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# **Homegrown: Pastor Advocacy for Victims of Sex Trafficking**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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## Abstract

Human trafficking consists of both sex trafficking (ST) and labor trafficking (LT) and is a growing problem for the United States. The Federal Human Trafficking Report (2019), states that Missouri is ranked ninth in the country for active criminal human trafficking cases. This issue is particularly prevalent in our churches because churches serve vulnerable populations and predators may be drawn to churches. Religious academic literature about pastor advocacy for victims of ST is lacking, while popular news sources reference case after case where pastors are the predators. This study consisted of nine Christian pastors who currently served in a pastoral role. The purpose was to understand how Christian pastors have advocated for victims of ST in their faith communities. The framework of transformational leadership was used to explore advocacy efforts. This qualitative, content analysis revealed seven themes: (1) ST ID; (2) Education; (3) Passion points are indicative of God calling people to act; (4) Umbrella advocacy consisted of indirect, peripheral, and direct pathways; (5) Heart work was built through ecumenical collaborations; (6) Spirit work evokes transformational learning for all; and (7) Protection of the flock addresses advocacy readiness, protection from spiritual woundedness, and inherent dangers which seeks to advocate for vulnerabilities within faith communities. Results indicate that long standing advocacy was present, and that females and males are both active in advocacy efforts although utilizing various roles.

*Key words:* Christianity, pastors, advocacy, sex trafficking, transformational leadership

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Pope Francis said this about human trafficking: “it is an atrocious scourge, an aberrant plague, and an open wound on the body of contemporary society” (Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking, 2018). Bales (2012), Professor of Contemporary Slavery, co-author of the global slavery index, and co-founder of “Free the Slaves” a sister organization of Anti- Slavery International, one of the oldest human rights organizations, estimates the number of people trafficked globally is about 27 million. As of 2016, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Walk Free Foundation, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, estimated that 40 million were enslaved in modern day slavery (ILO executive summary, 2017). This is not just a global epidemic, but also a national one. However, the U.S. is actively engaging in anti-trafficking efforts.

The United States was listed as one of the countries most active in the fight against modern day slavery (ILO Executive summary, 2017). Evidence of that is seen in the U.S. Department of State Annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) outlining those most vulnerable to human trafficking (U.S. Dept. of State, 2021). The U.S. is seen as a major trafficking destination country (Savona & Stefanizzi, 2007). The Polaris Project (2018) reported 7277 possible cases of sex trafficking in the U.S., of which about 65% specifically involved women over the age of 18. Thousands of citizens, primarily children and women, are trafficked within U.S. borders for sexual exploitation (Baldwin et al., 2011). The Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking states that females/girls represent 96% of victims trafficked for sexual purposes, but it also happens to boys, transgender, and gender nonconforming individuals (Inter-Agency Coordination

Group, 2020). Many are run-aways, from foster care, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, from single-parent households, and are the most vulnerable to the predatory practices of traffickers in the U.S. Next, we will discuss the history of trafficking legislation and how the issue relates to the church.

### **History of Trafficking Legislation**

“Our history is not our future.” M. L., Sexual assault survivor (Evans, 2019)

To combat the issue of trafficking in persons, the first legally binding global attempt was asserted by the United Nations’ (2000) *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, which is often referred to as the Palermo protocol. This went into effect in 2003. This criminalized trafficking and asserted the first internationally agreed upon definition of trafficking in persons which consisted of three elements: action, means, and purpose (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). Human trafficking is described as the *act* [emphasis added] of (United Nations, 2000):

recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by *means* [emphasis added] of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, or the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the *purpose* [emphasis added] of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others, or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of the organs. (p. 2, article 3)

The U.S. Congress set the legal precedent for the prosecution of human trafficking as a federal offense in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) which originally encompassed legal definitions for human trafficking, making distinctions between trafficking for sexual purposes, for labor, and for the trafficking and exploitation of minors (TVPA, 2000). This version defined sex trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting a person for the purpose of a commercial sexual act” (22 USC § 7102, 9). Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST) was also defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where the person is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident under the age of 18” (2000). In order for a crime to meet the legal definition of ST for adults, the element of force, fraud, or coercion must be proven with the elements previously mentioned. Because Federal legislation establishes that children under the age of 18 cannot consent to sexual intercourse, the requirement to prove force, fraud or coercion in cases involving DMST is removed.

There were three main components of the TVPA (2000) originally referred to as *protection, prosecution, and prevention*, or the 3P’s. *Protection* meant that the government increased its efforts to protect trafficked foreign national victims, including aid for victims who were previously unqualified to receive assistance; *prosecution* asserted that the U.S. government would strengthen efforts to prosecute traffickers including concrete definitions of modern-day slavery, sex trafficking, and labor trafficking and how they differentiate. *Prevention* was utilized to increase efforts in the U.S. and to the foreign countries who needed assistance in drafting laws and prosecuting

trafficking, meanwhile creating programs for victims and addressing trafficking in the U.S. In 2010, the 4<sup>th</sup> P of *Partnership* was added emphasizing partnerships between intelligence agencies and local communities (Shoaps, 2014). Since churches exist in local communities and often provide services as well as meet basic needs for vulnerable populations, their participation is essential. These efforts aided in providing definitions, legislature, and distinctions, however, identification of victims is still fraught with challenges.

Trafficking minors has become big business in the world, and especially in the U.S. as a popular destination country. Identification and thus advocacy, are problematic on many levels due to human trafficking myths. For example, narrow depictions of the traffickers as well as the trafficked, stereotypes of those involved in a trafficking situation, and recruitment methods can all hinder advocacy. According to the FBI, less than 1% of kidnappings end in human trafficking and perpetuates the myth of the “white van theory” which purports that victims get kidnapped from the street by predators in white vans (Rothermich, 2020). However, kidnapping can occur. That myth can hinder the proper identification of victims. Traffickers confine victims, create mistrust of the police, and other authority figures (Polaris Project, 2019). Many are unaware of how susceptible vulnerable populations are in the U.S. and in what environments they are most vulnerable. This issue is particularly relevant to the church and the populations that churches serve in the faith community in which their ministries are located.

### **A Homegrown Issue**

Education can help empower the church to increase awareness by giving accurate information. The church body needs to understand that beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

and subsequent shutdown, there will likely be a whole new cohort of people who will grow bored with pornography and move to purchasing sex, which will intersect with sex trafficking (Eckhardt as cited in Bettis, 2020). Now that churches are open again, ministry leaders should prepare for the brokenness that people may be struggling with (Bettis, 2020). In the aftermath of COVID-19, the community's needs will shift because new vulnerabilities will emerge while the preexisting ones will be exacerbated (Let my people go, 2021). Christian counselor, Eliza Huie (2017), poses these questions to churches: What are we doing to make churches refuges? How are we making it a safe place for those who have been in the dark? We need to meet and care for vulnerable groups by speaking of the struggles both from the pulpit and in small group settings (Huie, 2017).

However, issues of trafficking presented long before the pandemic. We live in a sex-crazed world where sexuality is the subject of profound abuse, perversion, sexual abuse, and human trafficking that must be dealt with differently than how the church has dealt with it historically (Allender & Longman III, 2014). The porn phenomenon study conducted by the Barna group in 2016, a landmark Christian study done on pornography, reinforced that not only are Christians targets, but they are also suffering themselves as many congregants, senior pastors, and youth pastors battle pornography addiction (Treasures Report, n.d.). The study sample size for senior and youth pastors was a total of 770 and the church is deeply impacted (Barna study, 2016). This makes work like this even more relevant because the church may be full of predators, buyers, and children. Steve Arterburn (2016) posits that every time a man in the church views, clicks, and buys porn, he is supporting human slavery because it is a gateway to sex trafficking. True

efforts are being made in the Christian community to model transparency with real life issues that plague the church as well. The body of Christ is affected. However, the church is not the only space in which one can be affected by human trafficking. The surrounding communities are affected as well.

Sexual exploitation occurs in affluent neighborhoods across the state and our nation (Griffin, 2018). The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC, 2020) released statistics for the state of Missouri and defined “contacts” as: calls, texts, online chat, email, and web forms. They stated that there were 587 contacts in 2019 developing to 233 cases in 2019 with reference to possible ST (NCMEC, 2020). This type of victimization takes place across every platform; social media, messaging apps, gaming platforms, and dating sites (NCMEC, 2020). Most survivors do not report their abuse and research shows that 60% of child sexual abuse victims (a primer for sex trafficking), never tell anyone (London et al., 2005). The Bureau of Justice Statistics states that most sexual assaults and rapes perpetrated against women and girls in the U.S. between 1992 and 2000 were not reported to the police. Only 36% of rapes, 34% of attempted rapes, and 26% of sexual assaults were reported (National Institute of Justice, n.d.).

According to The Polaris Project (2019), most of the human trafficking and sex trafficking happens wherever there are international airports and interstates. For example, within the state of Missouri, there are multiple interstates that run through both the cities and suburbs including 29, 55, 64, 70, 170, and 270 to name a few. In 2019, 114 human trafficking cases, of which 87 were sex trafficking cases, were reported in Missouri (Sharp, 2020). Missouri ranked ninth in the country for the most active criminal human

trafficking cases (Feehs & Currier-Wheeler, 2020). St. Louis and Kansas City are identified as locations with more activity which may be representative of population size, but suburbs in Missouri are affected as well (Polaris, 2019). Major interstates run through both cities and suburbs.

### **Churches as Hubs**

Victor Veith, who is a child protection expert, states that women and men who sexually abuse children are also master liars who manipulate not only their victims, but also parents, churches, and communities into believing their crimes are not particularly egregious or are even the fault of the victim (Hart, 2019). Churches can be hubs for perpetrators and victims therefore we need more awareness and education in these sacred spaces. Researchers Eshuys and Smallbone (2006) found that contrary to what Christians may believe, that sex offenders who are most committed to church throughout their life accumulated the most victims and victims at the tender, early ages more than any offenders. Additionally, they found that a perpetrators participation in the church community did not deter their sexual and criminal behavior, in fact it worsened it. Thus, making it dangerous to assume that defenders are not among us in the church community. Behind each number, is a face, a story, a precious person who was designed in the image of God and they deserve a God-honoring response from the Christian community (Codone, 2019). In addition, the silence surrounded by sex, sexuality, and sexual behavior, can aid in promoting this type of behavior.

Predators and pimps hide in churches (Morin, 2020). Predators say that Christians are gullible and therefore, easy to fool (Hart, 2019). With this in mind, one needs to see what information pastors have, how they are advocating, and perceiving sex trafficking



victims. Leaders in Christian churches, particularly pastors have a unique opportunity to both create the space for awareness to occur, offer adult education training, and advocate for these vulnerable populations since the church may be considered a safe place inside of the Christian community. However, they cannot carry that burden alone. The body of Christ, consisting of all believers in Jesus Christ, could be involved.

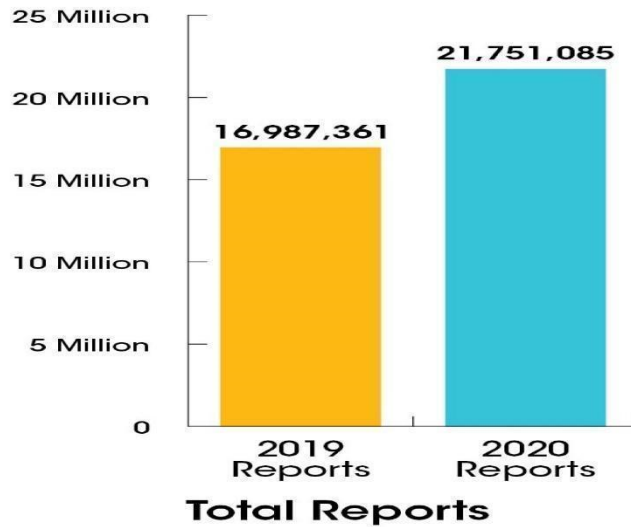
The religious community can play a vital role in bringing to light the human trafficking problem (Vicari, 2014). Specifically, pastors and their congregations may be more attractive options for victims because talking to a pastor may not be stigmatized, although they may not be considered official service providers, their services are typically part of their role and free to the public, and a sense of trust and respect in the community may be present (Payne, 2014). Although, they may not be the ideal candidate's dependent upon the experiences of victims and concern for avoiding retraumatization, they are stakeholders who can identify victims, promote advocacy through biblical teachings, counseling, accountability, and accurate information about taboo topics, especially about predators in churches.

Predators come from all walks of life and are nomadic, moving around frequently to avoid detection (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). In an editorial in a peer reviewed scholarly publication special edition about traffickers, called the *Anti-trafficking Review*, McAdam & Gerasimav (2022) state that even when identification and arrest occur, many are not prosecuted, convicted, and utilize resources to avoid officials. They further discuss that narrow depictions and stereotypes can prevent the successful identification of traffickers and even trafficking situations. Common stereotypes of traffickers include perceiving them as exclusively male, strangers, foreign, and always using physical force,

which does not reflect evidence found in literature (Raby & Chazal, 2022).

Not only do myths surround traffickers, but also the recruitment methods used to target the vulnerable. During the pandemic, many traffickers moved online. With 1.5 billion children worldwide taking classes online and spending more time in virtual platforms, they were more susceptible to online sexual exploitation and grooming (UNICEF, 2020). Online grooming and recruitment increased as children spent more unsupervised time online because of school closures (U.S. Department of State, 2021). In addition, Clawson & Grace (2016) state, “The hidden nature of the crime and the use of the Internet by traffickers make identifying victims challenging (p. 2).” According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), there was a 28% increase in Cyber Tipline reports of online child solicitation between January and December of 2020, when compared to 2019 (NCMEC, 2020). Figure 1 comparatively demonstrates the difference. Professor, Chris Lim, states that 70% of human trafficking begins online, while it was noted that Instagram is one of the main access points for trafficking minors (Rothermich, 2020). This means that they may have access to children they might otherwise not have had access to.

Figure 1.1- NCMEC, National Cyber Tipline Report



### **Transformational Leadership**

The theoretical model that will guide this study is transformational leadership. This was first discussed by Burns (1979). The theory posits that leaders stimulate and inspire followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and throughout the process they develop their own leadership potential (Bass & Riggio, 2010). This is particularly relevant because faith-based organizations are more likely to be located where impoverished people live thus helping meet basic needs of those in their communities (Boddie & Cnann, 2001). Faith-based can include both nonprofit organizations and churches. Pastors have valuable services to offer the community and would also be able to serve as male allies and motivate others to action. According to Bass (1985) transformational leaders commit themselves to the organizational goals (in this case the churches mission), transform followers by heightening their awareness of the importance of goals, encourage them to transcend self-interests for the good of everyone, and activate their higher ordered needs as they serve as a role model in pursuit of advancing the vision. A more in-depth discussion of transformational leadership will be explored in

chapter 2.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a lack of literature that addresses Christian pastor advocacy and their perceptions of victims. With an increase in trafficking in the church, popular media tends to sensationalize the church and demonize pastors. While we know there is an undeniable link between pornography and sex trafficking (Treasures Report, n.d.), it is up to the Christian community to give voice to the discussion, engage in dialogue, and highlight advocacy efforts. According to Dr. Arterburn (2016), porn is the greatest threat to Christians today because it kills intimacy with self, God, and others. In 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 the Bible warns followers about sexual sin:

flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought for a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.

To the best of the author's knowledge, religious academic literature is absent of articles that address pastor advocacy for sex trafficking victims specifically. When searches were conducted through academic search elite, EBSCO (contains a list of academic databases), Summon search engine, google, google scholar, and Bing the results proved disappointing because most topics were about scandals in Christian churches and pastors as predators. For example, the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, yielded one result when a search was conducted using the key terms of pastor, clergy, religious leaders, advocacy, human trafficking, sex trafficking, and sex trafficking

in the U.S. When a search was conducted in the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, it yielded no results. The key terms yielded a variety of articles on unrelated topics like sacred texts, philosophers, and international affairs. However, one magazine, *Christianity Today*, a Christian periodical founded in 1956, had two articles, which both addressed the church, porn, and sex trafficking post COVID-19. When a google search was conducted using the term “pastors” and “sex trafficking” one is presented with a laundry list of pastors who were accused of trafficking victims themselves. A sample of headlines is listed below.

1. Pastor used faith to exploit children in sex trafficking case in Orlando in 2012.
2. Three pastors charged with sex trafficking of children in Ohio in 2017.
3. Ohio pastor encouraged other ministers to have sex with “groomed” teen in 2019.
4. Former St. Louis pastor found guilty on eight counts of sex crimes against children in 2019.
5. Missouri pastor sentenced to 25 years for producing child pornography in 2020.
6. Megachurch pastor arrested for sex trafficking in Georgia.
7. Former Denton youth pastor charged with child sex trafficking in Texas in 2020.

Clearly, there are problems in the church and Christian leadership is needed to advocate for sex trafficking victims in a Christlike manner although discussions of these topics can be met with silence in sacred spaces like the church.

Sex and sexuality are rarely addressed in these sacred spaces in church because

they are taboo topics and if mentioned in the church, Christians are told what not to do (Allender & Longman III, 2014). We can be unprepared to engage on these topics. We need dialogue and education beyond that to encourage and engage Christians in the discussion. Pastors and congregations may be reticent to discuss sex within the church context, yet it is critical because if a predator attempts to infiltrate the church or when abuse occurs, the church has the knowledge and vocabulary to speak up about it (Caring Well, 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to disrupt the silence and explore pastor advocacy for victims of sex trafficking within faith communities. The study is designed to explore how have Christian pastors advocated for victims of sex trafficking in their faith communities. The study is most appropriate in Christian churches because the problem exists there via porn addiction, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking (Southern Baptist Counsel, 2019; Salter, 2003, Lee, 2016; & Moore et al., 2015). This study would provide Christian pastors involvement on an educational level and possibly promote leadership that engages citizens and provide an opportunity for biblical justice by making vulnerable populations visible.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative approach fits well for this study because it focuses on asking how and why questions that help understand behaviors, opinions, and give voice to overlooked populations that include social interactions through discourse, meanings of people, and uncovering perspectives in the church based on biblical principles (Sikor, 2020). Foucault (2000) states that a version of reality is created through discourse about what makes

sense, what can and cannot be said, and what is true and false which is limited by social and historical rules. Interviews will provide the opportunity to engage in discourse.

Analysis of information obtained through interviews will use the conceptual framework of a transformational leadership to explore pastor advocacy throughout the U.S. Individual, semi-structured interviews will be conducted, and thematic analysis embedded in the social constructionist epistemology will be applied.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching question for the study is “What advocacy efforts within faith communities have Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. undertaken for victims of ST?” Three additional questions will be asked:

1. How have Christian pastors participated in advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
2. What barriers have Christian pastors encountered in advocating for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
3. How have Christian pastors utilized the tenets of transformational learning to model advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

### **Significance of the Study**

Awareness is the key to understanding the problem of sex trafficking (Griffin, 2018) and may benefit the theological community, academic community, and Christian community. The results from this study may provide a forum for dialogue to occur and disrupt the silence of sex trafficking thus adding scholarship to an understudied subject in academic literature. In the academic community, this study may encourage more scholars

to explore the issues of sex trafficking and offer courses on the topic within theological institutions. The Christian community could enhance their understanding of sex trafficking and the community's role and, thus, gain an ability to advocate for victims.

Christian pastors and churches already advocating, might consider publishing literature that includes effective and ineffective advocacy strategies which could provide a template for theological education. Academic literature, and the results from empirical research, could drive policy, aid in creating curriculum, affect the social, historical, and cultural patterns in the church leaving a spiritual legacy for future generations. The Christian community may engage in knowledge sharing with other community partners promoting interdisciplinary collaborations. The knowledge gained from the study may serve as a launching point for scholars who could replicate the study in other faith communities.

The study may provide a model for improved ministry efforts and awareness of the needs of victims of ST. By empowering Christian pastors, it might be possible to disseminate information quicker and to larger audiences to focus on prevention for victims, leaders, and churches.

### **Terminology**

Before addressing the literature, it is important to define words so the reader will understand in context.

**Biblical justice** is defined as a relational term with people living in right relationship with God, one another, and the natural creation. We are called to do justice and live-in love (worldvision.org)

**Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)**- the involvement of a child (0-17 years) in sexual activity to



provide sexual gratification or financial benefit to the perpetrator. This abuse includes touching and non-touching behaviors. (preventchildabuse.org)

**Christian-** for operational purposes, the word Christian is defined as relating to or proclaiming Christianity or the teachings of Jesus Christ (Christian, 2019). A Christian is a person who believes in Jesus Christ as the son of God, seeks to imitate and emulate Christ, and feels compelled to act as Christ did.

**Buyers-** those who purchase children/adults illegally for sexual exploitation or gratification.

**Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST)-** According to the United States Department of Justice, when sex trafficking occurs in the United States with a US citizen or a lawful US resident under the age of 18, it is referred to as DMST (2021).

**Faith Community-** A community of people of the same religion or faith (Oxford dictionary).

**Human Trafficking (HT)-** Homeland Security (n.d.) defines HT as “the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation.” The United States Department of Justice defines HT as a crime involving the exploiting of a person for labor, services, or commercial sex (justice.gov, 2020).”

**Labor trafficking (LT)-** recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services using force, fraud, coercion, for the purposes of subjection, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery, (22USC s 7102)

**Predator-** a person/group that ruthlessly exploits others. Typically, this person is known to the victim (rainn.org).

**Sexual Assault-** sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. These include rape, fondling, unwanted sexual touching, sex acts and/or penetration of the body (rainn.org).

**Sex Trafficking (ST)-** is defined as a commercial sex act which involves “recruitment, harboring, or transporting a person from one country or area to another for the purposes of sexual exploitation through fraud, force, or coercion (TVPA, 2000).” No child can consent to sex acts or trafficking. They are all seen as victims and protected by federal law.

### **Summary**

This qualitative, thematic analysis seeks to explore pastoral advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities throughout the Midwestern U.S. On the international level, much work is being done to combat human trafficking globally through transformational leadership. Within religious academic literature, the topic is practically non-existent. In order to create relevant intervention programs one must understand what advocacy is occurring and the pastors’ experiences.

In chapter 2, a review of the literature will be examined. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology that will be used.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter will provide information about human trafficking within the context of the church. It begins with a discussion about sex trafficking identification, pastors' perceptions', and transformational leadership. The qualifications of pastors and the tenets of Christian faith will provide a launching point for validating biblical justice as the ultimate goal of faith communities. Advocacy by denomination within the Christian faith, showcasing how utilizing the human, intellectual, and financial capital in the church can promote collaboration and community partnerships will be explored. Because there is very little rigorous study on the topic in scholarly, peer reviewed literature, I will turn to the bible to provide scriptural definitions and justifications. Biblical scriptures will be provided in the New American Standard Bible (NASB, 1971/2020) throughout the chapter. This translation was chosen because a Theology professor and a Christian pastor recommended it as the most literal modern translation from Hebrew to English and Greek to English.

### **Human Trafficking**

This section begins with a discussion of human trafficking and then is organized chronologically to provide a history of the Christian contribution within the realms of human trafficking while discussing biblical justice and the tenets of Christian faith.

The scope of human trafficking in the U.S. is unclear, but much is known about the changing trends during and post COVID-19. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report (2021), during COVID-19, human traffickers targeted the growing number of people unable to mitigate, adapt to, or build resilience against the worsening economic and social effects; they exploited situations where screening and identification of victims

became more difficult including those confined to their homes, workplaces, households in need of financial support, and workers in the informal sector. The report also states that traffickers targeted families experiencing financial difficulties offering to recruit their children for debt bondage, while other families exploited or sold their own children to traffickers for financial gain. In addition, business owners and landlords pressured individuals to take out loans in exchange for cheap labor or commercial sexual exploitation. Additional methods used by traffickers sought to re-exploit survivors who became financially unstable and vulnerable to revictimization which can occur in airports, bus/train stations, truck stops, roadside rest areas, sporting events, abortion clinics, women's health centers, urgent care, emergency rooms, privately owned businesses, etc. (Mo. Dept. of Public Safety, 2021).

However, since the beginning of formalized anti-trafficking programming established by the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000, 10,000 survivors of trafficking have been identified (U.S. Depart. of Justice, 2020) and have been helped in rebuilding their lives (Preble, Cook, & Fults, 2018). Types of human trafficking include both labor and sex trafficking and are prevalent in the U.S. and the world (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021).

### **Labor Trafficking**

According to the TVPA of 2000, labor trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery” (22 USC § 7102, 9). Child labor is a form of work that is likely to be hazardous to the health and/or physical, mental, spiritual,

moral, or social development of children and can interfere with their education (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, 2016).

### **Sex Trafficking**

Sex trafficking (ST) can also be equally as damaging to children. Sex trafficking is widely regarded as a form of gender-based violence and global human rights abuse (Sen & Baba, 2017). The U.S. Dept. of State (2021) defined gender-based violence as “any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity.” However, the spotlight will remain on sex trafficking inside and throughout the U.S., although labor and sex trafficking can and do sometimes occur together (Koegler, 2019). In the literature review, the focus is on how advocacy for sex trafficking victims can employ both human justice and biblical justice.

An operational definition of justice is described in Micah 6:8, “He has told you, mortal one, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” In his book, *Just Mercy*, Stevenson (2015) discusses that when you can identify justice, then you can identify injustice, inequality, and unfairness that is often at the heart of injustice. Essentially, identifying injustice by confronting it and challenging it is what justice is about. Justice is about more than meeting the physical and spiritual needs of the vulnerable and weak and encompasses advocating for our neighbors by standing against the systems that hold them in a position of vulnerability (Sadler, 2019).

### **Barriers to Advocacy**

Learning about that vulnerability in the lives of survivors is crucial to understanding how to best advocate for them (McDonald, 2016). This study seeks to disrupt the silence in academic literature about the topic. Pastor Raleigh Sadler (2019) states that we miss incidences of exploitation and human trafficking in our faith communities, and those who are right in front of us because of external and internal barriers. He identifies key myths that serve as barriers to advocacy as misunderstanding how trafficking occurs, how it flourishes, who purchases sexual services, that human trafficking only means sex trafficking, and that victims will self-identify as victims.

Christian pastors may miss vulnerable people due to many external and internal barriers like sex trafficking identification, believing victims are not among them in their faith communities, missing opportunities to identify victims and indicators of trafficking situations, and insensitivity or lack of understanding about sex trafficking victims' experiences. These will be examined in the following paragraphs.

### **Sex Trafficking Identification**

Sex trafficking identification (ST ID) can be difficult for a plethora of reasons. ST ID has received much attention in peer reviewed, scholarly publications (Gonzalez-Pons et al., 2020; Donahue, 2018; Marcinkowski et al., 2021; Oram et al., 2016; Gutierrez-Puertas et al., 2021; Hodge, 2014; Baldwin, 2011; Macy & Graham, 2012). The identification of trafficking victims is essential in healing and restoration but if ID does not happen they are prevented from escaping and accessing services (Hodge, 2014). Particularly in the medical field, increasing awareness of human trafficking can assist in modifying practice and improve ST ID by emphasizing language barriers, the fear and shame factor, perceptions of victims, and focusing on nonverbal aspects like body

language (Baldwin, 2011). Logan et al. (2009) discusses three categories of indicators to consider during possible ID: a) the situational context- which includes the victims' ability to self-report their physical location and changes in address, b) story indicators including elements of the person's narrative which might point to trafficking activity, and c) the demeanor of the victim including being evasive while answering questions, appearing fearful, or depressed. In addition to these indicators, there are physical indicators that might lead to victim ID. Those indicators could be inadequate clothing for the season or environment, tattoos that indicate ownership, pregnancy, STD's and forced miscarriages (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2021). Physical and mental indicators are headaches, back pain, dizzy spells, being tired, loss of appetite, and weight loss (Oram et al., 2016). Those red flags could lead to proper identification in churches and referral to appropriate agencies.

Churches are the ideal environments for ST ID because they may have all three captive audiences- victims, perpetrators, and buyers. We may believe that the bible promises us a church where we only find safe people, but this couldn't be further than the truth because our ideals for the church often do not reflect biblical reality (Cloud & Townsend, 1995). This external perception can serve as a barrier. In addition, predators are drawn to churches. Predators report that religious people seem easier to fool and that they recognize ideal settings for exploitation (Salter, 2003). Churches can be ideal settings for this evil to occur and this presents both internal and external barriers to advocacy and ID.

When Raleigh Sadler (2017), who has a Master of Divinity (M. Div.) in Theological and Ministerial Studies and is the founder and executive director of a

nonprofit called “Let my People Go,” which empowers the local church to fight human trafficking, asked a survivor of sex trafficking how the local church served her during her exploitation, she laughed. She stated, “For years, I went to church regularly. No one noticed anything. Everyone thought I was happy, so nothing wrong could be going on.” She continued to explain that she was allowed to go there unaccompanied. Those misperceptions proved to be internal barriers that could have aided in identification.

That knowledge is echoed by the director of programs, Amanda Eckhardt, at Restore NYC, a nonprofit that provides long-term aftercare services for survivors. She stated that in her work with about 200 sex trafficking victims per year, many of her clients had traffickers who permitted them to go to church services and some attend faith communities regularly (Sadler, 2017). We can learn incredibly valuable lessons about the perception of this sacred space. This could suggest that the local church may not be viewed as a threat if victims are allowed to go alone, one of the only spaces in which they are permitted to go unaccompanied. Victims often get permission to go to public places alone like clinics, grocery stores, and even church (Withers, 2017). However, Christian pastors and their congregations need accurate information and education in order to combat barriers that may lead them to believe that victims are not among them.

Awareness is the first step in the process.

Not being able to recognize victims can aid in prolonging their slavery and serve as an internal barrier. Although this study focuses on advocacy by Christian pastors, the ultimate goal is to, hopefully, prevent making more victims and assist those who are victims through identification, referral, recovery, restoration, and to provide them with a sense of community. Hopefully, creating a different spiritual legacy for current and future



generations.

Not understanding the experiences of victims of ST can serve as another internal barrier to Christian pastors and their faith communities. Likewise, internal barriers may be present in victims of ST because of their negative experiences with Christians. Human trafficking survivor, Christine McDonald (2016), stated that one of the greatest barriers especially from the Christian community was the judgment she faced by others. In her book, *The Same Kind of Human*, she shares about a Christian customer who would lecture her about drug addiction. She mentions that because she was homeless and deprived of her basic needs of food and shelter, she would use drugs to help curb hunger pangs, to escape reality, and to avoid falling asleep because she had no safe place to sleep. Understanding correlations between drug addiction and sex work may help awareness.

Recognizing the suffering that victims endure is necessary in seeing them and being sensitive to their needs and insensitivity seem to occur because the church and leaders lack understanding about the plight of these girls/women (Shanks, 2018). “We must be careful to not close our hearts off to what we do not understand (McDonald, 2016, p. 102).” Especially leaders who can influence their faith communities.

Leaders can be empowered through education to overcome that barrier. Male allies are essential in this fight, especially those who are respected stakeholders and can utilize resources provided by other agencies if it is lacking in their faith communities. Within the state of Missouri, one such agency that provides information and welcomes collaboration to faith communities is the Missouri’s Human Trafficking Taskforce (Missouri Attorney General, n.d.) consists of multiple agencies and is structured as

follows:

- Ensure that we are serving the entire state across both urban and rural areas with efficiency and consistent quality
- Provide a holistic and comprehensive response through coordination of services, trainings, intelligence sharing and more
- Engage multiple agencies in a multi-disciplinary, coordinated strategy rather than a traditional model with everyone operating in a silo

Those stakeholders may include collaboration with law enforcement and governmental agencies through transformational leadership that can empower faith-based organizations with information about identification, advocacy, and avoiding retraumatization.

For example, the Missouri Attorney General's webpage has an extensive list of indicators and potential red flags to be used to identify possible victims of transnational and domestic trafficking, including both labor and sex trafficking (Polaris Project, 2019). That list includes work/living conditions, mental health/abnormal behavior, physical health, lack of power/control, and additional indicators. They also offer tips and resources for identification, intervention, courses, toolkits, and printable posters for the community (Missouri Attorney General, n.d).

In addition to transformational leadership in law enforcement and governmental agencies, healthcare organizations create resources that are being utilized in academic journals. In an article about the identification of victims in the healthcare setting, Scott (2020) identified red flags to look for: inappropriate clothing for the weather or venue, no cash, hotel room keys, extra cell phones, unfamiliar with their location, no ID, bruises, malnourished, accompanied by a dominant individual who refuses to leave them alone,

branding with symbols, words, or phrases like property of..., barcodes, or Daddy.

While it is helpful to identify victims, it is important to make every attempt to avoid re-traumatization of the victim in the process. Transformational leadership would emphasize how important it is to learn about indicators and train others in the congregation. That direction can come from the pastor who is using his “idealized influence” to model behavior. In the campaign, *Look Beneath the Surface*, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016), offer specific suggestions to faith-based and community organizations about ways to participate and advocate for victims at various stages of the process. They understand how crucial faith-based organizations are and invite their participation. They suggest creating a safe, nonjudgmental space to encourage victims to seek assistance. This space can be created and emulated by the pastor through word and deed and by the body of Christ.

### **Pastors' Perceptions**

Purekal (2012) suggested a decade ago that a study on the ways in which different denominations view and perceive trafficking would be advisable for the future. Pastors need to be aware of the needs that now exist inside of these vulnerable populations because of the pandemic, lockdown, and exaggerated needs as people's resources dwindled (Sadler, 2017). Research on pastor perceptions and sex trafficking victims are gaining more attention, studies on pastor perceptions have been done specifically to explore if perceptions impact advocacy.

Shanks (2018) conducted a study to examine if church leaders and the church have been insensitive to victims of ST by exploring the need for sensitivity training through conducting focus groups with 12 religious leaders and laity from different

churches and denominations. She addressed the challenges of the study by acknowledging that the topic of ST is a sensitive issue for discussion that can lead to fear, paranoia, discomfort, guilt and shame, and embarrassment among participants. All of which can serve as barriers. The study itself disrupted the silence, created dialogue, and provided educational awareness and sensitivity training that can be easily reproduced by other churches desiring to initiate and model transformation and transformational leadership. The study analysis revealed that the reason for the church's inattentiveness toward sexually exploited victims is because of the lack of education regarding sex trafficking. A lack of action did not equate to not caring about the victims. The author asserts that educating on the problem is key to understanding the victims and their need for compassion which can aid other leaders and ministries.

Knicht and Kagotho (2022) studied the meaning that faith leaders attach to counter trafficking initiatives by conducting a phenomenological study of 17 Evangelical pastors in the midwestern U.S. The purpose was to gather their viewpoints of trafficking discourse in the hopes of creating an inclusive knowledge-producing forum that promotes discourse and exchange of ideas between various actors. Four themes emerged: 1) God cares about survivors of sex trafficking, therefore, Christians have a moral obligation to intervene; 2) God, the Christian, and the survivors all play essential roles in assisting humanity; 3) Congregations' imperfect contributions create complexities; and 4) Managing those complexities involves understanding the truths in the Christian worldview that God is good, and all people have inherent worth.

These empirical studies aid in providing a bridge of understanding that can remove both external and internal barriers to advocacy. An example of how instrumental

pastors can be with sex trafficking victims follows. Pastoral advocacy was effectively modeled in a study by ten Kate et al. (2020) examining how to care for West African Victims of Human Trafficking (VHTs) in the Netherlands. Social and legal professionals were interviewed along with religious leaders from African-led migrant churches. The religious leaders were instrumental in communicating their perceptions most intimately linked to the needs of VHTs and offering insight into the victims' perceptions. All the interviewees believed in the involvement of religious communities as an integral part of their lives. Pastors were described as authority figures who were bound to secrecy. One participant stated that because they live communally that when VHTs are traumatized, they go to the religious leaders. They have bonded not just by regional heritage, but by spiritual coping. They can make or break the experience for victims.

### **Victim Blaming**

Often in Christian communities, the victims are received critically, as sinners, who should change their course (ten Kate et al., 2020). Unfortunately, victim blaming language is common. A government study (Clawson & Grace, 2016) addressed the lack of standard protocols for identifying potential victims encountering law enforcement, child protective case workers, street outreach workers, drop-in centers, school counselors, and emergency shelters was problematic. However, they stated that the greatest challenge was the lack of recognition of these minors as "victims." It was reported that many law enforcement, child protective services workers, and shelter providers believed that these girls had chosen to become involved in prostitution and therefore should be held accountable for their criminal actions. The stigma associated with prostitution was evident across many of the respondents in this study, including the minors themselves.

The girls did not view themselves as victims and, in many cases, did not want help. Viewing these minors as victims of sex trafficking that have been targeted by organized crime groups, instead of prostitutes in need of punishment, represents a huge paradigm shift that has occurred in statute, but not in practice (Clawson & Grace, 2016).

Seeing victims as victims is essential to identifying and working with this population but one needs to know what to look for. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (NIV).” Every victim has a spiritual inheritance and when it is forgotten it has the potential to further stigmatize victims and discourage relationships with God, self, religious groups, and pastors (Evans, 2019). We can avoid stigmatization by learning the facts, examining our perceptions and knowing how to identify victims. If victims are not perceived as victims, but as people who chose to engage in sexual services and therefore deserve the consequences, this will hinder perceptions, rescue efforts, and could deter involvement thus impacting advocacy (Clawson & Grace, 2016). However, studies on pastors’ perceptions are crucial to communicate the realities of these victims and how the church can be a place of refuge for victims. With better dissemination of facts, how to identify a victim, and clearer examples of leadership these practices and perceptions could be addressed more effectively (Marshall, 2010).

Additionally, in a qualitative, unpublished study of three pastors from a midwestern state in the United States, Heifner (2021) explored sex trafficking knowledge, legal definitions, and pastoral perceptions about sex trafficking victims. She found that three local pastors, one female and two males, ages 50-60, that have served

over 20 years each in Christian ministries at a megachurch, medium church, and a small church, respectively, all served in ministries that were actively advocating although in different ways. All interviewees believed that it was a biblical mandate to protect and defend vulnerable populations. Each pastor has a pseudonym referencing the size of the congregation in which they serve. Pastor Middle provided the legal definition and aspects required for a situation to be considered sex trafficking and stated that he understood the victims to be innocent. However, throughout the interview, it was stated that he stated that their sex trafficking was “a result of the victims’ bad choices” (personal communication, August 1, 2021). This statement could be perceived as victim blaming which is a barrier to advocacy. Just like the mention of this in the Dept. of Health and Human Services report (2016), the inability to perceive victims as victims can hinder advocacy efforts. Victim blaming can cause re-traumatization and cultivate a lack of trust with authority figures in general. The report discussed that even law enforcement officials and social service workers, who seemingly had accurate information about the realities of sex trafficking, had a tendency to blame the victims, especially girls, for their own imprisonment. Perceptions like these can be a barrier and deter service of victims.

### **Culture of Silence and Mistrust of Pastors**

Another barrier in the church is the absence of the topic of sex trafficking. This topic can be met with silence, indifference, and considered taboo in the church which could provide a breeding ground for this type of activity. Since there is so much negative publicity surrounding pastors with topics such as pedophilia, child sexual abuse (CSA), and sex trafficking, followers can lose faith and trust in their leaders calling for

transparency and authenticity from the pastors and leadership (Cobb-Hayes, 2018). Especially in a situation where trust has already been fractured; trust is essential.

As has been established, pornography can be a gateway where sex trafficking victims are forced into sexual servitude via the sex industry and sex trafficking. The church and leadership are plagued by these issues (Lee, 2016). However, the church can be resistant to addressing the problems (Reeves, 2003). Many churches are not aware of, comfortable with, or equipped to confront these problems, and churches need to make biblical justice their primary mission so the gospel can be proclaimed. Fighting against sex trafficking and sexual abuse was treated as a natural outgrowth of the gospel ministry, not a replacement for it. Wherever the gospel of Jesus is preached, lives will be transformed, healed, and freed (Holcomb, 2012).

Since this is a male driven epidemic, that can serve as a barrier to victims seeking help from pastors. However, the power that a male voice can carry in calling for accountability is second to none. Pastors carry a faith language and understand religious coping (Moore et al., 2015).

All of the respondents in Heifner's (2021) study recognized that the topic was taboo, and that silence is used to avoid topics of a sexual nature, particularly if illegal activity occurs within the confines of the church. Given that most leadership is male this may present additional barriers that may need to be addressed. A female, Pastor Mega, commented in the post-rescue phase of recovery for victims that "It is not appropriate for men to work directly with female victims because they can be triggers for victims who have been perpetrated by male clients, especially in the early stages of recovery" (Pastor Mega, personal communication, August 1, 2021). However, their expertise and



compassion as transformational leaders is requested at other stages and phases of post rescue and recovery. That recovery often includes physical, mental, and emotional needs from trauma.

In a study on pastor's depression intervention, Payne (2014) found that because pastors typically provide grief counseling among other services; it is important to understand the decisions they make when intervening. Church leaders historically have provided congregants with faith-based mental health (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010). Sex trafficking can cause trauma which leads to serious mental health issues and injury as well as physical problems, addictions, social stigma, and unemployment (Scott, 2020). Church leaders in faith-based communities serve as gatekeepers and can lead down important inroads that provide more effective transmission of information, education, and access to services and reducing the stigma of mental health (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010).

This could provide a forum for the religious community to add to the scholarship on the topic. Sadler, in his book *Vulnerable* (2019), suggests taking up trafficking for an academic study because there is much work to be done and we need more intellectual capital to tackle this problem. In addition, pastor and author, Scott Sauls, recommends learning more about what the Bible has to say about justice. He comments on the book *Vulnerable* that much of the content and stories of the book are unsettling and purposefully so. When our hearts are unsettled, we are moved to action (Sauls as cited in Raleigh, 2019). There is even a note to the reader stating that some of the stories included in the book give intimate details of the experiences of the vulnerability of human trafficking survivors. While they may be hard to read, they give an accurate depiction of

the realities of human trafficking. He begs the reader to take that into account. The reader can choose to disconnect when the realities become too horrific, but victims live those realities every day. A transformational leader can aid in promoting understanding of the victims' experiences and needs in order to transform thinking and promote paradigm shifts. That is a form of advocacy and modeling transformational leadership.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Taking that into account is essential as religious leaders have opportunities to model transformational leadership. Burns (1978) advanced the concept of transformational leadership as a mutual helping between leaders and followers with the goal of boosting motivation through morale building. He felt that the transforming approach created significant change in the life of people and organizations by redesigning perceptions and values, changing expectations, and through the aspirations of employees. Enhancing the concept, Bass (1985) developed his own theory of transformational leadership advancing how it can impact the followers' motivation and hence their performance through the 4 I's which are factors that are essential to the "transformation" process: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Figure 2.1 illustrates the characteristics.

Figure 2.1



Bass (1985) posits that *idealized influence* includes leaders who are exemplary role models who can be trusted and respected. Second, *inspirational motivation* involves leaders who can motivate followers to commit to the vision of the organization by encouraging a team attitude. Third, *individualized consideration* are leaders who encourage staff/employees/congregants to reach goals that are beneficial both to the individual and the organization. Finally, *intellectual stimulation* encompasses leaders who encourage innovation and creativity by challenging the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the group or organization. Transformational leaders promote critical thinking and problem solving in order to enhance the organization (Bass, 1985). First, they can begin with themselves.

Mezirow (1991) states that a critical element to the process is self-reflection through transformation and defines transformational learning (2000) as the process by which we transform our taken for granted frames of reference (mind-sets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) to make them more inclusive, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove truer or justified with the purpose of guiding action. This can set the stage for awareness and

education. It is crucial that awareness is a discovery for both the pastor and the congregants. Gregory (2019) emphasizes the “need for strong pastoral leadership that brings transformation to individual members and congregations through advocacy. This need has existed since the inception of the church and will continue to be needed until Jesus comes back” (p. 56). He states that pastoral leaders should be able to teach the saints, care for them, set an example, pray, and establish the vision which ultimately spreads the gospel. In doing so, they will inspire their congregants to be moved to action.

Although, the theory of transformational learning has been long criticized for ignoring the emotional, affective, and social context (Clark & Wilson, 1999; Lucas, 1994; Taylor, 1994), Mezirow (2000) in his most recent work does acknowledge their relevance in the process of meaning making. Transformational leaders can and do provide unique and essential contributions which are desperately needed at the local level.

They are important leaders in their communities who can transform others’ lives, including their own. Transformational leaders can bring transformation to individual followers, but also, to the culture of the organizations they lead (Abbasi & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013). The ability of a transformational leader to bring about cultural change is a powerful aspect of leadership if the culture of the organization is contrary to the strategies and plans that have been designed, they are certain to fail (Groysberg, et al., 2018). The organization’s culture develops in large part from its leadership, but the culture itself also has the potential to develop its leaders too (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Pastors are the logical choice to begin a dialogue that promotes advocacy because of their authority, and they can call the body of Christ to action. The church has also been

a place of miracles, healing, and hope. The body of Christ has the opportunity to shift the culture inside of the Christian church and offer a safe haven to victims. Christian pastor, Eddie Byun (2014) describes his own transformation as a pastor after reading about human trafficking in 2010 of being shaken to the core but having barriers because he was uninformed, and resources on the subject were lacking which hindered advocacy. He prayed and asked God how he and his church could advocate and then he began to act and influenced them to act as well therefore exercising the characteristics of *inspiring motivation*. As a result of his personal conviction and professional commitment to bringing others along, he and his congregation prayed, fasted, hosted two conferences to educate their own people, sent out short-term missionary teams to international hotspots, one congregant served women escaping sex trafficking in Korea, another served victims internationally for a year, and then a staff member resigned to pursue full-time ministry with victims. As a result of one pastor's conviction, an entire congregation was called to action and it led to advocacy locally, nationally, and internationally. The pastor was so moved, he wrote a book about God's justice titled *Justice Awakening* and offers biblical justification about how pastors and churches are called to advocate for human trafficking victims by sharing their own testimony, suggestions, and ideas thus providing resources to those desiring to advocate. Byun (2014) stated, "We had been sleeping before, but as we began to put our faith into action, an army was waking up in our congregation, which was a beautiful sight to behold" (p. 20).

### **Qualifications of Pastors**

Religious leaders are placed in positions of authority and trust, and the outcomes are devastating when abuses of authority and violations of trust occur (Moore et al.,

2015). That is one of many reasons why it is important that the religious leader take their vows to protect and nurture their members seriously (Pargament et al., 2008). However, they also need to be given the proper tools and education.

Religious leaders come to ministry for various reasons. Some feel called, chosen, or positioned to serve in a ministry full time. Others may utilize formal adult education. We can see that being called or chosen by God to serve as a leader is referenced in scripture. For example, in 2 Timothy 1:9 it states that God “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity (NASB, 1971/2020).” In another scripture, God promised a hope and future to his people who were enslaved in Babylonia as referenced in Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope (NASB, 1971/2020).” That hope still applies for all of those who remain enslaved presently. John 15:16 says, “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of in My name, God may give to you.” We are also reminded in 1 Corinthians 12:18-25 that we all have a role in God’s church:

**18** But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. **19** If they were all one member, where would the body be? **20** But now there are many members, but one body. **21** And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." **22** On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; **23** and those members of the body which we

deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, **24** whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, **25** so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another (NASB, 1971/2020).

Along with being called or chosen, there are biblical qualifications for religious leaders as reflected in 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, *it is* a fine work he desires *to do*. <sup>2</sup> An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching, <sup>3</sup> not overindulging in wine, not a bully, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money. <sup>4</sup> *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity <sup>5</sup> (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), <sup>6</sup> *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into condemnation incurred by the devil. <sup>7</sup> And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. That description is expanded as we read further in 1 Timothy chapter 4:12-16.

<sup>12</sup> Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith, *and* purity, show yourself an example <sup>[a]</sup>of those who believe. <sup>13</sup> Until I come, give your attention to the *public* <sup>[b]</sup>reading, to exhortation, *and* teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which

was granted to you through *words of prophecy* with the laying on of hands by the <sup>[c]</sup>council of elders. <sup>15</sup> Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. <sup>16</sup> Pay close attention to yourself and to the teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will save both yourself and those who hear you (NASB 1971/2020).

In addition to responding to a calling, giftedness, and an invitation, some denominations

do require formal education and training. As such, there are numerous schools of theology, seminaries, certificates, and programs available for religious leaders. In the state of Missouri, there are 20 theological seminaries offering bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees including: Biblical studies, Christian Ministry, and Theology (Dept. of Higher Ed. and Workforce Development, n.d.). Covenant Theological Seminary, a member of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), offers degrees such as a Master of Divinity (MDIV), Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies, Master of Arts in Ministry, Master of Arts in Counseling, Master of Arts in Missional Theology, and a Graduate certificate (Covenant Theological Seminary, 2021). At Baptist Theological Seminary, the MDIV is the basic degree for college graduates and offers concentrations in Preaching and Pastoral Ministry, Biblical Language, Christian Education, and Women's Ministry (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022). The required courses focus on the Old Testament, New Testament, Hebrew, Greek, Baptist History, Theology, Apologetics, Evangelism, Discipleship, Principles of Preaching, Leadership and Missiology. An additional statement asserts that female students have to complete Principles of Teaching and a course called Age Group Ministry. There are no required



courses for human trafficking, although there may be elements sprinkled throughout the core curriculum. For example, the MDIV at Covenant focuses on cultural apologetics and leadership for community transformation through project-oriented approaches. This could be an excellent opportunity to learn specifically about diversity in the local community and human trafficking. Not having these resources available could serve as a barrier as pastors may be unprepared. Another Missouri institution concurs that formal education is crucial.

Dr. David McAlpin, of Lindenwood University in the St. Louis metropolitan area was a co-founder and the former lead of the Center for Christian Ministry Studies. He was also a senior pastor and a Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Midwestern Seminary. He announced in 2002, the Introduction to Christian Ministries Studies program, with majors in Pastoral Ministry and Youth Ministry. He reinforced its necessity by saying that many prospective ministers and youth ministers are not adequately prepared for the real-world diversity of issues they face during their first pastoral assignment (Lindenwood University, 2002). Sex trafficking would most likely be one of the issues they could face whether they serve in children's ministry, youth ministry, or as the senior pastor. Regardless, they will be responsible for the protection and safety of those vulnerable populations within their ministries. Being uninformed could be detrimental.

One particular seminary that educates their students about vulnerable populations, church cultures, and self-care through boundary setting is Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO. It is part of the United Church of Christ. They require first year ministry students to complete a one-day workshop on Health and Wellness Boundary Training.

The workshop was offered to local pastors and other leaders as an option for qualifications or certifications through their governing bodies. The workshop topics included: compassion fatigue and burnout, mindfulness, respect, and harassment awareness (including quid pro quo, hostile environment harassment, and church cultures), working through stressful and changing times, and a session on finances. Reverend Darrell Goodwin (2021) spoke about the culture of harassment in churches by stating, “In faith-based settings, we have learned to ignore harassment creating a pervasive culture. We are called to interrupt the silence. Offenders can be ministers, volunteers, or community members. We create the ethos and model it.” While he was not specifically speaking about human trafficking, he was referring to advocacy for victims of harassment, which could include human trafficking. He did, however, speak inadvertently of transformational leadership by providing guidance and direction that modeled idealized influence, provided inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration by warning that if religious leaders choose not to intervene in disrupting unhealthy culture, they may inadvertently become co-conspirators. He modeled this in the following statement, “If I do not do something when things happen, then this (harassment) becomes part of the history of the church.” This models his idealized influence and may provoke others to action by example.

Another example of preparing future ministry workers for the needs of an ever-changing society is St. Mary’s Seminary & University (SMSU, 2014) in Maryland. They offer a course for high school juniors through their Pinkard Scholars program in Youth Theological Studies. The course is RLST 235: Foundations for Dialogue: Theology and Culture, which increases their understanding of:

- The Theology of God and the existence of evil;
- The person and work of Jesus Christ;
- Humanity, sin and grace;
- The cultural reality of Human Trafficking with a specific focus on where God, Christ, sin, and grace interact.

It appears seminaries are recognizing that pastoral leaders need information and education about the cultural climates they could face, the vulnerable populations they may interact with, and being transformational, change agents in their churches and in their local communities while modeling the work of Christ. They are empowering them by speaking to the realities they may face when they enter into their mission fields.

### **Tenets of Christianity and Biblical Justice**

While empowering ministry leaders is essential, one must understand that the most influential part of being a transformational leader is to model and emulate the teachings of Christ to achieve biblical justice on earth as eluded in the bible. God sees the corruption and injustice that allows sex trafficking to flourish, and He will take vengeance. The body of Christ has assets to be able to do this. “We are called to be the mediators of God’s justice on earth” (Project Fight, n.d.). The Christian community comes in the name of the family, which is God’s family. Christians have and continue to play a vital role in exacting biblical justice.

Human trafficking should be an agenda item for every faith worldwide. The church should be devoted to biblical justice. We can promote biblical justice and be the hands and feet of Jesus to a broken, dying, and hurting world. Biblical justice promotes equity in the 10 commandments and is defined by an all-knowing God and God alone

(Wolfe, 2021). A Holy God made the universe in such a way that actions are true to His character, and the laws derived from His character, however, are always punished rewarding every act of justice and punishing every injustice (Alcorn, 2003). Defending the vulnerable and ending slavery is a biblical mandate. In the Christian faith, we preference God's justice and reassure ourselves that if we do not see justice on this side of heaven, God will exact justice in the afterlife. Biblical justice advances that the body of Christ should protect the oppressed and articulate the value and sacredness of each life just as Jesus did.

In an unpublished study by Heifner (2021) she found that three local pastors in a midwestern state, cited bible stories that reinforced the ministry of Jesus and how he lobbied for vulnerable populations. "Jesus came for the marginalized, period," stated Pastor Mega (Personal communication, August 2, 2021). Her statement aligns with Proverbs 31:8-9 "Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable." Each pastor spoke of their perceptions of the definitions of sex trafficking and were educated at what elements need to be present for the act to be categorized as such- fraud, force, or coercion (TVPA, 2000). Having that information can lead them to be valuable partners.

According to feminist leader, Laura Lederer (as cited by Hertzke, 2004), evangelical Christians are valuable partners in coalitions against trafficking because of the moral clarity that they bring. She put it like this "We're made in the image of God; You don't do this" (Hertzke, 2004, p. 326). That moral clarity was on full display in June 1999 when over 130 religious leaders signed a statement of conscience asking Congress to pass federal anti-trafficking legislation. The statement said, "the God given dignity and

integrity of each individual compels us to take action to combat this evil” (Schleicher, 1999, p. 17). That is strategically and wisely utilizing our human assets and our intellectual assets through transformational leadership that takes responsibility.

Religious leaders have access to vulnerable populations, influence, and inspire other family members using their human capital. Pastors work with the poor and marginalized. Their history and knowledge of these vulnerable groups positions them to focus not only on demand, but to demonstrate the collective responsibility of society in ending human trafficking and sex trafficking (Leary, 2015). If the pastor talks about the realities and devastation of sex trafficking victims and proclaims deliverance and hope for them, it helps authenticate discussions in other venues such as home, bible study, small groups, children, and youth choirs (Moore et al., 2015). Pastors can influence their congregations and work with other agencies in the community focusing on sharing intellectual capital of life experience and education.

Christian evangelists Beth Moore and Joyce Meyers, both victims of CSA, use their platforms to advocate and give hope. Beth Moore stated in an interview that she was a victim of CSA and that it occurred in the home and while she does not identify the perpetrator, she admits that when it is the person who is supposed to protect you that can really confuse you (London, 2020). Joyce Meyer’s stated in an interview that, “Sex is something beautiful that was created by God. Sex is not something dirty. Sex is spiritual, which is why the enemy tries so hard to pervert it in the world” (Meyer, 2021). She addresses that they as a ministry receive an abundance of questions about sex so that is why she is using her platform to help educate using the bible as a template to demonstrate

God's express will because we rarely hear discussions about this from the pulpit or in private classes to teach people. In October 2021, Joyce Meyer Ministry donated \$550,000.00 to a ministry called Treasures, to open a safehouse for women escaping sexual exploitation in California (H. Grillo, personal communication, October 26, 2021). They know the impact of CSA on development and the depth of pain because they have personally lived it.

In an article about the black church and CSA the authors' state that the invasion by another on a child's inner self causes greater damage to the soul than any other type of abuse (Moore, et al. 2015). Christian Author Marnie Ferree in her book *No Stones* (2010) has dedicated her life to interrupting the silence surrounding CSA and sexual addiction. She posits that silence permeates the church when it comes to discussing healthy teachings about sexuality and that sexual education should begin in the home, but if that is not going to happen then the church needs to step in (Ferree, 2010). Awareness can interrupt the silence and seek to eradicate sexual abuse and sex trafficking.

"Religious faith can be a powerful motivating force inspiring individual and community action both spiritually and practically," writes the Global Freedom (Walk Free, 2015) about the purpose of enrolling faith leaders against human trafficking; "Global faith leaders, by their words and deeds, may form the faith inspired will and effort by women and men to overcome the human-made evil of modern slavery" (Maillard, 2015). They have human and intellectual capital.

This speaks of the intellectual capital available in leadership and congregations. Leary (2015) states that religious leaders are part of an organized religious system that can fight these traffickers by being aware of the local manifestations of the crime.

Organized religion and the Catholic Church in particular, are equally as organized and comprehensive as these criminal elements. The ability of religious orders, dioses, or networks of religious groups such as the international network of consecrated life against trafficking in persons is unparalleled (Leary, 2015). Buy-in is essential.

When there is buy-in from pastors, they can reach large groups of people who invite their congregations to get involved and learn about the life of a victims of ST who is groomed by a trafficker that who gets them addicted to various substances. Baker (2012), reported Pastor Rick Warren informs his staff at Saddleback Church that “Once you stop learning, you stop leading (p. 30).” Pastor Warren understands his role as a transformational leader in leading by example. He is an excellent example of a transformational leader contributed by confronting a crucial issue in the Christian community- pornography. He made comments about pornography by contributing with intellectual capital “Pornography is poison because when you read or watch what is blasphemous, evil, vile, and abusive and it does not bother you, you have a problem (Gryboski, 2016). In addition, empirical research would be helpful.

Empirical research (Burse, Barnett McElwee, Collins, Smith-Osbourne & Stewart, 2021; Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2013; Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2014) has been done in the Black church and about pastors being able to promote adult education within the walls of the church and encourage congregants to focus on education, health, and activism. Pastors promote healthy living and can offer healthcare related clinics in the church to attract participants that may not be comfortable going to the hospital but may go to the local church for help. Those needs could come in the form of mental, emotional, and physical health. Victims of ST often have work-related injuries like late onset of

sexually transmitted diseases, broken bones, scars, missing teeth, malnourished, etc. (Scott, 2020). Victimization by ST is known to increase risks among survivors for mental health and trauma related injury, physical health problems, substance abuse issues, social issues such as stigma, difficulty finding employment due to criminal history, and obstacles to leading a fulfilling life (Preble et al., 2018).

As previously mentioned, those obstacles can be exacerbated if victims encounter pedophiles or perpetrators in the church. The tenets of biblical justice call Christians to protect and defend those in need. Psalm 82:3 says, "Vindicate the weak and fatherless. Do justice to the afflicted and destitute." This includes those inside and outside of the church and local community. Many sex offenders find faith communities and Christians easy to manipulate. Salter (2003) documented how one convicted sex offender, a former minister, shared, "I consider church people easy to fool... they have a trust that comes from being Christians... they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people" (p. 28-29). Another trafficker, a female, stated that the church was her favorite place to recruit victims. She had been trafficked and recruited by a pastor's daughter who had also been exploited (Morin, 2020). Pastors and congregants should understand that this can be common practice in families and generational in nature. Koegler et al. (2020) state that trafficking exploitation by an intimate partner (IP), family member, or in the domestic setting is not uncommon. They posit that intimate relationships with a trafficker, psychological coercion and threats may reduce reporting of abuse, provision of services, and result in a misclassification as victims of IP violence. When a child is sex trafficked by a parent or other family member, immediate or extended, that is referred to as familial trafficking (Polaris, 2015). Thus, the church can be a space where pedophilia, CSA, sex



trafficking, and familial trafficking can intersect and overlap. However, accurate information can promote advocacy.

### **Christian Advocacy and Intervention Programs**

A powerful anti-trafficking movement has emerged in the U.S. establishing a new legal regime that organizes governmental response to the issues that unite groups who are at odds but produce successful legislative strategies at the local, state, and national levels (Campbell & Zimmerman 2014). Christians are no exceptions.

Christian advocacy has made a significant impact on the national and international stages for decades. Christianity has had a historically prominent role in anti-trafficking advocacy (Knight, Casassa & Kagotho, 2022). Christian missionary societies and feminist reformists initiated the anti-trafficking movement in the 1900's (George et al., 2010). Christian conservatism and radical feminist perspective strongly influenced the resurgence of anti- trafficking discourse in the late 1970's (Kempadoo, 2012). Along with abolitionist feminists and the political right, Christians were instrumental in the creation of a main piece of the contemporary anti-trafficking legislation in the U.S., the TVPA (Jackson et al., 2017). However, Christian advocacy has flourished. The opportunity to serve the vulnerable has been seen in an explicitly faith-based, and specifically Christian, approach to addressing sex trafficking that has dominated the anti-trafficking movement in the U.S. since the early 2000's (Purekal, 2012).

In December of 2014, global religious leaders of all faiths gathered to sign a joint declaration opposing modern day slavery (Rogers & Brinkmoeller, 2014) thus modeling transformational leadership. The faiths included Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Anglican, and Orthodox met in Vatican City to sign the Joint

Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery (Global Freedom Network, 2014). The joint declaration provided a unified stance stating that human trafficking is unacceptable, indeed, to God and human beings, thus having the potential to influence 90% of the world's population (Global Freedom Network, 2014).

As human trafficking (HT) has emerged as a major human rights issue locally, nationally, and internationally, Christians have become increasingly significant players in activism to end human trafficking even though Christian anti trafficking activism and advocacy is marked by considerable internal variation. Christian anti-trafficking advocacy and activism is far from monolithic, and several significant issues mark the intersection of Christian thought with the issue of HT (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 574).

The advocacy literature is present on an international scale with reference to human trafficking. A Christian, non-denominational organization incredibly active in the fight against human trafficking is the International Justice Mission (IJM). They do work in the U.S. and Canada. They partner with governments, corporate partners, and individual partners developing resources, compiling executive summaries, and reports. Topics studied are slavery, violence against women and children, and police abuse. They produce scholarly materials that include measurement and tracking of changes ensuring safer communities by partnering with community stakeholders and sharing their results. They have reports and summaries available for the Philippines, Guatemala, Uganda, Bolivia, Manila, Ghana, Thailand, and Cambodia (ILG, 2022).

When examining pastors and sex trafficking advocacy in popular media, a plethora of examples are offered through books, audio interviews, government websites,

newspaper articles, magazines, broadcasts, social media, etc. While these are helpful, pastoral advocacy in academic literature is lacking. Some popular media examples of pastor advocacy are “Pastor Works to Help Victims of Sex Trafficking” (Hayden, 2016). This pastor was a former Houston police sergeant who saw the crisis and worked toward opening a safe house. Carballo (2020) writes about a Milwaukee pastor who created an aftercare center for domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) victims. These examples demonstrate transformational leadership.

The church can provide valuable services that help meet the spiritual and physical needs of vulnerable populations. Since the church typically ministers to and is located among vulnerable populations, there is a high likelihood that they are interacting with victims but are unaware. If the adult education resources and pastor teachings empower congregants and community members with accurate information, then being able to identify victims of ST will be more probable (Byun, 2014). Below are a couple of examples of Christian denominations using their influence to assist, victims of ST within the local community.

In her study, Heifner (2021) found all three pastors engaged in advocacy through a local Christian safehouse. It was also discovered that advocacy was typically driven by women in the church. For example, all the churches financially supported a local, Christian safehouse. The mega church contributed beyond financial resources and donated items, visited the clients, invited the victims to services, required all leadership to read and watch documentaries about sex trafficking, etc. Thus modeling *individualized influence*. They hosted survival panels and a pilot project with a cohort of men. In addition, they are seeking resources and assistance from outside agencies who are

considered experts in the field of sex trafficking, medical services, counseling, and abuse, thus demonstrating *intellectual stimulation*. This collaboration can be seen locally through their examples, as well as by specific denominations and their contributions.

### **Catholic Church**

The United State Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, n.d.) provides a step-by-step guide for identification, assisting, screening, and reporting sex trafficking victims. They identify these red flags: the child is anxious, fearful, paranoid, avoids eye contact, secretive, and will not speak. They suggest asking these screening questions: Can you leave your job or house when you want? Is anyone hurting you? Do you live with or near your employer? Do you owe debt to anyone? Upon suspicion of trafficking, they suggest these steps: a plan for shelter, if no shelter is available find a safe home, and call to make a report to the Human Trafficking Hotline. If more help is needed, USCCB anti-trafficking program staff are available to anyone who utilizes their resources. In addition to the Catholic denomination's advocacy, the Baptist denomination is also in the trenches.

### **Baptist Denomination**

Russell Moore, Baptist president of the Ethic and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention, affirmed the need for a sexual abuse advisory group: "sexual assault and sexual abuse are satanic to the core, and churches should be the ones leading the way when it comes to protecting the vulnerable from predators... We as a denomination owe it to our pastors and churches to come together and provide the best resources and recommendations to address this crisis" (Caring Well, 2019, p. 6). They produced a report addressing CSA and incorporating victims' voices

and stories, many of which were abused in their own Baptist churches, about the impact of this abuse and how to educate the congregants, respond to victims, and prevent this from occurring (Caring Well, 2019). The church has been a leader in not just providing biblical education, but also offering adult education opportunities to their communities.

### **Black Church**

Adult educators can play a role in developing educational health related programs that meet the diverse needs facing the Black community (Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2014). The Black church had assumed multiple roles for African Americans as the epicenter of their religious, social, and political lives (Bryd, 1986), and it had a significant role of educating (Isaac, 2010). The church serves in the gap and provides a plethora of human service programs that victims could benefit from. Kramer (2010) reviewed research findings on faith-based organizations in human service programs and found that faith-based organizations tend to be more in touch with disenfranchised people, creating a rapport which promotes use of accessible services. Many associate the church's religious education programs with the studies of Bible school and Sunday school, but religious education may encompass topics that are offered in formal settings as well. Thus, it is important to understand pastors' perceptions, motivations, and barriers to promoting health education issues in the church (Rowland & Isaac, 2013). Despite the success of many programs, we often fail to hear of the pastor's perception of health education in the church (Isaac, 2013).

Some see the church as focused on the spiritual and emotional, but not the practical (Isaac, 2010). "Many factors impact programming of adult education in the Black church- financial, human resources, leadership, and external/internal influences

(Isaac-Savage, 2013, p. 13).” Educators can assist in the establishment of partnerships and collaborations between faith-based organizations and health care institutions. From the need’s assessment phase to program implementation and evaluation, adult educators can ensure that programs are firmly rooted in adult learning principles and strategies that promote lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles of congregations and the surrounding community (Rowland & Chappel-Aiken, 2012).

### **Intervention Programs**

As awareness grows, a pastor’s knowledge may expand and continue to grow on a continuum of transformational learning. As that knowledge increases and myths are dispelled, advocacy may bloom. Intervention programs could possibly improve prevention and decrease sex trafficking victimization in the church and local community. They could help raise awareness about ST and provide much needed education. Local nonprofit organizations that fight human trafficking typically offer training and education to community partners in a voluntary capacity or for a fee.

For example, one local safehouse provides community based and residential programs by providing preventative and restorative services. The Covering House (TCH) offers community-based services to prevent children and their support system from experiencing exploitation and serve as a support to individuals that have experienced trauma as well as presentations and training to community partners. TCH provides services for individuals in the community by meeting them wherever they are (The Covering House, n.d.). They specifically mention how the faith community can partner with them by inviting them to speak to parents, youth, and pastors, showing their video at service gatherings, connecting ministries within their church, and scheduling training for

staff and volunteers (The Covering House, n.d.). These resources are invaluable in the community, but information lacks about the success of these programs that is why inquiry must continue.

Pastors have reported that the topic of sex trafficking can be messy and dark, and many Christians do not want to deal with it but stated that they believed rural churches to be the most in need of adult education opportunities about sex trafficking (Heifner, 2021). They felt that they would benefit from training and development.

When discussing adult education training in the church, Pastor Middle indicated, “I’m just not sure how many people would sign up because it’s not a fun, pleasant topic. It is needed but it is anything but fun. It is dark. It’s the darkest side of humanity” (personal communication, August 1, 2021). Pastor Small echoed that sentiment in his statement about the culture in churches regarding the issues. “Abuse has happened in the church throughout its history. It has been swept under the rug, people have not noticed it, or they’ve refused to recognize it. Maybe it is easier in rural areas to keep our head in the sand. It may be perceived as an urban issue. They may think it’s a city issue, that’s not our issue” (personal communication, August 1, 2021). Pastor Mega shared her insights about spiritual recovery for those affected:

Male pastors have issues with porn, and sex trafficking is so intimately interwoven, most do not realize when they are consuming a product it is highly likely they are viewing a victim of ST. Educating men (bachelor party, sex industry, dancing, strip club, trafficked, porn movies) about participation can increase awareness. Men pastors can hold each other accountable, or women will just continue to keep putting band aids on it and doing aftercare. We learned through our interventions regarding

pornography that if you are going to open up a can of worms, you need aftercare in place. (Personal communication, August 2, 2021). They all recognized the power of education. “Education is powerful. If spiritual leaders, the more they realize the issues that are out there, the more you will see things develop, but again it is going to depend on the person, the spiritual leader/pastor” (Pastor Small, personal communication, August 2, 2021). All pastors believe it is biblical mandate as part of the tenets of Christianity. Their reflections could be perceived as a melding of the collective voices of the historical, social, and cultural context of the church.

Churches can participate and take advantage of intervention programs and also provide programs to the community. One specific way to engage would be through the nonprofit, Let My People Go (LMPG). Pastor Raleigh Sadler utilized his *individualized influence* by creating a nonprofit ministry headquartered in New York City. LMPG provides resources and training to pastors and their congregations so the local church can fight human trafficking. This is what he says about partnering with the organization, “By partnering with us, you’ll help us grow our network and enhance our impact. You’ll receive free access to a wealth of resources to help empower your church leadership and members to understand and engage in outreach to the vulnerable. Believing that clergy have a particular responsibility to mobilize and inspire their communities to care for those who are vulnerable.” (Let My People Go, 2021). While prevention programs are powerful, the need for transformational leadership is a precursor to those.

A multitude of academic studies have been done on transformational leadership (Rowold, 2008; Cobb-Hayes, 2018; Steinmann, Klug, & Maier, 2018; Hall, 2018). Harding Allen (2017) conducted a dissertation study about pastoral transformational



leadership and human service provision examining how pastoral leadership influences a church's decision about becoming a human service provider. She asserts that pastoral leaders play an instrumental role in determining whether a church becomes involved in human service initiatives depending upon the pastor's involvement at the initiation, implementation, and sustainability stages of development.

Transformational leaders are encouraged to shift their mindsets through a series of transformational and powerful learning experiences (Cunningham et al., 2018; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; & Young, 2015). Practical applications of transformative learning theory applied to adult education training could include self-examination and critical assessment of perceptions through identifying knowledge level/stereotypes of victims and discussing them in a safe space that promotes dialogue and respect for every voice and opinion. This could give pastors an opportunity to discuss the culture of Christianity, the role of a pastor, the role of a congregant, and a day in the life of a trafficking victim. Pastors can create a culture that demonstrates biblical justice as they transform their own thoughts about sex trafficking.

### **Family Capital**

Churches and their communities have power to organize, educate, and advocate, but they are not created equal. Because of the lack of economic means, many must limit the services they offer (Isaac, 2010). However, there may be untapped assets and capital that would help them fight sex trafficking. Hughes (2021), explains that every family has three assets—human capital, intellectual capital, and financial capital. The church family as a body of believers have them. First, human capital incorporates members of the families, church, community, and groups that meet on the property, but function

separately. Second, intellectual capital refers to the life experiences and education of all of those in the church family and community. Third, financial capital consists of the untapped financial resources in which every member is a part of the collective capital of the family (Biblical Leadership, 2016). Churches may have these assets but be completely unaware of them.

### **Human Capital**

Christians have the asset of Godly capital and human capital. God should be the first point of contact for gaining wisdom and instruction. The bible is the sacred text with answers to all social problems. When God calls us to something, Philippians 1:6 states that “we can be confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ.” When human will and God’s will align, no human force can stop us. We also have prayer and faith communities. The bible tells us to “pray without ceasing,” He reinforces our human capital when He calls us His children in 1 John 3. When God calls someone to leadership, there is an assumption that they will advance the work of Christ, serve as a leader along with the congregants, and in the surrounding community. This also involves the congregation as all strive toward serving others.

### **Intellectual Capital**

Christian denominations have developed amazing resources to collaborate and share intellectual capital by empowering the local church with resources, so they can advocate in their own communities. They have the body of Christ, our denominations, and their churches to pool resources from. In addition, each congregation has members with skills, gifts, and callings. They have expertise that is needed in a wide variety of

fields and disciplines. Romans 11:29 says "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Gifts given by God are welcome in God's kingdom.

Sadler and Byun wrote books about human trafficking modeling the *intellectual stimulation* aspect of transformational leadership. Each of Byun's (2014) chapters ends with group discussion questions and prayer guides for churches to use. Byun discloses how he learned about human trafficking, what God revealed to him about advocacy through scripture, and used his transformational leadership to call his church to action as previously discussed. Sadler (2019) discusses his own journey in learning about human trafficking, how he felt called to implore other pastors and churches to action and concludes his book with a list of "100 Ways You Can Fight Human Trafficking." This section includes educational resources, academic resources, practical application, suggestions about dialoguing with community members like bus drivers, retailers, small business owners, etc.

### **Financial Capital**

Denominations and churches allocated funds for ministry, staff, and buildings. However, those funds may not permit donations to other ministries unless categorized as missions or designated as a tithe. Churches can consider financially supporting a local nonprofit that fights ST through a monthly donation as a mission's project. They can utilize their own resources to host adult education events, collaborate with local law enforcement, hospitals, clinics, businesses, and community members. They can have fundraisers.

Money is not the only financial capital needed to fight this fight. Churches can share resources. Donations of staff, service, time, objects, clothing, electronics,

appliances, furniture, vehicles, houses, and land are all needed for local safehouses. Most nonprofit organizations will accept gently used items and that greatly benefits them because they can reallocate resources.

Because resources are limited in many congregations, other ministries have provided ways to get involved without making a financial commitment thus modeling *individual consideration* to promote development in followers in the church. For example, the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST) has memberships that do have fees, but if that is not possible, they also have free toolkits for the local church to use if they cannot enroll in membership. In addition, they have an advocacy section which includes printable fliers to use if a church wishes to participate in National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, hosted annually in January (FAAST, 2022).

For other ministries that work in service to the church like Exploit No More, they accept stock, mutual funds, and seek corporate partnerships. The church could also make these requests. They could also utilize their human and intellectual capital and provide services to the community for a minimal fee to generate funds. In addition, they could participate in a crowdfunding campaign where they collect from a large group of people.

### **Community Partnerships**

Pastors have social networks and connections to other leaders in communities which is a huge asset because they can build partnerships utilizing their *idealized influence* as transformational leaders. Referencing back to the “work that serves others and makes the world better” (The Economic Wisdom Project, n.d., p. 9), they have access to local leaders in law enforcement, healthcare, banking, construction, social service

agencies, and local businesses, etc. They can work on a task force together. This applied on a local level for a former police sergeant who is now a pastor.

Although Kenny Martin was a sergeant and worked closely with vulnerable populations that included children from poverty, broken homes, who lacked education, healthcare, and basic needs it was not until he was a pastor that he helped three women escape sex trafficking. For years, he worked to open a safe house in which victims would receive medical care and educational assistance (Hayden, 2016). His intellectual capital was evident.

However, pastors could be considered experts in their community's culture and that may promote partnerships. While they may be foundational within their communities, they cannot be considered experts on sex trafficking as more often than not, they need to be trained as well. They need to grow in knowledge too. Adult educators working in the field can offer their intellectual capital by studying the subject empirically and designing curriculum to be used in ministries. They can also utilize informal learning by engaging in dialogue with abuse experts, survivors, and healthcare providers (Hart, 2019). The success of any church-related program depends on the support and leadership of the pastor (Isaac-Savage, 2013).

True change often involves a change in basic assumptions. Religions and their long-standing role in important social sectors of primary education, collegiate education, houses of worship, medicine, and social work are uniquely positioned to contribute to this social messaging and move society in the direction that condemns human trafficking, but also condemns and stigmatizes its causes (Leary, 2015). The social messaging communication occurs via the internet, websites, blogging, social media applications,

chatting, podcasts, and community groups. Partnerships between religions and law enforcement, religious organizations and other members of civil society, and governments (Maillard, 2015) are essential. We all have a role to play.

With reference to financial capital, some churches lack the resources to address theirs and their congregants' needs. For example, in a study about African Americans and health disparities, the authors found that they were more apt to go to a trusted pastor or spiritual leader and discuss health issues over seeking out a healthcare professional because of the mistrust between them and the healthcare system (Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2013). That mistrust can be traced back to the injustices performed during the U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee. In another study about African American Pastors' perceptions of the educational role of the church about health, of the churches who did not offer health education in the church, 59% cited a lack of financial resources as the main reason for not offering these in the church (Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2013). However, a lack of resources is not an indicator that pastors or churches have nothing to contribute.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the literature on transformational leadership and Christian pastoral advocacy. Biblical justice and the tenets of Christianity were reviewed. The capital that exists in the church was explored along with Christian advocacy and intervention programs. The next chapter focuses on the methodology of the study.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter begins with the overarching question and the research questions that drove the study. The research type, population, sample, data collection, and instrumentation will be discussed along with a data analysis, limitations of the study, and a chapter review.

#### **Research Design**

Because the topics of sex and sexual behavior are sensitive, especially within the culture of churches (Allender & Longman III, 2014; Ferree, 2010), a qualitative thematic research method was employed. As such, individual interviews were conducted to provide anonymity for the Christian pastors who participated. The researcher was female, and some participants were male. Males are typically in leadership positions inside of the Christian faith community. This added a layer of consideration as to how to have crucial conversations on taboo topics. It is possible that gender differences could compromise the accuracy of data collected from the interviews which was another reason that they were conducted one on one. Focus groups were not chosen for the reasons mentioned above. Pastors may have been less forthcoming with information, especially if they were among a group of their peers.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the data set through rich description which involves an iterative process of searching (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative, thematic design was chosen for this study because the purpose was to explore the knowledge and understanding of selected pastors engaging in advocacy which could be best done through qualitative inquiry. Merriam (2009) states that qualitative research focuses on people's experiences and their perspectives. In

qualitative research, there is much less concern on the sample size and more attention and emphasis is placed on details of the setting and the situation, the participants, and the rich descriptions of the participants' experiences (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

The overarching question for the study was "What advocacy efforts within their faith communities have Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. undertaken for victims of ST?" Three additional questions were asked:

1. How have Christian pastors participated in advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
2. What barriers have Christian pastors encountered in advocating for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
3. How have Christian pastors utilized the tenets of transformational learning to model advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

### **Positionality**

Knight & Kagotho (2022) assert that researcher's identities and lived experiences influence all phases of a qualitative study from conceptualization to data presentation. This author is a PhD student who is part of a Christian community. She has familiarity with biblical language and the vernacular spoken in Christian faith communities. She is an educator in both secular and Christian higher education for 18 years who specialized in gender and intercultural communications. She worked in a safehouse for teen victims of ST, and served as a volunteer and paid employee as leadership in a Christian nonprofit seeking to offer long term residential care to teen victims of ST.

### **Population and Sample**



The population for the study were female and male Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. Christian pastors were the ideal subjects because they hold formal, leadership positions and know their flocks in the faith community. Religious institutions provide children with opportunities to learn, express faith and to grow spiritually by being able to relate to something greater than self by providing opportunities for physical, mental, and relational growth (Moore et al., 2015). However, they have to be safe in order for this growth to take place. The church may be seen as a safe place with safe people (Cloud & Townsend, 1995).

A pilot study was conducted by Heifner (2021) to both inform and guide the researcher to study the topic on a larger scale in August 2021. The inclusion criteria was the same, with the exception of the required advocacy to vulnerable populations component. The pilot study used similar criteria for selection (stated below) but was conducted with three pastors including one female and two males who served in different settings: a mega church (average weekend attendance exceeds more than 2000 people), a large church (attendance ranges between 301-1999), a middle-sized church (weekend attendance averages between 51 and 300 people), and a small church (average weekend attendance 50 or less) (Barna Group, 2016). Heifner (2021) identified local advocacy efforts which could be replicated. The pastors discussed how they ministered to sex trafficking victims while modeling their mission and the teachings of Christ. Each congregation was actively involved in multiple forms of advocacy. They spoke of the culture of silence and who might most benefit from education and awareness on human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking.

Heifner's (2021) study revealed that much of the advocacy work that was being

done in churches were typically initiated by females, driven by unpaid, female volunteers rather than employees in formal positions of leadership, although advocacy for sex trafficking victims by both sexes occurred. Traditionally, women outnumber men in the church, tend to participate more in bible study, and religious discussion (Podles, 1999). Thus demonstrating that women can be instrumental in driving advocacy within faith communities even when not part of formal leadership. However, the majority of leadership are men so that becomes a necessity to involve both sexes as they may have the capabilities to initiate and institute formal advocacy efforts within faith communities. Both sexes were included. Thus encouraging the inclusion of both sexes when they serve in official capacities.

### **Study Participants**

The researcher recruited nine Christian pastors of different sexes, races, ages, education levels, church sizes, and denominational affiliations to give voice to their perceptions and perspectives.

The inclusion criteria stated that pastors must be involved in some type of advocacy for vulnerable populations that could include victims of ST because victim identification is challenging. Criteria for participation was as follows:

1. Christian pastors who serve in different capacities within a specific religious denomination or church (Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Protestant, etc.).
2. Pastoral role (i.e. senior pastor, children's pastor, mission's pastor) of any Christian denomination
3. Served for a minimum of a year in a formal, paid position
4. Called, trained, and/or educated through informal or formal adult education,

life experience, seminary training, etc.

5. Currently engaging in some form of advocacy for vulnerable populations that could include victims of ST in their faith communities. This could include but is not limited to supporting safehouses, homeless ministry, LGBTQ, foster children, donations of time/money/resources, fundraisers, mission trips, prevention programs, panel discussions, participation in national/international campaigns, hosting discussions or health fairs, etc.

The nine pastors represented four Midwestern states in the U.S. Data collection included one-on-one semi-structured, Zoom© interviews. The initial plan was to utilize the three pastors who participated in the previous pilot project for snowball and convenience sampling. All three pastors were contacted either via email, text, and/or telephone, given the inclusion criteria, and asked to recommend other pastors. One could not think of a referral but stated that he would get back to the researcher after reflecting. One forwarded the email invitation to all pastors within their multi-site church with four campuses, equaling around 20 pastors, but this yielded no recruitments. The remaining pastor did not reply. This method yielded no recruitments from pastors who participated in the original pilot project.

The researcher then contacted a pastor, who was an acquaintance, to extend an email invitation and he agreed to participate. At the end of his interview, he provided contact information for pastors who participated in a local collaborative both within and outside of his denomination. From his referral, one pastor was recruited, and five additional pastors were contacted by the researcher via phone calls and/or emails, but some did not reply, and others declined participation without providing a reason. At that

point, the researcher utilized additional ministry partners for referrals of pastors including nonprofit volunteers for organizations serving vulnerable populations, and nonprofit volunteers/employees active in ST advocacy to gain more participants. The remainder of the sample, seven pastors, were acquired through these additional efforts but were completely unknown to the researcher. Although established ministries to victims of ST were not a requirement, several pastors questioned their ability to participate because they did not have designated programs for victims of ST in their faith communities. However, after discussion, they were cleared to participate because of their advocacy with vulnerable populations that could be serving victims. Utilizing the virtual format for interviews yielded more diversity in study participants from more states in the U.S.

Participants received an introductory packet prior to participation which included an email invite explaining the purpose of the study and the type of participation being solicited (see Appendix A). The email also contained the informed consent form (see Appendix B) which defined participation and protocol. An interview guide (see Appendix C) was also included which explained the types of question categories and subtopics. Pastors were asked to review documents prior to the interview date. After that, the interviews were audio and video recorded via Zoom©.

### **Data Collection**

Pastors were asked to identify dates and times in which they could complete their interviews. Pastors participated in a 60-minute, semi-structured, recorded, Zoom© interview with open-ended, preplanned, and probing questions (see Appendix D). The interviews were video recorded, audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim into written transcripts. Each pastor was provided with the video and written transcriptions

post interview to continue to engage in member checking. The researcher used an interview question protocol and field notes during the interviews and also recorded post interview reflections in her reflexive journal. This enabled her to revise questions and reflect on interviewing skills that needed to be honed. All of these were utilized in post interview stages and were reviewed along with the videos of the interviews and nonverbal communication was noted and cross referenced with field notes.

### **Interviews and Questions**

Semi-structured interviews were used for the study because the topic may be unfamiliar, but also uncomfortable to the participants. The questions targeted beliefs, values, attitudes, and experiences. The interviews were semi-structured to invite thoughtful participation and allow for probing and new lines of questions. The structured interviews relied heavily on a preestablished sequence and pace of questions that the researcher adheres to, as opposed to using a semi-structured that has an interview protocol that serves as a guide that directs conversation (Hays & Singh, 2012). This was done to allow a departure from protocol so other possible topics and disclosure could emerge that may be relevant to the discussion. Merriam (2009) discussed that semi-structured interviews are used because the researcher assumes that the participants define their worlds in unique ways. The understanding of their worldviews within their personal and professional identities was crucial in this discussion and the format would encourage the expression of those worldviews through additional feedback.

Questions were developed from the literature review and Heifner's (2021) pilot study and framed around the four aspects of transformational leadership. Questions were revised after the pilot study based on participant feedback and suggestions on question

reconstruction. Clarification questions were used throughout the interviews and post interviews to check for accuracy of the participants' feedback through member checks.

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (2009) states that the qualitative research process is cyclical as opposed to linear as collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Further, the process works in tandem as each interview is conducted and each phase of data collection directs the next phase as one both refines and reformulates questions. That collection then leads to the data analysis phase.

Because existing theories and literature on the subject are limited, the researcher allowed themes to emerge directly from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Open coding was applied. Creswell (2015) states that coding is a process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting them back in a meaningful manner. Merriam (2009) describes open coding as being "open" to all possibilities in exploring the data as a researcher reflects on notes, comments, and queries in the margins of interview transcripts.

The researcher utilized recorded Zoom© interviews, interview transcripts, and a reflexive journal that detailed strategies to mitigate bias, thoughts during the interviews, and post interview reflections. Participants were informed that she was a PhD student studying adult religious education who is also a Christian. During the interviews, as conversation guided, her previous experience working in a safehouse with ST victims, her professional experience as a professor, and personal experience with victims were revealed. Reflections of the researcher were recorded throughout the process in her reflexive journal.

Reflexive journals are utilized so the researcher can actively self-reflect on the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The reflexive journal was reviewed post interview and pre interview in between the interview subjects thus modeling what Merriam (2009) states about refining when the information is fresh in the mind of the researcher. Hays and Singh (2012) discuss that reflexive journals are used at every phase in the process to assess how the research process is impacting the researcher both personally and professionally. The journal created an audit trail that documents the process, whereas the transcripts served as the units of analysis.

### **Analysis Steps**

Hays and Singh (2012) state that generic steps in the qualitative process include reducing, collecting, memoing, and summarizing data. A qualitative thematic analysis was utilized. The researcher and another adult education professor engaged in analysis. Open coding was used, and themes were derived from the data which assisted in organizing, coding, identifying themes/patterns, creating a codebook, and then developing a narrative. First, the interviews were transcribed word for word using the Zoom© software system producing line by line written transcription. In an effort to stay as close to the data as possible, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions word for word to check for spelling and accuracy of decoding from spoken to written words. This was done twice. Then all video recordings were reviewed and cross referenced with written transcripts. Revisions were made as transcripts were missing information, misspelled words, omitted line numbers, and misidentified the speakers. Hays and Singh (2012) strongly recommend researchers review data themselves in order to focus on verbal language, but also to focus on elements of nonverbal communication. Second, while

reflecting on the reflexive journal and transcripts, the researcher began the coding process, while also challenging assumptions, worldviews, and biases as she developed codes (Merriam, 2009). A code is a label or tag that organizes, and chunks amounts of data into units of analysis as one works in an interpretive manner to create etic codes as the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). Third, the researcher explored words, sentences, and/or paragraphs, and how those wordings and statements may reflect perceptions. Fourth, the researcher manually coded by making comments on the transcripts, color coding with highlighters, and creating posters of potential codes. Fifth, the researcher brainstormed those codes in order to examine how they could be identified as patterns as differences and similarities were postulated while reflecting on the research questions along with an additional adult education professor. Sixth, new codes were created accordingly, as the researcher reflected on whether the codes and their names accurately reflected the descriptions. Seventh, once codes had been revised, themes were developed into a codebook (see Appendix G). Finally, these were documented in a list of codes, definitions, and examples taken directly from interview transcripts. Data saturation was achieved in the ninth interview when information repetition occurred, and no new information was collected.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The aforementioned steps assisted in demonstrating the credibility of the researcher as data was analyzed in an organic manner as codes and themes emerged and drove the data. The pilot study was used to inform question construction for this study, guided the design phase, and validated the need for both sexes in paid positions to participate in this study. Member checking (Merriam, 2009), whereby the participants'



reviewed the transcribed interviews, offered the participants the opportunity to clarify, add notes, and continue engagement in the process post-interview as we collaboratively reviewed and revised for clarity and authenticity of interpretation (Hays & Singh, 2012). Hays & Singh (2012) state that member checking can be conducted within the interview itself, after data has been transcribed, or after analysis of transcripts. The researcher utilized member checks during all interviews, sent out post-interview questions and requests for additional information to selected interviewees, and then extended an invitation post transcription during the analysis phase inviting all interviewees to participate via email (see Appendix E). She sent the video files and line by line transcription to all interviewees for their reference. All interviewees were engaged in member checking during the interviews, four pastors provided minimal feedback post interview during transcription review as matters of clarification to specific questions asked by the researcher, and several provided minor feedback during the analysis phase answering an additional question and suggesting revisions in the analysis chapter. She created a member checking log to document the process of engagement (see Appendix F).

### **Limitations**

The researcher's experience in the Christian community could be perceived as biased. The safeguards of utilizing previous participants through snowball and convenience sampling could have impacted the study. However, the majority of participants were unknown to the researcher thus providing distance between them. In addition, credibility was addressed through using a reflective journal and member checking, thus allowing the data to drive the study as opposed to personal opinion and

interpretation. An additional researcher was consulted thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the data analysis phase.

The fact that the researcher used snowball and convenience sampling could have impacted the participants' ability to disclose information of a sensitive nature about the taboo topic. This topic is not popular in Christian communities and is considered "taboo" because it touches on sex and sexuality (Ferree, 2010). This may have influenced who participated and how they participated. The researcher combatted these limitations through clear, honest communication with participants that built rapport through the interview process by offering total anonymity and through member checking. That feedback was kept in a locked, secured place where no one else had access to.

### **Ethics and Human Subject Protection**

The researcher completed Human Subjects Training and conducted a pilot project on the subject which was needed because of the lack of religious, academic literature prior to this study. The pilot addressed what knowledge and ST advocacy efforts existed in three separate Christian churches in a Midwestern state and results helped to shape the data needed for this larger dissertation study. This project was approved by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and all consent processes were reviewed prior to the study. Feedback was given from the IRB and an advisor on the project and email invitations, documents, letters, and forms were approved prior to distribution for the pilot study conducted. After the study, revisions were made to the introductory script and interview questions asked of the participants during the interviews. This was done in preparation for the dissertation study using a larger sample size. As a researcher, educator, and Christian, strategies to mitigate bias were applied. However, the

researcher had connections in the local, Christian community and utilized those through mutual acquaintances to recruit additional participants.

### **Summary**

This study examined Christian pastor advocacy for victims of ST. The research questions, population, sample, and data collection were discussed in detail, along with strategies to mitigate researcher bias and limitations. Nine Christian pastors from four different Midwestern states in the U.S. were recruited. Allies from the pilot study were utilized to assist in recruiting pastors through snowball and convenience sampling. Data analysis included coding by the researcher as well as an additional adult education professor and member checking was employed. Every effort was made to avoid researcher bias as positionality was discussed and a reflexive journal kept.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis**

As stated in Chapter 1, this qualitative, thematic analysis sought to explore pastoral advocacy for ST victims in their faith communities throughout the Midwestern U.S. Understanding what advocacy is occurring and the pastors' experiences were necessary since literature is lacking. Pastors participated in a 60-minute, semi-structured, recorded, Zoom© interviews with open-ended, preplanned, and probing questions. Post interview they were sent the line-by-line transcription and videos. This study's design, data collection, analysis, and conclusion will be explored along with the study findings. The chapter is organized by the themes that emerged from the data followed by the three research questions posed in chapter 1.

### **Study Design**

This qualitative, thematic study was conducted in Midwestern U. S. Nine Christian pastors from four different Midwestern states participated in one-on-one semi-structured, Zoom© interviews to gather information for this dissertation report. Reported findings are summarized as follows:

- Longstanding advocacy was present in these faith communities.
- Passion drives advocacy efforts which were typically initiated by males but maintained by females in the church.
- Interdenominational partnerships were driven by passion and provided opportunities for umbrella advocacy and collaboration.
- Multiple forms of advocacy are occurring within these faith communities.
- Both females and male pastors are active in the fight against sex trafficking in their faith communities, although roles may differ. Females tended to be in

direct leadership positions spearheading ministries devoted to advocacy for victims as part of their full- time roles, while males tended to provide overarching and peripheral and support when not in direct roles.

- Advocacy efforts were God ordained and Holy Spirit driven as part of a Biblical mandate.

### **Demographic Results**

We will now turn to the demographics of study participants by sex, race, marital status, age, education, denomination, and church size. First, with reference to biological sex, three females (30%) and six males (70%) participated as displayed in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1****Participant demographics**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean/Details</b>	<b>Mean/Details</b>	<b>Range</b>
Sex	Female (n=3)	Male (n=6)	-----
Race	White (n=7)	African American (n=2)	-----
Marital Status	Married (n=6)	Divorced (n=1)	-----
	Single (n=1)	Separated (n=1)	
Age	48.5 years	-----	33-65 years
Education	Higher Ed. (n=1)	Master's (n=5)	-----
	Bachelor's (n=2)	Doctorate (n=1)	
Denomination	Lutheran (n=2)	African Methodist Ep. (n=1)	-----
	Wesleyan (n=1)		
	Pentecostal (n=1)	Christian- Non- Denominational (n=4)	

With regard to age, two participants fell into the 30-39 age range (22%), four were in the 40-49 age range (45%), one was in the 50-59 age range (11%), and two were in the 60-65 age range (22%). The racial breakdown of participants includes two Black/African Americans (22%) and seven White/Caucasians (78%).

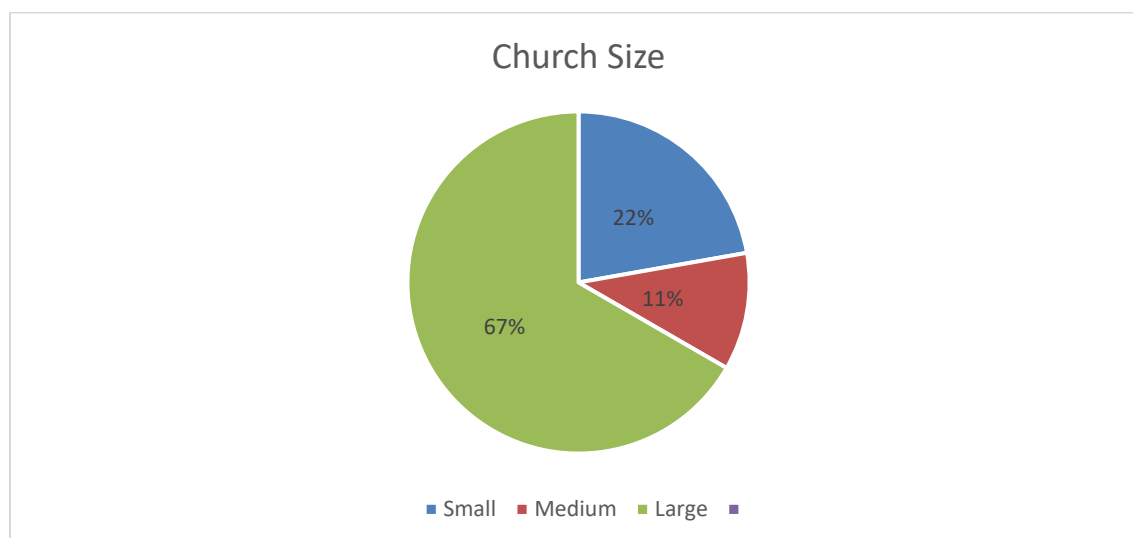
All of the study participants had some higher education with the highest degree being a Doctorate in Ministry. One participant had some higher education, two had

bachelor's degrees, five had master's degrees including one pastor who had two master's degrees, and one pastor had a doctorate.

All the study participants represented Christian ministries although their denominational affiliations differed. The following denominations were represented: Lutheran Evangelical Covenant- two (20%), Wesleyan- one (10%), Pentecostal-one (10%), African Methodist Episcopalian- one (10%), and four were classified as Christian, non-denominational ministries (40%).

#### **Figure 4.2- Church Size**

According to the Barna study (2016), church sizes are small (50 people or less), medium (51-300), large (301-1999), and mega (2000+). There were nine faith communities involved in the study.



There were two small churches, one medium, and six large churches. In order to protect the anonymity of the nine pastors, they will be referred to by the fruits of the Spirit. The fruits of the spirit are characteristics modeled and multiplied in the lives of believers as they become more like Christ. The fruits were referenced in the bible in Galatians 5:22-23 representing the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The

scriptures state that, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self- control (NASB 1971/2020).” To increase anonymity, these attributes will be the names used for the participants.

Pastor Love was a Caucasian male, age 35, with a master’s degree, and serves at a medium sized non-denominational church. Pastor Joy was a Caucasian male, age 48, with a Doctorate degree, serving at a large non-denominational church. Pastor Peace was a Caucasian male, age 49, with a master’s degree serving in a large Lutheran church. Pastor Patience was a Caucasian female, age 65, with a master’s degree serving at a large Wesleyan church. Pastor Kindness was a Caucasian female, age 65, with a bachelor’s degree serving in a large non-denominational church. Pastor Goodness was a Black/African American male, age 44, with higher education, serving in a small Pentecostal church. Pastor Faithfulness was a Black/African American female, age 33, with two master’s degrees, serving in a small African Methodist Episcopalian church. Pastor Gentleness was a Caucasian male, age 41, with a bachelor’s degree, serving at a large nondenominational church. Finally, Pastor Self- Control was a Caucasian male, age 57, with a master’s degree serving in a large Lutheran Covenant church.

## **Findings**

The overarching question for the study was “What advocacy efforts within their faith community have Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. undertaken for victims of ST?” The thematic connections will be discussed followed by each research question in numerical order below.

## **Thematic Connections**



In reviewing the qualitative data and codes, seven themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) ST ID; (b) Education; (c) Passion points are indicative of God calling people to act; (d) Umbrella advocacy consisted of indirect, peripheral, and direct pathways; (e) Heart work was built through ecumenical collaborations; (f) Spirit work embodies divine intervention enacted by human hands but ordained and directed by God; and (g) Protection of the flock which seeks to advocate for vulnerabilities within faith communities.

### **ST ID**

In this theme, ST ID was identified as problematic. Three codes emerged to create this theme. The first code represented an inability for pastors to identify victims of ST present in the faith community. Six of the nine pastors were unable to provide definitive answers when asked if they knew victims within their faith communities. Pastor Peace, male, age 49, stated that it would be helpful to know who the victims are in order to connect them to resources and congregants who can assist.

The second code described an inability for the faith community to identify victims of ST. Pastor Joy, male, age 48, commented that he did not know how often congregants would run into self-identifying victims. He further stated that victims may not want to self-identify. Pastor Love, male, age 35, was told that victims had attended services, but he was unaware of their presence.

The third code referenced the lack of ST ID from the viewpoint of the victims due to a lack of self-identification. Pastor Patience, female, age 65, discussed how one victim in her long-term residential program did not even perceive herself as a potential victim due to her age. Pastor Kindness, female, age 65, disclosed that if victims are involved in

intimate partner relationships that evolve into ST, they may not even understand that they are victims. Because of a lack of education, victims may not be able to self- identify.

Education is needed.

### **Education**

In this theme, education was discussed by all pastors. There were five codes that emerged from data collection. The first was a lack of formal education on ST for pastors. None of the pastors in the study received formal education through their seminary regarding the subject if they attended seminary for their theological education. They had all received some type of education on ST, but the majority of that came from nonprofit organizations dealing with the population, community collaborations, denominational initiatives, and coalition involvement. Second, there were myths about victims of ST. Third, there were myths about ST. Pastor Love, male, discussed that the myth of ST being only an international problem, may shock those trying to understand that it is domestic as well. Fourth, there was an absence of seminary education on ST. Pastor Peace, male, age 49, mentioned that ST is not something that his congregation would have been afraid to learn more about and that some topics are taboo, but in their faith community that was not one of them. Their advocacy stems back to previous leadership and spans more than 15 years. Finally, a lack of education on red flags was prevalent. Pastor Gentleness, male, age 41, mentioned that when it came to background checks, congregants knew what to look for but when referencing ST, he stated that they may not have received specific training.

### **Passion Points: God's Calling**

In this theme, "Passion points" advocacy was exemplified by a belief that God calls the body of believers to this type of advocacy. Pastor Goodness used the phrase "passion points" which is where the theme was labeled as a description of something the faith community is incredibly passionate about. God will call us to work He has chosen as referenced in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for us to do (NASB 1971/2020)." The express purpose is responding to a calling by God for work He has called us to do. Pastors in particular understand this notion of calling as many of them disclosed that they felt "called" to become pastors. Pastor Gentleness states, "I wasn't really planning on being a pastor it just kind of happened and you feel like you have been called (personal communication, October 12, 2022)." Pastor Goodness chuckles as he recalls that although he felt the calling, he ran from that but eventually surrendered. Pastors understand that when a passion and calling unite, their role is to allow that to come to fruition. ST advocacy is no exception.

In several instances, advocacy for victims of ST was initiated through the calling of national or denominational initiatives by male leaders. Several pastors inherited a legacy of advocacy that dated back over a decade. Specifically, two male pastors in the study spearheaded efforts in their faith communities thus proving that males are essential and can advocate in clearly defined ways and can be utilized in working with victims in specific types of advocacies. For example, Pastor Goodness, male, representing the smallest church in the study, has designated funds to assist a local Christian, nonprofit to support a local safehouse for teen victims of ST and street outreach ministry. He stated,

“ST advocacy is one of our passion points in the sense that we wanted to make that a part of our budget (personal communication, October 12, 2022).” He further discusses that his passion and calling were led by the revelation he had as an African American man about human slavery still occurring making this initiative a priority. While males reinforced those initiatives and drove advocacy initially, in general, female pastors and female volunteers maintained advocacy sustainability because of personal passion or being called. Three male pastors credited unpaid, female congregants/volunteers for sparking advocacy within their congregations as a result of their own passion and knowledge of the subject. Pastor Goodness says that you want people to do what they are already passionate about because he cannot personally lead every initiative. Pastor Peace, whose lifegroup volunteers eventually became a fund-raising division for a Christian nonprofit serving female, teen victims of ST, states that he does not have to work hard to inspire volunteers because they are already inspired, and God is working on their hearts. He says,

We just equip the saints to do what they feel called to do and about which they are already passionate. Leadership does not have to micromanage. If we let the groups do what they are passionate about doing, we do not have to make them because it is their personal passion. We get a lot more buy in when people step up and say this is a real passion of mine (personal communication, October 11, 2022).

Pastor Self-Control speaks of his faith community’s partnership with Pastor Kindness, who serves full time advocating for victims of ST, by reiterating that “I am not sure most pastors would have the capability and the know how to do that, but she seems to be called to do this (personal communication, October 28, 2022).” Pastor Faithfulness,

age 33, says of her congregants' calling and passion, I just walk behind them and wherever their minds go, I'm in support of it. This communicates the belief that these individuals have been called to this type of ministry by God and they are to support that calling and in some instances, step aside to allow God to work. God calls all, not just pastors. However, pastors are strategically positioned to support and recognize the calling on someone else's life.

Pastor Joy reinforces this belief when he says, "we want to empower people to do what God has called them to do (personal communication, September 28, 2022)." He spoke of a female volunteer in his congregation who took the helm stating, "she is an advocate on all manner of important causes as a social worker who had already been partnering with a Christian nonprofit that helps victims of ST through long-term residential housing, which was a "God thing (personal communication, September 28, 2022)." She drove initiatives in their faith community, but unfortunately, they did not sustain over time. Lack of continuity over time was identified by Pastor Joy as a barrier.

Aligning with that sentiment, Pastor Kindness, female, age 65, who leads full-time ministry efforts such as "The John School," Freedom Fighters, and the strip club ministry stated, "We need paid staff members. It takes more than just having a non-staff volunteer who is passionate about it. We need paid staff members for this ministry that can back it up and make things happen (personal communication, October 5, 2022)." While passion points may equate to a God calling on someone's life, human support through leadership is also needed to see those efforts come to fruition. However, a calling, pastor support, and passion may not be enough to sustain.

Short term advocacy provides the foundation for long term advocacy in a variety of capacities, but many types and levels of advocacy may be needed which leads to the next theme of umbrella advocacy which provides wrap-around support.

### **Umbrella advocacy**

In the majority of faith communities, that personal passion and calling, driven by either sex, provided a foundation for faith communities to entertain additional forms of advocacy. If they were involved in one form, they tended to be involved in multiple forms all of which would indirectly or directly benefit victims of ST even if they were unaware of or were not working directly with the population. Faith communities were involved in advocacy through indirect, peripheral, and direct pathways.

**Table 4.3****Umbrella Advocacy Pathways**

<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Peripheral</i>	<i>Direct</i>
Work with vulnerable populations in the faith community in general.	Supported advocacy without having a direct role but had overarching involvement.	Working directly with victims of ST for relational goals rather than ministerial ones.

Indirect pathways consisted of faith communities who did not have established ministries specifically for victims or were not targeting victims of ST within the larger community. Those advocacy efforts were for human service provision of basic needs to vulnerable populations in general. Faith communities tended to engage their extended communities through their advocacy for vulnerable populations like foster care, orphans, food insecurity, homeless (displaced), populations dealing with addictive behaviors, and pregnancy ministries. Although their work spanned multiple groups, many pastors were unaware of specific victims of ST/populations in which they were assisting because those efforts were indirect and as referenced previously, ST ID is so problematic. Pastor Joy, male, said that he did not know how often they would encounter self-identifying victims because victims may not want to self-identify for obvious reasons. Pastor Peace, male, whose ministry is very involved externally in advocacy was asked if he had interacted with victims of ST inside of his faith community and he replied not that he was aware of. Pastor Gentleness could not think of any reason his faith community would not meet those needs if they could identify the audience, the size, and the needs. They would most certainly address that felt need. This lack of visibility and identification may contribute to

why these ministries are unable to provide needs-based assistance because they may be unaware of the demographic. They may have encountered victims of ST through these forms of advocacy to vulnerable populations.

In addition to meeting basic needs, another indirect effort was through educational interventions. Those advocacy efforts focused on the supply/demand side of the issues and would have an indirect, although powerful impact on victims of ST. Pastor Kindness, female, says that this education does promote conversation and disrupt the silence within faith communities. Males led educational based advocacy on demand within their faith communities. Male pastors both participated in and led other males regarding the demand side of the issues modeling transformational leadership (TL) tenet one as Pastor Goodness emphasizes that “we realize that we have to lead by example by doing things we are advocating for (personal communication, October 12, 2022).” Pastor Love states that they have a public belief statement about sexual purity and also preach specifically about lust with the target audiences being youth and adult males. This is done through regular programming hosted annually.

Peripheral support consisted of male leadership supporting and validating callings through individual and collective support systems to allow for advocacy sustainability. Males actively participated in many of those efforts, where appropriate. Pastor Self-Control, male, age 57, says, “I know I can’t be primarily involved in working with the women, so I oversee the program, participate on the event planning team, engage in fundraising, and serve as the primary contact for ministry partnership (personal communication, October 28, 2022).” Even if direct contact with the populations is not involved, pastors provided overarching support so the ministry efforts could flourish



within their congregations. This validates the need for resources like human power, support staff, validation of advocacy purpose, education from the mainstage, and encouragement to establish 501c3 corporations. While males tended to serve in indirect functions and not personally be involved, their peripheral support allowed for the passion points that validated the needs and continuum of short term and long-term efforts which operate within the faith communities. Pastor Kindness states that they have full support from the male pastors even though they may not head up those specific ministries within their faith community.

Direct efforts were exemplified by ministries specifically working with victims of ST. For example, strip club outreach is a direct effort whose target audience are female, adult victims of ST. Their methods are nonintrusive. Their goal is relational rather than ministerial. They offer a presence and build relationships with the women and have been doing so for over 8 years with the permission from ownership. Pastor Patience describes this ministry effort like this,

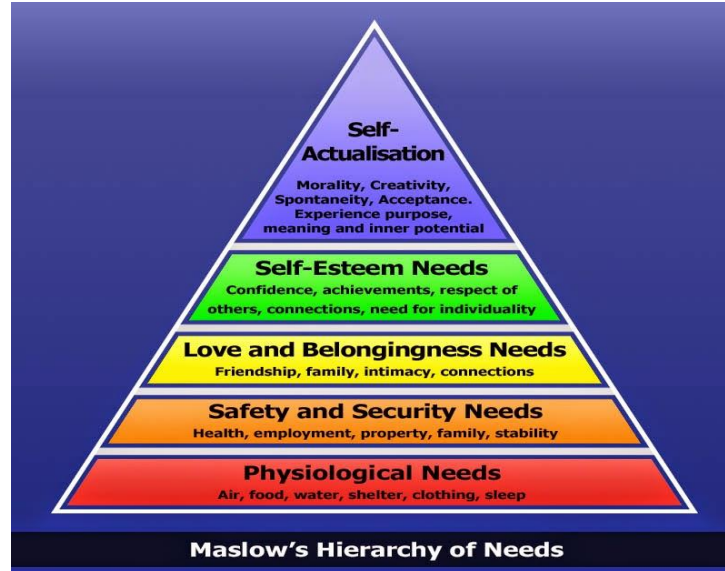
Once a month, we simply build bridges and relationships through gift bags/treats, and roses which are given to each dancer. Volunteers are usually college age females, interns, me, along with volunteers from other area churches. A local flower shop donates the flowers and volunteers make and wrap the treats. A male security person accompanies the ladies but stays outside while volunteers enter the club (personal communication, February 15, 2023).

They often provide gifts, encouragement, and additional kinds of support. Pastor Kindness, female, 65, speaks of the victims of ST's desire to bond with church women and build relationships as they have experienced it through their strip club ministry which

has been active for over 15 years. Like Pastor Patience's faith community efforts, these are also relationally focused. With reference to one particular victim, she said, "She needed a mama. There was a need to attach there, and we were able to provide her with a woman who could mentor her (personal communication, October 5, 2022)." Stating that well after some of those relationships become established, the women may still be working in the industry but maintain those relationships. Victims of ST's needs extend far beyond basic needs. She states that when working with survivors of familial trafficking that they need a safe, loving family which includes a mama, and a dad who will not succumb to sexualized behaviors, a community, financial help, a faith community that will not be shocked by how they behave or parent their own children, and that their needs are astronomical, especially when survivors were trafficked in childhood.

They needed relationships, mentoring, and additional resources. Faith communities may be more suited for specific types of advocacy dependent upon their own internal and external resources and skill sets. When direct efforts were used, faith communities working within ST victim populations were able to assess and understand needs better to assist the population. In several examples, the faith communities were providing an incredible amount of assistance that tapped into higher ordered needs as defined by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy, all humans have the same basic level needs including survival, physical and psychological safety, social connection, self-esteem and actualization (Maslow, 1943). This theory states that lower-level needs must be met to achieve the higher ordered needs (Beebe, Beebe, & Ivy, 2010). They are defined in the figure below.

**Figure 4.4 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**



Source: Beebe, Beebe, & Ivy, 2010

When ministry efforts attended to physiological needs, the efforts tended to be indirect and in support of others who had direct contact with the population. When advocacy was peripheral, needs like financial, safety, and security needs were primary. For example, Pastor Peace's faith community works directly with a Christian nonprofit that serves teen victims of ST in a safehouse. The female volunteers have been granted access to the girls to focus on higher ordered needs like love and belonging needs through intimacy and connection as they teach, pray, and study the bible with them. Given safety protocol in safehouses, this type of access is incredible difficult to attain. However, it demonstrates the level of trust extended to this faith community that volunteers are permitted access to the home and the girls. In this example alone, multiple levels of Maslow's hierarchy are being enacted through various forms of advocacy. When collaborations take place, advocacy efforts increase, and victims of ST are served in sustaining ways which leads to the next theme of Heart work.

## **Heart work**

The theme of Heart work was representative of passion driven by ecumenical collaborations involving other denominations and secular sources from community partnerships that is non-competitive and collective. Theological or denominational differences were irrelevant when they considered collaboration. This allowed for more advocacy for victims of ST by combining human, financial, and intellectual capital through collective approaches. Pastor Peace, male, large church, spoke of their partnership with Pastor Goodness, male, small church, and said, “I did not know Pastor Peace, but we heard he was doing good work in the city in ST advocacy, and he is not from our church/denomination, but who cares? We just asked how can we help you (personal communication, October 11, 2022)?” Pastor Goodness says, “We realize we do not have the ability to do it (advocate) ourselves and we always feel it is better to partner with somebody who is already doing it. Makes that even stronger than trying to do it by starting from scratch and doing it yourself (personal communication, October 12, 2022).” Partnerships with those who have expertise and financial resources are essential. Pastor Faithfulness, female, age 33, speaks of her ecumenical partnerships when she says:

I always feel like human power is first and best, financials can come with that, and we need people who are passionate and equipped. We partner with other churches because you know you try to do it on your own, but it really is the community that has to kind of bridge those gaps together. Everybody is supposed to treat somebody good. Love your neighbor. We partner with other denominations including Lutheran, Church of God in Christ, and Methodist (personal communication, October 18, 2022).

Pastor Gentleness, male, speaks of having a representative come from a local nonprofit that provides community-based services and long-term residential housing to female, teen victims of ST. He serves as the president of a community outreach coalition for a drug free community, and he says, “there is no race in lifeboats, we want to be able to help people. And so we are not competing with other churches. We are the strongest home when we are together so we can make the biggest difference (personal communication, October 20, 2022).”

The most extensive ecumenical partnership in the study provides umbrella advocacy from three different denominations, a Wesleyan Church, a Lutheran Covenant Church, and the Brethren in Christ U.S. denomination in collaboration with their surrounding communities. Because they joined forces, each faith community serves according to their gifts and expertise. For example, Pastor Patience, female, age 65, works full time in her role as Executive Director and her faith community provides the following of human power, financial capital, and intellectual capital as they utilize all three pathways: indirect, peripheral, and direct, thus modeling Maslow’s needs:

- Female, paid, full-time pastor, paid survivors of ST, and male pastor leadership driven initiatives
- Long term residential housing for adult women who were victims of ST and a strip club ministry to adult female victims of ST
- Curriculum for the long-term residential housing
- Programming and education for both the faith community and victims
- Staff and operate the ministry

- Supply two offices in their church with support staff who print publications and materials
- Give monetary donations to the ministry that was established as its own 501c3
- Adopt the women at Christmas, gives gifts, have ministry fairs, and host graduations
- Provide volunteers for mentoring, community partnerships, job placement, training, service opportunities, and community resources

At the time community saturation of pro-bono services occurred, her leadership considered program duplication in another city or town within the state. They put out feelers within their own denomination before exploring additional partnerships. Pastor Patience was then contacted by another denomination who had a house and wanted to explore partnership. She stated that they had been praying about that option. This birthed the partnership between the Pastor Kindness and Pastor Self-Control, their leadership, and their faith communities.

Pastor Self- Control recommends that other pastors find those who have more knowledge and experience and see if you can partner with them.

Partnership is a great way to tackle getting engaged and I don't think that those partnerships have to be specific Christian ministry partnerships. From my experience on our coalition, there are many people in our community that have a passion to address ST. Don't come at it from a Christian mission motivation and it's not a bad thing to collaborate with people who have the same goal but maybe

not the same initial motivation, but maybe see a need and want to address it (personal communication, October 28, 2022).

Pastor Self- Control's faith community provides indirect, peripheral, and direct support through human, financial, and intellectual capital thus modeling TL tenets one, two, and three. Their capital provides:

- A residential facility, maintenance of the property, pay for utilities/maintenance, hired a full-time properties manager, and financial donations
- Male allies/volunteers working in indirect and peripheral ways
- Females working in direct pathways
- Special events to promote the program within the faith community and externally
- Small group bible studies with clientele, mentorship programs, and prayer
- Host fundraisers and provide victim and leadership testimonies
- Celebrate and hold graduation ceremonies for clientele

Pastor Self- Control said, "We felt like in order for the program to be successful in our community, there had to be way more partnership across the community (personal communication, October 28, 2022)." The third faith community was a church plant 15 years ago whose primary outreach was to those who struggled with addiction. They have a strong recovery program and when reflecting on the higher ordered needs of the victims of ST, both pastors believed clientele may be more comfortable there. They provide:

- Weekly church services which victims attend

- Discipleship functions and walk alongside the women in their healing journey

As previously mentioned, victims of ST have tremendous needs that require more than just indirect, peripheral, and direct pathways. This extensive partnership between three different denominational faith communities addresses all levels of Maslow's needs and provides advocacy for up to 12 clients per program cycle. As demonstrated, multiple types and forms of support are needed, and it often takes the entire community addressing needs to serve the population in a holistic manner. According to Levenson (2017), when a client's basic needs for safety, respect, and acceptance in a helping relationship are understood, an environment of trust can be established.

Advocacy readiness, needs based advocacy, and spiritual maturity, can be assessed by pastors who have an intimate knowledge of their flocks and target audiences and can best decide how to assist them in their healing journey. That knowledge drove the next theme of Spirit work, which will now be discussed.

### **Spirit work**

This theme reinforces that Spirit work is a God-driven and ordained-transformational learning journey. This is a process for non-believers, Christians pastors, volunteers, advocates, and victims of ST receiving services. This may lead to advocacy readiness and participation. All are in a process of growth and transformation and is not dependent upon the work of human hands nor are its outcomes. In the views of Christians, the Holy Spirit does the work for all involved.

Pastor Patience, female, acknowledges that in advocacy efforts and victim participation in the long-term residential program that "people try to lead, but the Holy



Spirit is the one who needs to convict hearts (personal communication, October 3, 2022).” The design of their program does not require conversion to Christianity of its clientele thus acknowledging that the Spirit of God leads and evokes any change which may include knowledge, healing, and restoration. She states:

We do not mandate that victims change their beliefs. We do not mandate that they change anything. You have to step back and give victims the grace and space to wrestle and let the Holy Spirit do the convincing and the convicting. You are not the one that convinces or convicts (personal communication, October 3, 2022).

Spirit work drives transformation for all and exemplifies that a transformational learning journey is individual as well as collective and that includes pastors, congregants, victims of ST, and the external community. This also includes unknown, God ordained timelines which may extend beyond the time period in which faith communities interact with victims of ST. The goals of helping were more holistic in nature and did not include conversion of faith. Pastor Patience also mentions that “They do not have to accept Christ. If a client leaves us, and they do not align with scripture, I am ok with that because there is an understanding that the Holy Spirit is still at work in their lives. It is a process and that is okay (personal communication, October 3, 2022).”

This process extends to the faith community as well. Pastor Kindness, female, validates that personal passion can be cultivated from personal pain. She recalls that the sexual abuse ministry her faith community began over 35 years ago has provided a passionate launching point for continued advocacy because of their own personal experiences. Their learning was transformational, and they have extended that through

character classes, recovery groups, sermon series, “The John School,” Freedom Fighters, and the strip club ministry.

Pastor advocacy, readiness, and knowledge levels may differ. Pastor Gentleness discusses TL tenet two and three when he reveals that for the congregation’s development as well as the leaders, his faith community recently read *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. He says, “we want to connect people, grow spiritually, and navigate life together which is a good way to represent a mission statement. You’re loving God and bringing people to Jesus for life (personal communication, October 20, 2022).” Pastor Self- Control reflects on his own transformational learning journey of Spirit work with regard to ST. His leadership has been leaning into this area for five to ten years. He explains:

We want to be learning and growing. I have not done as much as I could or should with sex trafficking, but I am much further down the road than I was four years ago. I knew a bit about it four years ago, but I know a whole lot about it today. I want to continue to translate the cause for people, I want to be able to point to what the purpose is, or what the reason behind why we’re doing this is (personal communication, October 28, 2022).

His faith community is the one that now has an ecumenical partnership with two other denominations of the same faith after learning from their previous experiences with serving adult females who had aged out of foster care. Their transformational experience positioned them to better understand needs and the type of advocacy they wanted to partake in with this population. Pastor Joy states that much learning for leadership has to be learned on the ground. Pastor Love speaks of transformational learning and leadership

comes from both seeing and doing the work. Reflecting on his own participation in street outreach to victims of ST, he states that Jesus walked with his disciples, he went everywhere they went, he did everything they did and being a servant and a disciple is what they try to emphasize as they protect their flocks which is the final theme.

### **Protection of the Flock**

The final theme exemplifies the importance of advocacy readiness, protection from spiritual woundedness, dispelling myths that harm all, and disciplinary measures. Pastors acknowledged that transformational learning is essential especially when it comes to understanding myths about victims of ST that could cause inadvertent spiritual woundedness in the populations they are trying to serve. Pastor Joy, male, is driving educational advocacy with the goal of awareness to his leadership and youth group volunteers regarding transgenderism as they have transgendered individuals in their congregation. He states, “This is not an area in which I have any expertise, but I decided to jump in no matter how messy and splashy it got. We teach about accepting all people as Christ has accepted us. Volunteers have been confused about how to help. Our youth are growing up in a more complicated world and we want to help them understand God’s vision for their bodies (personal communication, February 25, 2023).” This demonstrates TL tenet one because he is serving as a role model, and TL tenet three through educating himself and his community with an express concern for the development of believers and the transgendered people they serve in their faith community. For his transformational learning, he utilized two key resources: *Embodied* by Christian author Preston Sprinkle, who has a PhD in New Testament and specializes in sexuality, and *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* by Mark Yarhouse, a Christian psychologist who works with

transgender individuals. They have also used Dr. Preston Sprinkle's book on homosexuality, *People to be Loved*. This assists in raising awareness, providing education so myths and misunderstandings do not create caverns of division within the faith community.

Pastors understood that their faith communities may not consist of safe people. Admittedly, they were keenly aware of dangers within faith communities, leadership, predators targeting faith communities, and making sure that victims of ST were protected as much as possible when interacting with their congregants, as well as through their community partnerships. They were able to identify and use transformational learning to combat dangers within faith communities, dangers within leadership, and barriers. Pastor Kindness and her leadership dedicated a sermon series entitled "Burned by the Church" to address spiritual woundedness.

Spiritual woundedness was of great concern both within leadership, administration, faith communities, within ST victim communities, and when those communities interacted. As referenced in TL tenet one, pastors are role models who have tremendous ability to influence their flock but also advocate for their faith communities who may be able to assess advocacy readiness by type and level of involvement based on spiritual maturity and understanding. Pastors educate their faith communities, spend quality time, counsel them, serve, and understand their strengths and limitations.

When victims of ST are woven into ministries, protocol was in place to protect them as vulnerable populations who could be spiritually wounded and revictimized. When ministry efforts are direct, the pastors tended to be more informed about potential woundedness with the ST victim populations to avoid victim blaming, silence, and

judgment. Believing in myths could also be a recipe for disaster for all audiences. They were very serious about protecting victims from potential danger both inside the faith community and within their established community partnerships. They tended to understand how catastrophic a breach of trust by Christians could impact victims of ST personally, psychologically, spiritually, and their healing journey. Pastor Patience, female, age 65, spent one and a half years educating her faith community and leadership for advocacy readiness and engagement before they ever received victims of ST in their faith community. She states the following:

I am invited by churches to come, and I often take a survivor who has graduated from our long-term residential housing program. We share with the congregation, mission's group, or event group about ST and especially address some of the myths held by church goers on the subject that might often bring judgement, condemnation, and rejection that can be spiritually wounding to a victim of ST. Our program works hard to not only provide healing and recovery emotionally, mentally, physically, but also spiritually, reconciling them to a Heavenly Father who loves them, but also to His Bride, the Church, who can be grace-filled, non-judgmental, tangible form of Christ to the broken, hurting, and seeking life change. The bride who will be in any city they are in when they are not in our safe, secure, loving environment (personal communication, February 25, 2023).

Aligning with those sentiments, Pastor Peace, male, large size church, stated that they need to know the flock and who to connect survivors to. Pastor Kindness discussed that her faith community openly embraces convicted sex offenders and victims of ST in the same space. She was cautious in using men in ministry efforts because she stated that

“they would need men who would not succumb to sexualized behaviors (personal communication, October 11, 2022).” Given that her faith community is blended, strict protocol regarding offenders has been established to both protect the general community, victims of ST, and the offenders themselves. Her transformational learning has continued and as she modeled TL tenet four, intellectual stimulation, because she educated herself about recidivism rates through self-directed learning from Dr. Anna Salter, a psychologist who specializes in predators, perpetrators/victims in her faith community, attending and presenting at the International Christian Alliance on Prostitution (ICAP) conferences formed in 2006. This global network of practitioners work together to strengthen their capacities to help women and men in prostitution and those who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation (ICAPglobal.org). She credits survivors for educating her. She educated the male staff about the dangers which helped birth safety protocol in their faith community. Their protocol advances that offenders will be watched, cared for, taught, invested in, and that extends to both male and female offenders. Male allies and chaperones are handpicked by leadership. The men are trained in protocol that Pastor Kindness developed utilizing the work of Dr. Anna Salter. The protocol dictates that offenders be watched while they are present in the building, they are only allowed to use a designated restroom, they must work with their probation officers, and they have monthly meetings with pastors. Depending upon volunteers/graduates healing journeys, they could be utilized in various capacities.

Pastor Kindness reiterates that they believe in redemption but also must discipline when a breach of behavior or trust occurs describing a breach that occurred in her faith community. They had a female, victim of ST who needed services on her car. The church

paid for repairs to be made by a congregant's body shop approved for referrals. Unfortunately, when the female solicited services, he made advances toward her, which devastated her and negatively impacted the victim. The incident was reported. Male allies from the ministry went to confront the man with the goal of rebuke. Pastor Kindness also mentioned that the goal of the rebuke was redemption stating, "We provide every opportunity to invest themselves in a healing process (personal communication, October 5, 2022)." As a result of that incident, the leadership rebuked him, and discontinued sending referrals to him. "The leadership supports and advocates for the ministries (personal communication, October 5, 2022)."

Now that the themes have been discussed, the research questions will be addressed.

**RQ # 1- How have Christian pastors participated in advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?**

The table below provides a summary of advocacy type within each pastors' faith community.

**Table 4.5 Advocacy type**

<b>Pastor</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Monetary</b>	<b>Outreach</b>	<b>Survivor</b>	<b>Safehouse</b>	<b>Residential</b>
Love	X	X	X	X	X	
Joy	X	X	X			
Peace	X	X	X		X	
Patience	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kindness	X	X	X	X		
Goodness	X	X	X		X	
Faithfulness	X		X			
Gentleness	X		X			
S. Control	X	X	X	X	X	X

The pastors themselves had all received some type of education or training about human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking, prior to the study. The majority of that education was provided by nonprofit entities that specialize in anti-trafficking advocacy in their local communities. Several were exposed to those agencies through their collaborative partnerships via denominational affiliations, interdenominational affiliations, and/or community coalitions in which they participate.

Advocacy manifested in various forms via including preventative education, monetary donations, community outreach, survivor events, safehouse support, a residential long-term therapeutic house, offender education and rehabilitation, and strip club ministries. The residential housing program was created and maintained initially by the faith community, but eventually became its own entity and is now a nonprofit



organization that the faith community still supports. The offender education and rehabilitation programs were created and are maintained within the faith community with external support from their collaborative partners including law enforcement, prosecutors, and parole officers. Two of the faith communities have long-standing strip club ministries that were created and now are maintained, and supervised in house and female pastors oversee those ministries as part of their full-time duties.

For example, Pastor Love stated that his advocacy came through the denominational initiative called Operation Stoplight, which was a national campaign targeting human trafficking, and when he accepted his assignment, the legacy of advocacy was already being practiced by the male, senior minister. Because he had a background in social work, he had worked at a domestic abuse agency and had previously counseled victims. In addition, he stated that he personally learned about trafficking by listening to a survivor speak about her familial and generational trafficking experience. They also had a female, unpaid congregant who was personally passionate about the topic who brought unidentified survivors to the church and spearheaded volunteer efforts with a local nonprofit safehouse. The church participated in weekly street outreach in a well-known area for trafficking and hosted survivors to speak about their experiences to the congregation. In addition, they financially support a local nonprofit who has a safehouse for sex trafficked girls in their community.

Eight out of the nine pastors provided preventative education focused on sexuality and pornography specifically geared to youth and male audiences in their faith communities. These came in the form of sermons from the pulpit, sermon series on sexuality and relationships, participation in national campaigns like Porn Sunday, hosted

by an anti-pornography Church, or Celebrate Recovery (a Christian based 12-step program for those struggling with hurts, habits, and hangups), prayer breakfasts, and special events with topical discussions about the dangers of pornography. This educational advocacy addressing the demand side of sex trafficking, which pornography can be a gateway for, had been long standing.

All the faith communities taught positive sexuality through educational interventions. The target audiences for these interventions are typically youth, adult females, and adult males. Interventions are offered through sermon series, women's small group studies, men's small group studies, and special events. Pastor Love states their beliefs surrounding positive sexuality, "If we can scripturally shape our youth's views of sexuality in adolescence, they will be statistically less inclined to exhibit, or experience persevere sexuality and other issues as adults (personal communication, September 15, 2022)." He also adds that the bible is used as a template to discuss healthy relationships as they offered a 10-week study on Ruth where they explored healthy interpersonal relationships like family, friendship, community, and romantic couplings. He also taught a sermon about Rahab, (a prostituted adult woman in the bible), her role in the lineage of Christ, and the redeeming reality of her life. In addition, Pastor Kindness and her leadership of mixed sexes have taught extensively on healthy sexuality primarily to their youth, pre-marital groups, abuse groups, and Freedom Fighters. She disclosed, "We have offered "Boundaries" as a class over the years, offered character classes, and hosted trainings on domestic and sexual violence for our pastors and lay counselors over the years (personal communication, October 5, 2022)." Pastor Gentelness explains that his leadership and faith community offered a five-week series titled "Making Love Last a

Lifetime” which covered topics like dating, marriage, sex, and healthy communication practices in relationships. This educational intervention was taught by the pastor from the mainstage to the entire faith community and then dialogue continued within their small groups. Pastor Self- Control also asserts that his leadership teaches from the mainstage on human sexuality annually. Educational intervention programs about perverse sexuality and positive sexuality are taught in many faith communities that include vulnerable populations.

Pastor Joy also mentioned that his advocacy to vulnerable populations had been long standing although they did not have a specific ministry devoted to ST victims. A female, unpaid volunteer who was passionate about the topic hosted an event about human trafficking in order to raise awareness. In addition, their church had a survivor led trauma ministry devoted to various addictions that could have served victims of ST. He stated, “We need to create a church culture where we do not pretend we are not sinners and addicts ourselves (personal communication, September 28, 2022).” He focused on preventative education specifically related to the topics of pornography and did a sermon series entitled “Sex on the roof.” They emphasized sexuality, focused on pornography, and participated in a national campaign with an anti-pornography church to host a Porn Sunday event. This contradicts the research that states that silence is often used surrounding topics of sex, sexuality, and pornography in faith communities.

Pastor Peace, male, became familiar with the topic because of the churches’ participation with a local nonprofit that they partner with. Their church has what are called lifegroups which are driven by congregants’ passion for specific causes, populations, or projects. A female, volunteer began a lifegroup with other women in the

church. They decided to make jewelry for a local nonprofit that had a local safehouse for girls who had been sex trafficked. They fueled the fundraising efforts for that nonprofit for years with the overarching support of the leadership at their church. The program was so successful that it ended up becoming its own 501c3 nonprofit serving as the fundraising division for the Christian nonprofit serving victims of ST locally. It has even provided part-time and full-time employment for members of the church. Currently, the church pays consultants to teach lifegroup members how to form 501c3 organizations evolving from their personal passions and matches monetary donations from the ministry projects/fundraisers that they assist. They equip congregants to follow passions through an understanding that God calls them. Pastor Joy states, “I do not have to work hard to inspire congregants. They are already inspired because God is already working their hearts (personal communication, October 11, 2022).” This reinforces Philippians 2:13-“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (NASB 1971/2020).” Congregants drive those passion points with peripheral and overarching support from pastors.

Pastor Kindness is in a ministry that began as street outreach taking the love of Jesus to people suffering with sexual brokenness for over 35 years. They define “sexual sin” as self-focused fulfillment outside of the bounds of marriage between a consenting adult male and a consenting adult female, sexual sin that is non-loving, and non-respectful. Their efforts focus on preventative, corrective, and restorative education. Her church now has multiple ministries that tackle the supply and demand elements of human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking. She credits survivors for educating her. For example, her faith community has a men’s group called, Freedom Fighters, for Christian

men who struggle with sexual sin on their path to sexual integrity. They explore what leads to sexual addiction and the use of prostituted people. Pastor Kindness and her faith community collaborate with the police department, parole officers, and the court system to offer training called "The John School" which provides education for males charged with soliciting sex and first-time arrests only. If they participate, they go to "The John School" before they go before a judge. She states that this looks good for the offender and that they have also received feedback that in some instances, the information has changed the participants' views of the person being prostituted. They utilize participants from Freedom Fighters to speak at "The John School" specifically about sexual addiction and using prostituted people. Some Freedom Fighters have also been participants in "The John School." Although the training itself has no cost, monies obtained for costs of materials or donations from male participants is funneled into the strip club ministry or in assisting female survivors leaving the sex industry. She also provides as part of her job duties personal counseling to survivors, refers to them to professional counselors and therapists, and they connect and partner them with mentors in the congregation. When recalling one specific example of working with one female survivor, she stated that the mentor relationship was identified as a need, "We just needed to find her a mama because she needed to attach to a woman (personal communication, October 5, 2022)."

Evidence to support the validity of this mentorship model was advanced by Chisholm-Straker et al. (2018) in a study exploring homeless youth. As of the time of publication, this study was considered the largest sample of longitudinal data collected involving 344 participants exploring similarities and differences between trafficked and non-trafficked homeless youth residing in the U.S. The authors found that although

homeless youth shared similar life experiences, those who had a supportive adult in their life were less likely to be trafficked. This demonstrates the importance of mentorship.

Pastor Patience leads the ministry to sex trafficking victims as her full-time pastoral role. Her church participated in a collaboration with other denominations in 2009 and learned about human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking. At that time, she learned that there were only 100 beds in long term residential housing programs nationwide in the U.S. for ST victims. This inspired her leadership, herself, and her church to take action. Eventually, their church opened a long-term residential facility for female adult ST victims. The safehouse that the church started is now its own nonprofit organization which her church supports in a multitude of ways. They have several approaches to their advocacy for ST victims and are reaching women escaping the sex industry. First, they have participated in outreach through their strip club ministry for over eight years. Second, they received a \$25,000.00 donation from a congregant who donated the money on behalf of his deceased wife who volunteered in that outreach program. Third, in addition, a house donation from another couple in the church led them to open up a long-term residential housing program for women escaping the sex industry who voluntarily join the program. Pastor Patience designed all the curriculum, created internal/external documents, policies, procedures, interviews/hires/manages staff, disciples' survivors, trains survivors, and established community partnerships. The church provides human power for the ministry, two offices in their church that provide secretarial staff, printing, and monthly donations to the ministry. They host ministry fairs to promote the home, congregants as well as graduates/survivors serve in the house in paid leadership roles, they host graduation ceremonies for the women enrolled in the

program, they adopt the women and provide discipleship and gifts, and they work side by side with the women who serve the community alongside of them.

Pastor Self-Control learned about ministry efforts from Pastor Patience and his church joined the fight. He had received education about sex trafficking through her, online resources, workshops, reading a book authored by a survivor, at pastor conferences, and through coalition involvement. Years prior, a home had been donated to his church. They open a residential facility to serve adult women who aged out of the foster care system. He stated that their efforts proved unsuccessful because they were unaware of the specific needs of the population, their vulnerabilities, and how addiction impacted their lives. They kept the property but had not been actively using it until deciding to seek ministry partnerships for how best to utilize God's house. At the same time, Pastor Patience and her leadership were proactively seeking collaboration so the program they created could be duplicated in another community in their state to advocate for more ST victims.

Pastor Self- Control sought out organizations and churches who were mission-minded and even entertained interdenominational partnerships. They ended up partnering with Pastor Patience after learning about their long-term residential program. They interviewed several ministries, but ultimately decided to provide their facility to the program so it could be duplicated in their community and serve female, adult ST victims. Pastor Patience oversees the staff, hiring, training of volunteers, and programming as part of her full-time duties. Pastor Self- Control and his faith community provide onsite support among other things so they can serve more ST victims in their local community. They provide the home, maintenance and care of the physical structure, they pay for the

utilities and maintenance, they provide volunteers to work in the home, they do bible studies, and host special events like graduation ceremonies for graduates. Both sexes are active in ministry and serve in various ways offering peripheral and direct support. They are purposeful in choosing their male participants, they have a male properties director who works on site, and they engage in dialogue about the frequency and type of engagement between male volunteers and survivors without bringing further harm to survivors. This partnership will be discussed further in a later section.

Advocacy was seen through preventative education, monetary contributions, survivor events, safehouses support, residential care, and strip club outreach. Barriers do exist and will be discussed now by examining the second research question.

**RQ # 2- What barriers have Christian pastors encountered in advocating for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?**

All pastors stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had decreased attendance. Pastor Kindness stated that, COVID “pulled the plug on everything and interrupted programming they were actively engaged in (personal communication, October 5, 2022).” Pastor Gentleness stated that they offered a Celebrate Recovery program for those with addictions, but that program faded with COVID and had been repurposed to another church. In addition, pastors mentioned the following barriers that could prevent advocacy were lack of education and awareness, the fact that ministries have lifecycles meaning that they are popular at different times, identification of victims and their needs is problematic, and silence about the topic.

In general, most pastors stated that more education and awareness is needed. Pastor Faithfulness stated that her faith community needs more education and awareness



and that her experience came from working with vulnerable populations when she was a mental health social worker by working with the displaced, food insecure, and through a crisis line. She emphasizes to her congregants that “people have been wearing masks long before COVID. We never know what people have been through (personal communication, October 18, 2022).” Pastor Love asserted that there may be a lack of understanding and awareness that sexual slavery is still occurring. He also stated that misinformation and ignorance of the facts could also hinder advocacy. Not only is education and awareness needed about human trafficking, the same is needed about dangers existing within the faith communities.

Pastor Love admits that pedophiles and predators engage the church and Christians often overlook red flags because they are grace filled. He spoke of a suspected pedophile, with no criminal record that attempted to infiltrate their church and children’s program. They used their vetting processes and explained their extensive protocol of background checks, mandatory training for children’s and youth ministry workers, monitoring, and safety protocol. When they declined the person’s offer to serve in the children’s ministry, the person left the church. They attempted to monitor where that person went to warn the next church. While predators can be men or women, using men in this type of ministry can be plagued with issues. A pastor involved in the pilot project discussed how that they had a youth pastor in ministry who was convicted of child molestation in their program. Additionally, Pastor Kindness stated that since they embrace sex offenders, a convicted pastor who served his sentence was welcomed into their faith community post- conviction. This was problematic so she spoke with leadership and expressed concern in allowing the pastor to participate in any ministry

efforts where he had a lead role with minimal accountability.

Pastor Joy and Pastor Gentleness both stated that different causes have life cycles and are popular at different times. Many of the ministries have been active in the fight for over a decade. Pastor Joy mentioned that advocacy efforts in his faith community may have failed because congregants did not have clearly defined goals with an action plan of how to advocate for ST victims and eventually fizzled out. However, the church was incredibly active in serving vulnerable populations through a variety of ministries including the homeless, foster care ministry, etc.

Aligning with the literature about education and awareness being needed in order to identify victims, Pastor Joy stated, “I do not know how often congregants run into self-identifying victims. They may not want to identify (personal communication, September 28, 2022).” In concert with that sentiment, Pastor Peace stated that it would be helpful to know who the survivors are in order to connect survivors with resources and congregants who can assist them. Pastor Gentleness stated that they might not be able to identify the population, size, or their needs, and that could hinder advocacy. However, he also stated that if there was a need they would consider more advocacy. Pastor Love mentioned that a female congregant active in advocacy expressed to him that several survivors had attended the church, but he was unaware because they were not identified. They may not self-identify because they do not perceive themselves as victims. Pastor Patience spoke of several survivors not even perceiving themselves as potential victims because of their age which enhanced vulnerabilities to being trafficked. Pastor Kindness concurs that victims do not self-identify because they may not even be aware that they are victims, especially if an intimate partner is trafficking them. Concurring, Pastor Self-Control

mentioned that he was sure they have survivors in the church, but more training and education may be needed. Because they may not be able to be identified, advocacy to vulnerable populations in general may be the most effective way to advocate for ST victims.

Pastor Joy, who leads a medium to large sized church, stated that although they engage in a host of ministries where they are serving vulnerable populations, they do not have a designated ministry focus for ST victims because they lack staff, resources, and that without momentum, follow through, and passion, ministries will fail. He discussed pastor burnout, role overload which Pastor Gentleness also mentioned, and the mass exodus of pastors as possible contributors to not being able to engage in more targeted advocacy. Pastor Kindness posited that lack of follow through and budget cuts have been contributors to less advocacy in her ministry. A lack of money, human power, and resources can serve as potential barriers.

In contrast, advocacy had more to do with passion than deep pockets as referenced in this study. It can be done with limited resources. Pastor Goodness is in leadership at a small church. He learned of slavery during his higher education experience and has made it his personal mission to advocate for victims. Although his congregation is small, he and his congregation donate money to a local nonprofit who does anti- trafficking work and helps support a local safehouse for ST victims. He and his family felt called to move to the city and began street outreach as well. They engage in food distribution and hope to increase advocacy for ST victims but admits that it takes a partnership and a community. “We do not have the ability to do it ourselves. We need to partner because we are small and lack expertise in how to best serve victims (personal

communication, October 12, 2022).” In his previous pastoral assignment, they did not have designated ministries for ST victims nor volunteers to spearhead advocacy efforts. In addition, the church may not be the ideal place to receive assistance for ST victims.

Pastor Joy recalled a story from the book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey about a woman who was engaging in familial trafficking, selling her two-year old daughter who was stricken with guilt and shame. She was asked if she ever thought about going to church for help. She asked, “Why would I ever go to a church because they would just make her feel worse about myself?” Pastor Joy says that bad reputations of churches can be a deterrent for people needing help. Barriers also exist for survivors when considering participation in faith communities. Pastor Goodness also discusses how victims themselves may feel shame or perceive shame projected onto them by congregants because of judgments made about them as individuals and there may still be discomfort with the topic in faith communities. Pastor Patience says that survivors may have shame and might not entertain the church because it may be the last place to go for help.

Pastor Patience stated that saturation of pro bono community services in her community that is running the long-term residential housing can be challenging. They have eight clients in her long-term residential housing program and donors provide salon services, chiropractic care, medical/dental services, job skills, and employment. Although the need to serve more victims is ever-growing, saturation of community resources serves as a barrier to serving more victims. Duplicating the program in a nearby community within her state may yield more successful outcomes than increasing efforts in her community due to saturation.

Although that program duplication is occurring and Pastor Patience engages in partnership with Pastor Self-Control in his community, attaining community partnerships and resources without the familiarity of the program and established partnerships could serve as a barrier. External credibility is needed to attain buy-in in the community. A lack of established partnerships can be a barrier as Pastor Self-Control explains, “We felt that in order for the long-term residential housing to be successful in our community, there had to be partnerships across the community. Pastors do not have the capability and know how to do this type of ministry. Pastor Patience seems called to do this (personal communication, October 28, 2022).” Pastor Faithfulness echoes that when referring to advocacy for vulnerable populations in her community by stating that a lack of established relationships and community partnerships can be barriers.

Pastors identified many barriers which include the reputation of the church, saturation of pro bono services, and a lack of established partnerships. Now that barriers have been identified, we will now turn to the final research question which explores the tenets of transformational leadership.

**RQ# 3- How have Christian pastors utilized the tenets of transformational learning to model advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?**

**Tenet # 1- Idealized influence**

This tenet describes a leader as a role model and may be trusted and has admirable qualities. Two pastors discussed their own personal pain and how that has been used to minister to others who are suffering. Pastor Joy states, “God transforms someone’s pain to His purpose (personal communication, September 28, 2022).” Pastors

find that their own testimonies give them a relatability that people resonate with when deeming a leader as credible. Aligning with Isaac-Savage (2000) in reinforcing the importance of pastor buy-in, Pastor Goodness states that the leader has to catch the vision first. He continues by saying that “a faith community would need advocacy from the main stage for anybody else to catch the vision (personal communication, October 12, 2022).” Pastor Patience says that “we go to hard places (personal communication, October 3, 2022).”

Pastor Faithfulness believes the same and asserts that she models sensibility and non-judgmental approaches to leadership with her congregants. She advances that “people have been wearing masks long before COVID, so we do not know what people are covering up, so let us be receptive to that (personal communication, October 18, 2022).” She continues by mentioning that she would not ask them to do anything she herself is not willing to do by being out in the trenches with congregants, just like Pastors Love, Peace, and Self- Control. Each pastor participated in advocacy efforts by serving right alongside teams thus validating the necessity of community service.

### **Tenet # 2- Inspirational motivation**

This tenet describes a leader who creates a vision that is inspirational in order to motivate the followership. Pastor Self-Control, male, age 57, states his ministries mission and vision statement, “we desire to be a high impact transformative community by going deeper in Christ and further in mission (personal communication, October 28, 2022).” Pastor Love stepped into that kind of vision with a legacy of advocacy that was denominationally driven and modeled by the senior pastor. He was the benefactor of an emphasis on advocacy which his denomination stated would be a mission and focal point.

Aligning with denominational validation, Pastor Patience, female, age 65, was introduced to sex trafficking through her denominations commitment to engage and work with other collaboratives which eventually birthed a full-time ministry and a strip club outreach that evolved into long-term residential housing. That devotion to assist ST victims has led to successful advocacy that expanded to another church and other denominations being invited to participate. Denominational validation is essential as well as pastor validation.

Although Pastor Goodness comes from a small church, after learning about the prevalence of human slavery, he made it an agenda item that he personally adopted, as well as his family, and their church family. Although funding is limited, he along with his congregants, made a commitment to assist survivors through their financial support of a local nonprofit that does anti-trafficking work and emphasizing that every contribution counts.

### **Tenet # 3- Individualized consideration**

This tenet describes a leader who has authentic concern for the development of followers and demonstrates that they are listening to their followers. Learning and growing are not just the charge of the congregation, but also the pastors themselves as they deal with real world issues and lead the charge for spiritual growth. Pastor Self-Control speaks of growth, “we want to deepen relationship with Christ through spiritual disciplines and growth opportunities (personal communication, October 28, 2022).”

Pastors Goodness, Gentleness, Patience, Peace, Love, Joy, Kindness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control all offer opportunity for followers to grow by way of small group bible studies, discipleship opportunities, lifegroups, online studies, etc. These groups

incorporate and build upon sermons, biblical teaching, sermon series, topical studies, personal passion, and advocacy.

Pastor Faithfulness explained that her denomination assigns pastors to faith communities. When she arrived at her ministry, the congregants had lost their current pastor. She was met with resistance but stayed the course. She listened to the concerns of congregants and extended respect to her aging congregation. When her two-year anniversary arrived, she asked them to reflect on their own growth in the process. She used their feedback to motivate them to continue to grow and change even when they were not aligned in decision-making and change was eminent.

With regard to victims of ST, Pastors Patience, Kindness, and Self-Control reinforce that growth of victims is of the utmost importance. The advocacy they participate in understands the holistic nature of healing. Pastor Patience embedded into the program design that the women would learn the value of giving back through service in the faith community which they agreed to join as part of their voluntary participation in the program. This was not included as a way to convert them, but to assist them in becoming comfortable being in a church setting and with a faith community in which they themselves are a part immediately upon entering the voluntary program. The participants serve in the church alongside staff. Part of the goal is to desensitize any negative emotions about being in the church and to get acquainted with staff so they can develop relationships. Women are not forced to proclaim Christianity or accept their religion because it is understood that the process of cultivating faith is a personal and individual decision. The women are required to attend church weekly and participate in



book studies on various topics like sex addiction and romantic relationships. which they are informed of in advance to their participation in the program.

Survivors are also welcome and folded into ministry for their own growth as well as assisting others. Pastor Kindness states that “if you have achieved a level of healing, we want you to invest in others and encourage them to begin their own healing journey (personal communication, October 5, 2022).” She also mentions that neutralizing tough topics is an opportunity for growth for all. They have done this by tackling topics like pornography, victimization of women, domestic violence, and various kinds of abuse. Pastor Patience states that survivors also change the church and help people grow.

#### **Tenet # 4- Intellectual stimulation**

This tenet describes leaders that engage followers by challenging their intelligence and inspiring creativity and entrepreneurship. Pastor Kindness posits, “Jesus wants us to grow, not just with intellectual knowledge about the bible and what we need to do, but he wants it to sink into your heart and you have to relate that to your own life and experiences in history (personal communication, October 5, 2022).” She also discussed the growth that takes place in house. She personally learned about sex trafficking by listening to experts, reading books, listening to survivors, counselors, psychiatrists, exploring recidivism rates, researching, and attending conferences.

In her faith community, leadership is required to attend healing groups and character development classes. If leaders are struggling with pornography, protocol has been established as follows: the pastor is temporarily removed from certain duties, they have mandatory participation in Freedom Fighters, they must attend one-on-one counseling, and have maintenance check-ups. She states, “we realize that we have to lead

by example by doing the things that we are advocating for congregants (personal communication, October 5, 2022).”

Because of a lack of literature on the topic in adult religious academia, many had to seek out education on their own outside of their formal education which rarely if ever addressed human trafficking. Pastor, Ralieg Sadler, wrote the book *Vulnerable* because literature was lacking when he was introduced to human trafficking over a decade ago. During the interviews, information from his text was shared and Pastor Gentleness ordered the book before the interview concluded. He was given the information because he asked what they could do for victims. The researcher referenced a section of the text entitled “100 ways your church can engage.”

Pastors participate in many pastor collaborations within and outside of their own denominations. They are collaborative partners both within the religious community and the external community expanding their knowledge and experience with real life issues and their impact on the faith community. For example, Pastor Peace serves as a police chaplain and is exposed to many vulnerable populations. In addition, his ministry provides an internal endowment to lifegroups derived from congregant passion, supports a local nonprofit that serves those struggling with homelessness by providing space for fundraisers, hosting events, weekly food donations, and community outreach. That particular ministry also advocates for international orphans, refugees, a pregnancy help center, substance abuse, and foster families in which the possibility they are engaging with victims of ST could be likely.

The four tenets of transformational leadership have been reported along with the research questions. A chapter summary will follow.

## Summary

Thematic analysis showed that seven themes emerged from the data. The first theme was ST ID. The second was education. The third were defined as passion points as God callings that drove advocacy. Umbrella advocacy was done through three primary pathways: indirect, peripheral, and direct. Heart work enabled those pathways through established ecumenical partnerships which allowed for providing advocacy for higher ordered needs for victims of ST. Spirit work was representative of transformational leadership for all players involved. All four tenets of transformational leadership were found in the answers of the pastors to the research questions. Finally, Protection of the Flock reinforced that pastors were keenly aware of barriers and potential dangers which may reside both inside of faith communities and the populations they serve, all of which can either promote or stunt growth.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study was an examination of Christian pastor advocacy for sex trafficking victims throughout the Midwestern US. Pastors ranged in ages from 33-65. Semi-structured Zoom© interviews were conducted with nine pastors, three female and six males, in four midwestern states in the U.S. Academic research on this topic studying Christian pastors' transformational leadership for victims of Sex Trafficking (ST) in their faith communities are lacking. Study results suggest that long standing advocacy is occurring in faith communities and collaborations are ecumenical in nature, with both men and women actively engaged in advocacy efforts within their faith communities.

The overarching question for the study was “What advocacy efforts within their faith communities have Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. undertaken for victims of ST?” Three additional questions were asked:

1. How have Christian pastors participated in advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
2. What barriers have Christian pastors encountered in advocating for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
3. How have Christian pastors utilized the tenets of transformational learning to model advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

Qualitative, thematic design was used because the experiences of pastors engaging in advocacy were crucial. Given that pastors may have various knowledge levels, it was necessary to explore what was known by pastors about victims of ST and how they were advocating. Pastors participated in 60-minute, semi-structured, recorded,

Zoom© interviews with open-ended, pre-planned, and probing questions. The interviews were video recorded and then transcribed verbatim into written, line by line transcription by Zoom©. Transcripts and video recordings were reviewed by the researcher. Each pastor was provided with the video and written transcriptions post interview as well as a draft of the analysis chapter to read to engage in member checking. The researcher used field notes during the interviews and also recorded post interview reflections in her reflexive journal.

A qualitative thematic analysis was utilized. Open coding was used, and themes were derived directly from the data. Steps that assisted in organizing and analysis included categorizing data, open coding, identifying themes/patterns, creating a codebook, and then developing a narrative through an iterative process.

## **Findings**

Major findings demonstrate that: longstanding advocacy was present, in some cases driven by national initiatives targeting advocacy for victims of ST; both female and male pastors are active in the fight against ST in their faith communities, although roles may differ. Females tended to be more intimately connected to ministries devoted to ST advocacy. While males tended to provide indirect, overarching, and peripheral support, the majority of female pastors served in leadership positions where they tended to oversee as part of their full-time responsibilities' ministries assisting victims of ST. Ecumenical collaborations were present and allowed for umbrella advocacy.

Several advocacy efforts that began in the faith community eventually became their own nonprofit entities and intervention programs were developed, maintained, and sustained in house with umbrella advocacy in which more services and elements of

holistic care could be practiced with involving various ministry partners.

### **Educational Context**

This study may provide adult educators with examples of advocacy and further advance scholarship on the topic by utilizing the experiences and perspectives of Christian pastors. This would provide more scholarship on the topic like Purekal urged in (2012) when she asserted that academic studies on the ways in which different denominations of Christianity and their advocacy for victims of ST would be advisable for future research.

With reference to theology, a theological professor, Zimmerman (2011), spoke specifically of how departments of religion could increase involvement by stating,

Departments of religion should study the intersection of Christianity and human trafficking not only with an eye to Christian engagement with this major human rights issue, but in relation to the ethical implications of how constructions of freedom and human dignity function as they are applied in diverse contexts. (p. 575)

The faith community is a diverse context in which the pastors understand that assisting others escape slavery is a biblical mandate. This study explored those intersections.

Fear (2015) and Fitzgerald et al. (2016) both concur that institutions of higher education have a responsibility to their host communities to advance the economic, health, and the social well-being of students and residents. Universities and colleges offer educational platforms to learn about societal challenges, to develop evidence informed scholarship that helps shape our interventions, and to empower individuals to “chart

pathways in achieving upward mobility and promoting civic engagement” (Fitzgerald et al. 2016, p. 246).

These societal challenges, upward mobility, and promotions of civil engagement are embedded in many of the faith communities’ missions, yet that education did not come as a result of their theological studies. None of the pastors involved in the study received as a part of their theological education, teachings or instructions on human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking. The majority of their education came from informal or self-directed education through their denominational initiatives, collaborative partners, working with survivors, and nonprofit organizations active in advocacy efforts. Two pastors, who were theologically trained, gained knowledge from working firsthand with survivors because their backgrounds were in social work.

Pastors acknowledged that a barrier faced by themselves, and their faith communities was a lack of education. It seems likely that this would provide an opportunity for more educators who design curriculum surrounding these topics. Transformational learning was cyclical and a process for pastors, faith communities, and the victims of ST. The study findings concur with Knight and Kagotho’s (2022) study in which they conducted a phenomenological study of 17 Evangelical pastors’ experiences asserting four themes, which included that God, the Christian, the community, and the survivor all have essential roles in reducing sex trafficking as part of helping humanity. All of the pastors saw it as a biblical and divinely ordained initiative from God. Buy-in was already there.

### **Unexpected Findings**

Unexpected findings of this study included that longstanding advocacy with many

participating for 10 plus years, was present ranging from serving vulnerable populations that may include victims of ST to overseeing and running ST ministries and intervention programs specifically devoted to ST advocacy. In-house intervention programs and community partnerships served girl victims of ST, advocacy to adult, female victims of ST, convicted male perpetrators, and both sexes who have sexual struggles. These advocacy efforts aligned with the U.S. Dept. initiatives of protection, prosecution, prevention, and eventually partnership (TVPA 2000). In 2010, the 4<sup>th</sup> P of *Partnership* was added emphasizing partnerships between intelligence agencies and local communities (Shoaps, 2014). In addition, higher education institutions can bolster U.S. State Department initiatives through research, workforce, policy development, and education (Fitzgerald et al. 2016).

Barriers that have been documented and studied including silence did not appear to be identified barriers in this study. Silence on the subject of ST was not present in these faith communities and because of their longstanding advocacy, continual dialogue was normative behavior in many of the faith communities. Education about preventative and perverse sexuality and practices was also done from the pulpit, during special events, and directed specifically to male audiences and youth. However, an unexpected finding was about the efforts to promote positive sexuality within the church which was done through biblical teachings about Ruth and Rahab (a prostituted person), sermons, healthy relationships, and education using books like *No Stones* and *The Purity Principle* previously mentioned. This contradicts the research by Allender and Longman (2014) that states that sex and sexuality are rarely addressed in these sacred spaces in faith communities because they are taboo topics, while reinforcing the notion that Christians



are taught “what not to do,” through educational interventions like pornography campaigns, men’s meetings, sermons, and youth events. This educational advocacy both emphasizes the perverse side of sex and sexuality, while emphasizing positive sexuality and healthy relationships as a preventative template to deter perverse behaviors. The demand side of human trafficking, specifically the dangers of pornography, are being targeted through these educational interventions.

### **Recommendations for Educators**

Study results clearly indicate that ST ID and education are needed within theological institutions and the faith community. Faith communities are no better armed to identify victims, assess needs, or develop protocol any more than any other professional context.

A government study (Clawson & Grace, 2016) addressed the lack of standard protocols for identifying potential victims encountering law enforcement, child protective case workers, street outreach workers, drop-in centers, school counselors, and emergency shelters was problematic. In this study, victim ID was also problematic. Several pastors mentioned that they had been informed that victims were present but had no discernible way to identify them. In addition, since victims rarely self- identify they may be missed within the faith community and valuable resources and information may not be given because ID and needs are unknown which may prevent any advocacy that may be occurring.

Educators can design curriculum that focuses on ST ID specifically within faith communities addressing myths and how faith communities might engage with potential victims through human service provision. Additional curriculum for pastors and faith

communities about avoiding spiritual woundedness, exploring myths, and ST ID of human trafficking and sex trafficking victims may be advisable. Both Christian pastors and faith communities may benefit from educational programming that promotes awareness and assist with ST ID which is a widely studied issue in academic publications (Baldwin, 2011; Donahue, 2018; Gonzalez-Pons et al., 2020; Gutierrez-Puertas et al., 2021; Hodge, 2014; Macy & Graham, 2012; Marcinkowski et al., 2021; Oram et al., 2016). Victim identification has also been studied at length in various contexts like medicine and the government (Baldwin, 2011; Logan et al. 2009; Hodge, 2014.). The faith community was no exception in needing additional education regarding ST ID. Educators can examine current course offerings and descriptions within theological institutions to assess if human trafficking and sex trafficking are being taught. If not, they can design courses that address these subjects and/or embed them into required courses that focus on cultural elements and modern societies. This may be most appropriate in children's, youth, national, and international missions' courses.

Pastors may provide indirect and peripheral support for advocacy, but this does not mean that they should be seen as experts or the leaders of matters of ST. They need to learn ST ID and then refer to appropriate professionals, but that does not mean that they cannot be utilized. For example, once victims are identified, they should not be pressured to disclose details or information they are not ready to share (Levenson, 2017).

Conversely, pastor buy-in is essential for active involvement and continuation of intervention programs. Their role may be to drive initiatives, but it will take both sexes to create, maintain, and validate promote advocacy within their faith communities. While it can be problematic to use men in various stages, they were heavily utilized, proactive,

and provided various kinds of support and involved the men within their faith communities. Establishing defined roles and clearly articulated responsibilities within the faith community where all sexes can be of service would be advisable.

Problems can and do arise as were mentioned in this study. Predators infiltrate the faith community, may hold leadership positions, and be members of the church or part of the extended community in which there are established partnerships (Salter, 2004). Dangers exist inside of the faith communities themselves which may be a reason why victims may not see faith communities as viable options. They minister to vulnerable populations many times as unofficial human service providers. As this study demonstrated, protocol has been developed and practiced both by female and male leadership in an effort to protect the flock and hopefully avoid spiritual woundedness. Despite this, infractions did occur and involved pedophiles and predatory behavior within faith communities. These infractions were dealt with by male leadership with the purpose of rebuke in a Christlike, grace filled, yet firm manner through the male allies and in some cases involved prosecution. Studies on predators and their connections within faith communities would be useful. Additionally, demonstrating the need for ST ID, Predator ID training, and changes in recruitment methods post COVID may bring awareness to the faith community that may help prevent victims from becoming victims through intervention programs and mentoring. If the adult education resources and pastor teachings empower congregants and community members with accurate information, then being able to identify victims of ST will be more probable (Byun, 2014).

### **Recommendations for further research**

Research findings demonstrate the need for more ecumenical studies which may be able to establish a template for involvement since a few ministries were unable to provide the human capital, intellectual capital, and/or financial capital to participate in advocacy due to declines in members post COVID, pastor overload, and lack of education. Smaller ministries did not have the resources of human power, finances, or support staff, in order to advocate specifically or directly to victims of ST. However, that was more likely when partnering with other faith communities and utilizing their resources and callings. Studies utilizing small congregations would be recommended. Pastors need to be aware of the needs that now exist inside of these vulnerable populations because of the pandemic, lockdown, and exaggerated needs as people's resources dwindled (Sadler, 2017).

Research findings point to the fact that needs existed for pastors as well. For example, the need for more education about ST ID, needs assessments, and how to refer victims to external agencies. Their knowledge levels differed and ranged from basic information to extensive knowledge about ST and the victims of ST. Because none of the pastors received formal education specifically regarding sex trafficking through their university degrees, using more recent graduates, which could include participants younger than 30 would be helpful. As one female pastor stated about her own experience, "Younger leaders seem to be more educated and knowledgeable on these issues. Education may help burst the naivety bubble (personal communication, October 5, 2022)." Studies targeting younger age demographics who may have more recently been in the academic environment in various ministerial areas with vulnerable populations like children's ministry, youth ministry, and missions may demonstrate curricular changes

that encompass cultural elements of their job role that include information about ministering to victims of ST in their communities. Future studies could utilize various methodological designs that would explore pastor's experiences including case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory.

For example, Shanks (2018) conducted a study to examine if church leaders and the church have been insensitive to victims of ST by exploring the need for sensitivity training through conducting focus groups with 12 religious leaders and laity from different churches and denominations. She addressed the challenges of the study by acknowledging that the topic of sex trafficking is a sensitive issue for discussion that can lead to fear, paranoia, discomfort, guilt and shame, and embarrassment among participants. All of which can serve as barriers. The study itself disrupted the silence, created dialogue, and provided an educational awareness and sensitivity training that can be easily reproduced by other churches desiring to initiate and model transformation and transformational leadership. The study analysis revealed that the reason for the church's inattentiveness toward sexually exploited victims is because of the lack of education regarding sex trafficking, which was also reflected in this study.

## **Conclusions**

An absence in academic literature on pastoral advocacy for victims of ST did not represent an absence in local advocacy from pastors in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S. The issue of human trafficking, and specifically sex trafficking, is incredibly complex and layered. While these topics are more widely publicized on the international and national stages, much is still unknown, misunderstood, and misrepresented. Despite this, Christians have been incredibly active both internationally

and nationally in anti- trafficking movements. Myths about victims, perpetrators, and where these crimes occur only hinder correct identification and allow these crimes to perpetuate in local communities. Faith communities are no exception.

However, this study helps create dialogue, disrupt silences, and externalize what is being done in communities of faith. Hopefully, it can provide a template which both has the ability to inspire hope and encourage intervention programs in other faith communities by offering knowledge and education with the ultimate goal of raising awareness and making sure that homegrown problems are not perpetuated while remembering that every victim of ST has a spiritual inheritance and when it is forgotten it has the potential to further stigmatize victims and discourage relationships with God, self, religious groups, and pastors (Evans, 2019). Pastors carry a faith language and understand religious coping (Moore et al., 2015), and can be instrumental in addressing issues through their transformational leadership.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Email Invite

Dear Pastors,

My name is Julie Heifner. I am a PhD student in the Department of Education at UMSL studying in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting interviews for the purpose of studying Christian pastor advocacy for sex trafficking victims.

I am seeking participants who are in Christian churches in paid, leadership positions, specifically pastoral roles. Participants need to have held the position for more than one year but can serve in any pastoral role in a Christian church in Missouri.

I am requesting your participation in a one-hour, recorded interview conducted via zoom. Along with this invitation, you will receive a consent form and an overview of interview protocol. After the interviews, each interview transcript will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed for themes through discourse analysis. You will be given an invitation to check for accuracy of translation and an ability to clarify verbal responses during data analysis. Every effort will be made to protect the participants' identities and confidential responses. There is no compensation for participating in this project. However, your participation could lead to greater public understanding and appreciation of how Christian pastors are fighting sex trafficking.

If you are willing to participate, please respond. The interviews will begin in August 2022. If you have any questions, please contact me at (314) XXX-XXXX or [jccfx2@umsl.edu](mailto:jccfx2@umsl.edu).

I appreciate your consideration,

Julie Heifner

## Appendix B. Informed Consent



# Informed Consent for Participation in Research

## Activities

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ HSC Approval Number

\_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ PI's Phone Number

\_\_\_\_\_

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Julie Heifner and Dr. E. Paulette Isaac-Savage. The purpose is to explore the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies for sex trafficking victims in a Midwestern state and what meaning they make of their experiences.
2. Your participation will involve a one-on-one, zoom interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted at a location and a time convenient for you.
  - 6-8 church leaders may be involved in this research project.
3. The loss of confidentiality risk will be minimized, because although identifiable names will be recorded, they will be coded, and pseudonyms will be used to only be identifiable to the researcher.
4. There are no direct benefits for participation. However, your participation will contribute to the adult education knowledge base and social advocacy.
5. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to withdraw at any time. To withdraw, please contact me at (314) XXX-XXXX. You may choose not to answer any questions and you will NOT be penalized in any way.

6. By agreeing to participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In all cases, your identity will be concealed. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection). That agency would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your data. All data will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office.
7. If you have any questions or concerns, or if any problems arise, you may call me at (314) XXX-XXXX or Dr. E. Paulette Isaac-Savage, Dissertation Chair, at (314) 516-5303. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at (314) 516-5897.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

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Signature of Investigator or Designee

Date

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Investigator/Designee Printed Name

**Appendix C. Interview Structure**  
**Homegrown- Dissertation Interview Protocol**

**Christian Pastor Protocol**

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee (Title and Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Survey Section Used:

\_\_\_\_ A: Demographic Information and Background

\_\_\_\_ B: Personal Opinions/Beliefs

\_\_\_\_ C: Behavior/Experiences

\_\_\_\_ D: Knowledge Base/Level about Sex Trafficking

Other Topics Discussed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Documents Obtained: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Pastoral Interviews- Introductory Protocol- Interviewer**

*Introduction section: Welcome! Thank you for your participation. My name is Julie Heifner. The 60-minute individual, semi-structured interviews will be recorded and viewed only by me. Files will be kept on a password protected laptop in my private residence. At the conclusion of the study, I will transcribe the interviews and destroy the transcripts after you have had an opportunity to review. Your informed consent is devised to meet human subject requirements. Your participation is voluntary, and all information will be confidential. You may stop at any time. The secure location is used to minimize*

*noise and breach of confidentiality. We will begin with background information followed by 10-15 questions. Time permitting, additional feedback may be solicited.*

*The purpose of this dissertation is to explore pastor advocacy for sex trafficking victims.*

*My goal is to increase awareness while encouraging you to advocate for sex trafficking victims through transformational leadership. You are instrumental in combatting this evil in your congregations. My hope is that we can engage in a courageous conversation about societal issues impacting our faith communities. Shall we begin?*

**Conclusion section:** *We made it! You have concluded the interview. Could you provide the names and contact info. for pastors that may meet the criteria and be interested in participation? Specifically, I am looking for pastors who represent diversity in sex, age, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, race, experience, etc. Thank you for the pleasure of your time. If you have questions, please contact me at (314)XXX-XXXX or [jccfx2@umsl.edu](mailto:jccfx2@umsl.edu). I will follow up with the transcripts to continue the conversation.*

**Post Interview Comments/Leads/Observations:**

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Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research. Uploaded by: IfD\_ Qualitative Research

Specialists, Feb 15, 2018

**Assessed:**4/6/21 at 12:15 pm via Chrome at

[https://web.stanford.edu/group/ncpi/unspecified/student\\_assess\\_toolkit/sampleInterviewProtocol.html](https://web.stanford.edu/group/ncpi/unspecified/student_assess_toolkit/sampleInterviewProtocol.html)

### **Appendix D. Research and Interview Questions**

The overarching question for the study is “What advocacy efforts within their faith communities have Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. undertaken for victims of ST?” Three additional questions will be asked:

1. How have Christian pastors participated in advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
2. What barriers have Christian pastors encounter in advocating for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?
3. How have Christian pastors utilize the tenets of transformational learning to model advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

**Overarching question:** “What advocacy efforts within their faith communities have Christian pastors in the Midwestern U.S. undertaken for victims of ST?”

Demographic information-

- A. What is your current leadership position/how long?
- B. What is your highest degree/experience level/field of study?
- C. Briefly describe your role/responsibilities.
- D. What are the missions/vision of your current ministry/position?

Background information- Federal def. of human trafficking (labor/sex trafficking) provided.

1. What do you know about ST in the US, particularly Missouri?
  - a. Where does it take place? City, county, rural, etc.

- b. How do you think victims are recruited? **Myths discussed.**
- c. How is the sex industry supported? bachelor parties, strip clubs, pornography, street prostitution, massage parlors, escort services, video sex, chat lines, etc.
- d. Describe a sex trafficking victim. Their sex, age, race, family background, location, educational level, ethnicity, sexuality, life circumstances, etc.?

Missouri is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> for the most human trafficking cases in 2019 in the country. Most of those cases were sex trafficking.

**RQ 1-** How have Christian pastors participate in advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

- A. What kind of training or education, if any, did you receive about ST and from whom?
- B. What advocacy is occurring?
- C. Why did you decide to participate?
- D. How did you or your ministry become involved?
- E. Who drives those initiatives (males/females, paid staff/volunteer, etc.)?
- F. Discuss the success of failure of your efforts.

**RQ 2-** What barriers have Christian pastors encountered in advocating for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

- A. How do you perceive victims? How might leadership/congregants perceive victims?
- B. Identify external/internal barriers you all faced.
- C. How did you overcome the barriers?

**RQ 3-** How have Christian pastors utilized the tenets of transformational learning to model advocacy for victims of ST in their faith communities in the Midwestern U.S.?

- A. What do you know about TL?
- B. How have you modeled the 4 tenets of TL in your faith community?
- C. How can you use *inspirational motivation*, *individualized consideration* and *cultivate intellectual stimulation* to overcome barriers in your faith community? (Missions trips, campaigns-S.O.A.P. Up, products made by survivors, prevention, events, safe houses, experts, survivor panels, sermons, etc.) Describe E. Byun and R. Sadler.

**Historically, the church has been a place of hope and healing, but also a breeding ground**

**for predators. Most predators do not have a criminal background (Salter, 2003).**

**They**

**average about 150 victims by the time they are caught.**

## Appendix E. Member Checking Email Invitation for Analysis Chapter

Dear Pastor,

I hope you are well and your 2023 has been great thus far.

Here's an update on my dissertation. Interviews produced about 600 pages of text. The study design includes the "member checking" phase to further extend participation. A draft of the analysis chapter, video recording, and transcription are attached (attached or separate email- transcriptions may be missing text, speaker feedback, etc.).

If you're interested in participating in a voluntary capacity, please do so by **Thursday, Feb. 23, 2023**. I appreciate the contribution you have already made.

Pastors were referenced by the fruits of the spirit in the chapter. This may take anywhere between 10-30 minutes. Please provide feedback in red including any suggestions/clarification, save, and send back via email. I will take all feedback into consideration.

- You were referred to as Pastor Patience.
- Pages 2-6 are the intro./demo info. for participants.
- Your info. is highlighted in **yellow** for easy identification. I would recommend reading the highlighted chap. info. first and only referring to the video/transcript if there are questions or you want to see info. in context.

Thank you for your help.

Best,

The Researcher

### Appendix F: Member Check Log

Pastor #	Phase- member checks conducted	Comments/feedback
Pastor Love-1	<p data-bbox="610 348 841 380">During interviews</p> <p data-bbox="610 491 1045 562">Post interview- clarification needed on pornography education</p> <p data-bbox="610 638 1032 779">Post interview- requested additional info. about previous denominational initiative for ST-national campaign</p>	<p data-bbox="1076 348 1536 449"><b>Minor-</b> clarification provided regarding involvement and multiple forms of advocacy.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 491 1555 592"><b>Minor-</b> feedback provided about their public belief statement on purity and the topic of lust.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 638 1555 961"><b>Minor-</b> 1 paragraph about the origins of the campaign and how it was enacted in the faith community, although the program no longer existed. Provided additional feedback on 3 educational interventions highlighting positive sexuality but had no revisions for the analysis chapter draft.</p>
Pastor Joy-2	<p data-bbox="610 972 841 1003">During interviews</p> <p data-bbox="610 1226 1032 1402">Post interview- request for clarification on interview content regarding congregants' feedback on topical educational advocacy about pornography</p> <p data-bbox="610 1444 1016 1545">Post interview-analysis chapter-invitation to analyze, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p data-bbox="1076 972 1555 1178"><b>Minor-</b> clarification given about how his faith community may be encountering victims although they may not be aware. Research about ST ID and human service provision was shared.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 1226 1507 1297"><b>Minor-</b> he offered reflections and feedback.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 1444 1555 1875"><b>Minor-</b> no revisions requested. He provided feedback about Allender and Longman research mentioned in the chapter regarding silence used in faith communities about sex, and that the study results contradicted those findings. He provided 2 additional paragraphs discussing how he is engaging his leadership and faith community regarding transgenderism, shared resources he is using to promote</p>

		educational advocacy, and assist the faith community in gaining awareness about the target audience.
Pastor Peace-3	<p>During interviews- I needed clarification on their church history, initiation of advocacy, and clarification on how Lifegroups maintained advocacy efforts</p> <p>Post interview-analysis chapter</p>	<p><b>Detailed-</b> he provided feedback about paid staff members or volunteers and which sexes performed which roles of advocacy involvement.</p> <p>Declined further participation in this phase.</p>
Pastor Patience-4	<p>During interviews- clarification on advocacy and expansion of intervention programs</p> <p>Post interview- requested contact information regarding ecumenical partnerships</p> <p>Post interview-analysis chapter- invitation to analyze, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p><b>Minor-</b> she provided clarification of most recent advocacy and outlined program duplication in the same state.</p> <p><b>Minor-</b> she disclosed information about a ministry partner during the interview. I contacted her to ask if I could get the contact information of the pastor and faith community that was provided. She replied and provided that information. That pastor agreed to be interviewed and participated in the project.</p> <p><b>Minor-</b> no revisions recommended. She answered about positive sexuality and provided additional context regarding their strip club ministry (protocol, human power-sexes, volunteers, history of involvement, safety measures, etc.).</p>
Pastor Kindness-5	<p>During interviews- clarification on program interventions</p> <p>Post interview-analysis chapter invitation, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p><b>Minor-</b> she provided feedback about 4 intervention programs, the target audiences, program participation, and program design.</p> <p><b>Minor-</b> no revisions requested. She provided feedback about the program interventions expanding on how participants qualify to participate and how her leadership discusses positive sexuality.</p>
Pastor Goodness-6	During interviews- clarification,	<b>Minor-</b> clarification about his

	<p>request for additional information about TL tenet 1, 3</p> <p>Post interview- analysis chapter invitation, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p>transformational learning journey and how that awareness positioned him with a heart for ST advocacy.</p> <p>The invitation was sent with a follow up email 1 week later, but no additional feedback was received.</p>
Pastor Faithfulness-7	<p>During interviews- clarification needed on denominational protocol and how pastors are appointed</p> <p>Post interview- analysis chapter invitation, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p><b>Detailed-</b> she provided detailed feedback about her denomination, history, protocol for placement of pastors, leadership boards, and governance function.</p> <p>Invitation was sent with a follow up email 1 week later, but no additional feedback was received.</p>
Pastor Gentleness-8	<p>During interviews- requested more information on community coalitions</p> <p>Post interview- analysis chapter invitation, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p><b>Minor-</b> he disclosed community coalition involvement and role while discussing history and the informal education he received from a 501 C3 organization specializing in anti-trafficking work, specifically ST.</p> <p><b>Minor-</b> no revisions requested. He provided feedback about program interventions including a sermon series on dating, marriage, sex and healthy communication.</p>
Pastor Self- Control-9	<p>During interviews- requested clarification partnership history and involvement</p> <p>Post interview- requested information about additional faith community involved in his partnership.</p> <p>Post interview- analysis chapter invitation, and asked about positive sexuality</p>	<p><b>Minor-</b> he gave feedback about their history, contact, and involvement.</p> <p><b>Minor-</b> the name of the faith community and their denomination was provided.</p> <p><b>Minor-</b> he provided feedback with minor revisions to the content in the analysis chapter.</p> <p>He spoke of positive sexuality and their program interventions like annual sermons about scriptural teachings on human sexuality.</p>



### Appendix G: Codebook

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Description/definition</b>	<b>Example- quotes</b>
<b>ST ID</b>	Pastors unable to identify victims of ST	Encompassed an inability to identify victims present in the faith community.	“It would be helpful to know who the survivors/victims are in order to connect them to resources and congregants who can assist.”
	Faith community unable to identify victims of ST	Described an inability to identify victims within the faith community.	“I do not know how often congregants run into self-identifying victims.”
	Victims do not self-identify	Referenced a lack of self- identification among victims.	“Victims may not want to identify.”  “Victims might not even be aware that they are victims, especially if an intimate partner is trafficking them.”
<b>Education</b>	Lack of formal education on ST for Pastors	Examples of pastors’ inability to engage because of a lack of education on ST.	“Pastors do not have the capability and know how to do this type of ministry.”
	Myths about victims of ST	Examples of myths about who might be a potential victim and how trafficking occurs.	“Victims may not perceive themselves as victims because of their age.”
	Myths about ST	Represents a lack of understanding about how ST functions.	“Porn is a big fuel. It’s a supply and demand business model. If we didn’t have supply, we

	Absence of seminary education on ST	Encompassed denominational learning, self- directed, coalition learning, and/or learning from nonprofits, etc.	wouldn't have demand.”  “I did some learning through our denominational initiative on ST.”
	Red flags	Discussions of “red flags” regarding predators, victims, or ST situations of which may include identification, inability to identify, or ignoring them.	“Predators and pedophiles engage the church and Christians often overlook red flags because they are grace filled.”
<b>Passion Points</b>	God calling	Includes statements about believing that God ordains specific work that may be occupational, and/or advocacy related for individuals and faith communities.	“I wasn't really planning on being a pastor, it just kind of happened and you feel like you have been called.”
	Passion initiated advocacy	Includes statements about passion as a launching point to initiate engagement or advocacy.	“We just equip the saints to do what they feel called to do and about which they are already passionate.”
	Pastors nourish callings	Defined as an inner conviction and passion that translates into advocacy within the faith community which is supported by the religious leaders.	“I just walk behind them, and wherever their minds go, I'm in support of it.”
	Called persons	These are the key players who drive/maintain	“I'm not sure most pastors who have the capability to

		advocacy within the faith community either in a formal, paid capacity or an informal, volunteer capacity deriving from personal conviction.	and the know how to advocate, Pastor Kindness seems called to do this.”
<b>Umbrella Advocacy Pathways</b>	Indirect advocacy efforts	Includes details or descriptions of any type of advocacy that will ultimately benefit victims of ST through education, prevention, protection, or correction.	“I would say pornography is a huge fuel of ST. It’s a simple supply/demand model. If there was no supply, there would be no demand.”
	Peripheral advocacy efforts	Descriptions of any advocacy in the faith community in which having leadership support and approval would be essential.	“One of the ways that we interact is that we let a Christian nonprofit agency that does anti-trafficking work park their vehicle on our property.”
	Direct advocacy efforts	Encompasses advocacy dealing directly with victims of ST or providing resources where they will be directly impacted. For example, donations of money, items, time, services, visiting victims, collaboration, using experts, survivor involvement, strip club ministry, safehouses, etc.	“For over 8 years, we simply build bridges and relationships through gift/bags, and roses that each dancer at the strip club receives during a visit.”
	Recipient of advocacy	Recipients of advocacy and intervention programs which could	“We run what we call “The John School” which is

		be both female or male, children or adults, of any age or stage of life. This could also include perpetrators who fuel ST.	for men who were arrested for soliciting prostitution.”
<b>Heart Work</b>	Mission/Vision	Captures organization mission and vision statements reinforcing TL tenet # 2- that belief systems and spiritual conviction are the driving force behind heartwork done in the faith community internally or externally.	“It ends where we live. Work, learn, and play.”
	Ecumenical collaborations	Exemplifies collaborative efforts inside of the Christian faith but that do not necessarily need to be denominationally associated.	“There are some that are Church of God in Christ, we will fellowship with some Lutheran, and Presbyterian. We are Methodist, so you know any Methodist congregation, we are all hands on deck.”
	Community Partnerships/ Coalitions	Represents secular agencies or resources that unite wedding efforts with faith communities.	“One of my roles as a founding member and current president in working with a coalition of stakeholders from the community as an outreach person for a drug free community. There is always a correlation between

			drug use and sexual misconduct.”
<b>Spirit Work</b>	Spirit inspired transformational learning (TL)	Describes personal transformational learning as a Spirit inspired process that is enduring.	“You have to step back and give victims grace and space to wrestle, and allow the Holy Spirit do the convincing and convicting.”
	Learning is cyclical	Statements reflecting that learning through advocacy is cyclical and layered	“You don’t know the difficulties unless you’re in the trenches.”
	Pastors as instruments of and recipients of Spirit inspired TL	Captures pastoral transformation in the process as they learn and grow.	“I have not done as much as I should have or could have but I am much further down the road than I was four years ago.”
	Victims of ST as instruments and recipients of Spirit inspired TL	Describes exposure, TL, and how they teach the faith community	“We’re challenging them with the different way of viewing things and different belief systems.”
<b>Protection of the Flock</b>	Protection of children	Includes protocol employed by the leadership inside the faith community in order to protect the most vulnerable populations internally/externally. May include training of staff, background checks, fingerprinting, insurance policies, etc.	“We do annual background checks on all volunteers who work in our children’s and youth ministries.”
	Advocacy readiness	Captures assessment of their target audience (faith community) and their advocacy	“I feel like if the truth scatters your congregation, then they are just not

		readiness	ready, but they need to be made ready.”
	Protection for ST victims inside the faith community	Acknowledgement that woundedness can and does occur within the faith community	“Our lead pastor actually preached on victim advocacy to help people understand that part of God’s mission is for us as the healing community is to engage with people who are vulnerable and victims.”
	Disciplinary infractions	Included protocol and disciplinary measures for infractions in the faith community or surrounding community for predators, pastors, members, and victims of ST	“A phrase we have coined at the leadership level is that it’s connection before correction.”
	Culture clash	Encompasses barriers in the faith community and victims of ST themselves that can prevent understanding and inadvertently cause spiritual woundedness. For example, myths, silence, judgmental attitudes, spiritual immaturity, victim blaming, etc.	“The women didn’t even understand how they could be victims.”

### Appendix H: Interview Transcription Line Tags

<b>Pastor</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>	<b>Line numbers used from transcripts</b>
Pastor # 1- Love	9-15-22	60-70, 144-149, 255, 398-416, 470-494
Pastor # 2- Joy	9-28-22	62-64, 181, 185-186, 233, 284-285, 291, 449, 476, 537, 587, member checking email
Pastor # 3- Peace	10-11-22	121, 156, 195, 209-297, 235, 241, 284, 285, 430, 438-439
Pastor # 4- Patience	10-3-22	101, 116, 202, 237, 387, 391, 425, member checking email
Pastor # 5- Kindness	10-5-22	185-186, 208-214, 234, 295, 311-342, 330-341, 352, 362, 369, 404, 422, 425, 429, 437, 477, 509, 534, 541, 547, 555, 578, 611, 619, 665, 679, 708-711, 733, member checking email
Pastor # 6- Goodness	10-12-22	60, 62, 175, 220, 221, 229, 328, 396
Pastor # 7- Faithfulness	10-18-22	83, 92, 112, 125, 170, 284, 499
Pastor # 8- Gentleness	10-20-22	42, 75-77, 124-126, 292, 462, 489, 502, 578
Pastor # 9- Self- Control	10-28-22	42, 168-170, 181, 183, 196-200, 217, 232, 312, 331