, 2008) proclaimed management consists of seven functions including planning, organizing, leading, coordinating, controlling, staffing, and motivating (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy, 2008). These functions provide the
framework within which this study will discuss management. Additionally, this study will look at some of the theoretical underpinnings of modern management thought by reviewing some of the early writings, as they might apply to functions in the church.

Sun Tzu's The Art of War recommends awareness and action based on the strengths and weaknesses of both self and opponents (Kotter, John P. & Dan S. Cohen, 2002). Niccolò Machiavelli’s The Prince recommended fear but not hatred be used to maintain control, while Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations describes how changes in processes could boost productivity with the use of specialists (Gomez-Mejia, Luis R., David B. Balkin and Robert L. Cardy, 2008).

**Decision theory**

Issues in Decision theory involve the philosophy, mathematics, and statistics relevant to questions concerning whether to leave or stay with a particular church. The relation to game theory, as an adjunct to the question of which is the best decision, represents an opportunity to refine practices involving church members, in a more rational approach. Study has uncovered a related area of study, called Positive Discipline addressing the issue of people not behaving in ways consistent with axiomatic rules, *often their own*, leading to violations of optimality (Mathur, 1991). This study will attempt to develop a method, which will help describe what people will do as it relates to declining membership in the church.

**Intertemporal choice**

Another area of possible relevance concerns choices with differing actions producing outcomes at different points in time (Wortham, 2007, Young, 1997). Some answers depend partly on factors such as inflation, the person's life expectancy, and confidence (Wortham, 2007, Young, 1997).
Competing decision makers

Some decisions are difficult because of how other people in the situation will respond to the decision made (Mockaitis, 2005). This is perhaps where the analysis will fall under the label of game theory, rather than decision theory, though it involves the same mathematical methods (Mockaitis, 2005). In Game Theory, most problems treated in decision theory are one-player games (Dixit, Avinash, Nalebuff, 1991) against an impersonal background situation).

Complex decisions

Other areas of decision theory concerned with decisions presenting difficulty because of their complexity hold promise for the study of declining membership because the complexity of the church environment can irritate the decision made. In such cases, the issue is not the deviation between real and optimal behavior, but the difficulty of determining the optimal behavior in the first place (Mockaitis, 2005).

Paradox of choice

The paradox of more choices leading to a poorer decision or a failure to make a decision at all (Iyengar, Lepper, 2009) is significant to this study because of the availability of multiple choices when leaving or entering the church environment. Sometimes, choice causes analysis paralysis, real or perceived, or perhaps rational ignorance (Beck, 1975, Ward, Hudson, and Marshall, 1995, Golomb, 1992).

Statistical decision theory

Statistical tools and methods, though available, do not appear to be particularly appropriate for the types of decisions involved in membership movement within the church, beyond the need for trend analysis.

Game theory
Though mathematically intense, this study will apply game theory to the situations involved in declining church membership. Specifically, Von Neumann's book *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* by von Neumann and Morgenstern, suggests some solutions for two-person zero-sum games. Additionally, the focus of this study is on cooperative game theory, which analyzes optimal strategies for and between groups of individuals, presuming the internal enforcement of agreements between them. This might prove useful in explaining the relationship between the church and its congregants.

A discussion of the prisoner's dilemma and the Nash equilibrium may also be applicable to a wider variety of church related situations in terms of an analysis of non-cooperative games as well as cooperative ones. Reinhard Selten’s (1965) concept of subgame perfect equilibria and its refinement of the Nash equilibrium (including the latter trembling hand perfection), holds the potential to shed some light on the reasons for declines in membership in the church by identifying sub-routines within structure. Additionally, the concepts of correlated equilibrium, trembling hand perfection, and common knowledge present some challenges to this study.

**Self-organization**

Considering the issue of self-initiated organization, rather than the natural or social selection occurring in the dissolution or breakup of churches this study examines changes occurring because of other modifications promoting survivability. Shelton (2003) postulated self-organization, rather than decline may be the true consequence of adaptations resulting from a constant state of, perturbed equilibrium, (Shelton, 2003). The church may also be viewed as a learning organization, existing in a constant flux allowing self-organization, rather than bifurcation through planned change (Dooley, 1995).
Dooley also says being *off-balance* encourages regrouping and re-evaluation for control and equilibrium to facilitate networks for growth and allow the church to change *cruise* to *turbo* concerning membership needs. Dooley continues by noting the maintenance of an equilibria state seems to be an intuitively rational method for enabling an organization to gain a sense of consistency and solidarity, while existing on the edge of a chaotic state remains the most beneficial environment for systems to flourish, develop, and grow (Dooley, 1995).

Understanding when an organization is near chaos, makes it possible to achieve innovative competitiveness. The church needs re-invention not only to survive but also to prosper where other organizations compete for the life blood of its membership. The church appears to be in an under extended equilibrium struggling for survival. If the church does not essentially change its purpose, its membership will continue to feel secure with the system changing appearance but remaining familiar.

**Scope and Limitations.**

Demographically this study represents Midwestern, Baptist Churches, in West Michigan, confined to the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC). The study is confined to issues of Membership and the Reasons for decline or increase in attendance and participation in the church. Some limitations are externally imposed by super-organizational restrictions imposed by associations above the local church, whereas others are internally imposed by the willingness, or lack thereof, of organizations or congregants to participate and doctrinal restrictions, due to the nature of the study.

The *limitations on proprietary information* in terms of data and data collection represent areas where nonprofit organizations are vulnerable to governmental scrutiny. Many churches find it necessary to withhold proprietary information concerning their organizations, resulting in
the possibility of certain areas being impossible to study, particularly where finances are concerned.

Additional relevant issues include potential fears of misrepresentation and the possibility of interdenominational, racial, personal, and doctrinal bias. A vast number of Baptist Churches in the area are accessible through the phone directory but the more than 5000 churches in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex and surrounding counties represent a very diverse sample of church organizations. In addition, approximately 30% are "black" churches of the Baptist persuasion. The majority of churches in the area fall into larger branches of the Baptist tradition, such as Methodist, Protestant, and Prespetyrian and Pentecostal denominations with the Catholic Church providing a large portion of the remainder.

Another internal limitation involves the permissibility of interviews acceptable to Ministers where their officers are concerned. This limitation involves both the Ministers and the officers and members themselves because of personal preference. Church leaders also have a singular disadvantage in comparison to normal for-profit organizations, because they have little more than nominal authority over their congregations, based solely on the force of their charismatic will.

This phenomenological study and meta-analysis is limited in terms of demographic range and ethnicity due to the location and focus group. However, presumably "interdenominational" in scope, restrictions of time money and available personnel preclude a statewide or national approach to the subject.

Likewise, the Ministers and churches involved are largely relegated to "small city and town" settings, as opposed to larger metropolitan settings or much smaller rural and county
settings. However, for this reason the generalizability of this study has greater range and applicability.

A final limitation of the study will involve statistical data collected from organizations remote from the local area. Consequently, the generalizations from this data will be weighed against the qualitative data gained during the interview processes. In the final analysis, the generalizability of this study is both limited to local congregations, but viable over the whole of religious institutions only if the local demographic is similar or compatible with other demographics based on scale.

**Summary**

Chapter 1 outlines the issue of "Religion and religious institutions as having played a significant role in shaping American society" (Lindsay, 2006), following the events of 911, in 2001. Subsequent to this circumstance, progressive churches, in their efforts to keep up with changing societal expectations, have moved ever closer to a *progression into oblivion*.

Membership and participation in local churches, has been steadily declining in the last half of this century among children and families. This phenomenological study proposes to explore the nature of developmental approaches governing declines in membership and participation within the church in an effort to develop a collective causal approach to possible solutions.

In terms of doctoral study and the body of knowledge, the value of this study lies in its relationship to the need for membership support, within both for-profit and organizations. Churches have revealed ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part can become agents in the destructive process of declining membership and support for the church (Mechling (2010)).
In terms of analysis, this study will use qualitative, predictive, and forecasting tools to compare and correlate data to identify causative factors within this phenomenon. Further correlation techniques will subsequently be used to measure the strength of relationships between these causes and develop a prognosis of outcomes based on specific combinations of causal factors.

The questions of trend, demographics, and conspiracies offer an opportunity to identify declining membership in the church on a more basic and personal level. This study seeks to understand how varying combinations of causes produce greater or lesser urgency around decisions to attend, participate in, or leave the church.

The theoretical framework of this study covers management, leadership, conflict, power and influence theories with a correlational approach to the impact of game theory, religious doctrine, religious theory, and Baptist theology. The exploration of the complexity of these approaches suggested the value of a Five Paragraph format for categorizing reference information, which is used to place pertinent references in a manageable order for review.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Social science is associated with fields outside the natural sciences (Compte, 2005). Despite the detailed work of men like Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber (Kuper & Kuper, 1985, Verheggen et al. 1999) the social sciences do not particularly address themselves to leadership. The fields covered most predominantly include the social sciences (but are not limited to) business administration, economics, government, law, and psychology (Garai and Kocski, 1995). Consequently, using the military Five Paragraph Order format, this study is separated into the following five categories: Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Logistics, and Command and Communications, in an attempt to organize a direct train of thought from problem to conclusion.

EBSCOhost and ProQuest, two major databases of the online library of University of Phoenix provided access to book, journal, and peer-reviewed articles as well as dissertations, while the Stafford, Oxford, and Harvard online libraries provided verification of many more popular articles. Journals were also accessed by searching for specific titles prefixed or suffixed by theoretical headings such as church, religious, leadership, management, economics leadership, and business. A structural diagram of the Literature Review is presented as Appendix I.

The Phenomenon

The online dictionary defines phenomenon as a fact or occurrence observed as generally out of the ordinary, which excites the interest of people or provokes curiosity. Such a circumstance provides a sequential order connecting the phenomenon of declining membership with a number of causal factors linked to a multifactor paradigm to identify the phenomenon of declining membership.
Beginning in the 1960s, McLeod (2007/2009) discovered exploding religious changes resulted in a kind of *new theology* and *new morality*. This new moral theology emanated from such charismatic leaders as Pope John XXIII and Dr. Martin Luther King as well as radical changes from other quarters like Marxism, feminism, and the new *affluent lifestyle*. Other writers such as Pratt (n.d.) made note of alarming but regular declines of 14 – 24% in following decades, among main line religious adherents. In developing the situational aspects of this study, specific topics reflected their particular applicability to the issue of declining membership.

Organizational philosophy and design as well as complex systems and church autonomy provided theoretically abundant resources for review. A dissertation from the ProQuest Dissertation & Thesis Database, by Elton (n.d.) provided some fundamental information concerning church organizational structure, while Costa (n.d., ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis), added information on some of the paradigms of the church in terms of structure and activity. Additionally, Stewart (2008, ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis) provided a substantial outline for the approach taken by this research.

*The Situation* may be described as a theoretical representation of the problem to be investigated in this study. The effort to produce a foundation for the current state of affairs in church attendance and participation required a basic search of the literature encompassing organization, philosophy, leadership, theology, the church, and complex systems. The determination of the current state of affairs concerning numbers of participants, congregations, and denominations based on the most current studies revealed a specific list of categories. Using the categories below provided both statistics and numbers of congregants for the general population as well as evidence of trends in attendance both positive and negative.
Investigation into the issues of Attendance, Organizational Design, Paradigms, Complex Systems, and Autonomy provided a grounded focus into the situations surrounding the phenomenon of declining membership and activity in churches across the United States and within the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC).

**Phenomenology, the Church, and Attendance and Theory**

Phenomenology, as envisioned by Husserl, proposes rejection of Plato in favor of reflective attentiveness, which addresses *lived experience* expressed by comprehending and describing its genesis, or emergence from a specific event. This allusion to the possibility of structure, rather than experience, or perhaps both being the cause of declines in attendance within the church is unique. Derrida demonstrated an originary complexity, with multiple consequences by conducting thorough readings of philosophical and literary texts, to determine what aspects run counter to structural unity or intended sense (Cf., Gasché, Rodolphe, 1987).

By demonstrating the aporias (a rhetorical expression of doubt) and ellipses of thought, Derrida shows how originary complexity, which cannot ever be completely known, works its structuring and destructuring effects (Cf., Gasché, Rodolphe, 1987). It helps answer the question of “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” In other words, which is first, declining membership or the problems cause it? The answer to this question will allow this study to prioritize causative factors in a linear fashion and weigh the accumulation of factors precipitating declining membership and participation in the church.

**Feminist theory**

Feminist theory as an extension of feminism in the philosophical discourse, and as it pertains to declining membership in the church, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. Women's roles, lived experiences, and political aspirations, encompass the fields of
anthropology, sociology, communication, psychoanalysis, economics, education, and philosophy (Brabeck & Brown, 1986). One issue investigated by feminist economists concerns the inadequacy of unpaid labor predominantly performed by women, such as volunteer work (service to churches), housework, childcare, and eldercare (Waring, 1988).

There have also been challenges to the rhetorical approach of mainstream economics (Nelson, 1992, ‘993) criticizing the basic mainstream assumptions of economics, including the *Homo economicus* model (Ferber, 2003) suggesting we are rationally self-interested actors who make judgments toward subjective ends. This approach questions the level of *self-interest* involved in decisions to leave the church or not participate in its activities.

The opposing view, *Homo recipricans* suggests the motivation is not of selfish interests, but rather cooperative intention to improve our environment (Ferber, 2003). Ferber (2003) also notes Betsy Warrior’s cogent argument concerning the domestic and voluntary labor of women and the foundation of economic survival, which suggests a fundamental impact on the economics of church membership (Ferber, 2003). Such a view increases the importance of understanding the potentially detrimental impact of women leaving the church, as a greater threat than is ordinarily perceived.

One alternative model, the *Capability Approach* (Sen, 1985) incorporates an analysis of gender and economic data suggested by Marilyn Power (2006). Power argued for the importance of real freedoms in assessing a person’s advantage or disadvantage, by noting individual differences in the ability to transform resources into valuable activities (Sen, 1985). Sen also suggests a balance of materialistic and non-materialistic factors involving the multivariate nature of activities producing happiness over the distribution of happiness in society (Sen, 1985, Power, 2006).
The potential of a kind of Needs Paradigm surrounding the issue of declining membership would explain some of the reasoning behind the decisions involved. In the area of Psychoanalytic feminism, Freud maintained gender is most likely based on the psycho-sexual development of the individual (Chodorow, 1991 and Lerman, 1990). He believed gender inequality (producing discrimination against women in the church) comes from experiences which provoke men to think masculine, and women to think feminine. Consequently, a social system dominated by males influences individual psycho-sexual development, which in turn influences activities such as church participation, leading to potential dissatisfactions (Chodorow, 1991 and Lerman, 1990).

**Postmodernism**

Postmodern Christianity is closely associated with postmodern philosophy because some Christian postmodernists assert an affinity with foundational Christian thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas, Eckhart, and Silesius (Chisholm, 1911). Stuvland (2010) suggests postmodern Christianity and the emerging church movement create shared values brought about by globalization and could also have an effect on declining membership (Stuvland, 2010).

Common ethics and the question of whether people from a variety of cultures could share the same values, allows Stuvland to respond to the criticism of such ideas tend to further the hegemonic spread of Western values (Stuvland, 2010). In terms of its effect on the decision to leave or stay with a congregation, the theories of Watson (2010) concerning Christian rationality and Postmodern Relativism suggest a cultural context of Christian Rationality versus Stoic Rationality in the decision process, (Watson, 2010).

In terms of communicating the idea of Christianity in the postmodern era Patalon (2001) suggested everyone can communicate evangelical truths creatively in other ways, through
historical or cultural contexts, which explains how the church presents the importance of faith
(Patalon, 2010), in facing decisions to leave the church.

**Structuralism**

Structuralism argues for the idea of culture being understood by means of a structure
distinct from the organizations of reality and the individual. Similarly, deconstruction represents
its binary opposition (Smith, 1996, Baldick, 2004). The issue proposes certain theoretical and
conceptual opposites, arranged in a hierarchy, which include (but are not limited to) examples
such as Enlightenment/Romantic, male/female, speech/writing, rational/emotional,
signifier/signified, and symbolic/imaginary. These theories apply to declining membership in
terms of the diametric reasons for making the decision to leave or stay, despite the diametric and
hierarchal nature and dependencies of the relationship.

Post-structuralism rejects the dominant relation in the hierarchy by exposing the
dependency of the dominant term on its apparently subservient counterpart. These meanings
prevent the assumptions producing the illusion of singular meaning by illuminating how male
can become female, how speech can become writing and how rational can become emotional
(Deleuze, Gilles. 2002). Under this mode of thinking, the dominant causalities associated with
decaying membership may well be reversed. The Post-structuralist notion of "self" is separate,
singular, and coherent opposes the notion of the individual made up of tensions between
conflicting knowledge claims (e.g. gender, race, class, profession, etc.) as understood based on
how work relates to the personal concept of self. This is particularly true in the church where the
self, faith, religion, and responsibility bind tightly together. Opposition between Lacan's (1964-55)
views on the self (or the subject), including a psychoanalytic dimension and Derrida's
(2002) stress the effects of power on the self, which is thought to be a component of postmodernist theory (Lacan, 1991).

The self may also relate to declining membership through the issue of intended meaning, as secondary to perceived meaning. Post-structuralism rejects the idea of a literary text with a single purpose, a single meaning, or one singular existence. Instead, every individual creates a new and individual purpose, meaning, and existence for a given text. Outside literary theory, this position is generalizable to any situation in which the subject perceives a sign provoking decision. Saussure's scheme suggests meaning is in the eye of the beholder (Whitle, 2002, Lodge & Wood, 2008, Koster, 1996).

**Phronetic Social Science**

Phronetic social science as applied to political and economic phenomena is based on the Aristotelian concept phronesis meaning practical judgment, common sense, or prudence (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Schram, 2006, and Geertz, 2001). The term describes an intellectual virtue used to deliberate on social actions as good or bad for humans (Flyvbjerg et al.) The relationship between values and power is relevant to declining membership and participation in the church. This study asks four value-rational questions: Where are we going? Is this development desirable? Who gains or loses, and by which mechanisms of power? Finally what, if anything, should be done about this development (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Schram, 2006 and Geertz, 2001)? These questions are applicable in the discussion of declining membership and participation in the church involving choice and decision.

**Structural functionalism**

Herbert Spencer, believed selection pressures will not necessarily be felt in time to change them, nor will they be experienced and reacted to, in time to always work (Turner, 1985,
He, in fact, recognized centralized and consolidated authority in a given polity influences its ability to adapt. In other words, the centralization of power can and does often lead to stagnation, revealing tremendously significant issues in the Baptist church. Parsons, heavily influenced by Durkheim and Weber, synthesized their work into a system-theoretical concept and methodological principle of voluntary action (Craib, 1992).

Declining membership, when viewed under Spencer's social system theory, involves the actions of individuals (Parsons & Shills, 1976). His analysis of the interaction between two individuals faced with various actionable choices (Parsons, 1961:41) and influenced or constrained by physical and social factors (Craib, 1992:40), offers promise in analyzing behaviors repeated in more or future interactions. Additionally, more interactions and expectations reflect the concrete process of social interaction, with specific role-partners (Parsons, 1961:43-44). Furthermore, the recognition by Parsons of one person's ability to fulfill many roles is relevant to persons joining or being a member of more than one church simultaneously (Parsons & Shills, 1976:190).

Socialization is the means of social control for transferring the accepted norms and values to individuals within a society (Ritzer, 1983:196). The mechanism of socialization is therefore independent of autonomy, creativity, passiveness and conformity because the phenomenon of the institutionalization of expectations is culturally constructed (Parsons, 1961:38). Socialization also supports positive and negative sanctions based on the success or failure of meeting expectations where Parsons recognizes even socialization is problematic and subject to change, (Cuff & Payne, 1984:46). However, the concept of movement towards equilibrium ties in with the application of game theory. Thus, Individuals involved with changing situations such as
increasing or declining membership, adapt through a process of role bargaining, (Gingrich, 1991)

When the individual cannot adjust, due to sudden radical change, dissolution occurs and either new structures (or therefore a new system) are formed, or the church dies. This model of social change has been described as a moving equilibrium, (Gingrich, 199), suggesting a desire for social order based on the supposition of the church multiplies by dividing. Such a thesis suggests what is perceived as declining membership and activity, may actually be a lateral movement or unrecognized growth.

The Mission of this study can be understood as a representation of the purpose for the study. The mission or purpose involves the discovery of the underlying causes and motivations surrounding decreases in church attendance and participation with the intent of discovering remedial practices to overcome the situation. By focusing on the activities, intentions, motivations, innovative processes and recruiting practices of the church, this study seeks to interpret the phenomenon of declining membership in terms of interrelated collective issues, which may function as single causative factors of the phenomena.

The specific activities or motivations under discussion reveal a schematic displaying the direction or vision of church leaders and congregants, which may be correlated to the framework of game theory and decision theory. Merton uses a derivative of Durkheim's idea of anomie to describe the breakdown of social norms and values, giving a workable idea for systematic change where a discontinuity between cultural goals and the accepted methods available for reaching them may not exist (Roberts & Rokeach, 1956).

Roberts and Rokeach (1956) agreed with Merton who believes conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion are the five situations facing a person (Roberts & Rokeach,
A person making the decision to leave or remain with a church must either conform to socialized goals, innovate to achieve said goals, choose the prescribed method without ambition, or reject ambition, thereby settling himself or herself up for failure, or the person must rebel and change his or her goals and ambitions.

**Church Activities**

The design and plan of a life suggest by Collen (1998), revolves around each individual functioning as a point of reference for lifelong accomplishment through activity (Collen, 1998). An interesting phenomenon among Southern Baptist churches involves the quiet transformation from the sectarian traits of small fellowships and bivocational lay clergy in the SBC (Southern Baptist Conference) to congregations with the ambition to become Mega-churches (Finke, 1994). The activities supporting this effort represent the opposite sides of glass (you cannot see the difference, but they support the both the same and different efforts).

The movement toward a more philosophic approach (Bristor, 1185) analyzes consumerism concerning activities within the church, based on dimensions highlighting differences in approaches to study (Bristor, 1185). With reference to declining membership, some scholars suggest church strength inhibits liberation theology while church weakness facilitates its emergence (Mackin, 2007). Thus making efforts to stem declining membership present a dilemma among those who take the opposite view.

Some of the misconceptions surrounding the relationship between organizational theory and religion is due to writers such as Ammerman (2005), continually finding significance in the application of business, leadership and organizational principals to the functioning of the church (Ammerman, 2005). Community-based participatory activities and study (CBPR) approaches are a potentially effective strategy for exploring the development and evaluation of membership
concerns (Berkley-Patton et al, 2010). The availability of public funding for charitable church activity has progressed phenomenally sparking a notable dispute over whether the propensity of congregations to provide charity is becoming increasingly disputable (Hungerman, 2008). Consequently, religious commitment (church involvement, private devotionalism, and religious salience) among churches as a function of being served by a religious congregation, is declining in equal proportion to the ongoing declines in membership and activity in the church (Wielhouwer, 2004). The debate about the relationship between religion, economic activity (Mutch, 2009), and Faith-Based interventions using a Community-Based participatory approach holds promise despite the negative effects on volunteer-led activity can be devastating when membership is declining (Wilcox et al, 2006). Declining membership also has a detrimental effect on the process of revitalization when concentrating on the contributions or noncontributing actions of distinct urban actors such as banks, community development corporations (CDC), church organizations, and even individual congregants (Zielenbach, 2000).

The Execution stage is a representation of the methodology used in this study to understand the current practices of church organizations and competing organizations using a Meta-analysis of current methodologies. The study provides practical advice to church leaders on the rationale behind the phenomenon of declining membership, attendance, and participation. The Literature Review explores phenomenology, ritual, economics, demographics, and politics, along with doctrine, general society, and apocalyptic views. The three main areas of focus most important for this study are the interconnectivity, compatibility, and mutuality of purpose within the causative factors exposed through a search and interpretation of relevant topics, as they apply to declining membership in the church. These topics included (but were not limited to) religion, attendance, church, business, organizations, leadership, economics, and decision theory.
The next step is to interview religious leaders and lay persons from a variety of church and denominational backgrounds and environments to obtain a broad view of the phenomena associated with declining church membership. Specifically targeted questions and subjects will solicit qualitative responses, to be coded as part of the data collection and analysis process.

The final application of game theory and decision theory, in this three-stage process, is an analysis of the findings, to provide insight into the motivations governing the decision of whether to remain or depart from a given church organization. The conclusions from the third stage of this study statistically attempts the measurement of frequency of response and depth of conviction.

**Phenomenology**

This study takes an operational look through the eyes of Pastors, Congregants, and other leaders in the church to obtain observations gleaned from those in the best positions to witness the phenomenon of declining membership. By assessing the effect of religious affiliations on the phenomenology of transient membership this study proposes to analyze current and past work in phenomenology (Ghauri, 2010) through the use of a meta-analytic process.

Beginning with a topical search, this study develops a foundation for a meta-analysis of phenomenological methodology. The recent theological turn in phenomenology and the relationships among philosophy, religion, and democratic politics offer the potential for a deeper understanding of the connectivity between the causative factors of declining membership (Gangle & Smick, 2009). Phenomenological studies involving women may reveal something about the specific nature of women's participation within the quagmire of declining membership circumstances (Dietsch, McMurray & 2006).
Janicaud (Llewelyn, 2010) complains the rigorous science Husserl projected is not the forte of some French phenomenologist's, so the significance of Heidegger's phenomenology of religion is an important step stabilizing this study (Feher, 2008). Burch (2010) found Merold Westphal's claim of Jean-Luc Marion's hermeneutical phenomenology is especially useful. However Burch offers a cautionary theme in view of Heidegger’s recognition of the difficulties facing a phenomenology of religion, based on the exacerbating problems many of the so-called religions display (Bernasconi, 2009).

Marcelle (2010) observes Aron Gurwitsch's desire to introduce a theory of organization developed by Gestalt psychology into Husserlian phenomenology could possibly offer insight from a psychological point of view (Marcelle, 2010). As a means of determining intentionalism, the phenomenology of perceptual experiences within a given sense modality supervenes the contents of the modality. Consequently Speaks and others provide an appropriate philosophical foundation for Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, although studies in the social sciences to investigate the meaning of lived experience have not confirmed this (Speaks, 2010, and Roubach et al, 2010).

In agreement with Smith, Bekker, and Cheater (2011), a discussion of the relative merits of generic and theoretical approaches to qualitative study, represents a challenge to the current study (Smith, Bekker & Cheater, 2011). Through an analysis of various books related to phenomenology, and some study into authors such as Edmund Husserl, Herbert Spiegelberg, and others, this study will form a methodological approach suitable to the issue of declining membership (McBride, 1979, Smith, 2011, Lloyd, 2010).

**Economic Practices**
The issue of religious economics exercises a strong influence on both the church and the congregation. In an effort to develop a means to uncover the causal effect of trust on economic growth this study will focus on the inherited component of trust and its time variation (Algan & Cahuc, 2010). In terms of urban influence, some issues not controlled by a religious body (secular) do have some influence on the operation of declining membership and participation in religious activities (Elmore, 2008).

Religious affiliation and participation are associated with others regarding behavior in public goods and bi-lateral trust games there is value in the application of game theory to the decision-making process (Anderson et al, 2010).

Beed, 2006), recognized Welch and Mueller (WM) (2001) demonstrated a classificatory method for conceptualizing relationships between religion and economics (Beed, 2006). From 1870 to 2007 black ownership increased by 46 percentage points, as opposed to a white ownership increase of only 20 points (Collins & Margo, 2011), suggesting a potential correlation between prosperity (increased assets) and declining or increasing membership and participation in church.

Due to dramatic improvements in the legal rights of married women in recent decades, there have been significant changes in the economic status of women and families (Doepke & Matthias, 2009) which may be reflected in membership statistics for the church. However, a consequence of this is a greater focus on subjects like Marriage, Marital Dissolution, Family Structure, Domestic Abuse, Economics of Gender, Nonlabor Discrimination, Labor and Consumers, Demography, Technological Change, Choices and Consequences, and Diffusion Processes (Doepke & Matthias, 2009).
Despite interest in the influence of religion on economic activity by early economists like Adam Smith, there has been little modern study on the subject of rights (Lewer and Van den Berg, 2007), but religious toleration has characterized Western thought because of the writings of John Locke and Samuel von Pufendorf (Montanye, 2011). Though the recent literature offers intuitively appealing bases for and evidence of, a linkage among religious beliefs, religious participation and economic outcomes, there is a serious question of whether the outcomes are positive or negative (Daniels and von Ruhr, 2010).

We generally express the term globalization in global terms but there is such a thing as micro-globalization affecting declining membership in a less the positive manner (Juegensmeyer and An-Na'im, 2005). Witham (2011) follows the thinking of Max Weber who argued religion influences economic behavior (Witham, 2011), stating the economics of religion applies the insight of Adam Smith to religious activities (Witham, 2011). One of the mechanisms promoting wealth is the so-called Gospel of Prosperity preached through Christian revivalism or evangelism, and in one form or another in most churches whether charismatic, Pentecostal, evangelical, or any other of a number of denominations (Hackett, 1995).

With the business organizational models of the club and the firm in economic theory declining membership is explainable through the origins of religion (Hackett, 1995). The role of moral functioning on economic agents promoting stability and progress presumes to have a deleterious effect on declining membership in the church (Helburn, 2001).

Authors germane to the connection between economics and religion, and their relationship to declining membership in the church include Adam Smith, SMELSER, Neil J., SWEDBERG, Richard, MARSHALL, Alfred, 1842-1924, KEYNES, John Maynard, 1883-1946.

Doctrine
There are as many different doctrines as possible locations for churches proliferating the world. This disunity overshadows one of the suspected root causes of declining membership in the church because of the migratory nature of populations and individuals. Religious doctrine is both a nebulous and concrete premise on which to rely for understanding confuses personal preference with the will of God. Modern church doctrine covers a wide range of convictions from the libertarian convictions of John Clarke (Bozeman, 2006) to the Gender-defined roles in Floridian Afro-Baptist churches with the emphasis on matrifocal social organization, kinship ties, and valorization of motherhood, complemented by male corporate leadership or male dismissal (Brown, 1994).

Questions of whether religious persons should serve in high political offices, such as president and debates over the true meaning of religious freedom in the post-modern world (McConnell, 1993) frequently arise. McConnell also notes efforts to recognize the attitude toward religious faith and the impact of liberalism on freedom of religion while Snyder (2010) and others like him systematically address education in the Christian Church (Snyder, 2010) and the use of the doctrine on justification (Szirtes, 2002).

Lindman (2011), on the other hand, points out some of the religious disputations in the Church over the doctrine of Universalism, or universal salvation, while disputes between Southern Baptists and American evangelicals, the Jewish community, the Reformed Church, and the Catholic church rage on (Yarnell III, 2006). Competing organizations such as The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) (Cook, 2010), The American Baptist Association, The Roman Catholic Church (Peck, 2010), Protestant theology (Szirtes, 2002), the Reformed Church, the Lutheran World Federation, Southern Baptists, and American evangelicals (Yarnell III, 2006), also have
doctrinal issues only differing to varying degrees. Finally, doctrine is also disparate over time and among states, regions, and even nations.

The Administration and Logistics of this study reflect the methods that will be used to organize and report the categories and causes discovered in the study. In an attempt to discover the underlying mechanics of church organization and its influence on the members of the congregation, this study tries to understand the perceptions and perceptual responsibilities of the participants. Therefore, it became important to investigate the functional technologies, both human and mechanical, operating within the church. To this end, this study examines the topics of Organizational Effectiveness, Organizational Function, Religious Technology, and Resource Allocation.

Organizational effectiveness

The fact of logistical support pertaining to supplies is well documented. This study focuses on the investigation into the supply of members, where they come from, how they are encouraged or discouraged, and the question of what drives them away. One method of increasing the depth of effectiveness suggested [by Haas (2010) points out self-managing teams engaged in knowledge-intensive work can perform more effectively by combining diverse knowledge bases into specific goal related tasks (Hass, 2010). With respect to declining membership and participation the issue of self-management is critical to understanding the motivations and driving forces behind church activities whether personal, or organizational.

An empirical examination of the relationships among organizational entities and their learning capability, commitment, and effectiveness will shed light on the effect of internal and external training and the effect it has on declining membership (Ussahawanitchakit, 2008).
The Investigation of both Pastors and Congregants will provide crystallization of the characteristics of organizational climate their effects on variables while adding support to the meta-analysis (Jianwei Zhang and Yuxin Liu, 2010). Among other things, it is important to place the spotlight of analysis on the dynamic occurring between decoupling, legitimacy, and institutionalized misconduct involving declining membership in the church (Maclean & Behnam, 2010).

One of the consequences participating in the church is the widespread tendency toward deceptive actions and practices, which spill over into declining membership (Maclean & Behnam, 2010). When leaders and spend up to 60 - 80% of their time communicating, the significance to declining membership is enormous and ineffective or inefficient communications will be deleterious to membership, jeopardizing the interests of the church and threatening both internal external sustainability (Raina, 2010).

**Performance**

Perceptions of the facets of organizational culture related to leadership and personal effectiveness (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007) appear to be linked to the phenomenon of Decoupling--the creation of gaps between formal policies and actual practices as it unfolds over time (Tilcsik, 2010). This raises another issue concerning the effects producing declines in church membership. The complex subject of leadership raises the question of how to motivate employees to participate actively in activities which perpetuate the retention of church members (Savage-Austin and Honeycutt, 2011).

The building and use of an organizational memory system would go a long ways toward the ability to sustain motivation in a less than heavy handed manner (Jennes & Olfman, 2004). Such a system provides a more efficient sharing of knowledge and information, thereby
increasing the impact of learning capabilities for the benefit of congregant retention (Leslie, Dalton, Ernst & Deal, 2002). McAdam (2005) suggests the church should develop ways to determine, identify, and respond to the needs of its people (McAdam, 2005) through qualitative emergent and transformational means (Spitzer, 2007).

By extending the differentiation-integration view of organizational design to teams, as proposed by Hass (2020), self-managing teams can engage in knowledge-intensive work to perform more effectively. By empirically examining and investigating the relationships between learning capability, commitment, and organizational effectiveness, as recommended by Ussahawanitchakit (2008), the church might well achieve the isolation of causal factors affecting declining membership. Jianwei (2010) additionally recommends an evaluation of the characteristics of church climate and its effects on organizational variables. This study can aid in measuring the effects of coaching as a management style for developing church leaders as well as spotlighting the dynamic occurring between decoupling, legitimacy, and institutionalized misconduct (Maclean & Behnam, 2010).

Stifling the erosion of church membership also involves the role of management development (MD) through improvements in individual performance (Winterton, 1999). With appropriate considerations in selecting a management method, churches may well be able to engineer retentive mechanisms encourage, rather than discourage congregants (Gift & Kinney, 1996).

The Command & Communications section of the Five Paragraph Order details the chain of command and communications to ensure quality reporting, designated leadership and proper followership. Command is a product of the sum of communications, leadership, management, power and influence. This study consequently proposes an understanding of the operational
mechanisms of power and influence, as they relate to leadership and management in the church environment. Investigation into religious organizational methodologies sets the stage for intra-communication within the organization providing an understanding of how things get done (Follett, ). For this purpose, it is necessary to examine Power and Influence, Leadership Theology and Practices and the adherence to Transparency as they apply to causation and membership decline. This study emphasizes, understanding these things as both direct and indirect causative factors, influencing the decline of membership in the church.

**Power and influence**

Raven (1992) suggests power and influence, as it relates to declining membership in the church, relies on situational and personal variables based on the ability of the agent in power to bring about such change (Raven, 1992, Schwarzwald et al, 2006). Raven also provides the determinants of the potential power choice are dependent on one of six sources or bases, including informational, reward, coercion, legitimate, expert, or referent power (Raven, 1992, 2008).

The six bases of power are relevant to the exercise of any control over declining membership in the church, and each can have either positive or negative consequences. It is interesting and informative to recognize western democracies benefit from a conceptualization of the church as a *societal veto player* with the ability to govern moral and political choices (Fink, 2009).

The charisma and moral power in contemporary ministry is a reflection of the objective public reverence provided to men and women of the cloth, and it represents a worthy goal for the ambitions of certain people. One of the drawbacks of religious conflicts based on the elite centered theoretical model however, is the violent movements and activities plaguing them.
Violent or aggressive advocacy overshadows decreases in membership, whether the violence is verbal, emotional, or physical.

Christian and other nonprofits are providing a wide range of goods and services to individuals and congregations. Religious observance directly affects individuals through strict rules, and thus influences the retention or loss of members, though the direct causes of this influence are often ambiguous (Scheitle, 2007 and McNamara, 2009).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have altered the perceptions of religious change creating an extreme consequence for declining membership, as religious converts become more zealous and violent (Brown, 2007). As part of the organizational mechanism socializing members, the presence of power and its ability to influence congregants is an inevitable consequence of growth.

**Leadership practices**

Leadership practices in the church generally revolve around the particular denomination served, with differentiation usually being a consequence of doctrine. Though there are as many types and styles of leaders as there are individuals who choose to lead, the primary leadership style of the Church is charismatic, even in direct business applications, when leaders may be selected for other qualifications. Thoman (2011) believes leadership development remains a critical need for our churches when it concerns the processes of decision-making.

One problem for the ministry is the effort of some to give it back to the laity because the level of leadership development in many township and village communities is not adequate to the elevated needs of larger organizations (Manala, 2010). One possible approach for the biblical rationale for the mentoring of church planters provides instruction and experience for young and new leaders could nullify the adverse effects of inexperienced leaders on congregational
retention Davis, 2010). Consequently, American communities with significant needs are challenging the assumptions of policymakers who have acted as if the federal government was the prime mover in supporting the needs of the church (Shirley, 2010).

Additionally, Women in many Christian cultures are told men are strong and should lead the church. Consequently, some women rationalize they should not assume top leadership roles in the church (Lin, Li, & Irby, 2010). Obviously leadership behaviors among senior pastors in Churches concerning the effects of gender may be associated with declining membership in an adverse manner because of the majority of females filling the pews (Fogarty, 2009).

A 2003 report by the Episcopal Church Foundation (Strawbridge, 2009) reveals the conclusion of Leaders being responsible for leading strategic change in organizations, with the application of leadership rests on individuals who often lack knowledge of theology. Changes in the current teaching of churches, occasioned by internal political changes in doctrine like the Ad Gentes, the Decree on Missionary Activity within the Catholic Church, often have a deleterious effect on leadership, as it applies to membership retention (Frazier, 2010).

Despite the practicalities and worldly demands of both the lay and ordained ministry, Christian leadership is fundamentally theological in its source, substance, and ends Beely, 2009). However, Allen and Maureen, Davey (2010) ahow there is a significant role in the delivery of mental health care services for parishioners and their families (Allen and Maureen, Davey, 2010).

As complex systems, organizations exist far from equilibrium where the ongoing interaction of system components leads to emergent and self-organizing behavior. Leadership therefore, plays a more important role in the development of policies and practices might discourage declining membership (Plowman et al, 2007). An examination of how race matters
for the leadership structure of interracial churches and how the church responds to the loss of key church leaders may also shed light on how churches differ, in the congregational culture surrounding women's leadership (Echlund, 2006). It is more than obvious leadership behaviors among senior pastors in Churches concerning the effects of gender may be associated with declining membership in an adverse manner because of the majority of females filling the pews (Fogarty, 2009).

There is a need for Church leadership in the midst of world changes and the societal forces affecting the church (Frazier, 2010). The historic connections between religion and spirituality to women, education, advocacy, and leadership have made the role of the church more vital to the essence of leadership, and vice versa, as they apply to declining membership (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010, Beeley and Britton, 2009). "Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power," by Kenneth B. Clark and William Julius Wilson discusses the social sources of power in U.S. urban ghettos (Clark, 1989). Such an analysis sheds light on the importance of the inner-city storefront-sanctified church and its impact on the migrations causing declining membership in larger churches (Crombley, 2007).

The significance of the intersection of organizational theory and the study of religion includes the need to avoid certain misconceptions (Ammerman (2005) and Paul DiMaggio (1998) noted, "because much religious activity is institutionalized and carried out through formal organizations (Ammerman, 2005, DiMaggio, 1998). Ammerman further suggests religious organizations are both private and public at the same time because there are issues affecting leadership having both public aspirations and private consequences (Adams, 1986, Hall, 1998).

There is a second misconception concerning religious organizations, which suggests they have a unique institutional logic (Friedland & Alford, 1991) because of a moral and spiritual
dimension distinguishing them from other voluntary organizations. This does not make them reducible to the doctrinal rigidity and otherworldliness invariably dictating a uniquely religious institutional form (Ammerman, 2005). Many "storefront" churches, Ammerman (2005, p. 354) notes, in agreement with Omar McRoberts (1999, 2003) and Timothy Nelson (1997), exercise a variety of ways in which the organizational cultures of congregations take the social fact of the street into account in shaping members' relationships and organizational goals (Ammerman, 2005).

Ammerman finally notes, the stated goals between churches (and therefore, their leadership) and cultural patterns are not identical because religious organizations must be understood in their specific cultural and historical context (Ammerman, 2005). The factors and qualities building young people to become leaders are vital, and one of those sources is the church (Adair, 2002). The church is often portrayed as an institution working to achieve social, economic, and political equality (Johnson, 1975), particularly in the development of women in leadership (Adair, 2002).

The sociological concept of secularization involves two closely related ideas (Fulcher, 2003). First, it implies a disengagement of religion from public institutions. This means religious beliefs and practices are detached from major social institutions and purely private matters of individual belief and choice (Fulcher, 2003). Indeed, Fulcher shows the word secularization was originally used to denote the removal of territory from the legal control of a church. This was generalized to mean the declining public significance of religion (Fulcher, 2003). The idea of secularization, implies there has been a disenchantment of social life. It is often claimed belief in God is less common in Europe and the United States today than was the case in the past (Fulcher, 2003).
This loss of traditional religious belief displays modern societies as increasingly secular societies. In both Great Britain and the United States there has been a close association between religion and national identity (Fulcher, 2003). In Britain, this took the form of the nominal affiliation of a majority of the population to the Church of England. In the United States, this association took the form of high levels of church attendance. The identification of religion and national community has led many sociologists to suggest secular societies are organized around a pattern of civil religion (Fulcher, 2003).

The introduction of new techniques of mass communication undermined the prestige and influence of established groups threatening the authority of established individuals and agencies, subverting their control over knowledge. The press encouraged a positive worker mentality, based on the argument the wealth of society was created by the workers.

Ritual activity and organizational dynamics are habits of practice by which groups and individuals function, pray, organize, and interact. The effect on Christian feminism and the destabilization of gender in the United States has had a disadvantageous effect on declining membership in the church. Consequently, different understandings of political activism and resistance pervading women's scholarship concern the decision of whether to leave or remain with an organization. Thus Hutton Smith (1997) felt the challenges brought by changes in the management of human service institutions challenged to react quickly and efficiently to influences and demands force the need to explore the idea of groups being a threat (Weisbrod, 2002).

Linder (2004) suggested the religious thoughts of children in relation to their respective communities also has an effect on declining membership to the extent they do influence permissive parents.
Topics of Interests

The process of developing new theory involves the application of innovative and usually unexpected strategies to commonly held beliefs. This study attempts to fulfill this obligation by applying some of the basic concepts of game theory and decision theory to the phenomenon of declining membership in the church. By honing the focus of this study to the specific issue of declining membership and its causes, this study can identify the players, and their direct or indirect influence on the phenomenon.

Preliminary study has identified issues, circumstances and individuals not commonly associated with declines in membership, and this study attempts to reveal unexpected connections in terms of their relationship to one another in general, and their collective influence on declining memberships in particular.

Game Theory

Morey (2009) suggests, in the audio book The Evolution of God, by Robert Wright, a game theory approach to God and religious coexistence and harmony justifies the theory behind the current study effort (Morey, 2009). One of the issues coming to the surface in game theory is the suggests the nature of religious discourse is noncognitive and not verifiable or assessable for correction through the provision of evidence (Kimble, 2010). This phenomenon, which in political rhetoric is labeled as part of the The Pharisee Effect, describes situations in which religious appeals are used within the political context (Powell, 2006).

In this study, direct interview data are used to support the argument, consistent with Durkheim's theory of the modern Olympic Games, which sees secular religious festivals as secular games under game theory (Rothenbugler, 1989). As a matter of positive religious
tolerance, the Polarity of the concepts of tolerance and intolerance allows easy positioning in the theory of games as it applies to the reasons for declining membership in the church (Oke, 2002).

Establishing a relationship between game theory and the application of game theory to groups of actors in the church community offers the opportunity for greater theological understanding of the disparate issues involved in decisions concerning membership (Buss, 1978). Additionally, the philosophical hermeneutics of 20th-century German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer can be usefully applied (Matheson, 2009). Garwood (1977) suggests the book 'Religion, Truth and Language-Games,' by Patrick Sherry might also offer some much needed justification for the application of game theory to the issue of declining membership in terms of validating religious theory (Garwood, 1977).

Decision theory

Meacham (2010) notes in "Bayesianism, Infinite Decisions, and Binding" (Arntzenius et al. (Mind 113:251–283), the suggestion of cases in which unbindable agents are driven to choose actions with disastrous consequences (Meacham, 2010). This appears to be the case in declining membership scenarios. The defense against this theory the question of whether a decision rule leads to disaster only when people cannot bind themselves (agree), it should not count against the decision rule (Meacham, 2010). This argument has far-reaching consequences for decisions involving church membership.

Basili and Zappia (2009) offer the idea of an unconventional approach to individual decision making existing where membership decisions are made under Shackle's non-probabilistic conceptualization of individual decisions under uncertainty. This is a result of the so-called non-additive probability approach of Gilboa and Schmeidler (Basili & Zappia, 2009). The reliance of strict Bayesian theory on probabilistic judgments based on point-probability
estimates is thought to be untenable, whereas non-additive decision theory provides non-additive probability distributions in choice as an alternative to Shackle's approach of a qualitative notion of probability, such as potential surprise (Basili & Zappia, 2009).

Schrift, Netzer, Oded, and Kivetz (2011) discuss the condition of congregants making the decision to leave or stay with the church under reasonable conditions of social cognition often attempt to simplify choices by bolstering their tentative choice to stay or denigrating the alternative choice of leaving, or vice versa. Schrift et al. point to several methods of sabotaging choice including overweighting small disadvantages of superior alternatives, converging overall evaluations of alternatives, reversing preference ordering, and even choosing less preferred alternatives (Schrift et al, 2011).

Specifically, members strive for compatibility (equilibrium?) between anticipated and actual exertion (Schrift et al, 2011). If leaving is more difficult than initially expected, the decision is simplified by sabotaging the choice (Schrift et al, 2011). However, if the choice is easier to resolve than anticipated (e.g., an important yet easy choice), the member will artificially increase the benefits of the effort (Schrift et al, 2011).

The ontology of decision theory has been subject to considerable debate in past discussions of just how we ought to view decision problems and has revealed more than one interesting problem. Shaffer argues Bayesian or evidential characterizations of decision situations do not adequately account for knowledge of the causal connections between acts, states, and outcomes, and is therefore incomplete (Schaffer, 2009). When we attempt to incorporate knowledge of the causal connections, a technical problem arises questioning the use of decision theory as a model of human or machine planning concerning the phenomenon of declining membership (Schaffer, 2009).
In consideration of issues of urgency in decision making, this study finds merit in understanding the three most often-used performance measures in the cognitive and decision sciences, which are choice, response or decision time, and confidence (Pleskac & Busemeyer, 2010). Consequently, the use of a random walk/diffusion theory—2-stage dynamic signal detection (2DSD) theory—accounts for the three measures using a common underlying process, suggested by Pleskac. We believe assumed evidence accumulates after the choice and perceptual variables are affected by time pressure, which regulates the accuracy of choice and confidence allowing subjects to act in a manner consistent with the optimal solution when making decisions concerning membership (Pleskac & 2010).

Kameda, Tatsuya et al. (2011) suggest a game theory model would be useful in individual decisions involving membership where the subject contributes personal resources to the group (family or church) decision versus free riding on the contributions of other family or members' opinions (Kameda, Tatsuya et al, 2011). Most public games assume the family group accomplishments are linear in individual consequences, but Kameda's model assumes decreasing marginal family benefit as a function of aggregate individual participation (Kameda, Tatsuya et al, 2011). This diminishing marginal returns assumption is more realistic for the potential influence generated by family pressure (Kameda, Tatsuya et al, 2011).

Gubhaju and De Jong (2009) have suggested household economic assumptions on migration (from one church to another) decision-making rules are segmented by gender, marital status, and time frame of intention to migrate, as suspected by this study (Gubhaju and De Jong, 2009). Analysis of how individually held "own-future" versus alternative "well-being" decision rules effect the intentions to participate in church activities when male and female adults are concerned offers the opportunity to measure the strength of male and female opposition
(Gubhaju and De Jong, 2009). Results will provide new evidence on the way household strategies and individual goals jointly affect intentions to move or stay within the church environment (Gubhaju and De Jong, 2009).

Almeida, Leando et al. (2009), discusses the application of game theory and decision theory to different areas including Physics, Economics, Biology, etc (Almeida, Leando et al, 2009). This study proposes a similar game theoretical model of Planned Behavior or Reasoned Action will establish an analogy between the two specific theories of, individual decision-making and group decisions. This approach offers a more thorough examination of individual probabilistic behavior (Almeida, Leando et al, 2009). Almeida proposes the use of game theory concepts so transformed intentions can be described in behavior by the Nash Equilibrium, and the process will correspond to the best individual decision/response while taking into account the collective response (Almeida, Leando et al, 2009).

*The Changing Size of Congregations in America*

Religious institutions of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC) provide varied services on a weekly basis, including marriage counseling, Bible study, drug counseling, regular church services, funeral services spiritual counseling, and soup kitchens (Stewart, 2008). Local church leaders also volunteer their assets for community events, including political activities and weddings (Stewart, 2008). With the notable exception of leaders’ salaries, all services provided to the community are on a voluntary basis (Stewart, 2008).

Like for-profit organizations, religious organizations are confronted with the complexities of shrinking resources, budgetary constraints, and an environment that continues to evolve making change a constant (Chaves, 2006; Thumma, Travis, & Bird, 2006). Religious organizations also have plans, strategies, visions or goals, communication problems, and HR
problems (Chang, 2006b). Profit making organizations require the creation of profitability; while the church needs members to raise funds and provide voluntary services, while attempting to increase spiritual development (Stewart, 2008). The survival of either of the two differing types of organizations is dependent on their respective visions, goals, and strategies (Stewart, 2008).

*The Changing Size of Congregations in America*

The literature reveals decreasing membership and attendance in mainline churches in the United States is on the rise (Chang, 2006b). Virtually all of the mainline churches in the U.S. (Chang, 2006b; Chaves, 2004), have experienced decline in membership over a 10-year period dating 1994-2004 (Chang, 2006b). Marcum (2002) The mainline protestant churches are generally identified as The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, International Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and Reformed Church in America, United Church in Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The problem of declining membership produces varying degrees of critical problems for different denominations, some more than others (Stewart, 2008).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• While active membership in the Presbyterian Church declined by 12%, between 1994 and 2004, for that same period, membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) declined by only 4% (Chang, 2006b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) lost 43,175 members between 2003 and 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In New Jersey, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) lost 1,469 members (&quot;Who We Are”, 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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• With a drop of 21%, the decline in membership for the Disciples of Christ is greater than the decline experienced by both Presbyterian Church and ELCA (Chang, 2006b).

• The decline in membership is different across local churches and denominations.

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Available data from Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) revealed that as membership declined, contributions from congregants decreased, expenditures increased and total revenue decreased.

• Contributions from congregants of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2005 were $2,730,561,500 while in 2004 it was $2,848,821,400, a decline of $118,259,900 or a decline of 4%.

• Total revenues between 2007 and 2006 for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) declined by $669,587,000 or 20%.

• In 2006 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) had total revenues of $3,344,438,400 while in 2007 total revenues were $2,674,851,400 (“Who Are We”, 2007).
The major funding for religious institutions in the United States accrues, from free will offerings made by congregants and other voluntary supporters (Chaves, 2006; “Who Are We”, 2007). A decrease in membership and attendance can negatively influence the total revenues earned by religious institutions (Stewart, 2008). The decrease in membership and revenue collected does not necessarily create lesser spending, as data from Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) revealed (Stewart, 2008).

Data on budgeted and expenditure year ended 2004 for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) revealed that contributions from congregants were less by $7,852,756 when compared to 2003. Expenditures for the same period were up by $12,323,850. Chaves (2006) offered that the trend of decreasing membership and contributions, and increasing spending will not slow down any time soon and over time quality of programs and services in these congregations will decline, forcing members to seek larger congregations (Stewart, 2008).

Larger congregations or mega churches are not new to religious institutions as they predate the 1960s (Chaves, 2006; Loveland & Wheeler, 2003; Thumma et al., 2006). Mega churches are made up of both denominational and nondenominational members and 54% of all mega churches range in sizes of 2,000 to 3,000, and only 4% have more than 10,000 members (Thumma et al., 2006). Mega churches account for 0.5% of Protestant churches in the United States of which 34% is nondenominational, 16% listed as Southern Baptist, 32.8% accounted for by the eight mainline protestant churches, and the other 17.2% listed as other (Thumma et al., 2006).

Mega churches are getting bigger and the sizes of large churches have been increasing from the 1970s without any slowdown in this trend (Chaves, 2006). While the size of mega churches has been increasing, the total population of all churchgoers has not increased, and what
has happened is a change in distribution (Chaves, 2006; Thumma et al., 2006). A change in distribution can lead to small congregations getting smaller and church leaders confronting increased spending on programs to keep members and attract new ones (Stewart, 2008). Larger congregations can lead to greater financial contributions from members and an increase in annual revenues.

Increased revenues can enhance more programs, quality of worship, and greater community advocacy (Bruce, 2006).

**Reasons for Going to Church**

Understanding the construct of spirituality as a complex, multifaceted entity involving ultimate and personal truths and inviolable conditions (Howard, 2002), religious organizations have subsisted on voluntary membership for more than 2,000 years (McManners, 1990). Consequently members have come to expect a certain stability and permanence. There are many reasons expressed for going to church including the worship of God, social community connection, networking, the propagation of tradition, self-renewal, involvement in advocacy, and outreach (Bruce, 2006). However, the greatest reason for going to church seems to involve in community service and outreach programs (Bruce, 2006).

Bruce (2006) found 77% of the population to be involved in community service and outreach programs. The congregational shift from small denominations to larger ones limits the amount, type, and quality of services provided (Stewart, 2008). Decreased membership in local churches decreases the quality of services available for both congregants and congregations (Chaves, 2006). Cultural and technical innovations, a culture of bigness, and higher expectations are variables Americans have become accustomed to since the 1980s (Stewart, 2008).
Both for-profit and nonprofit organizations, which are unable to address these variables, will experience a shift in customer, client, supplier, and stakeholder bases (Stewart, 2008). Small congregations unable to provide appropriate services in the form of worship, music, community outreach, and local presence as expected will continue to lose members to larger congregations and mega churches (Chaves, 2006). Churches in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex are not exempt from the phenomenon of changing congregation concentration (Stewart, 2008).

**Practical application in Game theory.**

The Types of games considered for this study were chosen to represent the varieties of determinants involved in the issue of declining membership. NonCooperative games, where there is no binding commitment, but communication is allowed (Harsanyi, 1974) represent the condition that many congregants and potential participants in the church find themselves in when they first consider religious activities. This mentality leads to Systematic games where the benefits of any given strategy depend only on one person and the other strategies employed, not on who is playing them, which suggests the illusion of self-determination and a belief that others have no influence on us.

Asystemetric games where strategy sets are not identical for both players and Simultaneous games where both parties move and decide at the same time have the potential of defining the levels of influence associated with the disparate positions of congregants and church leaders in terms of the ability to coerce cooperation and loyalty. It is a natural progression of the effects of simultaneous games to Sequential games where subsequent players possess some knowledge about earlier actions but not necessarily perfect knowledge, which suggests the influence of reputation on the decision to participate in church activities.
Finally, Imperfect Information games where not every player knows the actions of the others seem to predicate the application of secrets, fraternities and cliques that may be involved in the decisions surrounding declining membership and participation because of the occasional need to be chosen rather than to choose participation. This raises the dichotomous condition of Stochastic Outcomes games, sometimes considered as one-player games, which might make it appropriate to add a random player making chance moves or moves by nature (Osborne & Rubinstein, 1994). This condition may well represent the influence of a stranger in the process of decision making when it comes to deciding whether to stay with or leave a congregation.

The object of these considerations, for the benefit of this study, involves an attempt to categorize the decisions made involving declining membership, in terms of some form of motivation based on goals or expected rewards.

Decision theory

This study suggests people do not generally behave in a manner consistent with axiomatic rules, even their own and optimality will always be in short supply. In an attempt to address the issue of what people actually do as opposed to what they should do; this study seeks to create hypotheses for testing against actual behavior. First the study will examine the conditions of perfect information, rationality and then by relaxing those assumptions, this study attempts to produce a series of different prescriptions or predictions about behaviors. To this end, this study proposes to apply each of the following 10 paradoxes to the issue of declining membership in the church to detect the behind this phenomenon.

The Abilene paradox involves situations in which the collective group decides on a plan, which does not reflect individual desires. Individuals generally make decisions based not on their
preferences but on what they think, others want. This usually results in the parties doing something no one really want to do because of what they thought everybody else wanted to do (McAvoy & Butler, 2007, 2006). This is representative of a common breakdown in unit, team or group communications, in which each member mistakenly believes his or wishes are opposed to the group's. In such a case, individuals do not want to separately raise objections because they want to get along. This condition is commonly expressed as a desire to not "rock the boat" (McAvoy & Butler, 2007, 2006).

In an application to declining membership and participation, the Abilene paradox raises the question of a church Pastor or member's belief the congregation (or a faction within it) might desire his disfellowship or removal from the church. In terms of participation and activity, a person might believe others think his or someone else's participation is not desired due to rumor or innuendo.

The Buridan's ass paradox addresses the issue of choosing between two outcomes of equal value. This philosophical paradox, under the aegis of free will, describes a situation in which the participant faces the choice of leaving or remaining with the church (a dichotomous condition) when the consequences of either choice are the same. In this instance, there is no rationale for making one choice over the other (Lamport, 1984). This paradox also satirizes the notion of determinism, which states there are conditions for everything, and there is nothing else happening (Earman, 2007).

In an effort to test determinism empirically, the philosophy of physics might be applicable to the idea of Causal determinism if understood as cause-and-effect. This study will examine the belief in the concept of events being bound by causality to produce declining membership and participation in the church being determined by prior states. This paradox in
philosophy, concerning the concept of free will suggests Incompatibilism is incorrect in its assumption of the truth of determinism ruling out the existence of free will. The compatibilist believes if determinism is true, it would negate what we call free will (Malpas, 2003).

When applied to declining membership in the church, such a notion suggests declining membership and participation is the result of prior states and the decision of the individual has nothing to do with it. This conclusion is much like the choice made between two equal consequences cannot be justified by rejection of the remaining choice. In the case of declining membership and participation a question arises concerning whether the phenomenon is offset by increases in membership and participation elsewhere.

The paradox of Morton's fork (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009) involves choosing between unpalatable alternatives. In the process of declining membership and participation in the church, it is possible the desire to leave is not rewarded by a better or even equal place to go, nor is the decision to stay rewarded by any benefit. If staying means disgrace and leaving means disgrace to the member or participant, what choice is to be made, and for what reason. The choice between two equally unpleasant alternatives is usually recognized as a dilemma, generally described as two paths to the same unpleasant conclusion using expressions such as, between a rock and a hard place.

The horns of a dilemma are similar to conclusions of the Appeals Court in the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in Burroughs v. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc., 683 F.2d. Judge Kearse essentially concluded the consequence Morton's fork is an indirect attack, in which all paths should lead to the same end. However, the major premises must be sound to force the participant into a dilemma. If the standard by which we judge similarity is not the same for both consequences, the Fork is flawed because its tines are not true opposites. Understanding
this, the conditions surrounding declining membership and participation in the church meet the
dichotomous requirements mentioned by Judge Kearse, making the application of Morton's fork
viable for this study. Participants may be confronted with limitations in places to worship,
economic restrictions, or limited doctrinal choices.

The Inventor's paradox revolves around the possibility of it being easier to solve a more
general problem when it covers the specifics of a particular solution. Within the context of
declining membership in the church a participant trying to participate or avoid participation in a
specific activity might be constrained by the need for transportation, which could be solved
through carpooling or bus transportation for the entire group.

The Paradox of tolerance will be particularly useful in addressing the question of whether
decreasing membership and participation is a function of tolerating the intolerant. This is
particularly germane in the church setting because religious intolerance is a major problem in the
world and in congregations. A person could easily be persuaded to leave a supposedly tolerant
congregation because of intolerance.

The Prevention paradox focuses on the issue of one person benefitting at the expense of
many people who have to change their behaviors — regardless of whether they receive any
benefit, or even suffer, from the change. In the context of declining membership and
participation in the church this would involve the decision to remain or leave based on some
issue unique to only one or a few people. The epidemiologist Geoffrey Rose (1981), describes a
contradictory condition in which the majority of incidents come from a group at low or moderate
risk, and only a minor amount of incidents come from a high risk population (Rose, 1981). For
example, the attendance of women in the church is declining at a disproportionate rate to men,
when there are more women joining the church than men. This situation is paradoxical because
it is common and logical to equate the high-risk population of men leaving the church with making up the majority of the burden of attendance.

The prevention paradox has been encountered when churches or organizations attempt to introduce large-scale intervention to improve male attendance at church. It has been found many interventions aimed at improving male attendance have relatively small influences or perceptible benefits on the size of most congregations.

In the Prisoner's dilemma, two people might not cooperate even if it is in either of their best interests to do so. In this fundamental game theory problem, we find the demonstration of why two people might not cooperate in maintaining participation or attendance, even if it is in both their best interests to do so. The game is with attendance and participation payoffs and penalties similar to those formed in the original dilemma (Poundstone, Boyd, 2007, et al.).

Following the classic example of the prisoner's dilemma (PD) might be presented as follows: Two persons are accosted by a Pastor. The Pastor has no knowledge of the capabilities of either person, and so meets with them separately to offer each the same proposition. If one agrees to recruit for the benefit of himself and the other (defects) just recruits for himself (cooperates), the defector receives an award and the silent accomplice receives a prestigious appointment. If both only recruit for themselves, neither gets the promotion. If each helps the other, the one with the most recruits wins. Each member must choose to help the other or not to do so. Each is assured the other will not know if he does not get the help of the other at the end of the competition. How should the members act?

The Relevance paradox represents the condition in which relevant information is not sought out because its relevance only becomes clear after the information is available. This condition occurs when individuals or groups only look for information relevant to themselves.
Despite the presence of information (data, perspectives, general truths, etc.) not being known for whatever reason its relevance is revealed only after it is acquired. Thus the information seeker is trapped in a paradox (http://claverton-energy). In terms of this study, members often decide to leave or join a congregation based on information changing their minds had they known it beforehand.

An ultimatum game is a form of Hobson’s choice, which is different from a choice between two or more options, none of which is attractive. Only two choices are considered, when in fact there are other choices to be made in this condition. This is also a logical paradox in which something needed can only be acquired by not being in the situation, choices yield equivalent, results, and the choice between paying and suffering an unpleasant action.

A Hobson’s choice is a free choice involving only one option in a take it, or leave it situation. Individuals who leave or join a congregation encounter this choice most often.

The St. Petersburg paradox relates to probability theory and decision theory based on a particular game called the St. Petersburg Lottery, which leads to a random variable with infinite expected value. It is a situation in which a naïve decision recommends an action no rational (reasonable) person would take.

In terms of the cost of attending or participating in church versus what one gets out of church, it is possible the St. Petersburg paradox can be displayed as a game. The game leads to a random variable of X (the individual cost or contribution) with an expected value to the member. Prosperous salvation (an infinite expected payoff), would be considered worth only a very small amount of contribution. By transposing a numerical value (any value) into the terms of the paradox, a naïve decision only takes the expected value into account and recommends an
action no rational person would take. It becomes a question of how much would a person contribute if the reward were an infinite level of salvation.

The expected value is an infinite sum expected by the church member, where the church has infinite resources. This means the member should definitely come out ahead, regardless of his or her contribution for entrance. While a large chunk of prosperity and salvation is rare, when it eventually does come it will most often be way more than the member has already paid to take part. In the general treatment of deciding when it is best to play, a member would therefore participate in the game for any price if given the opportunity. However, some people (Martin, 2004), have expressed disbelief in the result. Martin quotes Ian Hacking as saying, "Few of us would pay even a small amount to enter such a game." and he says most commentators would agree (Martin 2004),

Even though this is potentially a very complicated rationale for making the decision not to attend or participate in church, it is indicative of the very real decisions made by worshipers of all faiths. Because the collection and accumulation of monies is representative of a business activity, the question of economics will always come into play when church leaders and church members make decisions about attendance and participation based on money. Thus, the St. Petersburg paradox is indicative of an actual economic function involved in the decision process surrounding declining membership in the church. Furthermore, for church members, the notion God's Salvation is unlimited and free raises the question of how much time, money, and attitudinal spirit is required for salvation. Thus, the demands of membership and participation, no matter what creed or denomination, become a factor in the decision to leave or stay with any given church.
By applying the paradoxes mentioned above, to the actual decisions made, this study hopes to discover some of the motivations behind these decisions, which are unapparent to the decision maker at the point of decision. These are the "suspected" motivations are generally not spoken during the actual decision making activity.

**Conclusion**

After arranging the prescribed ideas behind this phenomenological study and meta-analysis, using the prescription of the military Five Paragraph Order, this study found the approach of the chapter on methodology more intriguing. Honing the problem of declining membership and participation in the church into a concise statement of categories including the essential theoretical underpinnings of leadership, management, decision theory and game theory clarified the essence of the problem. The discussion of situation and mission covers problem and purpose regarding more plausible steps available through theoretical investigation leading to the proposal of a different paradigm. The analysis of execution provides a means of deriving unconventional data in conventional ways, which sheds light on hidden motivations surrounding the phenomenon of declining membership in the church. This led to the most plausible outline for the completion of the methodology chapter, which discusses meta-analysis, phenomenological study, qualitative analysis and how they can be related in a cohesive fashion to tell the story of multifactor causal effect.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The selection of phenomenology as the methodology for the current study involves the belief that phenomenology represents an appropriately useful examination of the causes and processes expressed in continuing declines in membership and participation associated with virtually every religious organization in the country. A qualitative approach backed by a meta-analysis of previous theory will discover how information, attitude, economics, doctrine, values, and experience effect the decision to remain with or leave a particular congregation or religious organization.

McMillan (2004, p. 273) suggests the ability of phenomenological study to describe the experiential realities happening daily helps interpret the essence of those experiences, as perceived by the participants. This is fundamentally necessary in formulating a multivariate paradigm to explain declining membership and formulating an approach to correcting this problem. Phenomenological study is used for this study in order to identify the causes and meaning of experiences and perceptions, which change the attitudes of individuals making the decision to leave the church.

In agreement with Marton's (1988, p. 147) opinion, this phenomenological study aims to uncover the structured environment in which categories of understanding exist. This complex of motivations describing the phenomenon will provide an understanding of other people by creating a multifactor paradigm more clearly representing the true cause of declining membership.

Objective of the study

The specific hypothesis of this study concerns the fact that there is no single cause for declining membership in the church, but rather there are combinations of factors dependent on
the individual, the family, the community and the church itself. This study will discover the multifactor causal conditions provoking declining membership in the church by addressing the following questions:

- Does declining membership and participation in the church continue to exist and if so to what extent?
- Does the phenomenon of declining membership cross gender, generational, doctrinal, economic or attitudinal lines?
- Is there any correlation between the specific reasons given for leaving the church or failing to participate? And do these reasons occur in recognizable groups or clusters?
- Are there correlations across doctrines, denominations, gender, status, economic background, age or attitude?
- What are the mechanics of the decision making process leads to declining membership, in terms of game theory and decision theory?
- How do the revelations of the current study compare to the discoveries of previous studies and would a multifactor paradigm alter previous conclusions?

A second reason for selecting a phenomenological approach to this study involves a preference for face-to-face interviews and the direct application of specific questions to specific topics. The major interests of this study lies in the responses of participants, the method of sampling, the procedures involved with informed consent, the of rights of participants, the researcher's function and data collection and analysis descriptive in nature.
Study Design

The Phenomenological study.

Phenomenology is a qualitative study method rooted in social philosophy and psychology, which is a response to 19th century scientific positivism. Scientific positivism could not adequately address some problems in the humanities, suggests Sadala and Adorno (2002). Initially proposed by, and associated with, Husserl (1962), Bernstein (1983) supports an understanding of the life-world experience, through the visualization of a phenomenon and the individual experiences to which the phenomenon is inextricably linked. Husserl (2000), further proposed, phenomenology provides an ability to investigate a subject in real time, reporting phenomena as they occur rather than explaining cause after the fact.

Martins and Bicudo (1989) describe phenomenology as a specific method for interpreting live experience, rather than relying on statistics. Thus a phenomenon describes a situation or condition which is experienced (Giorgi, 1985), even though the experience may be periodic or occasional. Therefore, this study aspires to start the methodology by observing real experiences and recording the direct understanding of those experiences by the participants involved. Thus phenomenological study provides the analyst with the individual meanings participants experience and their personal perception of reality (Lawler, 1998).

Martins (1992) says phenomenology concerns understanding phenomena, as opposed to explaining it. The main function of this observation of phenomena is to fathom how phenomena is experienced and perceived (Marton, 1994). Phenomenological study has produced two indigent forms of inquiry – descriptive and interpretive.

Husserlian phenomenological philosophy, describes experience as reality, rather than using predetermination as the basis of description (Martins & Bicudo, 1989). When using the
methodology of description, the study removes preconceived notions in such a way in such a way the interpretation given by participants represents the true reality of the subjects intention (Paley, 1997, Porter, 1998). Underpinning this method is the belief in the basic idea a phenomenon is intentional, meaning consciousness is understood to be the consciousness of something (Sadala & Adorno, 2002).

Heidegger's (1962) interpretive phenomenology, contends, experience is not and should not be separated from observation and interpretation. Therefore, interpretive study creates cohesive meaningful accounts from both the analyst and participant (Price, 2003). Kleiman (1995) offers the idea of description creating structure, while interpretation seeks to tell a story about what is observed. Husserl, suggests, the heart of this phenomenon is in the awareness of and intention toward it (Sadala & Adorno, 2002), causing this study to use a descriptive approach to structure an understanding of the phenomenon of declining membership in the church.

The intent of this study is to recognize the perspective of church members and religious individuals in terms of their decisive reasoning about maintaining or discontinuing membership and participation in the church. Phenomenology was also selected to evaluate how two or more disparate reasons for leaving the church might interrelate. Although individuals are unique, holistic beings of specific sociocultural backgrounds, they interpret and understand the world individually. This study investigates the experience surrounding the process of discontinuing church participation or affiliation in ongoing situations, which have to be faced.

The central aim of understanding the phenomenon of self-directed learning, is by definition concerned with "self" and the experiences of, "self". The experience and possession of attitude falls into the category of self-learning. Phenomenology is particularly suitable for
revealing how, church members and church leaders perceive and understand their learning process, and how the process applies to the decision to leave or remain with the church.

Phenomenological study is an important method of study for those interested in church activities, doctrine, and general practices. Specifically, researchers have previously studied denominational participation, membership statistics, migrations, and some instances of doctrinal change (Lee & French, 1997). Sjostrom and Dahlgren (2002) propose phenomenological study describing both the structure and substance of phenomena, as providing religious study with an awareness concerning the implications of certain signs and activities.

Phenomenology is also useful with respect to developing an understanding of the motivations behind, barriers to, and support for membership and participation in the church. Additionally church leaders may discover how to encourage and facilitate the reversal of negative trends from the perspectives of both church leaders and congregants. From the consequent discovery of new categories and inductive analysis can be developed to better describe the essence of phenomena (Sjostrom & Dahlgren, 2002).

Uljens (1988, p. 134) showed phenomenological study involves the selecting phenomena, the selection of an approach, and a revelation (through taped interviews) of ideas, transcription of recorded data, and analysis of the written statements using description of the constructed categories. This study chose to use two methods for the investigation into the phenomenon of declining membership in the church.

First, informal interviews designed to explore and discuss the experiences of those who have observed or experienced the manifestation of declining membership and participation or the effects of situations, which have motivated declines. Second, the study anticipates an opportunity
to observe the phenomenon of declining membership due to the impending retirement of a very charismatic and influential church leader.

**The Meta-Analysis**

This is a systematic method for synthesizing the categories to be used in understanding declining membership and participation in the church. Whiston & Peiwei (2011) believe "Meta-analytic studies can provide relevant information" to both religion and leadership by systematically synthesizing the studies performed by researchers, concerning the issue of declining membership and participation in the church. Understanding methodologically sound meta-analysis require careful planning, diligent literature searches, detailed coding of study information, and knowledge of meta-analytic approaches to statistical analysis (Whiston & Peiwi, 2011), this study chooses to conduct this project using the following seven-step process:

- Formulate Study Question(s)
- Determine Meta-Analytic Approach Best Fits
- Search the Literature and Identify Possible Studies
- Determine Inclusion Criteria and Develop the Coding Manual
- Extract and Code Study Information
- Perform Data Analysis
- Write Meta-Analytic Manuscripts

The purpose of this meta-analysis is to aggregate studies in a defined area to make conclusions based on the compendium. These conclusions will form the grounded basis for the development of additional study questions to be used during the interview process of this study.
Additionally the meta-analysis will provide a grounded approach to the categories considered for coding in terms of specific subjects analyzed.

Whiston & Peiwei (2011) in agreement with Cooper (2010), Cooper, and Robinson, & Dorr, 2006, suggest Meta-analysis has been increasingly recognized as a methodologically sound approach to synthesizing study (Whiston & Peiwei, 2011). Also the reason for using a meta-analysis is the opportunity noted by Whiston and Peiwei (2011), for showing the quantitatively aggregate results of numerous empirical studies (Erford, Savin-Murphy, & Butler, 2010).

As noted by Glass (2000), this meta-analysis will provide a means for speaking of the statistical analysis. Glass defined meta-analysis as the statistical analysis of a large collection of analysis results from individual studies for the purpose of integrating the findings (Glass, 1976, p. 3). Whiston and Peiwei (2011) note meta-analytic studies systematically analyze studies from diverse journals including unpublished studies, dissertations, and theses providing quantitative reviews, which expand the comprehensive nature of this study and increases the degree to which the results are useful. By producing viable effect sizes, which are quantitative indices of the practical significance of the effect declining membership and participation this study (Whiston & Peiwi, 2011).

As Cooper (2009) made clear the main effect question raising the issue of membership and participation are declining in the church, augments other effect questions addressing the individual, the group, the environment, status, culture, and attitude. The initial formulation of study question(s) is based on conversations between this researcher and various members of his own congregation, discussing what is commonly thought of as declining membership.

Issues arose involving the following questions:
When friends and associates were asked whether there is in fact an ongoing decline in church membership, several variances or levels of decline were mentioned. These variances suggested a transitory feature in membership declines based on exploration as well as discontent, which provoked a sense of subjectiveness about the reasons for declines and increases in church membership and activity and the efficacy of such claims.

Another issue the study is forced to address involves the phenomenological question of membership multiplying by division within the church. Some individuals discussed the conditions surrounding the phenomenon of clannishness and the desire to follow the will of certain groups or individuals when it comes separating or participating within a larger group. To some extent, the question may involve the demographics of declines in membership based on age, race, sex, economic condition, doctrine, political status, and attitude. However, when individuals split off from parent groups, particularly without any form of formality, it gives the appearance of decline when in fact the separated group may grow with only a slight deviation from the doctrine of its parent group.

Further considerations concerning the question the movement of members over the broad base of religious organizations suggesting the specter of declining membership may really be an illusion produced by poor record keeping or internecine competition. This opinion seems to be based on the issue of whether there is any correlation between the specific reasons given for leaving the church or failing to participate and the mechanics of the decision making process, in terms of game theory and decision theory. The most intriguing question investigates the reality of how the conclusions of this study compare to previous studies, and whether a multifactor paradigm alters previous conclusions.
The Meta-Analytic Approach best fitting the aims of this study is an aggregated data (AD) meta-analysis. The statistical synthesis of the data provided by an aggregated data (AD) meta-analysis, from studies of a similar nature, along with the summary statistics presented in reports (Cooper, 2009) will solidify the results of the current study. This synthesist will first systematically attempt to published and unpublished reports addressing the topic of declining membership and participation in the church. Then the extraction of effect sizes based on the summary statistics presented in reports, will be developed. Finally, this study will develop a statistical combination of effects, with which to estimate the average effect size and the associated confidence interval (Cooper, 2009). Additionally, this synthesist will examine sample and study other features influencing current study outcomes.

This premise involves the analysis of a series of studies addressing the identical conceptual hypothesis of declining membership in the church (Cooper, 2010). Identical conceptual hypothesis, for the purposes of this study means the studies are not measures of similar concepts (e.g., self-esteem and self-efficacy) but rather measures of conceptually identical topics of interest or an identical conceptual hypothesis (Cooper, 2010).

An alternative to this approach, which is more comprehensive (but also more time consuming) is the meta-analysis using and accumulating individual participant-level data (IPD) (Cooper, 2009). Distinctly different from the AD meta-analysis an aggregated (collectively similar) data, the IPD (individual personal data) meta-analysis requires collection, checking, and re-analysis of data from each study to combine results. However, the time consuming and tedious nature of an IPD meta-analysis places it beyond the time frame and scope of this study, though this method would be preferable, given more time and resources. Despite Glass's (2000)
suggestion for replacing AD meta-analysis with IPD, this study exercises an avoidance of the IPD form of meta-analysis.

This study searches the literature to identify possible studies, by using the University of Phoenix Library, The Stafford Library, The Harvard Online Library, The Oxford Online Library, The Grand Valley University Library, and the Library of Congress. The initial search terms will include (but are not limited to) Religion, Church, Church Attendance, Church Participation, Economics, Church Culture, Church Organization, Church Leadership, Leadership, game theory, and decision theory. Additionally this study will contain as much Book, journal and published, and unpublished dissertation work as can be found in the anticipated six months of the study period.

Using the d index (also referred to as g or ES) or standardized mean difference this study will attempt to associate the mean differences to group differences as they relate to the main study question of declining membership and participation in the church (Cooper et al., 2006). In this regard, the issue becomes a question of which causal factors have a greater effect comparatively on the effect size. Additionally, it appears an Odds ratio can be used as a measure of effect because the issue of declining membership and participation is a dichotomous (or binaurally categorical) outcome measurement (Cooper et al., 2006).

Basically, odds ratio will describe the strength of association between these two dichotomous variables and used to analyze other dichotomous variables within the study. In this way, an odds ratio characterizes the change in the odds on the dichotomous dependent variable for a unit of change in the independent variable (Trusty et al., 2004).

The Determination of Inclusionary Criteria and the Development of the Coding Manual, is governed by the specific goals of the study, which particularly involve the collection of data
regarding absenteeism, participation, attitude, and the mechanisms of the decision making process. Therefore, the main inclusionary criterion is declining membership and participation in the church. Those variables identified in other studies will become the inclusive independent variables associated with declining membership and participation in addition to those variables initially identified by this researcher.

A coding manual ensures systematic coding to increase the reliability of this study to provide precise, detailed, and comprehensive results. Cooper (2009) says a meticulous coding manual reduces the chances of miscoding variables and therefore, improves the legitimacy of results.

Data collected and extracted from participants will then be Coded as Study Information, until a representative sample is accumulated. The extraction of the necessary information from each study will be correlated with information from the current study (Cooper, 2009). Additionally, a portion of the studies will be double-coded, with the additional precaution of indicators of reliability to give evidence of whether drift occurred. This study will select procedures such as kappa or infraclass correlations to calculate interrater reliability in the meta-analysis (Wilson, 2009, Cooper, 2009).

The Data Analysis involves the comparison of collected data to the initial AD meta-analysis. At this point, a further regression analysis will be performed to reveal both the level of causalities and the association between them. This data analysis will provide information from individual studies to synthesize for statistical results, from which this study can make inferences about the populations from which the study samples are drawn (Cooper, 2010). This analysis will focus on the variation and distribution of effect sizes and the relationships between effect sizes and moderators of interest, As Cooper (2009) made clear. The main effect question of this meta-
analysis asks is membership and participation declining in the church and is augmented by other effect questions addressing the individual, the group, the environment, status, culture and, attitude of the participants.

As recommended by Cooper (2009), this meta-analysis contains, effect size estimates which are often treated as the dependent variables, whereas the moderator variables are typically considered independent variables (Durlak & Lipsey, 1991). In meta-analytic data analysis, this researcher at a minimum produces results concerning (a) average effect size, (b) confidence intervals for the effect size, (c) tests of significance, and (d) homogeneity analysis.

Concerning the question of Underlying assumptions, this study will (a) ensure individual results are related to the same group differences and correlations examine the same constructs, (b) comparisons, or tests performed in the meta-analysis are independent of each other, and (c) the results from the primary studies are accurate and valid (Cooper, 2009).

The Unit of analysis used for calculating d index or standardized mean differences, their index or correlation coefficients, and the odds-ratio effect sizes when multiple dependent or outcome measures are used (Durlak & Lipsey, 1991), will be dichotomous in accordance with the dependent variable of declining membership.

Another issue to be addressed by this researcher is the decision to make inferences and generalizations beyond the observed studies and about the hypothetic by adding a population beyond from which the studies are drawn, thus suggesting the value of the RE (random-effect) model is more appropriate, as recommended by Hunter and Schmidt (2000).

With respect to the Calculation of effect size, this study will estimate potential biases and apply weights to adjust for them (Cooper, 2009). In terms of the Confidence intervals, this meta-
analytic situation will not include zero (e.g., -.50 to -.25 or .33 to .67), which will therefore make the average effect size significant (Cooper (2009).

The final test of variance for this study will be the Test of homogeneity of effect sizes. By comparing the observed variance in the effect sizes with the expected variance in theoretical effect sizes, the assumption sampling error alone provides the source of variance will disprove the null hypothesis (Cooper, 2010).

Results will be documented in manuscripts developed from the analysis of the collected data, and the conclusions based thereon. As a type of literature review, the meta-analysis contained in this study will operate as a source of aggregate study studies systematically analyzing study components from diverse sources to synthesize quantitative reviews and expand the comprehensive nature of this study to increase the degree to which the results are useful (Cooper, 2009). Finally, this documentation will be in accordance with the recommendations of The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.)

Game theory

Expecting to find competitive interaction within the issues surrounding declining membership in the church, this study chooses to engage the application of Game theory in plain English, to analyze the possible outcomes for situations involving declining membership and participation (Koselka, 1995). As suggested by, Koselka (1995), this study will describe the reaction of participants to information and situations in their environment by factoring their reaction into their actual decisions (Koselka, 1995). The multidimensional thinking of good decision makers considers the permutations of feedback loops suggesting a multifactor paradigm might be associated with declining membership and participation in the church (Koselka, 1995).
Another consideration in the application of game theory to this study concerns the possibility integral members sometimes cooperate with one another to avoid situations in which both parties and groups lose, by spreading rumors to gain market share or concealing information from others (Koselka, 1995). This is not collusion, but rather a matter of common sense. Why participate in the decline of membership and participation when proper analysis (game theory) says it will not be of benefit?

The application of game theory to the issue of declining membership in the church can reveal four important things: first, game theory will help define the parameters of the causative factors influencing declining membership. Second, game theory will help initiate the organization of compatible causal factors into multifactor groups based on some operational criteria, such as attitude, age or sex. Finally, game theory will help develop secondary reasons for the declines in membership and participation increasing the visibility of such phenomena or conversely, may provide the catalyst for the interrelationships.

Pasquino (2001) discusses the Hobbes statement concerning the natural condition of humanity as a sub-optimal Nash equilibrium in which permanent distrust is in fact, more rational than cooperation. In other words, Hobbes suggests the war of all--against all is more rational than peace and political order (Pasquino, 2001). Additionally, he thinks permanent and generalized distrust is the true nature and condition in which human life is qualified and justified, placing the human state of nature in correspondence with the Prisoner Dilemma matrix, in which there is no way out of the dilemma (Pasquino, 2001).

One of the many possible games played and diagnosed is the form of game theory used in a time sequencing of moves. In this game (described with a decision tree), each vertex or fork represents a choice. A number on the vertex represents the identified individual. Each of the
lines out represents a possible action. Each positive or negative choice leads to a lower level of specified values viewed as generalizations of the decision tree. (Fudenberg & Tirole, 1991 p. 67).

In order to avoid the criticism of assumptions because the assumptions are often violated, this study will restrict the application of game theories to the description of the game being played as it applies to declining membership in the church. Specifically, it is possible to make the assumption participants consistently attempt to maximize personal benefit (the Homo economicus model, (Persky, 1995)). When people sacrifice for the benefit of others the reality is human behavior often deviates from this model.

The value of caution concerning the assumptions of this treatment, involves experiments, which have demonstrated the refusal of using equilibrium strategies, or break-even methods (Camerer (2003). Furthermore, the decision to apply game theory forces the adoption of Normative rather than Prescriptive analysis because game theory is not usually used in a predictive manner with the behavior of humans, but rather as an example of how people ought to behave. The Nash equilibrium more closely displays the best response to others and suggests the need for a strategy appropriate against the non-equilibrium strategy of others.

**Design Appropriateness**

**Participants and Subjects**

Initially a random sample of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC) will be taken using the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Telephone Directory. The list of churches contained therein will be to obtain a representation of the proposed population of churches. Purposive sampling will be conducted to acquire participants for this study, with participants being chosen
because of their unique and specific knowledge and their exposure to this study topic (McMillan, 2004).

To study declining membership in the church, this researcher has chosen ordained Pastors, Ministers, Priests, Rabbi's and Lay Preachers for their particular expertise, and observational experience derived from their own perceptions in their own (and visited) congregations. Random, but purposely specific sampling will be conducted to select participants from a portion of the respective congregants who volunteer and meet the criteria of having left, or observed someone who has left, a congregation.

The intention of the study to involve two to five Ministers, and five congregants from each of the eight major religious groups in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex (GRMC), including Baptists, Protestants, and Methodists, Islamic, Presbyterian, Catholic, the Church of Christ, the Reformed Church, and Nondenominational congregations. This demographic will confirm the categories of previous studies, which have revealed the declining membership phenomenon at local, national, and international levels. The participants will represent the full range of churches by size, from small to large to mega-churches, where possible.

These churches in Southwest Michigan, are located in the Midwestern United States. Gaining some randomness, the particular churches chosen will initially be chosen from every third listing contained in the Grand Rapids Phonebook. By choosing established congregations, as opposed to new congregations, an accurate assessment of congregational obsolescence can be obtained. The chosen participants will represent the largest range of individual demographics to ground the study in contemporary logic.

*Sampling Frame and Selection of the participants*
Following acceptance and appropriate approvals from local leaders, associations, remote leaders, and the University of Phoenix participants will be recruited for the study through personal requests and announcements made just before or after religious services, and upon the recommendations of respective church leaders. Voluntary participants will be accepted, along with participants who accept personal invitations. However, efforts will be made to insure equanimity concerning the number of representatives from each of the selected religious groups, denominations, and churches.

**Informed Consent**

The procedure for gaining informed consent will produce clear information to Participants and reflect the fact that participation in this study, does not, and will not, affect, or constitute any form of performance appraisal, nor will it be used for this purpose by any entity or agency. Participation in this study will not be used to produce any form of work appraisal. Informed consent will all detail the three days - to a week considered adequate for participants to decide whether to participate in the study. Additionally, the consent form will provide assurances of anonymity and the researcher will personally collect completed forms and answer any additional questions generated.

A letter of request for participants formulated to inform them of the purpose of the study, along with a Consent Form requesting permission to use data received will be secured to ensure the protection of the participants' rights and confidentiality. After signing informed consent forms participants will be selected for appropriate times and places to be interviewed and given an opportunity to ask questions and obtain the details of the study as well as request personal considerations they might deem necessary.
Interviews will be scheduled within normal, eight to five working hours, wherever practical and confidentiality will be ensured by disallowing the use of names in reporting the results, through the use of an encoded number system. Participants will receive transcripts of recorded data from interviews to assure accuracy and will participate in checking material, before results are collated, analyzed, and published.

Responsibility for promoting full disclosure with no authority over the participants, concerning assessment, or evaluation rests with the researcher and regular availability will be provided during normal daytime or evening hours for discussion of any concerns regarding the conduct of the project. Participants will be reminded they can withdraw from interviews at any time.

*Role of this researcher*

As a Deacon in a Baptist church, consideration must be given to the potential opportunity for unintended bias. This researcher serves as an aide to the Pastor, advisor to members of the congregation, a missionary and community activist, and an instructor. The responsibilities of a Deacon include the study of Scripture for the edification of himself and the church and the security of the needs of the Pastor and Congregation, in terms of spiritual community activity, and ritual responsibility (Jordan, Townsend and Isaac, 1993). Additionally maintenance of the physical church and grounds, the development, promotion and support, of knowledge and capabilities for members of the congregation represent insider knowledge that could bias the evaluation of the data. These conditions coupled with the Deacon's responsibility for the evaluation and development of the church membership and religious and personal growth
while assisting the Pastor in the development and planning of projects in support the ministry must be considered.

As a Deacon, involved in this type of study there is room for concern about the researchers role while conducting the study, which reflects the notion of Heidegger (1962) concerning being part of the social world of the participants and causing personal experiences and biases to become involved in the interpretation the activities of the participants. Additionally, Kellett (1997), Van der Salm and Bergum (2000) argued, the researcher’s role is to work with participants in the construction of the phenomenon and its meaning. However, it is highly possible for the researcher to influence the results of the study because of a vested interest in the outcome.

Being a Deacon, in a well-established congregation, presupposes some basic knowledge of declining membership. Understanding this, care must be taken to reduce the problems of bias by conducting interviews from a prepared script and submitting uuencoded and undefined results to an independent assistant before collating the information for analysis. Before proceeding to each data collection I will consult with an independent assistant when setting codes and identifying the categories of the findings.

Methods of data collection

Qualitative data collected through informal interviews, retrieving ideas, opinions, and experiences concerning attendance, and membership documentation, will provide information about attitudes, values, and what participants may think they do, as opposed to what they actually do (Patton, 1990). Observation is also expected to provide information concerning actual performance (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).
As with Marton and Both (1997), the semi-structured interview is the preferred data collection method for this type of study. Furthermore, the interview process as a widely used method in phenomenological study is considered a good methodology for the study of individual insights and experiences (Davis, 1984, Windsor, 1987, French, 1989, Nelms, 1990, Beck, 1993, Sheilds, 1995, Baillie, 1995).

Patton (1990, p. 45) notes, when interviewing people to find those things we cannot directly observe, the issue is not whether observational data is more desirable, valid, or meaningful. It is more correct to recognize we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, intentions. We cannot observe behaviors taking place at some previous time. We cannot observe situations without the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. Two important issues arise with respect to interviewing as a Phenomenological study method Patton (1990).

First, participant motivations may positively or negatively influence the data generated, and second, this researcher's understanding and correct interpretation of responses is significant to determining further lines of questioning. For this reason a secondary set of follow-up questions will be prepared and available for each ongoing interview, and redeveloped as necessary throughout the ongoing process. The interview, including its analysis, is intended to be direct conversation between two people, the researcher and the participant (Johnson, 2000).

In the interview, this researcher will consider the participant's situation in an effort to understand a person's point of view (Gadamer, 1989). Listening with constant attention to the subject as he or she responds, provides an opportunity for understanding the meaning of what is said and how the perspective is shaped, which is of paramount importance. In this way, the
researcher and subject are allowed to connect and profoundly reduces the distance between what is said and what is heard.

This distance will be further reduced as analysis of the text, and the efficiency of the interview process are reviewed through subsequent investigations of meaning, to ensure proper understanding of the perspectives of the participant in the most clear manner possible. The importance of open inquisitiveness in both the process of interviewing as well as analysis (Gadamer, 1989), cannot be overstated.

*Participant observation as a method of data collection.*

Data will be collected through the use of participant observation, paying close attention to atmosphere, surroundings, and behaviors as they relate to the issues surrounding declining membership in the church. Observational data is appealing because it provides "live" data from "live" situations (Patton, 1990). Additionally, Patton (1990) goes on to suggest observational data represents the entrance into and comprehension of present situations being described. Morrison (1993) elaborates this opinion, stating observation enables the gathering of data concerning physical setting, the environment and its organization, the human setting, and the organization. Additionally, other Morrison suggests the people, and group or individual characteristics, formal, informal, planned, unplanned, verbal, non-verbal interactions, and the intentions and motivations of the participants become more observable.

Although the researcher will take a subdued part in the setting of the interviews, by assuming as natural a role as possible while exercising conformity, information will be recorded, both physically and electronically.

As Creswell (2002) notes, one disadvantage of participant observation is the difficulty of taking notes while participating in conversation and activities inside the observed phenomena.
Consideration will be given to the practicality of waiting to write down observations until after the interview is over, understanding the quality of the data produced could be adversely impacted.

Data collection procedure

There will be two interviews per subject. The initial interview, will obtain direct initial participant observations. The second interview will gather further details and clarity concerning issues arising during interpretation and analysis of the data. The first semi-structured and informal interviews will be scheduled to begin data collection when approval is gained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Phoenix.

These interviews will be semi-structured with 12 questions (demographic, doctrinal, economic, and attitudinal), designed to investigate the phenomenon of declining membership in the church. The interview questions will be formed using the traditional Liekert scale to measure the existence, necessity, and preventability of declining membership and participation in the church, based on varying factors associated with who and what helped, supported or provoked declines in membership and how subjects felt when declines were observed or spoken of or experienced.

The interview questions for the first interview of subjects will be contained in Appendix A. Ten questions, relating to the possible reasons one might leave the church will be designed for the interviews of Pastors and congregation members. Subsequent questions developed from the responses from the first interview will be contained in Appendix B.

Each interview will be scheduled to last approximated 30 to 60 minutes. Each interview will be conducted as informally as possible, in a location of the subject’s choosing, although initial contact is most likely to occur in or around the churches in question. This researcher will be the interviewer and a tape-recorder, will be used to record interviews with the permission of
each individual subject, prior to commencement of the interview. Careful record of unrecorded interviews will be kept and reviewed by the interviewer and the interviewee as well as an independent third party to help ensure the accuracy of data collected.

Pastors and leaders will be interviewed first, as their consent and support will make the additional gathering of information from congregant subjects of their respective organizations more legitimate in the eyes of their particular church members and organizations.

Members of the congregations will be interviewed in the same manner and process as Pastors and leaders. Interviews will be transcribed immediately after the interview is completed, or at the earliest possible convenience of the researcher. The answers to each study question will be summarized and submitted to a third party in order to receive comments and suggestions to be used later as information in the development of the interview method, in preparation for the second interview, and any necessary subsequent interviews. When the informal interview for all initial subjects is finished, the analyst will analyze and synthesize, summarizing the revelations of each participant’s responses to each study question.

**Participant observation**

This study will conduct participant observations, to identify expressions or displays of attitude, pre-judgment or preconceived notions. Wherever possible participants will be observed on familiar ground in their own congregational settings or at their own homes. Occasionally a number of participants recognized as colleagues and friends of the interviewer will be given particular attention to guard against internal bias. As a colleague of some potential subjects, the researcher takes responsibility for possible influence flowing to or from himself.

The researcher has no authority over these colleagues in terms of work appraisal, assessment, or evaluation. The researcher has held the position of Deacon and Missionary for
about seven years. Consequently, some knowledge and experience, with declining membership in the church and its effects have been retained. Thus, a unique position exists from which to understand and more clearly observe the ramifications of declining membership in actual practice. The social phenomenon types, which will guide observation and the writing of field notes (Lofland, 1971, Chantavanich, 2000, pp. 134-138), include Actions, defined as the incidents, situations or behaviors of individuals and Activities, defined as the continuous incidents, situations or behaviors of groups. Meaning, defined in terms of communicated or interpreted explanations, concerning actions or activities, in which meaning involves vision, belief, definition, or culture and Linkage – defined as the relationships and associations of churches and congregations and participants, among themselves and with their spiritual leader will be considered separately. And finally, Participation, defined as involvement with activities and situations and Setting, defined as the conditions and environment, within which the individual, church, or congregation experiences worship.

These phenomenon types, along with the categories defining the framework for writing field notes and analyzing these data will cover all incidents, situations, behaviors, and statements, subjects interviewed, working conditions encountered. Additionally, internal church environment specific to individual churches and congregations will be recorded in field notes. Later, this data, will be screened for the data relates to declining membership and participation in the church and coded field notes.

Field notes, will be reviewed for impressions and opportunities may later be used for future development observation methodologies in other churches and congregations. Particular care will be taken to ensure each participant is interviewed in the same manner throughout the study with the exception of preferences revealed by the subject and documented by this
researcher. Field notes will be completed by jotting down brief, important data to avoid the loss of important or critical observations to preserve information and avoid loss through forgetfulness. Fully detailed data will be reduced to writing later.

This will help in the arranging of descriptions for data analysis, making further plans, and drawing conclusions. This researcher, will select questions from the first interview have been augmented with the need for additional information to give additional details or clarify the initial responses of each subject.

Data checking

The data will be collected and checked to ensure validity and reliability based on the real conditions of the phenomenon. Validity, will be maintained by word for word transcription of the interviews. To ensure methodological triangulation of the data, multiple data sources, will be used, as recommended by Patton (1987), including interviews from different sources, such as Pastors and congregants. This, coupled with direct observation, improved reliability for the study will be provided.

Data analysis

Both inductive and deductive approaches will allow emergent patterns, themes, and categories to be revealed by the data rather than be controlled by predetermined factors prior to collection and analysis (Patton, 1987), on the one hand, and collation of frequencies of occurrence on the other.

The procedure for analytic induction which was used by French (1989) and Burnard (1991), using dual sources of data to analyze inductively the data from interviews and subject observations will be cross-referenced to ensure validity. The security transcripts and field notes,
will involve the labeling, data indexing, the sorting of content, and the production of a list of themes.

Goetz and LeCompte (1981) describe the constant comparative method used, as a continuous process of inductive category coding as simultaneously joined by comparing observed phenomena. Data will be recorded, categorized, and compared across categories in a manner Patton (1990) described as a process of categorization in which one is constantly revisiting the logical explanation and concrete data while searching for significant relationships.

**Analysis of data from the interviews**

Recorded data will be transcribed from the tapes recorded during interviews in the order received, coded and labeled in accordance with each interview question. Transcripts will be reviewed in the light of relevant literature on church activities, game theory, decision theory, and leadership. Transcribed interviews will be matrixed and typed on each page of the study notes and will contain the coded data using keywords relevant to the issues surrounding declining membership in the church and germane to the principals of game theory, leadership, and decision theory. Additionally, this study will group codes developed in previous steps using the constant comparative method while reviewing relevant literature to form operational categories.

**Analysis of the data gathered from subject observations**

Subject interviews and observations will be conducted by visiting each participant in the environment of his or her faith to observe congregational interactions. The data designated for social phenomenon will then be recorded in field notes (Lofland, 1971, Chantavanich, 2000), appropriate to each participant, until all participants have been interviewed. The analysis of data obtained through these observations will record accounts of what happens in the subjects natural environment and serve as summary accounts of the activities, behaviors, and incidents of
participants. These accounts will describe the subject’s relationships and participation within the context of the church environment as well as reveal the condition and status of the environment as it might apply to the working attitude of each participant.

All accounts will be typed on each page, where data will be coded with the use of keywords related to issues surrounding declining membership and personal conduct and activity. These grouped codes will be formed into modified categories based on field notes and individual accounts with the constant comparative method of reviewing the relevant literature. A summary of the data analysis form will be based on the categories developed and triangulating data and conclusions will identify the themes relevant to each study question by comparing the data from differing data sources.

By reviewing all data and comparing the categories from each source—the leader interviews, the member interviews and the subject observations—the researcher will identify themes by relevant study question. This will produce a merging of codes and sub-categories from the different data sources into categories for specific questions. These categories will become the preliminary antecedents of the study.

The data analysis will conclude with the documentation of the emergence of singular primary patterns of decision making having influence on more than one primary motivator (Diekelmann & Allen, 1989).

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Features included in the design and conduct of this study are intended to ensure reliability. These include multiple sources information (Pastors and other religious leaders and congregation members), the use of multiple sites (determined by the needs and dictates of the
subjects) within the broad category of churches, as multiple methods of data collection (interviews and observations).

The setting and participants described a way to allow results to be understood in the context of religion and the church so the applied settings are appropriate. Additionally, features in the design and conduct of the study ensure trustworthiness by having results reported in using quotes from participants and having conclusions drawn using the terms used by participants.

Furthermore, results will be checked by conducting secondary interviews and reviewing the roles and responsibilities of the researcher within the study. The consequent description of the church in this chapter reflects this researcher's purpose in revealing his knowledge and experience could be seen as related to, but separate from the results.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 provides the reasons for selecting the methodologies of phenomenology and meta-analysis and how this researcher intends to implement these methodologies. Phenomenology was chosen because it was determined to a method of choice for studying the perceptions and experiences of church members and authorities as they relate to declining membership in the church.

Given declining membership involves the perspective of church members as well as church leaders, it is important to employ methods to access those perspectives. The dual source collection of data using both church leaders and congregation members helps to ensure validity. Through participant observation will reveal the conduct and provocations surrounding declining membership. Data analysis using both inductive and deductive interpretations of the meaning of participants' perceptions as they arise serves to aid in grounding this study in subjective and implicit reality.
Provide, correct and reliable, conclusions, requires the checking and, confirmation of the validity for results among study, subjects in the second interview. The following chapter will present the results of the semi-structured interviews and participant observations.
Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Background

   a. Demographic

      i. Income : :-5K/yr; 6K-20K; 21K-40K; 41K-60K; 61K-80K; 81K+

      ii. Sex: Male; Female

      iii. Age: 0-10; 11-20; 21-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; 61-70; 71-80; 81+

      iv. Marital Status: Single; Married; Divorced; Widowed; Separated; Partners

      v. Race: Black; White; Hispanic; Asian; Other

   b. Religious Experience

      i. Doctrine: Christian (All Denominations); Muslim (all Sects); Indian (All Sects); Asian(including Hindu, Shinto, Confucius, Others)

2. Attitude Toward the Experience

   a. What is good about Your Experience?

      i. The Doctrine (Basic Tenets)

      ii. The Message (Basic Reward)

      iii. Spirituality (None; Some; Average; Above Ave; Very Spiritual)
iv. **Level of Satisfaction**: (None; Some; Average; Above Ave; Very Satisfied)

v. **Level of Commitment**: None; Some; Average; Above Ave; Complete

b. **What Would Make the Experience Better?** (Prioritize 1 high-5 low)
   
i. Doctrine
   
ii. Activities
   
iii. Leadership
   
iv. People
   
v. Structure

c. **What is disliked about the Experience?** (Prioritize 1 high-5 low)
   
i. Doctrine
   
ii. Activities
   
iii. Leadership
   
iv. People
   
v. Structure

3. **Current Personal Status**
   
a. What Positions have you held in the Church?
   
b. **What is your current Position in the Church?**
   
c. **How long have you had the Position?**
   
d. **How do you Perceive Your Own Status (Importance within the organization) in the church?** (None; Slight; Average; Above Ave; High)
e. Who has the greatest Status; Who has the least Status

4. Personal Profile

5. Why did you leave your last church Home?

6. Why did you join your Present Church Home?

7. Current Church Organizational Status

   a. How do you perceive the Status of Your Church among other Churches?

   b. How do you perceive the Status of your Church in the Community?

   c. Is your Church Economically Stable?

   d. What is your Church's Polity?

8. Declining Membership or Multiplication by Division

   a. How many churches do you belong to as a Member?

   b. Do you attend more than one church regularly (weekly, monthly, yearly)

   c. Why do you attend other churches?

   d. Why do you NOT attend other churches?

   e. Why did you leave your last church Home?

   f. Why did you join your Present Church Home?

   g. How have you experienced Dismembership?

   h. Have you Observed Decreasing or Increasing Membership over time?

   i. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Declining Membership?
j. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Church Growth?
APPENDIX B

THE RESOLUTION OF ISSUES: THE APPLICATION OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. *The first question raised by the current study concerns the issue of whether or not there is in fact an ongoing decline in church membership.*
   
   a. Do you attend more than one church regularly (weekly, monthly, yearly)
   
   b. Why do you attend other churches?
   
   c. Why do you NOT attend other churches?
   
   d. Why did you leave your last church Home?
   
   e. Why did you join your Present Church Home?
   
   f. How have you experienced Dismemberment?
   
   g. Have you Observed Decreasing or Increasing Membership over time?

2. *The second question raised concerns the often-subjective reasons for declines and increases in church membership and activity and the efficacy of such claims.*
   
   a. What Would Make the Experience Better? (Prioritize 1 high-5 low)
      
      i. Doctrine
      
      ii. Activities
      
      iii. Leadership
      
      iv. People
      
      v. Structure
   
   b. What is disliked about the Experience? (Prioritize 1 high-5 low)
3. A third issue the study is forced to address concerns the phenomenological question of membership multiplying by division within the church.

   a. How many churches do you belong to as a Member?
   b. Do you attend more than one church regularly (weekly, monthly, yearly)
   c. Why do you attend other churches?
   d. How have you experienced Dismemberment?
   e. Have you Observed Decreasing or Increasing Membership over time?

4. The fourth question involves the demographics of declines in membership based on age, race, sex, economic condition, doctrine, political status, and attitude.

   a. Income :-5K/yr; 6K-20K; 21K-40K; 41K-60K; 61K-80K; 81K+
   b. Sex: Male; Female
   c. Age: 0-10; 11-20; 21-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; 61-70; 71-80; 81+
   d. Marital Status: Single; Married; Divorced; Widowed; Separated; Partners
   e. Race: Black; White; Hispanic; Asian; Other
f. Why did you leave your last church Home?
g. Why did you join your Present Church Home?
h. Why did you leave your last church Home?
i. Why did you join your Present Church Home?
j. Attitude Toward the Experience
k. What is good about Your Experience?
l. The Doctrine (Basic Tenets)
m. The Message (Basic Reward)

n. Spirituality (None; Some; Average; Above Ave; Very Spiritual)
o. Level of Satisfaction: (None; Some; Average; Above Ave; Very Satisfied)
p. Level of Commitment: None; Some; Average; Above Ave;
   Complete

q. What Would Make the Experience Better? (Prioritize 1 high-5 low)
r. Doctrine

s. Activities
t. Leadership

u. People
v. Structure

w. What is disliked about the Experience? (Prioritize 1 high-5 low)
x. Doctrine

y. Activities
z. Leadership

aa. People

bb. Structure

cc. Current Personal Status

dd. What Positions have you held in the Church?

ee. What is your current Position in the Church?

ff. How long have you had the Position?

gg. How do you Perceive Your Own Status (Importance within the organization) in the church? (None; Slight; Average; Above Ave; High)

hh. Who has the greatest Status; Who has the least Status

ii. Personal Profile

jj. Why did you leave your last church Home?

kk. Why did you join your Present Church Home?

5. The fifth question concerns the movement of members over the broad base of religious organizations suggesting the specter of declining membership may really be an illusion produced by poor record keeping or internecine competition.

a. Have you Observed Decreasing or Increasing Membership over time?

b. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Declining Membership?

c. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Church Growth?
d. How many churches do you belong to as a Member?

e. Do you attend more than one church regularly (weekly, monthly, yearly)

f. Why do you attend other churches?

g. Why do you NOT attend other churches?

6. *The sixth question concerns the issue of whether there is any correlation between the specific reasons given for leaving the church or failing to participate.*

   a. Why do you attend other churches?

   b. Why do you NOT attend other churches?

   c. Why did you leave your last church Home?

   d. Why did you join your Present Church Home?

   e. How have you experienced Dismemberment?

   f. Have you Observed Decreasing or Increasing Membership over time?

   g. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Declining Membership?

   h. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Church Growth?

7. *The seventh question reviews the mechanics of the decision making process leading to declining membership, in terms of game theory and decision theory.*

   a. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Declining Membership?
b. Which Factors are more or less provocative in Church Growth?

c. Why do you attend other churches?

d. Why do you NOT attend other churches?

e. Why did you leave your last church Home?

f. Why did you join your Present Church Home?

g. How do you perceive the Status of Your Church among other Churches?

h. How do you perceive the Status of your Church in the Community?

i. Is your Church Economically Stable?

j. What is your Church's Polity?

k. How do you Perceive Your Own Status (Importance within the organization) in the church? (None; Slight; Average; Above Ave; High)

l. Who has the greatest Status; Who has the least Status

8. Question 8 investigates the reality of how the conclusions of this study compare to the previous studies, and whether a multifactor paradigm alters previous conclusions.
APPENDIX C

MEASURING SCALE
APPENDIX D

SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS
APPENDIX E

VALUE ANALYSIS
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT: PERMISSION TO USE PREMISES, NAME AND/OR SUBJECTS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Prospective Participant,

I am a student working on a Doctor of Management degree in Organizational Leadership at the University of Phoenix. My research thesis is entitled: A Phenomenological Study and Meta-Analysis of Declining Membership and Participation in the Church. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological, doctoral dissertation is to explore the attitudes, beliefs, and values of those who experience declines in membership and participation in religious institutions within the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Complex. Additionally, I intend to investigate and identify the factors they believe contribute to decreasing church membership and participation in church activities, and what influences these decisions.

Your participation will involve a face-to-face interview scheduled to last 30 - 60 minutes during which you will be asked to respond to open-ended questions. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or discontinue participation at any time. Furthermore, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself.

The research study may be published but there will be no reference to you by name or any other identifier and your results will be maintained in confidence. There are no foreseeable risks to you and the survey is voluntary with guaranteed anonymity to be maintained.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, your participation is expected to provide valuable data and information to the fields of leadership,
Management, and to those that lead non-profit organizations.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 616-243-3786.

Sincerely,

Clifford E. Jones

Participant Signature______________________________
APPENDIX G

CODE SHEET FOR INTERPRETATION OF ANSWERS
APPENDIX H

THE STRAW THAT BREAKS THE CAMEL'S BACK VS. THE MOUNTAIN THAT CRUSHES THE MOLE HILL

JUSTIFICATION FOR A NEW PARADIGM
Overview of Major Literature Title Searches

| Situation | The effort to produce a foundation for the current state of affairs in church attendance and participation requires a foundation that encompasses organization, philosophy and complex systems. It is also necessary to determine current state of affair concerning numbers of participants, congregations and denominations based on the most current studies. Using the categories below provided both statistics and numbers of congregants for the general population, as well as evidence of trends in attendance, both positive and negative. Investigation into the issues of Attendance, Organizational Design, Paradigms, Complex Systems and Autonomy provide a well grounded focus into the situations surrounding the phenomenon of declining membership. |

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The intention/mission of the research is to discover the underlying causes and motivations involved in the decreases in church attendance and recommend remedial practices to overcome the situation. By focusing on the activities, intentions, motivations, innovative processes and recruiting practices of the church, this research seeks to interpret the phenomenon of declining membership in terms of interrelated collective issues that function as single causative factors to the detriment of the church.

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By understanding the current practices of church organizations and the practices of competing and concurrent organizations, the research hopes to provide practical advice to church leaders on the retention of current members and recruitment of new members. To this end, The Literature Review explores Phenomenology, Ritual, Economics, Demographics, and Politics, along with Doctrine, General Society and Apocalyptic views. The three areas of focus most important to this investigation are the interconnectivity, compatibility and mutuality of purpose within the causative factors exposed.

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In an attempt to discover the underlying “mechanics of church organization and its influence on the members of the congregation, it is important to understand the perceptions and perceptual responsibilities of the participants. It is therefore important to investigate the functional technologies, both human and mechanical, operating within the church. To this end, this research examines the topics of Organizational Effectiveness, Function, Religious Technology and Resource Allocation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic of Examination</th>
<th>Peer Reviewed Articles</th>
<th>Popular Articles</th>
<th>Journal Articles</th>
<th>Dissertations</th>
<th>Books</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Effectiveness</td>
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<td>Functional Understanding</td>
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<td>Religion and Technology</td>
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<td>Resource Allocation</td>
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Command is a product of leadership and management power and
Consequently, an understanding of the operational mechanisms of power and influence, as they relate to leadership and management is essential. Investigation into the methodologies that set the stage for intra-communication within the organization provides an understanding of “how things get done”. For this purpose, it is necessary to examine Power and Influence, Leadership Theology and Practices and the adherence to Transparency as they apply to causation and membership decline. The research emphasises, understanding these things as both direct and indirect causative factors, influencing the decline of membership in the church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power and Influence</td>
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<td>Leadership Practices</td>
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<td>Transparency</td>
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<td>Management</td>
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Exigent Topics (outside of scope of the original)

The process of developing “new theory” involves the application of innovative and usually unexpected strategies to commonly held beliefs. This research attempts to fulfill this obligation by applying some of the...
focus) basic concepts of Game Theory, Chaos Theory and Decision Theory to the phenomenon of declining membership in the church. By honing the focus of the research to the specific issue of declining membership and its causes the research can identify the “players”, and their direct and/ or indirect influence on the phenomenon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaos Theory</td>
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<td>Game Theory</td>
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<td>Decision Theory</td>
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</table>

Appendix J

Table of Paradoxical Decisions Concerning Declining Membership and Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradox of choice</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
<th>Pos—Neg Decision</th>
<th>Total Occurances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The paradox of more choices leading to a poorer decision or a failure to make</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paradox</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Abilene paradox</td>
<td>Involves situations in which the collective group decides on a plan, which does not reflect individual desires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Buridan's ass paradox</td>
<td>Addresses the issue of choosing between two outcomes of equal value.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The paradox of Morton's fork (Encyclopædia Britannica. 2009)</td>
<td>Involves choosing between unpalatable alternatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Inventor's paradox</td>
<td>Revolves around the possibility of it being easier to solve a more general problem when it covers the specifics of a particular solution.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**The Paradox of tolerance**
will be particularly useful in addressing the question of whether declining membership and participation is a function of tolerating the intolerant. This is particularly germane in the church setting because religious intolerance is a major problem in the world and in congregations. A person could easily be persuaded to leave a supposedly tolerant congregation because of intolerance.

**The Prevention paradox**
focuses on the issue of one person benefitting at the expense of many people who have to change their
behaviors — regardless of whether they receive any benefit, or even suffer, from the change.

In the Prisoner's dilemma, two people might not cooperate even if it is in either of their best interests to do so. In this fundamental game theory problem, we find the demonstration of why two people might not cooperate in maintaining participation or attendance, even if it is in both their best interests to do so.
References


Acclaimed reference text. Description. A Hobson's choice is a free choice in which only one option is offered. As a person may refuse to take option, the choice is therefore between taking the option or not, "take it or leave it". The phrase is said to originate with Thomas Hobson (1544–1631), a livery stable owner in Cambridge, England. To rotate the use of his horses, he offered customers the choice of either taking the horse in the stall nearest the door or taking none at all.


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critique. Norton, R 2002, Queer language, A Critique of Social Constructionism and 
Postmodern Queer Theory [3].[dead link] Oxford English Dictionary, Editor:
"Amazingly, some writers have confused the obscure Thomas Hobson with his famous
contemporary, the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. The resulting malapropism is beautifully grotesque".


Description and chapter-preview links.


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