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## Non-Traditional Church Involvement as a Life-Course Turning Point: Qualitative Interviews with Religious Offenders

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NON-TRADITIONAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT AS A LIFE-COURSE TURNING  
POINT: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH RELIGIOUS OFFENDERS

by

William Hunter Holt

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Criminal Justice, Forensic Science, and Security  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

This research project conducted and then analyzed qualitative interviews from former and current addicts and criminal offenders who are voluntarily participating in the Christian faith at the same non-traditional, Protestant church. An abridged case study of this church is also provided for background and context. Life-course theory and grounded theory are utilized.

Both the offenders and this church were chosen in an attempt to better understand how the offenders' involvement at this house of worship, along with their faith in general, have impacted them. Obtaining the perspectives of the offender is essential for three reasons. First, qualitative research conducted in the fields of criminal justice and criminology is not as abundant or wide ranging in specific subject matter compared to quantitative studies. Second, the qualitative research knowledge as to what addicts and offenders actually perceive as impacting their criminal trajectories is limited. Most research on the impact of religiosity on crime and deviance fails to account for the viewpoints of offenders through qualitative research. Third, in order for faith-based organizations to discover if they are helping offenders become more law-abiding, particular focused must be made on the FBOs that appear to be attracting offenders and addicts organically.

The concept of religiosity pertains to how devout a person or group may be, both in rate and behavior, for whichever particular faith in a higher entity that they worship. Religiosity is comprised of multiple aspects of worshiping a higher-being, including but not limited to physical and spiritual adherence to the central tenets of a particular religion. Additionally, and by extension, increasing rates of religious involvement and

commitment have been touted as a mechanism to aid people in desisting from crime and deviance, as well as helping to prevent the engagement into criminal activity or substance abuse.

The themes identified in this project support the inverse relationship between criminal offending and religiosity, and the positive relationship between religiosity and prosocial behavior like volunteerism. Offenders want a non-judgmental church home that delivers sermons which relate Biblical scripture to modern-day societal struggles. Religiosity and salvation were identified as turning points within Life-Course Theory.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With tremendous gratitude I recognize my dissertation committee for their patience and professional guidance throughout this lengthy venture. Dr. Alan Thompson, my dissertation chair, had the wisdom to know when to inspirationally motivate me versus when to sternly coach so that I made efficient and effective progress. His ability to differentiate between these two was quite remarkable being that I lived in Texas, and he in Mississippi, for the majority of my dissertation project. Dr. Byron Johnson, of Baylor University, is the preeminent expert on the relationship between religiosity and crime, and I did not know him before contacting him to see if he was willing to participate on my committee. He graciously agreed. His direction and past research are priceless. Dr. Wesley Johnson is primarily responsible for me choosing The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) for my doctoral studies. We started our academic relationship at Sam Houston State University in the early 2000s. As fate would have it, when I began weighing options for doctoral programs, he and I “coincidentally” came into contact again. He helped sell me on applying and receiving an assistantship at USM. Thank you to all three of you. I am eternally indebted.

Dr. Thompson and Dr. Renee Bailey taught me so much in terms of improving my writing. Dr. Bailey is a fountain of English writing knowledge and critiqued me in such a way that was easy to receive and then turn that information into a better product. Dr. Thompson taught me the value of a single word, and to make every one count. These lessons will be retained, applied, and cherished.

Dr. Mary Evans and Dr. Bryan Bubolz also provided me abundant guidance for conducting a qualitative research project. I would have been lost without their experience

with this type of research. You taught me, and I read your works. That is why we are here.

The following list of teachers, coaches, and mentors have made such an impact on my life that any time I have a success or failure, I want to turn to them to express gratitude or seek counsel. For brevity I will not list how and why I am grateful for them, but please know they mean something immensely to me: Troop 63 Scoutmaster Frank Pellizzari, high school English teacher Jay Clack, high school English teacher Weldon Edwards, high school varsity basketball coach Kyle Short, Dr. Douglas Constance, Professor Jerry Dowling, Dr. Hasan Arslan, Dr. Hakan Can, police officer James Murphy, field training officer Dennis Thane, police officer Michael Kneese, police officer J.P. Ingram, Dr. DeWayne Adams, County Judge and pastor Michael Roach, Chris Windsor, and Dr. William Paul. The sum of their impact on me has no doubt played an unequivocal role in my doctoral achievement.

## DEDICATION

When I decided to return to academia to earn my doctorate, I left a thriving, eight-year law enforcement career while I was still a bachelor. I knew that going back to school before getting married and having kids would be much easier. So I moved from my native Texas for Mississippi with only a Blue-Heeler puppy named Pete.

Fast-forward two years, with all of my Ph.D. course-work complete, and I am married to a girl from my hometown in Texas. Through comprehensive exams and this dissertation project, Jenny Everett Holt has been my relentless supporter and companion. Two years into the dissertation process, we were blessed with a daughter, and then nineteen months later a second miracle girl, all while I was juggling a new career as an elected official in law enforcement. It is humorously ironic that my four-year plan to obtain my Ph.D. as a single male with no kids, was slowed at the beginning of year three, then derailed at the end of year four, and not even recognizable by year five!

To say that Jenny and our daughters, Lana Kay and Katie Lea, have made sacrifices, knowingly for Jenny and not so cognitively for the girls, is an understatement. Thank you to my wife for encouraging me and expecting me to isolate myself from the family to finish something that I started before you were ever in the equation. I love you and our daughters. Personally, this is for y'all so that the letters behind my name help open doors to provide for your future.

Professionally, my supplication is that the findings and discussion for this project will help assist addicts and offenders to build or restore lives that are not only in compliance with reasonable laws but also so those offenders become prosocial contributors. My additional petition is that faith-based organizations and the criminal



justice system will take knowledge and ideas from this project to aid those addicts and offenders who are often forgotten.

Last but not least, this is dedicated to my parents. I am a first generation college graduate. My father, the late Billy Holt, and mother, Debbie Loven, along with my step-father of 30 years, Royce Loven, all completed some college hours, and then went on to have a variety of long-lasting and successful workforce careers. They paid for my undergraduate degree so I did not have to work-fulltime and go to school. They planned this for me when I was a child, and took out no financial aid loans. They sacrificed for me then, so that I could earn a degree and hopefully not have to struggle in the same ways they did earlier in their lives. They understood the value of higher-education. Who knew that financing my bachelor's degree would ultimately lead to a Ph.D.? I surely did not, but I am grateful for them. I hope this project makes them proud.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The concept of religiosity pertains to how devout a person or group may be, both in rate and behavior to whatever particular faith in a higher entity of which they may believe. Religiosity is comprised of multiple aspects of worshiping a higher-being, including but not limited to physical and spiritual adherence to the central tenets of a particular religion. According to Johnson, De Li, Larson, and McCullough (2000), religiosity can be measured or defined by at least the following six methods: church attendance, self-assessed importance of faith, denomination type, prayer frequency and content, engagement in the study of sacred readings (e.g. Bible study classes), and participation in other religious activities outside of traditional and routine services. Religion and faith in a higher-being have long been subjects of philosophy and scientific study, albeit the latter to a lesser extent. Those who have utilized or analyzed the role and impact of religion and faith have done so from a wide variety of perspectives and modus operandi including social conformity, individual health, community well-being, and micro and macro-level economic stability (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013; Freeman, 1986; Hirschman, 2004; Johnson & Schroeder, 2014; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Lenin, 1909/1973; Marx, 1844/1977; Stark, 2012; Weber, 1904/2001). Additionally, and by extension, increasing rates of religious involvement and commitment have been touted as a mechanism to aid people in desisting from crime and deviance, as well as helping to prevent the engagement into criminal activity or substance abuse (Baier & Wright, 2001; Chitwood et al., 2008; Humphrey & Cordella, 2014; Johnson et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2002; Johnson & Jang, 2010; Johnson, 2011; Johnson & Schroeder, 2014; Office of Justice Programs [OJP], 2011). The literature review herein contains numerous examples



of scholarly research demonstrating the investigation into whether religious behaviors and faith can help decrease recidivism, prevent criminal exposure, and stave off risky behaviors. This research project explores this further by obtaining and then analyzing interviews from former and current addicts and offenders who are voluntarily participating in the Christian faith at the same non-traditional, Protestant church. An abridged case study of this church is also provided for background and context.

#### Components of this Dissertation

The primary research target are offenders who are attending, and in other ways involved in this specific Christian church. A preliminary presumption of this project is that the past and current offenders are attending under their own volition, for purposes of strengthening their Christian faith or becoming what is known as a “born-again Christian.” However, there is a possibility that some of them are under some type of mandate or encouragement from a criminal justice agency or rehabilitation treatment center. A third option may be that they are attending for other personal or ulterior motives.

The secondary focus for this research project is the Christian church as whole, more specifically the Protestant church where the above-mentioned offenders currently attend. Both the offenders and this church were chosen in an attempt to better understand how the offenders’ involvement at that house of worship, along with their faith in general, have impacted the individuals. Obtaining the perspectives of the offender is essential for three reasons. First, qualitative research conducted in the fields of criminal justice and criminology is not as abundant or wide ranging in specific subject matter compared to quantitative studies. Second, the qualitative research knowledge that does

exist is limited in regards to what addicts and offenders actually see and feel as impacting their criminal trajectories. Most research on the impact of religiosity on crime and deviance fails to account for the viewpoints of offenders through qualitative research. Third, in order for churches and other faith-based organizations to discover if they are helping offenders become more law-abiding members of society, particular focused must be made on the ones that appear to be attracting offenders and addicts.

Collecting and analyzing interview data from the participants will help determine the preliminary assumptions, as well as the overarching goals of this study. These interviews will also explore whether the offenders' spiritual conversion and/or church habits have played a role in their offending trajectory and life-course. The offenders' perspectives are what is sought in this element of the study. The overarching goal of this research project will be to discover how and what the offenders identify as the greatest attributes of the Christian church in which they attend, if any, as aiding them in leading a more law-abiding and prosocial life. Included in this inquiry will also be how their Christian-based relationship with God, notwithstanding the church in this study, has affected their criminal or addiction trajectories.

While listening to the offenders, another broad goal is to discover what motivates them to attend and regularly participate in their church functions. Subsequently, this researcher expects that the offenders will state actions or omissions that they perceive their church as having taken to attract and retain groups, such as offenders, who might not otherwise attend. The researcher will be specifically seeking what each offender has consciously recognized as an action taken by this church to reach out and connect to that person.

In addition to the above goals, the researcher will investigate the specific religious and spiritual beliefs of the offenders, in order to see if they actually align with their purported faith and their church's mission and vision statements. Offenders will be asked to state what their faith in a higher being consists of. Additionally, through a series of non-leading questions, the researcher will attempt to discover the aspects of the offenders' religiosity, if any, that have helped them to become law-abiding citizens, or to aspire a change in that direction. Attempts to identify turning points in the lives of the offenders will occur throughout the qualitative interviews.

#### Historical Relationship between Religion and the United States

Before this study is parsed any further, basic tenets of applied research make it necessary to point out how and why research on the relationship between religion and crime matters. Particularly in United States history, faith and the practice of one's religion can be traced throughout every era of development (Butler, 2004; Finke & Stark, 1992; Hirschman, 2004; Public Broadcasting System [PBS], 2010). This is not to say that every group that has immigrated to the U.S., or their subsequent ancestors, has vigorously adopted and practiced a religion. In fact, historical analyses have at times supported the opposite, demonstrating evidence that the great majority of colonists either did not initially prescribe to a religion at all; or they may have had a general belief in a higher-being, but did not engage in day-to-day religious behaviors and participation (Finke & Stark, 1992; Gonzalez, 1987; Hirschman, 2004; Stark, 2012).

What is supported through historical documentation and scientific analyses is that religion, namely Christianity, has an inherent role in the culture of the United States (Butler, 2004; Finke & Stark, 1992; Gonzalez, 1987; Hirschman, 2004; PBS, 2010).

Professor Emeritus at Yale University, Jon Butler (2004), wrote, “It has seldom been possible, much less wise, to assess American history before the Civil War without taking religion seriously” (p. 1357). Furthermore, religious and historical scholars generally agree that faith and religious behaviors have been an essential staple to the formation and evolution of the United States. This was not just confined to the religious freedom seekers on the Eastern seaboard, but also applies to the western frontier and the ever-growing evangelical movement in the southern United States (Butler, 2004). From a contemporary perspective, scholars cite the most aggressive surge of the Christian faith and practice as occurring between the 1800s through most of the 1900s (Butler, 2004; Finke & Stark, 1992; Hirschman, 2004; PBS, 2010).

Appendix A (Butler, 2004; Finke & Stark, 1992; Gonzalez, 1987; Hirschman, 2004; National Park Service, 2015; PBS, 2010; Stark, 2012) sufficiently highlights the role of religion in the evolution of colonial America and the progression of the United States. Whether it is non-secular groups seeking to find religious safe-haven, or a European kingdom attempting to spread their denomination of Christianity, these events, and others, should give the reader an idea of why religion and faith are still intertwined into the social fabric of America today. This appendix is not intended to be comprehensive or particularly detailed, nor is it an attempt to praise or criticize the role of religion in the United States. Rather, it is meant to display how religion and faith have become a part of the American family, community, and culture. This intertwining of religion and U.S. culture is relatively affixed, and while it may fluctuate, it is difficult to ignore faith and religion as a continued, viable option to help address crime and substance abuse. Continuing to research into the role that the practice of the Christian

faith has on ameliorating this nation's crime rates, both on a macro and a micro scale, as well as improving the overall American quality of life, make it worthy of study.

#### Current Faith-Based Movement with State and Federal Governments

The present relationship between religion, faith, and American government is also relevant. Over the last two decades, the federal government has invested money, time, and other resources in faith-based programs designed to transform and reintegrate offenders and addicts into both law-abiding citizens and productive members of society (Johnson, 2011; OJP, 2011; The White House Archives, n.d.; Yoon & Nickel, 2008). This dissertation is related to such in that it seeks to better understand, from the perspective of church attending offenders, the role of religious behaviors and faith on individual criminal desistance. With this in mind, an overview demonstrates the importance the U.S. and state governments place in recognizing the role of faith and religion in aiding social conformity and law-abidance.

In 1996, then-U.S. Congressman John Ashcroft, who later became a U.S. Attorney General, helped pass legislation that allowed religious-based groups to apply for and receive state monies for rendering social services. Previously, these fiscal resources had only been available to secular organizations. This portion of broader welfare reform legislation is commonly known as Charitable Choice 104, which severely reduced parameters concerning how religious groups intertwined their beliefs with the delivery of social services (Saxon-Harold, Wiener, McCormack, & Weber, 2000; Texas Freedom Network, 2002). Also in 1996, then-Texas Governor Bush created a task force whose purpose was to investigate and implement how best to utilize faith-based services in

conjunction with the Texas government's delivery of criminal justice and social services (Texas Freedom Network, 2002).

In January 2001, newly-elected President George W. Bush issued Executive Orders #13198 and #13199 creating faith-based initiatives within the White House and the following departments: Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services (Peters & Woolley, 2015; The White House Archives, 2001). The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives opened one month later (Johnson & Wubbenhorst, 2007; Texas Freedom Network, 2002). While speaking on the executive orders, President Bush said, "When we see social needs in America, my administration will first look to faith-based programs and community groups, which have proven their power to save and change lives" (The New York Times, 2001).

This faith-based movement, aimed primarily at helping the poor and those considered to be at high-risk for crime involvement and addiction, was not just a Republican or Presidential initiative. A 2002 Pew Research Center poll of American citizens revealed that approximately 70% of the population believed that the government should be the primary funding or delivery mechanism for those in need of social services. In that same poll, approximately 70% of the citizenry also supported the ability of faith-based organizations and programs to compete for federal money designed for the delivery of social services (Pew Research Center, 2002).

The state of Ohio passed HB 95 in 2003, creating the Governors' Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (Johnson & Wubbenhorst, 2007). In 2004 at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was

created. Also in 2004, Democratic Presidential candidate, John Kerry, expressed his support for faith-based relationships between government and religious-based organizations when he said, “I know there are some who say the First Amendment means faith-based organizations can't help government," he remarked. "I think they are wrong." (Christian Century, 2015; Lazarus, 2004). In 2006, both the House of Representatives and the Senate re-ratified the federal welfare program, keeping the aforementioned Charitable Choice portion intact.

Specifically with the intent of decreasing recidivism, President Bush signed into law the “Second Chance Act” of 2007. A large portion of this act was designed to use faith-based ministries both inside and outside of prisons in order to aid with offender reentry (Demoss, 2015; U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], n.d.). A group known as Prison Fellowship petitioned and lobbied for four years to help pass this act (Demoss, 2015).

By continuing the cooperation between the disbursement of federal dollars to both faith-based and secular organizations, President Obama has furthered the role of using religious organizations to combat crime and substance abuse. One of his first steps was to change the name from the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (OJP, n.d. b; OJP, 2011; Office of the White House, 2009). Carrying on what President Bush created, which was seven more federal departments added to the original five that housed a Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (Carlson-Thies, 2009); President Obama has maintained these centers within all 12 departments. Similar name changes, as previously mentioned, were given to these initiatives (OJP, 2011; Office of

the White House, 2009). According to the website for the OJP (2011), they represent the Department of Justice (DOJ) in assisting “faith-based groups with programs and initiatives throughout the criminal justice spectrum, ranging from youth violence prevention to crime victim assistance to prisoner reentry.” In 2011 at the National Prayer Breakfast, President Obama was quoted as saying, “Sometimes faith groups can do the work of caring for the least of these on their own; sometimes they need a partner, whether it's in business or government” (OJP, n.d. a). A very similar sentiment was asserted around the same time period in 2008 when Baylor University’s Institute for the Studies of Religion (ISR) published a special report entitled *Not By Faith or Government Alone: Rethinking the Role of Faith-Based Organizations* (Johnson, 2008).

As recently as October 2014, New York State’s governor, Andrew Cuomo (D), while speaking to a group of Baptist leaders in Harlem, expressed interest in creating a state-operated office that would partner with religious groups to help serve those in need (Jorgensen, 2014; Karni, 2014; Klepper, 2014). Governor Cuomo was quoted as saying, “From providing a healthy meal, helping a former inmate integrate into the workforce, to providing after-school activities and educational support to our children, New York’s local faith-based organizations do extraordinary work” (Klepper, 2014). In January 2015, Governor Cuomo finalized these plans by assigning Karim Camara to lead the newly named Office of Faith-Based Community Development Services (African-American Planning Commission, 2015).

Faith-based services likely have the heaviest presence within the prison systems. According to *Corrections Compendium* (as cited in OJP, 2011), almost every prison in the U.S., on both the state and federal levels, provide church and other faith-based



services. Approximately 93% of the prisons also allow prayer groups to be held (OJP, 2011).

These programs require taxpayer money in order to be properly implemented and successfully executed. Some programs begin while offenders are incarcerated, and others are initiated for offenders who are on probation or parole so that they may have an increased chance of prosocial reintegration. Such programs regularly partner with private entities such as churches and non-government funded rehabilitation organizations, both faith-based and secular (OJP, 2011; Saxon-Harold et al., 2000; The White House Archives, n.d.). Continued examination of the efficiency and the effects of these programs can be justified in the name of fiscal responsibility and the goal of decreasing crime.

#### Religious Organizations' Social Service Volunteering

The social science research community and the criminal justice system would also be wise to take advantage of the volunteer mechanisms of churches and faith-based groups. While the government operated faith-based initiatives require tax resources, most of these groups do not. Rather, they are funded and operated strictly through private donations of time and money. Inherent to these religious groups' volunteering efforts is the noble goal of attracting and sustaining prosocial relationships with people who are often the most vulnerable. President Obama described this on February 5th, 2009 when he said:

But no matter how much money we invest or how sensibly we design our policies, the change that Americans are looking for will not come from government

alone. There is a force for good greater than government. It is an expression of faith, this yearning to give back, this hungering for a purpose larger than our own...(OJP, n.d.).

Churches and faith-based organizations designed to assist high-risk or impoverished populations are going to exist regardless of whether they are legally allowed to compete for government funds. Knowing this, research on how and why these organizations fail or succeed at helping individuals decrease their recidivism or prevent criminal exposure is clearly justified.

The following descriptive statistics demonstrate the rates and consistency of volunteerism and financial donations that churches and faith-based organizations possess. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCSS, n.d.) and Giving USA (2013), in the year 2012, approximately \$316 billion were donated for all types of non-profit giving. The largest share of the aforementioned number was donated to religious organizations. This includes, but is not limited to, churches and faith-based organizations, having received 32% or approximately \$101 billion. This has been the general standard for decades (Giving USA, 2013; McKeever & Pettijohn, 2014; Corporation for National & Community Service [CNCS], 2009). For example, in 1996, churches and other religious organizations in the U.S. collected over \$81 billion in tithing and donations (Saxon-Harold et al., 2000).

Approximately 83% of churches engage in volunteering, whose charitable acts range from providing individual-level social services to helping improve communities and neighborhoods. Of these church congregations, 91% report that their unpaid members are involved in executing the operations and goals of the charities (CNCS, 2009). Faith-based organizations have the highest retention rate of volunteers when

measured on a year-to-year basis. To put this in perspective, consider the other types of charitable groups whose retention rates are less: environmental, animal-rights, the arts, health, international affairs, human services, and education (Giving USA, 2013).

Charities reported that when they utilize religious entities as a source for volunteers, they are able to obtain a larger number of people and an increased number of man-power hours (CNCS, 2009). In terms of trends and patterns, churches and religious organizations provided 45 million volunteers in 1996, and this accounted for almost 50% of all the volunteers in the United States (Saxon-Harold et al., 2000).

Approximately 42% of all mentor-based volunteering occurs within faith-based organizations. Faith-based organizations attract approximately 47% of volunteers identifying themselves as being from the black race. This is the highest percentage out of all races and ethnicities (CNCS, 2009). Given the overrepresentation of the black race in arrest, conviction, use-of-force, and victimization rates, government and non-government organizations (NGOs) alike should consider a greater tapping into of this volunteer mechanism. Additionally, the CNCS (2009) reported that every race serves within faith-based organizations at higher rates than other types of charities. As one might imagine, poor and at-risk youth are the least likely to volunteer, but those that attend church and other religious functions are more likely to donate their time (CNCS, 2009).

According to Giving USA (2013), from 2002 thru 2012, financial donations to all types of charities have increased by almost \$20 billion when adjusted for inflation. When not adjusted for inflation, the actual amount is just slightly under \$79 billion. In 2012, individuals were responsible for 72% of total financial donations, with foundations,

bequests, and corporations covering the remaining portions, all at 15% or less (Giving USA, 2013). Personal tithing at church would be counted as individual giving.

The year 2013 was very similar to 2012 in that approximately one-third of all financial giving in the U.S. was made to churches and religious organizations. This figure has remained relatively stable over the past decade, although there has been a slight decline since 2008. This decrease is believed to be primarily due to the recession (McKeever & Pettijohn, 2014).

#### Brief Overview of the Protestant Church in this Study

While the principal focus of the study is the qualitative interviews of the offenders, an inherent, secondary entity within this research project is the southern Baptist church, whose outreach and retention strategies will be examined as they relate to attracting offenders and addicts. The following overview of this secondary aspect allows the reader to have context as to why offenders from one particular church were targeted for data collection. This particular Baptist church, located in the southern United States, is in a city with a population of approximately 47,500. The surrounding small towns, and the nearby convergence of two counties' populations, result in the greater area having a population of approximately 135,000. Approximately eight years ago, this church underwent a mission retransformation that included changes in physical location, a revamp in pomp and circumstance, and a new mission statement that seeks to identify and provide a worshiping experience for the "unchurched."

#### *Synopsis of Supplemental Data Collection Methods Used*

One method to ascertain factors that aid long-lasting, prosocial change for offenders is to conduct qualitative studies on churches that specifically try to

accommodate individuals with a past involving criminality or substance addiction. Some churches have specific programs that attempt to attract offenders and addicts. These programs are designated for people with a history of antisocial behavior and are supplemental to the traditional church functions and organized services. Other churches have remodeled their entire mission statement so that they first reach out to those who were previously described, and then minister to them. The church in this study has the latter listed as one of their goals.

Through participant observation, unobtrusive measures, and interviews of the church ministers and leaders, this portion of the dissertation will act as a supplemental and contextual fieldwork strategy. By doing this in a systematic manner, the researcher seeks to learn how the church's attraction and retention efforts are executed. Additionally, the researcher wants to understand what these effects, if any, have on the past and current offenders who participate in the qualitative interviews.

### Theoretical Framework

Life-Course criminology is a viable and logical theoretical foundation for guiding this research project. It is possible that the interview and fieldwork results, in conjunction with future replications, could strengthen the ability of Life-Course theory to explain desistance from crime. This would occur by reinforcing yet another life-event, as an additional factor, which may help to improve the trajectory of offenders' lives. It is also quite possible that new, theoretical frameworks may be further developed through the process of grounded theory.

Life-Course theory, in terms of desistance from crime, attempts to identify what changes in an offender's life trajectory have intervened upon their daily lives, thus

influencing them away from a life of crime (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993/2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Schroeder, Giordano, & Cernkovich, 2007). These events are called “turning points” (Laub & Sampson, 1993) or a similar concept known as “hooks for change” (Giordano et al., 2002).

For example, research has identified prosocial, healthy marriages as an event that can influence an offender’s life toward conformity or help decrease or prevent criminality (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Holland, 2003; Laub & Sampson, 1993/2003; van Schellen, Apel, & Nieuwbeerta, 2012a). Likewise, various aspects of employment such as attaining a steady and lawful job that allows for a reasonable living, full-time work, or job satisfaction have also been recognized as a turning point (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Tripodi, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 1993). Joining the military has also yielded varying results (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Salvatore & Taniguchi, 2012; van Schellen, M., Apel, R., & Nieuwbeerta, P., 2012b; Wright, Carter, & Cullen, 2005). Other factors have manifested varying levels of empirical and systematic support for helping influence an offender’s life-course away from criminal acts or antisocial behaviors. Some examples include drug treatment, a spiritual transformation, new conventional social networks, the birth of a child, reuniting with law-abiding family members, and religious involvement (Bahr et al., 2010; Benda, 2002; Benda & Belcher, 2006; Dennis, Foss, & Scott, 2007; Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, & Seffrin, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2007). All of these are examples of potentially viable turning points that help build social capital in the life of offenders, who regularly have few to no healthy, law-abiding relationships.

Most of the above examples come in the form of informal social control, meaning that official or formal control mechanisms are not involved when attempting to prevent or decrease criminal propensity and acts. Formal control mechanisms and sanctions include, but not limited to: increased law enforcement presence, longer incarcerations, tougher non-confinement punishments, zero-tolerance policing, mandatory minimum sentencing, increased fines or taxes, increased regulation, increased monitoring, and creation of new laws. When these types of controls and sanctions are increased by an apparatus of the criminal justice system, it comes at the cost of taxpayer income and the further dispersion of limited criminal justice resources.

Examples of informal sanctions, also known as informal social control mechanisms, include, but are not limited to: loving and law-abiding family, peers, mentors, churches and other religious-based participation, neighborhood watch programs, school systems to a certain degree, hobbies, employment, collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), other conventional or social bonds (Hirschi, 1969), and faith in a higher-being. This study seeks to examine faith and religious participation as an informal social control mechanism. Generally, informal social control mechanisms do not utilize taxpayer money or other criminal justice resources.

According to Life-Course research, social capital (Laub & Sampson, 1993) acts as the “glue” that binds criminal offenders to prosocial relationships and conventional social institutions (Dennis et al., 2007; Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993). Past studies have shown support for religious involvement as a form of social capital or as a means to obtain social capital (Chu, 2007; Dennis et al., 2007; Schroeder & Frana, 2009). While there is support for such a sub-discipline of study, research lacks when it comes to

understanding the offender's perspective on the role of Christian salvation and religiosity as a turning point, thus creating social capital investments that steer offenders away from the criminal lifestyle. Using Life-Course theory as a guide, this study helps fill that gap.

When interviewing offenders who currently attend the church in this study, the researcher will use Life-Course criminology as a framework. As briefly noted above, and further delineated in the forthcoming literature review, a number of aspects of faith in a higher being have been studied in relation to their impact on crime prevention and criminal desistance. These variables include, but are not limited to, broad ideas such as religion as a whole, a spiritual conversion, religious habits, and faith-based rehabilitation programs. However, there is scant research on the nuances within these variables, specifically on where offenders feel the actual desistance process begin and at what point they recognize the cessation of their criminal behavior (Chitwood et al., 2008; Chu & Sung, 2009; Jang, 2013; Petts, 2009; Salvatore et al., 2012; Schroeder & Frana, 2009; Ulmer et al., 2012). The questions formulated for this research project seek to identify exactly when the participants perceived their criminal endeavors to be on the decline or non-existent.

While their answers will clearly be subjective, based upon their own perceptions, this research strategy can yield detailed and insightful evidence from face-to-face interviews and conversations (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2014). Past studies have cited the necessity of future qualitative inquiries so as to further discover and comprehend the details within the concepts of turning points and human agency (Chu, Sung, and Hsiao, 2012; Kirk, 2012; Mus & Eker, 2011; Salvatore & Taniguchi, 2012). It should also be noted that Laub and Sampson (2003) carried out interviews with over 50 of the original



Glueck (1950) participants. In short, the contribution of qualitative studies to Life-Course criminology makes logical sense and is even called upon within Life-Course specific literature.

Additionally, other questions asked of the participants will reflect Life-Course theoretical concepts such as: social glue, social capital, social bonding (Hirschi, 1969), and the internalization of not wanting to harm self and others (Nye, 1958). Due to the current unknown sample, a variety of answers are expected, as well as the researcher's desire to target offenders and substance abusers from a variety of socioeconomic levels and life backgrounds. This includes those who have been repeatedly processed through the criminal justice system, as well as those who have never been detected by law enforcement or processed by the courts.

This researcher posits that a myriad of variables within religion and faith in a higher-being should continue to be examined in terms of their ability to specifically act as turning points, hooks for change, and catalysts for igniting human agency (Laub & Sampson, 2003). If marriage, employment, military service, and other life events that create positive, social bonds can be turning points, then why not increased religious involvement due to a spiritual conversion and/or the formation of prosocial bonds from a non-threatening church? Laub and Sampson (2001) stated that there was strong support for the notion that religious involvement aided in preventing abnormal behaviors that are harmful to self and others. In their major life-course studies (Laub & Sampson, 1993, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1990, 1993, 2005), they also cited the importance of informal social control, by way of quality relationships with parents, spouses, and other adults, as helping to prevent and terminate delinquency, crime, and anti-social behavior. With this

in mind, it can be argued that numerous healthy, quality relationships can be formed through religious conversion and involvement, helping to prevent and cease destructive behaviors.

There is also the cautionary concept that one turning point alone may not be enough to positively change the trajectory of most offenders. Tripodi (2010) found support for the assertion that the variable of employment, by itself, was probably not enough of a turning point for many people embedded in a criminal lifestyle. If the idea that more than one turning point increases the probability of preventing and ceasing criminality, then research on religious effects should be studied so as to identify its role as a turning point when examined using a variety of methodologies. This is also supported by the concept of causal complexity, whereas variables should not just be theoretically or statistically studied in their own respective vacuums. Rather they should be theorized and analyzed as to what their influences actually are or are not when combined with other complimentary or competing independent variables (Perkins & Grotzer, 2000; Ragin, 1999; 2000).

Another justification for the need of increased qualitative research into the role of religion as a turning point is found in the work of Salvatore and Taniguchi (2012). They called for qualitative studies to be conducted on the relationship between modern military service and crime. Their logic, as it pertains to modern day military service, should also be applied towards better understanding how contemporary religious participation and belief affects criminal desire and behavior.

Finally, Cullen (2010), Jang and Franzen (2013), Johnson (2011), went so far as to say that there should be a specialized strain of criminology regarding the role of

religion in helping to decrease recidivism and crime. This study contributes to knowledge in that arena.

### Potential Policy Implications

Churches are non-profit organizations whose actions can benefit county, state, and federal governments that are increasingly under fiscal constraints. How the study of religious involvement translates into benefiting the criminal justice system and society is an area of research that is not fully developed and has plausible policy relevance. If repetitive, criminal offenders, or those with substance addiction, cite the initiatives of such churches as being a means to help them recover, the impact would be substantial. The success of contemporary churches that cater to those who are uncomfortable relating to a traditional church atmosphere could have far reaching policy changes for the criminal justice system.

Correctional wings of the criminal justice system could choose to partner with such churches on a formal or informal basis. Even if no partnership is achieved, it could be made known to offenders that these types of non-traditional, religious entities exist and have demonstrated elements of success. If continued research on this topic establishes that offenders feel, or directly know, that their increased religiosity and strengthened faith has helped them to recover or desist, a symbiotic relationship between the criminal justice system and similarly structured churches could prove useful.

## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

This review will begin with summaries of the existing meta-analyses and systematic evaluations on the relationship between religion and crime. This will provide historical context and an overall perspective of what the academic community has learned on the topic. Next, will be a focus on more recent publications, both qualitative and quantitative, most of which have not been included in any type of systematic review. Within the more recent publications, the researcher will concentrate on studies that are the most theoretically and methodologically aligned to this dissertation.

### Meta-Analyses & Systematic Reviews on Religion-Crime Relationship

#### *Juvenile Delinquency*

Johnson, Li, Larson, and McCullough (2000) conducted a systematic review (SR) on 40 studies that had examined the connection between religion and juvenile delinquency. The time frame for when these 40 studies were conducted was between 1985 and 1997. Only research that was published in peer-reviewed journals with sample populations from the United States were used. Johnson et al. (2000) included all refereed journals from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and criminology. One reason this decision was made was so the authors would have enough studies to conduct the review, since only utilizing top-tier journals did not yield enough publications on the general relationship to be examined. This scarcity of research, albeit from the mid-1980s thru the mid-1990s, further supports the need for research like this dissertation. Johnson et al. (2000) noted a similar assertion in their introduction of this publication, by noting that “minimal, yet consistent, attention” was being paid to what appears to be a moderate-to-

strong relationship between religious involvement and crime or juvenile delinquency (p. 32).

Of the 40 publications mentioned above, 30 of them reported an inverse relationship between religious factors and juvenile delinquency. Nine of the studies reported mixed, insignificant, or inconclusive findings; and only one study reported that the relationship between religious effects on juvenile delinquency resulted in harmful effects. The great majority of the studies only included juveniles, but a few of the studies encompassed males and females into their early 20s. The type of religious variables that each study operationalized also varied. This will be addressed in subsequent paragraphs, as was done by Johnson and colleagues (2000).

Religiosity can be measured a number of different ways, meaning that the way one utilizes their faith and religion to help them navigate life's choices and events, can vary. Johnson et al. (2000) categorized religiosity measures using the following six factors: church attendance, salience, denomination, prayer habits or frequency, Bible study participation, and other religious activities. It should be noted that this dissertation proposes to explore these same dimensions during the interviews with the participants.

Of the 40 studies reviewed by Johnson et al. (2000), only three studies utilized all six of the above factors. Most of the studies only examined one or two of these variables. Church attendance and the importance of the subjects' faith were the most commonly examined variables. Thirty-one of the studies attempted to quantify three or less of the factors, and of these publications, 21 (67.7%) of them found the aforementioned inverse relationship between religious effects and juvenile delinquency. Eight of these 31 studies found one of the following between the two broad concepts being examined:

insignificance, no relationship, or mixed results. Again, only one study found religious effects to contribute to increasing levels of delinquency.

Johnson et al. (2000) concluded that the more statistically rigorous studies resulted in confirmation of lower levels of delinquency due to religiosity. On the contrary, the studies that did not rely on reliability measurements or were simply less methodologically sound, were less likely to find a significant relationship between religious effects and delinquency. For example, Johnson et al. (2000) wrote that 27 of the 40 studies did not assess their measures of religion, in order to confirm their reliability. Of those 27 publications, 17 reported that religion had the intuitively expected, inverse relationship with delinquency. Eight of the 27 found no relationship or mixed findings, and only one study reported that increased religiosity resulted in increased delinquency. Of the studies that found mixed results, none oversaw a reliability of measurement test, nor used more than one variable to measure religiosity. Conversely, the 13 remaining studies that did ensure measurement reliability all found an inverse correlation between religiosity and juvenile delinquency.

#### *Criminal Behavior in General & Methodological Variance*

In another review of the literature, Baier and Wright (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that were conducted between 1969 and 1998. All studies examined the relationship between religion and criminal behavior. The great majority of the studies were published in books and journals, 56 to be exact. Four more studies were used as exhibits at conferences and dissertations.

Baier and Wright (2001) were trying to help rectify the academic contention regarding the role of religion on delinquency and criminal behavior, in that the

criminology, sociology, and psychology communities have not historically agreed on the salience of religion as a dependent variable. According to Baier and Wright, there was much variation in the findings of studies and reports on the role of religious effects on crime, and they believed this to be attributed to a combination of three possible reasons.

Their hypotheses for these three explanations are paraphrased as follows:

1. The potency of religious effects on criminal and deviant behavior partially depends upon how religiously entrenched the communities or sample population being studied already are.
2. Studies that focus on the effect of religion on vice-crimes, such as drunkenness, drug abuse, gambling, and prostitution will find a stronger relationship compared to studies where the crimes being examined involve easily identified and/or traditional victims, such as crimes against property and persons.
3. The variation in the researchers' methodology, theoretical framework, and sampling techniques help explain the lack of consistency in research findings on how religious effects correlate with criminal and deviant behavior.

Baier and Wright (2001) found varying levels of support for all three hypotheses, but it was the other goal of their study that added more answers to the question of whether religious beliefs and behaviors were worthy of consideration as a way to prevent or reduce criminal behavior.

Results of the meta-analysis revealed that religious effects, specifically levels of faith in religious tenets and religious habits, have a statistically significant deterrence on criminal behavior. Baier and Wright (2001) were able to label this quantification as being a moderate effect, just like many other dominating concepts and theories that have been historically and currently studied in the criminology field: social learning, personality traits, social disorganization, neo-classical, social bonds, strains, and age-graded informal social control (Akers & Sellers, 2013, p. 276-279).

The relationship between religion and crime cannot be thoroughly discussed without incorporating what is known about faith-based organizations (FBOs) and their role of delivering social services to the community. Unfortunately, from a historical perspective, rigorous research and analysis of FBOs in the United States is deficient (Johnson, 2011). Research on all aspects of FBOs is lacking, especially when it comes to their efficiency and effectiveness at assisting groups and individuals that are considered high-risk for criminal offending and substance abuse (Johnson, Tompkins, & Webb, 2002). One reason for the lack of social science knowledge on FBOs is because it was not until the mid-1990s that serious political and social debate began on the Constitutionality and implementation of FBOs as a non-government tool to reduce such social maladies as: poverty, juvenile delinquency prevention, lowering adult recidivism, rehabilitation from addiction, lack of education, and overall unhealthy lifestyles. The idea that FBOs could partner with state and federal governments, as well as receive direct and indirect financial assistance from the government, was also of concern.

Johnson et al. (2002) conducted one of the first and most comprehensive reviews of existing studies on FBOs. Their report had two overall-goals. One was to help clarify the relationship between religion and a myriad of unhealthy lifestyle choices, including but not limited to delinquency, substance abuse, and crime. Another aspect of the first goal was that the researchers also wanted to better understand how religious involvement affected the following prosocial and individual attributes: well-being, hope, self-esteem, and educational attainment. A total of 669 studies published from the years 1933 through part of 2002 were reviewed.



The second element of the study was to better understand the impact, if any, of faith-based organizations as an effective tool to prevent and reduce social plights, including crime concerns. The logic behind first reporting the results from the review on crime and religion was to provide context or a lens to the reader for the second half of the study. Specifically, if an inverse relationship between religion and crime is consistently found, then it logically makes sense to attempt to achieve the same results through the use of faith-based organizations.

Johnson et al. (2002) referred to the every-day, natural practice of religion as “organic religion” and the intentional organization of religious groups to reach out to underserved or high-risk populations as “intentional religion” (p. 8). The researchers reviewed organic religion and its impacts on the following lifestyle practices and consequences: hypertension, mortality, depression, suicide, sexual behavior, alcohol use, drug use, and delinquency. The summary of their review in this dissertation will concentrate on the latter three.

The overwhelming majority of the studies that were analyzed, led Johnson et al. (2002) to conclude that increased levels of religious behaviors and beliefs resulted in lower rates or prevention of juvenile delinquency, adult offending, and other behaviors considered harmful to self and others. For example, 97 studies were collected that pertained to the independent variable of religion and its effects on the dependent variable of alcohol use. Ninety-four percent (94%) of those studies revealed lower levels of alcohol use and/or beneficial outcomes due to the lack of abusing alcohol. Fifty-four studies on the relationship between drug use and religious effects were included by Johnson et al. (2002). Of those studies, 87% found that increased religious activities led

to lesser rates of drug use and abuse. This inverse relationship was consistently found regardless of the demographic characteristics of the population under examination.

Conversely, only four studies across both the alcohol and drug categories found evidence that increased religion correlated to an increased chance of substance use or abuse. Johnson et al. (2002) commented on these four studies as possessing methodologies that were less rigorous and sound when compared to the vast majority of the other studies. These findings are important because it is commonly understood, by both academic researchers and the general public, that there is a robust relationship between substance dependency and crime.

Still further, forty-six studies on the relationship between organic religion and crime were collected and analyzed by Johnson et al. (2002). Decreased levels of juvenile delinquency and adult criminal offending were associated with increased rates of religious behaviors and beliefs in 78% of those studies. Only one of the publications found a positive correlation between the two concepts and their specific variables.

Johnson et al. (2002) also collected publications that examined the relationship between religious effects and desirable statuses or outcomes for individuals. All four of these aforementioned categories were deemed to have a positive correlation with organic religion. Educational attainment was one of those four categories. Due to the acknowledged relationship between increased education and lower rates of juvenile delinquency and criminal offending, the specific findings by Johnson et al. (2002) will be herein described. Although only 19 studies were able to be collected, mainly due to a lack of research and publication on the topic, 84% of the discovered studies found that increased religious activities coincided with increased levels of educational attainment.

This offers preliminary evidence that delinquency and crime can be reduced through higher levels of education completion, due in part to the mediating assistance of increased religious beliefs and behaviors.

For the second broad goal of their report, Johnson et al. (2002) found that collecting published studies on the efficacy of FBOs proved to be sparse and difficult. They were only able to include 25 of 97 studies on FBOs, due to those 25 being the only ones that actually attempted to calculate the impact of the organizations' efforts. Even then, only 11 of the studies had a multivariate aspect to them, and none of them used random sampling or a methodology to ensure national representation. The difficulty within the collection process, and the limited statistical techniques and methodologies, according to Johnson et al. (2002), are evidence enough that more studies on intentional religion, by way of FBOs, need to be conducted.

As stated by Johnson et al. (2002), the following conclusions should be understood with caution and optimism. Ten out of the 11 studies that used a multivariate analysis found that the FBOs in their respective analyses were effective at achieving their desired goals and beneficiaries' outcomes. The goals of the FBOs ranged from improving prisoner rehabilitation and prisoner reentry to decreasing recidivism and aiding in substance abuse rehabilitation. Overall, 23 out of the 25 studies reported that the FBOs had provided services that were linked to positive results for the recipients. The other two studies resulted in findings of no association between FBOs and desirable, positive outcomes for the consumers of the services. For a relatively recent example of a publication on the complexities on studying faith-based treatment processes and outcomes, see Sung and Chu (2013).

### *Substance Use & Abuse*

Chitwood, Weiss, and Leukefeld (2008) conducted a SR on scholarly articles that had examined the religion-crime relationship, more specifically the role of religiosity and spirituality on substance use and abuse. The range of years for the studies were from 1997 to 2006, where 105 publications that utilized quantitative statistical techniques were selected for the SR. Chitwood et al. (2008) reported that 95 data sets had been examined within the 105 publications. As a result of their SR and analysis of the types of data sets used, the researchers called for an increase in original data to be collected so that numerous aspects of religiosity and crime can be intentionally and specifically measured.

Eighty-two percent of the publications were conducted on sample populations within the United States, and only 21 of the 105 studies used a longitudinal design. The remaining articles incorporated a cross-sectional design, and only 12 of the U.S. samples were nationally representative. According to Barry, Nelson, Davarya, and Urry (2010), Chitwood et al. (2008), Johnson et al. (2000), and Johnson and Jang (2010), both retrospective and prospective longitudinal designs are needed to better understand the concurrent and long-term effects of religiosity on crime, rehabilitation, and unhealthy outcomes in general. Likewise, these researchers have also called for more studies that are nationally representative.

Chitwood and colleagues (2008) also recommended for future research that more studies focus on the effects of religiosity with street drugs such as crack-cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. Only 16 of the publications they examined attempted to better understand this specific relationship, while the great majority of studies only looked at alcohol and/or marijuana among adolescents and young adults. Fourteen of the 16

studies scrutinized the relationship between religiosity or spirituality with cocaine/crack-cocaine. Nine of those 14 studies found one or more factors that were inversely related to that drug category (Chitwood et al., 2008). In conclusion, few articles have looked at other street drugs, thus no meaningful generalizations can be made.

Overall, 99 (94.29%) out of 105 studies reported some element of an inverse relationship between religious effects and substance use or abuse. Only four out of the 105 reported a positive correlation, and two of them were specifically measuring spirituality only. Chitwood et al. (2008) added another element of specificity to their SR that provides detail to this topic. They did so by separating and categorizing every association between some measure of religiosity/spirituality with some measure of substance use or abuse. A total of 410 of these measures were made across the studies that were accumulated. Just over 60% or 247 of the associations resulted in an inverse relationship between the two broad concepts previously described. Only 1.2% or five of the 410 specific measurements resulted in a positive correlation. No statistical significance was found in 38.5% of the associations.

When partitioning these specific measurements into alcohol and marijuana, 57.6% of the alcohol related associations had an inverse relationship with religious effects, and 62.3% revealed a shielding element against marijuana. Only three (1.06%) out of 282 of these micro-analyses across alcohol and marijuana revealed a positive correlation with religiosity/spirituality measures. Non-significant findings made up the remaining associations.

Chitwood et al. (2008) concluded their study with a number of remarks pertaining to the future needs on the research of the religion-crime phenomenon. First, more

longitudinal studies need to be conducted on a wider variety of drugs and sub-cultures across the United States. An accepted definition of religiosity needs to be adopted within academia, along with multiple specific measures of this concept, all of which are incorporated into future research. Knowledge on desistance processes and complete termination of all substances, especially street drugs, by way of religious factors, is lacking. Spirituality as a separate concept or variable from religiosity or religious effects needs to be operationalized and researched more consistently. Qualitative studies that explore what religion and spirituality mean to people engaged in street drugs will help define and standardize accepted measures for those concepts.

#### *Most Recent Review on Crime and Delinquency*

The most current and thorough systematic review (SR) of the religion-crime literature was published in 2010 after being collected and analyzed by Johnson and Jang (2010). Two-hundred and seventy-two (272) publications from 1944 to 2010 were included, with 247 (90%) of the studies concluding that religion and the practice thereof aided in the prevention of crime, as well as lowering the actual incident rates of juvenile delinquency and adult crime. Twenty-four of the 272 studies (9%), reported null effects or mixed results, and only two of the studies found a positive relationship between religious effects and criminal offending.

These consistent results were found across all types of studies, with varying methodologies, theoretical frameworks, statistical techniques, and sample population characteristics. For an example of the latter, the inverse relationship was found to overwhelmingly exist in the publications where juveniles were the target population, as well as adults. The same was true for race, gender, geographic location, no matter how

the variables of religion and crime were operationalized. Johnson and Jang (2010) also noted that of the publications with more advanced research methodologies and statistical analyses, the correlation between religion and crime was even more robust.

The breadth and depth of the SRs and meta-analyses reveal the consistent inverse relationship between religious effects on crime, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and other unhealthy outcomes; they do so in a myriad of settings. These include:

- in-prison faith-based rehabilitation programs for both criminal offending and substance abuse,
- organic religion's effects on prevention of substance abuse by youth,
- faith-based substance abuse rehabilitation programs for people who have *not* been processed through the criminal justice system,
- faith-based substance abuse rehabilitation programs for people on probation or parole,
- organic religion's effects on prevention and desistance from violence,
- organic religion's effects on adult prevention and desistance from vice-crimes

While the first section of this review has displayed a macro-view of the existing religion-crime literature, it is equally important to examine specific studies that are related to this dissertation. Studies with methodologies and theoretical frameworks similar to this dissertation will now be parsed, as well as articles that call for research to be conducted in the manner that this dissertation proposes.

#### Specific Studies on Religion, Desistance, and Protection from Harmful Behaviors

The next section of this literature review covers qualitative and quantitative studies that, with the exception of four publications, have not been included in any of the aforementioned SRs or meta-analyses. The following studies were not included in the previous reviews for one or a combination of the following reasons: published after latest review, qualitative in nature offering no statistical analysis, or did not fit previous review

criteria. The great majority of the publications in the previous section were of a quantitative nature. This dissertation is a qualitative endeavor, thus it is imperative to understand what the peer-reviewed literature has come to understand from the qualitative studies that explore the religion-crime relationship. This is a valid statement both in the context of FBOs and organic religion. Life-Course Theory is the primary theoretical framework used to search for past studies on this topic; however, it was not the only perspective utilized. Elements of Hirschi's (1969) social bonding theory, Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming, and Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory are also included.

Additionally, there are many specific relationships, questions, and other minutia regarding the religion-crime phenomenon still unanswered or in need of further verification (Chitwood et al., 2008; Chu et al., 2012; Cullen, 2010; Desmond, Ulmer, & Bader, 2013; Jang, 2013; Johnson et al. 2002; Johnson, 2011; Johnson, 2014; Ulmer, Desmond, Jang, & Johnson, 2012). Perhaps, a different approach to these concepts, such as the qualitative study in this proposal, can shed new light. "Future research should incorporate in-depth interviews to disentangle the process of how individuals benefit from the process of [religious] conversion" (Chu, Sung, and Hsiao, 2012, p. 207).

### Qualitative Literature

This researcher seeks to uncover the rich detail that qualitative research is known for producing, specifically from the perspective of the offender, by ascertaining whether their religious involvement at the aforementioned church and/or their strengthened faith in a higher-being, acted as one or a combination of the following:

- initial turning points through direct influence,



- secondary turning points as a result of some other traditionally accepted turning point(s),
- social capital or social glue that helped create or acted as catalyst for other turning points,
- some other form of positive reinforcement for prosocial improvement and/or the decreasing of recidivism/relapse,
- or none of the above.

An improved understanding of the linear occurrences of these events should better inform future academic research, as well as policy implementation for FBOs, jails, prisons, and community-corrections.

Theories on desistance lack religious components in their temporal and conceptual mapping (Chu, 2007). The number of research publications on the relationship between desistance and specific aspects of religion, spirituality, faith, and the effects thereof is also scant (Chitwood et al., 2008; Chu & Sung, 2009; Jang, 2013; Petts, 2009; Salvatore et al., 2012; Schroeder & Frana, 2009; Ulmer et al., 2012). Qualitative studies are not an exception; however, those that have been published have supplied the criminology, sociology, and psychology fields with promising evidence about the impact that religiosity and spirituality have on the lives' of offenders and addicts (Benda & Belcher, 2006; Bui & Morash, 2010; Jensen & Gibbons, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Michalsen, 2011; Schroeder & Frana, 2009; Terry, 2003; Giordano et al., 2002). Below are details from six studies, all published from the year 2002 to the present, whose methodologies involve all or partial qualitative components. They present pieces to the puzzle on religion-crime studies that parallel or overlap with this dissertation. None of them were included in any of the previously mentioned SRs or meta-analyses.

Bui and Morash (2010) interviewed 20 female parolees that had been successful in not re-offending for at least 21 months. Some of them went several months longer and

showed little to no sign of criminal relapse. These women were asked to recount what formal and informal events occurred while in prison, and immediately after being paroled that assisted them in finding new social networks, thus moving them down a path of non-recidivism. The researchers were able to find a common theme: formal prison and parole strategies that were put in place gave female offenders the information and ability to have prosocial networks once they were released. These strategies sought to specifically place the female offenders in programs that would help meet their basic needs once outside prison walls. Additionally, the programs sought to provide social networks that would help the women avoid past relationships and criminal networks (Bui & Morash, 2010).

Furthermore, the majority of the women in the study cited crucial parts of their success as being due to religious-based partnerships that were established in prison *and* then continued once the offenders were released. Clergy, church volunteers, and other religious leaders took on roles to involve the women in church participation, drug treatment if necessary, as well as physical and emotional necessities such as food and prosocial church networking (Bui & Morash, 2010). This aspect of the female parolees' success was worth noting when the researchers wrote, "Were it not for the women's church and family networks, parole services might not have been enough to create successful outcomes" (Bui & Morash, 2010, p. 19). It must also be noted that the women stated they were active in church or religious practices inside prison walls, as well as once they were released. This was deliberate on the part of the offenders, as noted by the researchers and the ladies themselves (Bui & Morash, 2010). This strategy is an example of where church and FBOs could intertwine their mission with that of prisons and parole

departments, or at a very minimum, be listed as resources for the women once they are released.

Schroeder and Frana (2009) conducted a qualitative study of newly released convicts that were living in a half-way house. These men were documented as frequent or serious offending criminals, all of whom had varying levels of drug or alcohol dependency. The underlying theme regarding religion and spirituality, as stated by the clients, is that these variables helped them with day-to-day stressors and the management of life's unknowns. In short, they were coping mechanisms. Anger, anxiety, and depression were three emotions identified by the researchers based upon the interviews. One purpose of Schroeder and Frana's (2009) study was to see how the offenders used religion and spirituality to manage these emotions.

The men specifically cited spirituality, and/or religion, as alleviating anger, thus helping them to stay away from substance abuse and behaviors that result in criminal acts (Schroeder & Frana, 2009). Anger has been tied to consistent criminal offending for persistent offenders (Giordano et al., 2007). Anxiety was an internalized emotion that the clients stated was a major propellant as to why they abused drugs and alcohol (Schroeder & Frana, 2009). The stressors in the clients' lives were usually not handled reasonably, and substance abuse was the escape from this anxiety. Spirituality and religion, specifically participation in prayer, meditation, or attending related events, allowed for an escape, or distraction, from the anxiety in their lives. These acts then produced a calming resonance in the men that allowed them to handle life's ordeals without turning to substance abuse (Schroeder & Frana, 2009).

Depression was the final emotion examined within this study. Attending religious functions or engaging in spiritual devotions provided the clients with hope for the future. In the past, clients would have let their depression dominate them to the point that they would not have effectively dealt with problems or day-to-day life. Without religion and/or spiritualism, the clients stated they were more likely to turn to crime or substance abuse; because, similar to anxiety and anger, addiction and quick fixes with crime were an escape from their sense of hopelessness (Schroeder & Frana, 2009). Individuals' and society's ability to maintain and strengthen mental health among the citizenry is essential to a number of criminal justice and social concerns (Slate, Buffington-Vollum, & Johnson, 2013).

Schroeder and Frana (2009) made it a point to distinguish between emotional turning points experienced by the offenders and turning points or hooks for change that build social capital, according to life-course theories (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993). The men studied did not typically make comments that their spirituality experienced in the half-way house translated into increased social bonds via social capital. For the time being, the men related their spiritualism to giving them internal peace and a higher level of happiness. Schroeder and Frana (2009) noted from the men's statements that they developed a sense of loneliness, because their attempts to rid themselves of a criminal lifestyle have made them outcasts within their former criminal networks. Additionally, they have not been accepted back into their original roles with prosocial family and friends, if those relationships ever existed. The men cited religious activities and spirituality as helping them through this transition period. The researchers also posited that while the men's new-found levels of faith and religiosity have not yet

produced prosocial networks, they may in fact, be initial steps necessary to form those prosocial networking groups, once they leave the half-way house (Schroeder & Frana, 2009). This is where a religious or church environment perceived by the offenders to be non-judgmental, and perhaps non-traditional in its message delivery, could be of use.

In the Michalsen (2011) qualitative study, 100 mothers were interviewed, all of who had been imprisoned in the recent past. Self-motivation to feel good about their daily actions, as well as their reliance through faith in a higher power, were common themes stated by the women. The participants had shown various levels of criminal desistance since being released (Michalsen, 2011).

More importantly, few people better understand what it takes to desist from crime than offenders who have successfully done so (Jensen & Gibbons, 2002). In another qualitative study, 20 adult ex-offenders were interviewed in order to understand what factors contributed to their ability to desist from crime. The researchers, Jensen and Gibbons (2002), discovered that the majority of the ex-convicts attributed their Christian relationship with God to be a crucial part of helping them reintegrate. The researchers concluded that shaming and religion both have separate roles and combining effects on helping the former offenders to become lawful members of society.

The desisting offenders' statements on re-integrative shaming and religion, in Jensen and Gibbons' (2002) study, generally differed from the other offenders who had not been able to avoid criminal behavior or repeated trips to prison. The offenders who were unsuccessful desisters had one theme in common that pertained to shaming. They revealed that their experience with shaming caused more harm than good, in that it stigmatized them and isolated their chances of taking on prosocial behaviors, such as

obtaining employment and finding solace with prosocial friends and family (Jensen & Gibbons, 2002).

Conversely, a differing theme was obtained from the successful desisters. The researchers identified one of the successful desisters as Harold. When speaking with him, the researchers noted that Harold was able to find acceptance within his family members' church congregation. They accepted him into the church family, and this positive action shielded him from the stigmatization that he felt due to the violence of his crimes. Harold knew he had done wrong and accepted that. He had fears that his criminal actions would overpower any goals or aspirations to reintegrate. However, the physical and spiritual embrace that he experienced from his family's church overshadowed the negative social consequences that often come with an offender, once released from prison (Jensen & Gibbons, 2002). It is this type of welcoming environment that is a large focus of the proposed study. What this church community did for Harold, and in general as a religious organization, to help foster hope so that he could move beyond the label of being a felon, is an expected microcosm of this proposed study.

Roger is another identified parolee in the Jensen and Gibbons (2002) study. Roger stated that part of his success was his post-release active participation in the Salvation Army Church. He has not re-offended in 13 years and has re-united with his children. Roger also noted that the personal shame he put on himself while in prison was a motivating factor to not reoffend once released. He cited the guilt he felt for letting down his children as another motivational factor for successful desistance.

Ten out of the 20 offenders in the Jensen and Gibbons (2002) study expressed personal religiosity while being interviewed. Of those ten that expressed some level of

personal religiosity, only one had a parole violation from the time the interviews were conducted in 1995 until just prior to publication in 2002. None of them were arrested for new offenses. Seven out of those 10 also expressed shame. The one parolee that expressed religion, but not shame, was the one who had the parole violation (Jensen & Gibbons, 2002). Of the ten parolees that did not state any level of personal religiosity, approximately half self-mentioned shame and the existence of new crimes or parole violations.

### Mixed Methods Studies

Forgiveness of self and others is a central tenet of multiple religions, including Christianity, the dominating religion in the United States. Benda and Belcher (2006) studied homeless veterans with drug or alcohol addiction in the 2000s. Their goal was to develop a theoretical model on how forgiveness, or the lack thereof, affects the propensities to begin abusing drugs and alcohol. They discovered that the ability to forgive, positively intensified the correlation that attachment and security in a higher power has on decreasing drug and alcohol abuse. Paralleling this, they observed that the more someone was able to engage in forgiveness of a person who harmed them, the better chance that those influential harmers would not factor strongly into whether a person began using drugs (Benda & Belcher, 2006).

Furthermore, Benda and Belcher (2006) were able to connect ties between attachment and spiritual well-being, attachment being a component of most studies based upon social control (Hirschi, 1969). Specifically, attachment to childhood caregivers and spiritual health were reciprocal. This mutual, symbiotic relationship was one gateway that allowed forgiveness to be an easier task to execute. The opposite was also observed.

If attachment to parents and other caregivers was lacking, then those particular veterans had a lesser sense of spirituality and could not forgive as easily.

Simply put, the interviewed veterans attributed their beginning and continued drug use as a mechanism that allowed them to escape their memories of childhood abuse and/or emotionally negative, battlefield-incidents. Forgiveness helps to ease the pain from the past and contend with current stimuli that causes depression and anxiety (Bender and Belcher, 2006). Coupled with drug treatment, both variables are likely to accentuate long-term sobriety or the desistance process (Bender & Belcher, 2006). The proposed dissertation would provide further insight into this process, by exploring the tenet of forgiveness in the lives of the participants.

A re-analysis of the data in the Ohio Lifecourse Study (OLS) was published by Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, and Seffrin (2008). They examined the first three waves of this data on how religion and spirituality affected patterns of criminal offending across the life-course of male and female offenders. All participants were housed in juvenile delinquency centers when first interviewed in 1982. These offenders were considered serious or persistent in their criminal behavior. They were interviewed again in 1995 and 2003. Many of them stayed on that same persistent, criminal-track over the decades, but some steadily desisted, while others were in and out of criminal engagement, depending upon a number of factors (Giordano et al., 2008).

For the quantitative analysis, the researchers collected data on the offender's patterns and rates by obtaining self-report surveys and through accessing official incarceration files. Religiosity was only measured in two forms: perceived closeness to



God and church attendance. This is a limitation of this study and others, as referenced in other sections of this literature review.

The regression analysis for changes in criminal behavior from 1982 to 1995 yielded no statistical significance between the two measures of religiosity in relation to decreasing rates of criminal activity or desistance. Neither gender nor race were significant with the religious effects measures. The only significant predictor of criminal behavior were the researcher's measures of criminal networks possessed by the participants.

When the qualitative analysis was conducted, the research showed that many participants within the sample credited their spiritualism as being a highly important factor that led to their desistance process. This did not literally translate to termination from crime, but towards their desire and process of desistance for the offenders that verbally made this type of statement (Giordano et al., 2008). The study concluded that religion, faith, and spirituality exhibited signs of being a positive apparatus in helping someone desist from crime. However, if criminal-peer networking or severe drug addiction exists then these factors may overwhelm prosocial ties to church, which is typically what is prescribed by one's faith.

Similarly, the offenders who were the most fully immersed into their church family, and those that had the most buy-in regarding the tenets of their religion, according to their personal testimonies, were the most likely to have ceased using drugs and committing crime (Giordano et al., 2008). The quantitative data as a whole did not support this; however, the authors noted that there are difficulties in capturing influential variables on life-course trajectories from only cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

### *Cognitive Lens Shift When Researching FBOs*

A final qualitative study sheds light on the perspective that both FBO staff and clients should have when working through the rehabilitation process. Understanding how to view FBOs that offer social services, in contrast to secular organizations that do the same, is essential. This is similar to a popular teaching concept in the social sciences, known as a paradigm shift or the act of viewing a condition with a different cognitive lens. This is also a form of empathy in that a person is asked to examine a situation through a lens that may not be instinctive. McCoy, Hermos, Bokhour, and Frayne (2004) provided that context when they conducted qualitative interviews on staff at a faith-based substance abuse facility.

One overwhelmingly, consistent response from staff was that studying religious teachings, praising God, worshiping God, and spiritual progression were absolutely essential to the programs' success rate. Implied by them, their success rates were consistently higher than secular programs. Likewise, if the clients spent increasingly more time with one another in a religious or spiritual setting, outside the required treatment criterion, then the staff perceived this to lead to a more substantial recovery (McCoy et al., 2004).

Many staff members were of the opinion that the conscious level of open-mindedness about a Christian transformation was directly and positively related to recovery, contributing to one client being more likely to desist from drug use than another. The staff also identified a "turning point" in one's life as being when the person consciously recognizes that their behavior is significantly jeopardizing some aspect of

their life (McCoy et al., 2004, p. 6). This is consistent with turning points and hooks for change mentioned previously (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993).

Four other factors needed for recovery were also identified by the staff. Three of those four were related to faith-based program tenets, and they are as follows: recognizing the influence of becoming saved through Christ, continually working to solidify a relationship with God, and accepting other people of God as your Christian mentors and friends. The final aspect of recovery was a secular belief that the client needed to cognitively accept that addiction involves a strong chance of relapse. A caveat in the mindset of the faith-based workers regarding relapse existed. They felt that relapse occurs if selfishness for worldly desires enter one's life. It was important for the staff to verbalize that training is given on how to teach addicts ways of recognizing dangerous predictors of relapse (McCoy et al., 2004). As it was in the previous subsection of this literature review, religious practice, in combination with a Christian network, was identified as a crucial part of what the staff saw in creating successful desisters. This is also a theme that this dissertation is proposed to explore.

A key difference between faith-based and secular programs was also identified by McCoy et al. (2004), in that the goal of faith-based programs was not simply termination of substance abuse, as it is with most traditional rehabilitation programs. Rather, Christian salvation and a life-course relationship with God is the end-game. In the eyes of the faith-based staff, sobriety is a natural consequence that is achieved along the way. Similar to this study, a component of this dissertation will be to interview pastors and staff who work at the previously described church.

## Quantitative Research on Religion and Drug Desistance by Adults

The following three studies were not listed in the previous SRs and meta-analyses. All were published from the years 2000 thru 2012 and find support for the inverse relationship between increasing levels of religiosity and decreasing levels of substance abuse. Elements of these studies inform this dissertation research, as well as bring to light certain underdeveloped aspects of the religion-crime field for which this dissertation is attempting to add knowledge.

Richard, Bell, and Carlson (2000) set out to examine whether substance addiction was neutralized more effectively by religious-moral communities, secular-moral communities, or by increased levels of individual religiosity. The sample consisted of addicts who had completed a publicly-funded drug treatment program. Interestingly, the operationalization and measurements of these three variables were a bit vague within this publication, a specificity concern already mentioned in the previous section of this literature review. Nonetheless, the researchers sought to partition the rates of individual religiosity from the rates of moral community participation in order to assess which of the two, if either, were better predictors of decreased drug use and successful drug cessation.

Researchers found one independent variable within the religious-moral community to be a significantly stronger predictor for overcoming crack-cocaine and/or alcohol addiction. This predictor was church attendance, and it was strongly correlated with an improvement in not using crack-cocaine or alcohol. Attendance in self-help recovery programs, which is an example of a secular-moral community, had an inverse relationship with alcohol use only. Curiously, individual religiosity was only measured by questioning patients on the importance of different elements of their faith, and did not

include how often they actually committed to religious activities or church functions. With this in mind, none of the aspects of individual religiosity appeared to have any bearing on drug cessation or treatment success. As has been consistent in other studies reported in this literature review, sample participants' self-assigned religious importance was not significantly correlated with decreasing existing drug use patterns. The non-religious moral community variables were also non-significant (Richard et al., 2000).

A multi-variate study in Taiwan found significant correlations between religious conversions during in-patient treatment and higher success rates for completing that program. Those that converted to Christianity, while in the program, tended to stay in treatment longer and had a higher rate of completion compared to those who did not convert. The program was based on a Protestant faith paradigm, putting equal importance on converting to Christianity as it did on overcoming addiction (Chu et al., 2012).

While this research example consists of in-patient treatment for addiction, the same premise exists for the proposed dissertation as it relates to the church in this study. One sub-area to be explored while interviewing the participants is the assertion that without God, and thus a lack of Christian faith and doctrine, offenders and addicts will find it more difficult to overcome their past temptations, habits, and deviant social networks.

Chu et al. (2012) also reported that religious converts were 18-times more likely to finish the treatment. Other predictors of graduating from treatment, as well as offenders having longer durations in the program, were age and prior attempts at rehabilitation. One area of inquiry in the offender-interview phase of this dissertation

will be to ascertain whether participants who have been incarcerated cite that establishing a relationship with a Christian church aided them with desistance during their post-release period. Likewise, the researcher will also explore if engaging in consistent and regular religious habits have aided offenders in long-term desistance. Unexpected themes and patterns from the participants' statements will also be identified and analyzed.

The key for churches to accomplish the relationship with offenders is to first attract this specific population and then retain their active participation in Christian functions. The ultimate goal of the church, of course, is to foster a conversion that results in a lifelong relationship with God, if one has not already occurred. How and why the church in the proposed study is doing this is part of the exploratory nature of the ethnographic interviews.

A priority for this researcher is to identify patterns of chronology that pertain to how some turning points lead to the existence of other turning points. For example, did a healthy marriage with a law-abiding spouse precede the participants' decision or will-power to increase their religious habits and beliefs? In contrast, did some of the participants seek out the church, and thus increase their religiosity on their own, without any self-identified turning points occurring first? Another example of a possible turning point that may precede an increase in religiosity, could be the birth of a child or the reuniting with children after an abnormal time away from them, due to incarceration or rehabilitation.

Chu and Sung (2009) conducted a study that differentiated, by race, how much religious involvement affected substance abuse desistance. This is essential to understand, because past studies have revealed that religiosity has a historic, cultural role

that is of relatively deeper importance in the black community. This has also been observed to be especially true while facing tough life obstacles such as: financial stressors, delinquent peer exposure, criminal desistance, addiction recovery, or being processed by some entity of the criminal justice system (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Jang & Johnson, 2010; Johnson, Larson, Li, Jang, 2000; Lutnick, Lorvick, Cheng, Wenger, & Kral, 2010; Molock & Barksdale, 2013; Roman et al., 2007; Sinha, 2007).

Overall, Chu and Sung (2009) were able to show a 15% greater success rate for desistance from drug use when significant levels of church attendance were reported at follow-up. For black clients that attended church recurrently, their chances of desisting from drug abuse went up 24%. On the other hand, religious involvement was not a statistically significant factor in influencing substance abuse recovery for white clients. Chu and Sung (2009) recommend for future research that the specific aspects of religious attendance be partitioned so that the exact factors contributing to drug abuse termination have the ability to be identified. This dissertation seeks to identify those factors from the perspective of the offender.

#### Organic Religious Effects on Violence, Non-Violent Crimes, and Victimization

The following two studies were included in Johnson and Jang's (2010) SR of the religion-crime literature. The detailed descriptions of each study are warranted due to the nature of this proposed dissertation. Three studies that have not found an inverse relationship between religious effects and harmful outcomes are also included.

Benda (2002) found that there was an inverse relationship between religion and illegal acts such as assault, selling drugs, and using drugs. Similarly, there was an inverse relationship between religion and potentially violent behaviors such as possessing

a weapon in public. Generally speaking, these findings are in contrast to Gerace and Day (2010), Cretacci (2003), Lutnick et al. (2012), and the quantitative section of Giordano et al. (2008), although the samples and methods being used are often fundamentally different. In the latter four studies, non-significance was reported when analyzing the relationship between either organic or intentional religious effects on treatment success, juvenile delinquency, recidivism, and decreasing criminal trajectories.

Benda (2002) specifically reported that religion had a direct correlation with the variable of attachment, a central tenet of Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory. Furthermore, religion was found to be directly related to reduced counts of violence and drug use. Religion was also indirectly related to reduced violence via peer attachment, decreased drug usage, decreased drug sales, and decreased frequency in carrying a weapon.

Belief is also a central tenet of Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969). In the Benda (2002) study, religion was found to be directly and indirectly related to increased belief in social rules, thus inhibiting antisocial and criminal behavior. Identifying with and joining prosocial groups, such as a church family, is part of the exploratory nature of the proposed study. Criminal behavior and drug use are in opposition of exercising one's faith on a daily basis, and it is illogical to assume that offenders who still engage in criminal activity and drug use would be able to maintain physical habits of attending church, praying, and, most especially, living a daily life based upon directives from such a religion as Christianity (Benda, 2002). Longitudinal studies should be conducted to evaluate the life-course trajectories of emerging adults, non-offenders, and offenders that



have adopted religious habits and/or have had spiritual transformations (Barry et al., 2010; Benda, 2002; Chitwood et al., 2008; Johnson, 2011).

Another study, conducted by Ellison et al. (2007), examined violence in regards to religion. They found that women who attend church services multiple times in a week are 40% less likely to be victims of domestic violence. They also found that men who attend religious functions several times a week are 72% less likely to abuse their wife or girlfriend.

#### Intentional Religion (FBOs) and Desistance from Crime or Addiction

One official form of implementing religion and spirituality into criminal desistance and sobriety processes is that of faith-based treatment programs. Duwe and King's (2012) publication assessed the effectiveness of a faith-based prisoner reentry initiative in Minnesota. They analyzed the recidivism rates of 732 offenders, who had exited Minnesota prisons from 2003 to 2009. The prisoners that went through a program, known as InnerChange Freedom Initiative, were significantly less likely, according to a number of regression techniques, to have future arrests, convictions, or subsequent prison sentences.

Roman, Wolff, Correa, and Buck (2007) have examined the differences between parolees that completed a faith-based reentry program and those that quit or were terminated, all from the same halfway house. This particular halfway house is described by its staff as infusing faith in a higher-being and spiritual ideals into the delivery of social services. Particular religious doctrine and denominations were not emphasized. Interestingly, those that stayed in the house longer reported that religion was less

important to them than others who graduated quicker. This relationship was of statistical significance, albeit a weak one, according to the authors.

Roman et al. (2007) reported that being black and Protestant was positively correlated, as was being Protestant and having family support prior to going into prison. Similarly, Protestants were more likely to have family support once they were out of prison. When participants were asked to rate their progress within the halfway house and satisfaction with the program, only Protestants had a positive correlation with each. The only denomination that had an inverse correlation with measurements on using hard drugs was also the Protestant group. Regarding gender, there was a positive statistical relationship between females and religious importance (Roman et al., 2007). Protestants and religious importance were also significantly correlated in a positive direction.

When comparing completers of the program to non-completers, women clients and black clients were more likely to graduate. Never being homeless prior to the last prison term gave participants a better chance of completing the program, as well. Those that completed the program tended to state that they had a positive religious transformation while in prison that led them closer to a higher-being. The non-completers reported that they had a decrease in spirituality, while in prison, which lessened their relationship with, or belief in, a higher power (Roman et al., 2007). Those that reported a decrease of spirituality while in prison were 34 times more likely to drop out of the halfway house program.

Armour, Windsor, Aguilar, and Taub (2008) evaluated the effects of an in-prison faith-based program on participants that self-reported as being Christian, as well as those that stated they were not. The Christian offenders improved in five of the six categories

that were measured. Specifically, they showed signs of the following: adopting the perspective of others, obtaining or increasing feelings of compassion for others, increasing their awareness of transcendence in their lives, improving the quality of relationship with others, and demonstrated the ability to forgive themselves, others, and God. Non-Christians scored significantly lower in these categories after going through the program yet scored better than Christians in their potential ability to forgive others. This is a positive sign for non-Christians. A possible explanation for this is that forgiveness is already a central tenet of Christianity. Subsequently, the Christian offenders may not have been able to significantly improve in this category, because their levels may have had less room for improvement (Armour et al., 2008). No negative affects against the non-Christian population were detected as a result of going through the faith-based program.

In another study, a federal faith-based prison program differentiated between completers and non-completers. One of the primary goals of the program was to lead a life away from crime (Daggett, Camp, Kwon, Rosenmerkel, and Klein-Saffran, 2008). The program incorporated a multi-faith approach, allowing the offender to pick their religion or denomination, tailoring the treatment to their background. This program was carried out in an intensive residential facility within the prison, partitioned away from the general population.

Findings indicated that those prisoners who completed their daily, sacred readings were more likely to graduate from the program regardless of their faith of choice (Daggett et al., 2008). Control variables, such as the offenders' criminal histories, past prison misconduct, and history of past imprisonment, did not play a role in graduation

versus incompleteness. Offenders that had a higher sense of well-being were more likely to complete the program. Those offenders who had a more confident sense of how they would reintegrate into the community also stood a significantly better chance of graduating. Religious habits and a plan to reintegrate into society, due to prosocial networks, were a common theme for success (Daggett et al., 2008). One goal of this dissertation is to investigate whether religious habits and prosocial networks have similar importance in the mind of offenders when they choose, on their own volition, to practice their faith outside prison walls.

These type of faith-based reentry programs, as mentioned throughout chapter one, are particularly promising because they are funded and operated almost exclusively without public funding. In fact, many of these programs do not utilize any tax-payer monies. With ever-increasing fiscal constraints on both state and federal governments, correctional entities being no exception; criminology researchers and criminal justice policymakers would be wise to take advantage of faith-based programs that have proven their effectiveness and efficiency. Likewise, organic religious functions and organizations, such as the church in this dissertation, may also prove to be resources for newly released prisoners, probationers, and those who have gone through some type of pre-trial diversion.

### Juvenile Delinquency and Religious Effects

Chu (2007), Richard et al. (2000), and Ulmer et al. (2012) reported that actual religious habits and involvement were inversely correlated with one or more of the following: substance abuse initiation, persistence, or desistance. Additionally, those who identified high levels of religious importance within their lives were the most likely to

never use drugs. The variable of religious importance in Chu (2007) played a key role in preventing drug experimentation and addiction by youth; however, once a younger person was addicted to drugs, only regular religious involvement, not religious salience, appeared to be the significant assister for desistance. There was also a similar finding in Richard et al. (2000).

The participants in the Chu (2007) study, all of whom were youth that frequently attended church activities, were 291% more likely to not use hard-drugs. They were also 142% more likely to be able to desist from them, if initial engagement occurred. Chu (2007) also noted that the importance one places on their religion offered no statistical explanation in helping them to quit using marijuana or other hard drugs.

Similarly, Ulmer et al. (2012) studied a nationally representative sample from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), waves one, two, and three. They discovered that youth with higher rates of religious participation were the least likely to ever try marijuana. Youth who stated they believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible were also the most likely to never try marijuana. The ones within that group that did, were the most likely to be able to end their use. Youth who decreased their religious involvement, as they aged through adolescents, were also more likely to experiment with marijuana, as well as to continue using. For those youth who were persistent with their use of marijuana, religious involvement was not a significant predictor in helping them to desist.

Ulmer et al. (2012) also controlled for possible rival, causal variables such as self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), social bonds (Hirschi, 1969), and exposure to delinquent peers. Overall, one-third of the impact that religious involvement had on

marijuana use was explained by the aforementioned factors. This should be expected due to the logical relationship between religious-involvement helping to: increase social bonds, decrease exposure to delinquent peers, and reinforce or increase levels of self-control. Approximately two-thirds of religious involvement was still detected in this study as having a direct and an independent relationship with the prevention of marijuana use.

Desmond, Ulmer, and Bader (2013) specifically researched the relationship between self-control, religiosity, and the use of alcohol and marijuana. Religiosity was measured through a number of means, including but not limited to: adolescents' and parents' church attendance, frequency of prayer, religious importance to self, denomination, and Bible literalism. Their Add Health sample was also nationally representative, from waves one and two. They reported that the most religious youth tended to display higher levels of self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), but those measures of self-control only explained a portion of religiosity's ability to prevent or decrease substance use. In other words, religiosity was able to account for the prevention and lower-levels of alcohol and marijuana use, independent of the self-control variable. When self-control and religiosity were both kept in the statistical analysis, religiosity's impact on marijuana use was reduced by 5.2%; and for alcohol it decreased by 5.6%. As might be expected, self-control tended to have a greater impact on substance use among those youth who had the lowest levels of religiosity (Ulmer et al., 2013).

Jang (2013) researched the relationship between turning points and measures of desistance from alcohol abuse, as well as protective barriers that aid in the prevention of alcohol abuse by youth. The turning points measured were: religious involvement,

marriage, and volunteerism. Youth from five waves of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 were the sample. Jang (2013) hypothesized that for the participants who did engage in binge drinking as youth, all three turning points would help decrease that behavior as they became adults. Similarly, Jang also hypothesized that for those youth who did not engage in alcohol abuse, all three variables would help prevent such abuse from happening during development into adulthood, as well as once they actually were young adults.

As for the variable of turning point of religious involvement, it proved to be significant in Jang's (2013) study. For those youth who engaged in binge drinking, increasing amounts of religious involvement were statistically significant at helping to increase the rate of binge drinking cessation or desistance. Religious involvement also proved to aid in the protection from alcohol abuse. Precisely, juveniles who did not engage in binge drinking were further protected from engaging in such habits as they entered adulthood, due to their increased levels of religious involvement (Jang, 2013).

How religious effects impact the transition into adulthood are an importance aspect of this dissertation. In fact, Barry et al. (2010) has called for an increase in research on the role that religion and spirituality have on late teens and young adults. It is expected that the majority of the participants in this study will be in their 20s and early 30s. From this perspective, the interviews will also seek to not only understand how their church involvement and increases in faith have helped them decrease criminal activity; but also will explore how it has helped them to decrease or prevent unhealthy behaviors, such as alcohol abuse.

## Closing Remarks

The latest literature and the majority of all findings on the religion-crime issue demonstrates more evidence of an inverse relationships between such concepts and variables as faith-based substance abuse treatment, religious habits, and religious involvement, in regards to such dependent variables as criminality, substance abuse, antisocial behavior, criminal acts, and victimization. One's regular involvement in church and religious activities appears to be the most impactful aspects of religious variables when it comes to reducing or preventing deleterious outcomes (Benda, 2002; Chu, 2007; Desmond et al., 2013; Ellison et al., 2007; Jang, 2013; Jensen & Gibbons, 2002; Mason, Schmidt, & Mennis, 2012; Richard et al., 2000; Ulmer et al., 2012). Simply having a self-perceived closeness to God, or saying that one's faith is strong or important appears to have a mixed or non-significant effect on desistance from substance abuse or criminal offending (Chu, 2007; Giordano et al., 2008; Lutnick et al., 2012; Richard et al., 2000).

Even with the consistent findings of the meta-analyses and systematic reviews, research on this topic is still in a comparatively young phase. What has been reported thus far needs to be verified, and the nuances between specific measures, concepts, and processes must be unearthed in order to decrease burdens on society and the criminal justice system. The above literature review cites the following research needs and recommendations: prospective and retrospective longitudinal study designs, qualitative research, more rigorous methodologies, multiple measures of religiosity and spirituality, nationally representative samples, and multiple controls within statistical analyses. This study attempts to fulfill a humble portion of that request.



### CHAPTER III - METHODS

This researcher seeks to interview current and past offenders, here on referred to as participants, who attend the church described in chapter one. In doing so, the researcher intends on thoroughly understanding what characteristics of the church, if any, have assisted the participants in reducing or desisting their involvement in criminal behavior or deviant activities. The researcher also seeks to learn if the church, as well as the participants' faith in general, have helped them to build prosocial habits and social capital, thus bolstering a perspective towards their criminal lives as being irrelevant and unattractive (Giordano et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 2005). In the course of this research, it is expected that the participants will describe what attributes of the church influenced them to initially visit and then regularly attend. Furthermore, participants will discuss information concerning the role of their faith and religion in general, and how that has impacted their life trajectories, be it positive or negative.

As briefly mentioned earlier, the researcher will engage in fieldwork strategies to provide context as to the uniqueness of the church where the participants attend. Participant observation and unobtrusive measures will be the two fieldwork data collection methods. According to Spradley (1980) and Patton (2014), participant observation includes one or more of the following fieldwork data collection methods: unobtrusive measures, interviewing respondents or fellow participants, and self-analysis as a participant, regardless the level of participation. The participant observation and unobtrusive measures shall better inform the analysis process of the qualitative interviews. From a cyclical perspective, the interviews are also expected to better inform the researcher during the analysis phase of the fieldwork strategies.

## Operationalization of Key Terms and Concepts

Commonly used terms should first be delineated. The term “participant” and “unchurched” need to be operationalized so the reader understands exactly to who and what the researcher is referring throughout the study. A “Participant” will possess one or more of the below criteria:

- currently on probation or parole, or
- a documented or self-admitted criminal law-breaker, or
- in the process of desisting from behaviors that involve crime as a way of life, or
- has permanently ceased committing criminal activity but previously engaged in criminal activity as a part of their normal way of life, or
- a recovering substance abuser, or
- a current substance abuser, or
- a permanent desister from substance abuse.

The term substance abuse will include alcohol or drug abuse. A person who has *desisted* from crime is anyone that has ceased in committing crime for one year or more. A person who has *desisted* from substance abuse is anyone that has ceased any and all use of any substance that threatens their sobriety and has done so for one year or more. A person who is in the *process of desisting* from crime is anyone who is actively taking measures to cease criminal activity through some form of rehabilitation, regardless of whether those measures are voluntary, compulsory, or some combination thereof. A person who is in the *process of desisting* from substance abuse is any person that is actively in the recovery process, regardless of whether those processes are voluntary, compulsory, or some combination thereof. When describing the interviews with each person, their particular circumstances and current status will be thoroughly outlined.

The term “unchurched” is going to be used throughout the study, so it should be properly operationalized. Before doing so, the origin of the word, in terms of how this church uses it, needs to be addressed. The term “unchurched” is formally and informally used at this church and others on a regular basis, primarily by the staff. However, it is also a term that the head pastor uses openly when preaching to the congregation about one of the main goals of the church. This goal can be found in the church’s vision statement, which is: *To be a church for those people who would not normally attend church.*

One of the goals of this study is to explore the participants’ history of individual involvement in a particular faith, church, and other religious related activities. In doing so, information about the participants’ past religiosity and offending can be compared to their current religiosity and offending. It is possible that some of the participants have been regularly involved in faith or religion throughout their life. This type of offender will be interviewed, although the main focus of this research is on the offender who fits the category of not prescribing to a particular faith or church family throughout their life-course, until now. The reasons for this should be apparent; still, what makes this study unique is that the church included in the research prides itself as being able to attract those who would not normally attend church.

Likely, for the participants in this study, many reasons exist for them to not have regular involvement in faith, church, or other religious behaviors. This researcher has attempted to delineate the various reasons as to why the interviewed participants will likely say they were not actively involved in church and religious activities.

Four rationales are expected; they are as follows:

- Some participants will likely report that one reason they did not attend religious functions in the past is because they felt they were being hypocrites.
- It is believed that the deviant nature of their lifestyle simply did not prioritize church or religiosity to a degree where it would result in them actually going to church functions or taking part in formal religious practices.
- Some of the participants will likely say that they were not made to feel welcome at most churches, because they did not fit in due to their appearance, reputation, or lack of knowledge about religious customs in a church setting.
- Some of the participants may say that they simply had no interest.

With this perspective, the term “unchurched” can include any of the following or a combination thereof:

- Anyone that was not raised as a child or adolescent in a Christian church; or
- has strayed from a Christian church upbringing and, as a result, has not been involved with a church or their Christian faith for years; or
- considers themselves to be agnostic or atheistic; or
- prescribes to another religion or world view that does not involve the Christian church culture; or
- considers themselves a cultural Christian in terms of their American identity, but has not, or does not, actively worship God in any manner that involves formal religious functions.

The last bullet is a means to encompass people who claim to be spiritual, or refer to themselves as Christians, but have an aversion to organized religion. This is a crucial distinction to make, in view of the fact that the theory which guides the below research questions, that being Life-Course theory, attempts to better understand the formation of prosocial relationships by establishing church habits and increased faith.

#### Research Objectives and Questions

There are three broad objectives for this dissertation. The first is to help fill gaps in the existing religion-crime literature, specifically pertaining to understanding nuances in the desistance process through the concepts of turning points and hooks for change.

This, of course, is being addressed from the perspective of the participants. The second overarching objective is to understand if the particular church in this dissertation is perceived by the participants as playing a substantial role in aiding them with one or more of the following: sobriety, decreasing recidivism, or increasing prosocial behavior. If one or a combination of these are occurring, then the study seeks to know if this is in part due to the church offering unique services or because of its non-traditional atmosphere. Still further, there may be other phenomenon occurring, and that is the essence of the third objective. The final goal is to explore and identify any themes and patterns from the participant interviews, both pertaining to desistance, and any other unanticipated theme. In summary, this researcher wants to know if there is something that this church does that is perceived to be more helpful to the unchurched, namely criminal offenders' and substance abusers' desistance processes. If the church executes something different than other traditional churches, how and why is this occurring?

The following research questions are listed in temporal order. The listing is meant to serve as an overview for how the interviews with the participants will be conducted. For example, the interviews will generally begin with the researcher trying to understand what attracted the participants to the church, and later whether the church and/or the participants' faith have helped them to desist. This chronological ordering is also meant to demonstrate the expected timeline for the participants' desistance process as theorized within Life-Course Theory. Ordering the research questions temporally demonstrates the soundness of Life-Course theory, according to how Akers and Sellers (2013) recommend to evaluate theories. Assessing turning points in life-course theory

(Humphrey & Cordella, 2014; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 2005), can also be seen within the research questions and their sub-topic interview questions.

It is essential to remember that each research question is being posed from the perspective of the offenders. Accordingly, the four research questions are:

1. Why do the offenders attend this church?
2. How have their church experiences affected the offenders?
3. What religious/faith factors have affected their offending or law-abiding trajectories?
4. When, if ever, did the offenders perceive a turning point(s) in their lifestyle?

The initial approach to the interviews will be to learn *if* the participants perceive a connection between their church involvement and faith with their ability to become: more law-abiding, less deviant, and more prosocial. If the offenders perceive this link, then the interview questions will transition into attempting to unearth *how* this is occurring or has occurred. Additionally, specific questions on desistance will incorporate the life-course theoretical framework. Central tenets of that theory such as: turning points, knifing off, human agency, social structure, and identity transformation will attempt to be identified.

Below are examples of sub-topic research questions. These are specific inquiries, which will be reworded for the asking towards a specific individual, but here they can serve as example questions for purposes of interviewing the participants.

- Did the participants' desistance process begin before or after they started attending the church?
- How do participants describe their church's impact, as a social structure, on their ability to not re-offend?
- What specific turning points, related to religion or not, are identified by the participants?
- What experiences do desisted participants believe helped them knife-off their current life from their past?

- What is different about this church compared to others?
- What religious experiences do the participants see as most beneficial to their desistance?
- What experiences do the participants associate with the beginning of their desistance?
- What experiences do the desisted participants associate with the end of their offending?
- How do their church experiences affect their ability to become more prosocial?
- How do offenders, who attend the church, describe their worshiping experience?
- How do recovering addicts, who attend the church, describe their worshiping experience?
- How do recovering addicts, who attend the church, describe this church's impact on their ability to not relapse?
- What physical or environmental factors at this church make it more appealing to the participants?
- What aspects of the church, such as the worship music, preaching, or Bible study groups, make the most impact, if any, in helping participants on their road to recovery?
- What does it mean to be a current/former offender who attends church events?
- What does it mean to be a current/former offender who assists in helping church events to occur?

### Fieldwork Strategies

The primary researcher will be a participant observer at church events and will also use unobtrusive measures, namely website and social media analysis, to further investigate how and why the church operates as it does. These two methods allow for direct sensory observation of how the church carries out its weekly functions. Leading up to this dissertation, the researcher has been able to hear about how this church is different, through both word of mouth and by being invited to church events. The interviews are expected to yield more insight into the church, but participant observation and unobtrusive measures are expected to allow the researcher to observe and experience the above claims, as well as any other phenomena. This type of systematic gathering of information and documentation has long been accepted as a way to conduct qualitative

research (Becker, 1970; Becker & Geer, 1957; Berg, 2009; Park & Burgess, 1921; Patton, 2014).

### *Participant Observation*

While visiting this church, the researcher immediately noticed the contemporary worship style and environmental setting of the sanctuary and grounds. The researcher soon learned, after attending a few times, that the design of the church was completely intentional, so as to come across as less menacing for people who might be intimidated by the traditional church setting. The researcher also learned that one of the major goals of the church is stated in the church's vision statement, ***"To be a church for those people who would not normally attend church."*** This vision statement is displayed on the church's website and is formally and informally referenced at various times throughout anyone's interactions at the church. Upon entering the church property through the main driveway, there is a sign on which the church mission statement is displayed: ***"To lead people to know, love and follow Jesus."*** This statement, and the placement of the sign, should allow the reader of this study to understand the core values and goals of the church.

After living in the community where the church exists, and attending a few church events, the researcher began to understand and meet some of the people struggling with addiction or who had past lives that involved varying levels of criminal activity. The church activities where the researcher met these people are as follows: Sunday sermons, Bible studies, and recreational events. It appears that these former and current offenders do not demographically make up the majority of the church attendees. However, the researcher did notice that a methodologically sound number of these regular attendees



and people joining the church existed. Many had public testimonies that involved past and present lifestyles of deviant and criminal behavior.

The researcher naturally developed varying levels of relationships with some of the church participants. Due to this involvement, he can access those that meet the targeted group parameters, in order to interview and interact. With respect to the prior establishment of rapport, previous research supports the above mentioned strategy and textbooks recommend it for conducting qualitative research (Berg, 2009; Lofland et al., 2006; Patton, 2014).

Participant observation techniques can fill gaps in the data that are sometimes not able to be collected during the interview process. Interviews can create an environment where people are unwilling to talk about certain aspects of the topic being studied, especially if embarrassment or unsatisfactory experiences exist (Patton, 2014). With this in mind, direct observation allows the researcher to see and otherwise sense, aspects of the unit(s) of study. In doing this, the researcher adds another angle to the study that does not involve the perceptions of others.

While it is true that the observer also documents his or her perceptions, training in self-discipline and self-awareness can be taken to ensure that their account is more of an all-inclusive documentation of the phenomena and entities being studied (Patton, 2014). This researcher, while being a relative novice, has been trained in qualitative research methods on the doctoral level, as well as having received many hours of general research methods training on the undergraduate, master, and doctoral levels. The researcher has also taken The University of Southern Mississippi's required trainings on how to conduct ethical and neutrally biased research projects.

The trust established when participating with others also helps them to feel more comfortable when engaging with you in future one-on-one interactions, whether those are formal interviews or casual conversations. This is also another benefit of participant observation, according to Patton (2014). The researcher can better delineate the accounts of those being interviewed, because the researcher has directly observed, heard, and sensed the same events during the participant observation phases of data collection. Additionally, the abovementioned growth in trust and relationship capacity allow the researcher to better understand and more accurately explore the phenomena, relying on their own reflections to help shape qualitative research projects (Patton, 2014).

Participant observation should be thought of as existing on a spectrum, from fully immersed participation to full observation with little-to-no participation (Patton, 2014). This researcher will be, for all intents and purposes, fully-immersed into the church as an attendee or receiver of the services offered by the church. This will allow the researcher to have the greatest chance of experiencing what the participants, and all attendees for that matter, experience. As an attendee who is participating and not delivering the religious services, this inherently prevents the researcher from influencing or dictating the types of services the church offers. This preserves and maintains the purity of the methodology, keeping the researcher out of the delivery of events to be studied, but alongside the consumers of the events.

The amount of involvement within a participant observation strategy can also vary. For example, this researcher will conduct some of his observations while not actually participating, but being within close proximity of other church attendees. A great deal of information can be obtained by observing the church and its attendees from

a distance. The researcher plans on conducting direct observation in the following places: the parking lot of the church campus and the lobby of the church; and through unobtrusive measures, namely online analysis of the church's website and social media. The latter will be expounded upon in subsequent paragraphs. Adjusting physical distances during observations allows the researcher to intake events and phenomena on micro and macro-levels. This increases the rigor of the researcher's perceptions and should allow for more insight, which is ultimately supported by Berg (2009) and Patton (2014).

Note taking will be a crucial aspect of the data collection phase of this dissertation (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2014). The settings within the church where the researcher will engage in participant observation are expected to be, but not limited to: Sunday church services/sermons, weekly Bible studies known as growth groups, community volunteer events, and the time periods before, after, and in between these events when people are causally interacting. The church also hosts special occasions and programs. These will also be periods when the researcher engages in participant observation. Additionally, the researcher will spend ample amounts of fieldwork time documenting, drawing, and photographing the architectural, physical, and environmental setup of the church. It is informally hypothesized that this latter aspect will prove to be a variable that helps to ameliorate feelings of intimidation that the unchurched might experience when considering visiting the church and attending church events.

Church services and Bible studies are expected to be very conducive for field note taking. Based upon the researcher's past attendance at church services and Bible studies, it is quite common for people to take notes in their Bible or on some type of notepad.

The researcher intends on taking field notes in the same way, which will allow him to easily blend into the environment. The act of taking field notes will allow the researcher to capture accurate observations and other sensory intake while in the midst of the participant observation. From this point forward, the field notes that the researcher records in the middle of direct observations will be referred to as “cryptic jottings” (Berg, 2009, p. 220).

Immediately after each observation session, the researcher will expand on the field notes. Doing so involves further expansion of the cryptic jottings, and as such will be referred to as “detailed descriptions” (Berg, 2009, p. 220). The researcher will complete this step in a relatively private setting, which allows the researcher to further parse out his perceptions, as well as any statements or actions on the part of others who are participating. This is the time where one’s memory of detail is crucial, as well as accurately noting those details in writing.

According to Berg (2009), while the detailed descriptions are being fully delineated into complete sentences, the researcher should also be writing “analytic notes” (p. 220). It is important during this step for the researcher to clearly note the difference between his or hers analysis and the actual observations notated in the cryptic jottings and detailed descriptions. During the analytic note description phase, the opportunity may exist for the researcher to tie his theoretical framework into observations made in the field. This is also the phase where the researcher may display his or her opinions about people, objects, and events that have been observed (Berg, 2009).

Another crucial aspect of participant observation, and fieldwork in general, is the collection of artifacts, which can include tangible items and documents of any sort

(Patton, 2014). Artifacts effectively illustrate what might take many paragraphs to describe, if not otherwise seen. According to Patton (2014), the type of artifacts that this researcher should seek when doing fieldwork at a non-profit organization, such as this church, are: mission and vision statement documents, public relations documents, social media analysis, documentation of special events, and the church's website in general.

The researcher knows from prior attendance at the church that a "Communication Card" is handed out at every weekend service. There is a myriad of information on these cards that will be described and analyzed. From time to time after the Sunday service is complete, the church will also hand out cards that issue challenges or goals to its attendees. These are the size of business cards and are meant to give the participants a goal or challenge during the week when away from the church. These types of artifacts will be collected and analyzed, along with the aforementioned examples from Patton (2014). It is important to continually remember that the purpose of the collection and analysis of all information and data is not an overall assessment of the church, but is to better understand how these things affect, if at all, the attraction and retention of participants.

### Qualitative Interviews

The nature and goals of this research naturally lend themselves to in-depth interviews with the participants and the employees of the church. It is expected, however, that parts of the participants' life histories will be discussed, therefore aspects of the interview strategy will involve life-histories. It is imperative to highlight the importance of life-history interviews when trying to understand a particular subset of people. This has been an accepted method of information gathering within the Life-

Course theoretical framework, especially when learning from people who have desisted, or are in the process of desisting, from crime and substance abuse (Carlsson, 2013; Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2008; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna 2001). Nonetheless, the overarching goal of these in-depth interviews is to explore how and why the participants came to participate in the church and whether they perceive their participation as having a crucial role in helping them to cease and desist criminal and deviant behavior.

### *Sampling Participants*

By using his contacts established through participant observation, the researcher will begin to sample and make contact with those to be interviewed. From here, the researcher plans to carry out a snowball sampling technique (Berg, 2009; Hagan, 2014; Patton, 2014; Wright, Decker, Redfern, & Smith, 2006), where the gatekeepers whom the researcher already knows will introduce him to other past and present participants that regularly attend this church. According to Berg (2009) and Hagan (2014), methodological soundness can be better assured by establishing rapport and using gatekeepers to access those to be interviewed. The participant observation and relationships made therein, help to establish this rapport with the gatekeepers and participants to be interviewed (Berg, 2009; Lofland et al., 2006; Patton, 2014).

### *Gatekeepers*

The researcher has also met with one of the associate pastors who will serve as a gatekeeper along with several of the attendees who the researcher knows. Specifically, the pastor will ascertain if the persons are interested in being interviewed. The researcher feels that an adequate number of individuals can be interviewed by utilizing the rapport

established through participant observation and connections made through the associate pastor. Berg (2009), Hagan (2014), and Walker and Lidz (1977) all recommend using gatekeepers to access people who have been, or are currently, marginalized or veiled in some form or fashion.

The pastor's title is Connections Pastor; and one of his primary duties is to host formal classes for those wanting to join the church, but they are open to all. The purpose of the class is to learn more about this church, as well as the Christian faith, if someone is not already familiar with those tenets. The responsibilities of this pastor at the church have allowed for the opportunity of getting to know many of the newer members, including participants.

In order to obtain a wide variety of participants from the church, if such a variety does exist, the Connections Pastor will need to be briefed on his methods of obtaining participants for this study. While the sample of participants from the church will not be nationally representative, it is important to try and interview a sample that accurately represents the different types of participants that do attend the church. Instructions will be given to the Connections Pastor to approach participants from a variety of backgrounds, specifically taking into consideration whether they are past or current participants, how long they have been an offender, and in what types of offending they have been involved. Additionally, it would be more methodologically rigorous (Berg, 2009) for the pastor and the researcher to explore whether there are participants who are attending the church as a part of a government or otherwise formal rehabilitation process, or if they are simply attending of their own volition.

While visiting the church, the researcher met four males and one female who regularly attend the church and have had some level of substance addiction, criminal history, or a combination thereof. One of these males is expected to become a second gatekeeper. If this part of the research strategy succeeds, this male will eventually go by the pseudonym of Sam.

A mutual interest in the outdoors was the initial reason the researcher and Sam were introduced by another former offender who will also likely be a participant. A friendly acquaintance was established with Sam that has persisted through the writing of this paper. The researcher eventually met two other participants through Sam, and this is when the mental expansion of this research project began to develop.

Sam is a native to the state and to the community where the church resides. He speaks the same language as the researcher, and their cultural backgrounds are similar. This will make communicating with each other efficient and more accurate. However, steps will have to be taken by the researcher to ensure that this level of comfort does not lead the researcher into assuming or implying that he and Sam understand each other fully when it comes to understanding domains and folk terms. The measures taken by the researcher to ensure that he and Sam are fully sending and receiving the most accurate information will be discussed throughout the methods and findings of this study.

Sam has already opened up to the researcher, in a personal and religious manner, as to the activities in which Sam used to engage before becoming a born again Christian. Formal interviews will be conducted with Sam, but thus far, and without prompting, Sam has told the researcher that he used to be consumed in the “biker culture.” This occurred within Sam’s community, a smaller neighboring town that immediately borders the city



in which the church is located. The “biker” lifestyle, as explained by Sam, involved primarily white males that own at least one motorcycle and have formed a range of relationships with other bikers. The group was not engaged in organized crime to the extent that outlaw motorcycle gangs do, but this group did spend a lot of time together engaged in various social activities. Sam has explicitly explained to the researcher that heavy drinking, fighting, and some drug use was the norm for him and his biker friends. Public drunkenness, one-on-one fighting, group fighting, and assaulting people in private or public settings were not uncommon. Illegal steroid use to accelerate physical weight training results was also common among those bikers who chose to body build. More on this will be detailed in the findings section after the interviews with Sam are conducted.

Sam introduced the researcher to two friends of his, who have also left the biker lifestyle. As of yet, not much is currently known about these two individuals. One of them was a regular weight lifting partner with Sam a few years ago. This male will be referred to as Davy. Sam still rides motorcycles with the second male on a regular basis; however, it is apparent through a number of means that they joy ride together for sight-seeing and exploring purposes, and not to engage in any illegal or unsafe behavior. This male will be referred to as Jim.

The researcher also knows several church participants by sight who fit the targeted audience to be interviewed. These people do not yet know the researcher, but through various ways, the researcher knows them to have had a recent past that involved some level of offending. For example, some of these potential participants have given public testimonies at the church. During these testimonies, they have referenced their former lives of criminality and how they have found salvation through Christianity.

Quite regularly, these videoed testimonies are posted on the church's website for anyone to see, demonstrating the unobtrusive measures data collection technique.

### Interviewing Strategies for the Participants

The interviews will initially be conducted in a semi-structured style (Esterberg, 2002), also known as semi-standardized (Berg, 2009), with open-ended descriptive questions that will allow the participants to emphasize that which they feel most strongly in regards to the church, their faith, and their history of deviance or crime. This type of communication possesses elements of a casual conversation, which allows participants to speak freely and more spontaneously. As needed, the researcher will tailor more structured and close-ended questions in order to better unearth the broad research questions of this dissertation (Berg, 2009). Likewise, if specific answers to other questions are not delineated during the open-ended questions, the researcher will be able to ask closed-ended questions in an attempt to acquire exact answers. It is an accepted practice for interviews to involve a range of communications from normal conversations to structured interviews (Berg, 2009; Lofland et al., 2006; Patton, 2014; Spradley, 1979).

The goal of the research will be stated upfront (Spradley, 1979). Careful wording shall be used so as not to bias or lead the participants into saying statements that they think the researcher wants to hear. This is one reason that initially asking open-ended, descriptive questions will allow the participants to focus on what the church has or has not done for them, and whether it has helped them to not recidivate.

On a case-by-case basis, the researcher will steer the interviews back towards the research questions so as to be efficient. The use of structural and contrast questions can aid in doing this. However, it should be noted that allowing the participants to talk freely

about their offending and their church experiences has its role. By doing this, the researcher may unearth information that was not initially sought in this research proposal, or it may add answers to the current research questions that were not previously expected.

#### Details on Sampling, Recruiting, and Interviewing

The gatekeepers will be used to initially approach potential participants. This buffer between the researcher and possible participants serves as a less invasive form of initial proposition. It will also help build trust between the participants to be interviewed and the primary researcher doing the interviewing (Berg, 2009). If the potential participants express interest in participating in the study, then an in-person meeting will be arranged between each offender and the researcher. The specifics on how the initial in-person meetings will take place may vary depending on the circumstances of each former or current offender. Some participants may have limited free time due to in-house rehabilitation, community correction requirements, or personal circumstances. Other participants, especially fully desisted ones, will likely have more freedom, time, and willingness to meet in a myriad of settings. The gatekeeper will be welcome to attend any of the initial meetings or introductions in order to ease any awkwardness or nervousness that exists with first time introductions.

No juveniles will participate in this study. Everyone to be interviewed will be over 18 years of age, and it is believed that most of the participants will range from their mid-20s through their 50s. Age verification, if needed, will be conducted by asking to see at least one official form of identification. A goal of 20 interviewees is desirable. If more can be obtained, the researcher will certainly accommodate. The minimum will be 15.

Additional efforts will be made to interview as many different types of participants as possible. The researcher will seek criminal participants without a history of addiction, as well as those that have documented substance abuse problems. The researcher will also attempt to interview addicts that have little to no history of criminal offending but self-admit a history of criminal offenses. Obtaining an equal number of males and females appears to be a nonissue; however, racial diversification may be limited simply because the church is predominantly attended by whites. Based upon preliminary observation, there does appear to be more minorities that attend this particular Baptist church compared to others of this size and locale.

Six of Berg and Lune's (2012) "Ten Commandments of Interviewing" pertain to creating an atmosphere that is comfortable to the interviewee, either physically or emotionally (p. 150-151). The following statements will address these. The interview locations with the current and former participants will be conducted in a neutral environment, away from the church. Depending on the current status of the offender, this may include their home; conversely, safety must be ensured for the researcher. Restaurants, parks, coffee shops, and the like can serve as neutral locations where the participants can feel free to speak positively or negatively about the church, as well as their personal lives. Neutral locations also offer the ability for the researcher to buy the offender a meal or non-alcoholic beverage as incentive and thanks for conducting the interviews.

Each subject will be interviewed one time in person. Each interview will range from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the efficiency of the communication between each offender and the researcher. Additional interviews may be requested by the

researcher and will take place if the participants are willing. These subsequent interviews may also be conducted by telephone or e-mail. Through a number of methods, explanations will be given to the participants that they may withdraw consent at any time and are under no obligation to complete any specific number of interviews.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be fully explained to the participants. The files and real names of the participants will be stored in a secure room behind lock and key, as well as on a computer that has multiple password required stages for access. As long as the participants allow it, a digital recorder will be used to capture the entire audio of the conversation. This will be used in conjunction with the researcher's notes that are taken during the interviews.

Consent will be explained to each offender in a private, one-on-one manner. Digital audio recordings will be used when the consent process is explained. Standard, IRB-approved consent forms will be used. A copy of the consent form will be given to each offender, regardless of if they sign it. Signed consent forms will be kept on hard copy file and scanned into digital format. Plain language will be used to explain verbally the meaning of voluntary consent. Simple, every day English will also be used on the written form. In the event that an offender's native language is not English, every attempt will be made to explain the consent process in their native language, both on paper and verbally. Each offender will be given multiple opportunities to ask questions at any time during the consent process. They will also be provided contact information for The University of Southern Mississippi's IRB and the chair of the School of Criminal Justice.

After consent is obtained, each offender will be given a pseudonym. From that point on, their pseudonym will be attached to any and all documents, data gathering tools, and results. Examples of these documents will include hard copy audio transcripts, file names on audio files, or notes taken by the researcher on paper or computer. The legend illustrating which pseudonym goes with each offender will be kept under a password protected computer file. A hard copy will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office or room.

The goal of the interviews will be explained to the participants upon their initial introduction with the researcher and will be repeated at the beginning of the first interview. The overarching research questions will not be explicitly stated, so as to avoid biasing the participants or eliciting responses that the participants feel the researcher wants to hear. This will in no way harm the subjects.

Several minutes will likely be spent first having the researcher and the offender get to know each other. This helps to build rapport and keeps the interview from starting cold (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2014). This is especially important when conducting interviews on topics that can potentially delve up sensitive information such as criminal histories, addictions, emotional scarring, and the like.

The participants will not be asked about any past or current victimization they have experienced. That is not the goal of the study. If the participants bring this up on their own, the information will be noted; but the researcher will not ask any related follow-up questions, unless it directly pertains to their experiences with the church, their faith, or any other element of religiosity. If the decision to ask follow-up questions about

victimization is made, the researcher will explicitly ask that offender if further inquiry is acceptable.

Verbal permission to conduct fieldwork within the church and its events has been attained. A written letter of approval from them will be obtained and attached to the IRB. The letter will be on official church letterhead.

### Sampling the Church Staff

The Senior Pastor, the Connections Pastor, and the Executive Pastor have all agreed to be interviewed by the researcher. The researcher has also come to know a few of the deacons, and attempts will be made to interview them. The researcher has not yet made any acquaintances with other church staff, such as secretaries, volunteers, or individuals on the lower-levels of the chain of command. This will be one area in which the researcher will have to penetrate, build rapport, and subsequently obtain interviewees in order to better understand the culture of the church.

One primary goal of this interviewing process is to specifically understand how the church leaders came to change the strategies and outreach of the church. These historical aspects of the transition of the church are likely not going to be captured through participant observation and interviewing the participants. Due to this, and based upon qualitative research guides (Berg, 2009; Burgess, 1985; Patton, 2014) which state that many details about particular events and sub-cultures cannot always be obtained without interviewing, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with the church staff.

## Interviewing Strategies for the Church Staff

These interviews will likewise be conducted initially with open-ended descriptive questions that will allow the pastors to emphasize that which they feel most strongly in terms of reaching the unchurched. As needed, more structured and close-ended questions will be asked by the researcher to further explore this (Berg, 2009). Researchers Berg (2009), Lofland et al. (2006), Patton (2014), and Spradley (1979) state that qualitative research can be soundly conducted using a wide range of conversation and interview styles.

The pastors will also be asked what they perceive and what they factually know about this church's ability to create more prosocial behaviors in the participants who attend the church. Their answers may be somewhat limited in this arena, but this specific subject matter will be a tremendous priority for the researcher when interviewing the participants. Comparing the pastors' statements to that of the participants' allows for confirmation through a similar process as triangulation. These comparisons will also allow the researcher to juxtapose meanings, definitions, and symbolism of services offered by the church as perceived by the participants and the pastoral staff.

Furthermore, it is important for this qualitative study to attempt to unearth any rich, detailed information (Becker, 1970; Blumer, 1969; Weber, 1949) about the church's known ability to decrease crime and deviance within the community. These interviews will likely take place at the church, or any convenient location that the pastors name, so as to have as much quality time with them as possible. Comfortable, natural, and convenient locations from the perspective of the interviewee are paramount (Berg, 2009).



## Data Analysis

When possible, the interviews will be digitally recorded. This will allow the interviews to be transcribed into searchable text using a computer program. The researcher will then use computer software that will allow him the ability to run queries on the dictated interviews. It is expected that the researcher will conduct analyses of the interviews, both by hand and with the assistance of computer software that will help reduce and manage the data.

By allowing the logarithms in the software to sort and code the data in this manner, the researcher is reducing his potential bias. Researcher bias can result when the researcher is seeking and finding patterns in the language that are based upon preconceived notions of the researcher (Berg, 2009). These biased assumptions could be fueled by what the existing literature might purport, what a specific criminological theory outlines, or what the researcher feels are patterns and answers that should come about from the data.

Berg (2009) outlines a process for data storage, retrieval, management, and analysis. This is the expected strategy to be used herein. This process begins with the aforementioned data storage, then continues with “data reduction”, “data display”, and ends with “conclusions” and a “verification” system (p. 54). Berg (2009) and Patton (2014) recommend that research go into picking the qualitative management software based upon expected needs and the actual types of data collected from fieldwork and interviews

### Potential Benefits of Study

The benefits of this study are multifold. From a criminal justice policy standpoint, the results will hopefully shed new light on the elements of this particular church that have helped or hindered the participants in becoming more prosocial. The results of this study may also shed light on the aspects of a traditional church setting and faith-based rehabilitation programs, which the participants feel have not worked for them. These characteristics can be contrasted against the church they attend in this study.

The criminal justice system regularly makes faith-based rehabilitation programs available to offenders. Some of these programs are operated inside correctional facilities, and some of them are operated by churches or privately funded entities outside prison walls. Community based corrections could possibly use the findings from this study, and others like it, to help determine which type of faith-based programs and churches yield the best results in terms of decreasing recidivism. Data would come from both the perspective of the offender and by triangulating the participants' information with their criminal histories and the observations of their community-corrections officers.

A second benefit is that the church will likely learn new knowledge about themselves and a unique sub-group of their attendees, having the aggregate results released to them. The identities of the individual participants will be kept confidential from the church, but specific statements that represent unique insight or common themes among the participants will be made available. The church will then know what they are doing that helps participants to establish Christian and/or prosocial habits. In theory, this will play a role in reducing criminal and substance abuse incidents without necessarily utilizing the criminal justice system. Additionally, the church will learn where they can

improve on as an organization so as to attract more participants and sustain offender participation. In theory, this will result in less recidivism by these participants, because the tenets of the Christian faith are in contrast to lifestyles of crime and substance abuse.

The benefits to the participants may be limited, but no feasible harm can be identified. It is possible that once the participants articulate how the church has helped them, they will have an increased sense of prosocial success. Similarly, their confidence to attain sobriety or desist from crime may be bolstered.

In conclusion, the criminal justice system, at least locally, may be able to see which religious-based rehabilitation programs and churches produce better results from the participants' perspectives. Triangulation of the participants' criminal histories and rehabilitation progress can be conducted to help confirm claims made by the participants in either direction. Lesser rates of recidivism mean decreased caseloads for courts and corrections. Consequently, less fiscal resources are required to process repeat offenders and will lower the overall numbers of people entering the criminal justice system.

#### Potential Risks

Participation of participants in this study is completely voluntary. They will not receive any benefits from the church, the criminal justice system, or any rehabilitation program for which they may be involved. This will help to ensure that they are not in any way pressured to participate. There are no perceived physical risks. The researcher will make every opportunity to interview the participants on their terms, so little to no inconvenience will occur. Contact information for the researcher will be given to each offender, should they want to clarify, ask, or add more information to their statements.

This will act as a control method to minimize any after-effects that could bother the participants once the initial interviews have been conducted.

It will be explained to the participants that they can opt out of the study at any time. This includes during the interviews, prior to the interviews, or in between one interview to the next. Unless participants who deselect themselves from the study specifically ask that their statements be withdrawn, any information obtained during interviews will be used. In the event that an offender is discovered as being intentionally deceitful, regardless of their motivation, that information will be selected out of the study. Likewise, any intentional deceit or sabotage of the study will result in them being terminated from the project.

Upon completion of the study, all digital audio recordings, transcripts, and notes will be archived in digital format. They will be stored on an external hard drive with password protection. This will be done for future verification and liability purposes, should a need arise. This also allow for future research, such as longitudinal studies or exploration of other aspects within the interviews.

### Challenges / Limitations

#### *Lack of Generalizability*

As with any qualitative research involving interviews and a case study, generalizing the results is limited (Patton, 2014). This specific church is relatively unique, which inhibits the researcher's ability to compare it to other Protestant churches in the southern United States. Likewise, the participants that are interviewed, for the most part, are expected to live and work in the community that has been previously

described. In short, the sample of participants and the church itself cannot be generalized to participants or other churches as a whole (Hagan, 2014; Patton, 2014).

There is, however, a movement across the United States where churches have and are engaging in similar strategies. Evangelical churches, many also known as Bible-based churches, are growing in number, as well as membership. These churches are sometimes created from the ground up, and at other times are retransformations from existing, traditional churches (Chang, 2002; Clark, 2012; De Groote, 2011; Hatmaker, 2011; Lourie, 2011; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008; Stanley, 2012; Stetzer, 2013). This means that the results from this paper could possibly allow other churches to learn how best to implement similar strategies, especially within the same region of the United States.

Even with only limited generalization possible, such a qualitative study should result in exploring uncharted territory by allowing researchers, policy makers, and criminal justice practitioners the ability to better understand this topic and to empathize (Blumer, 1969; Weber, 1949) with participants who have a Christian proclivity. The results of the literature review show sparse research addressing church strategies as a method to attract participants to church and, consequently, decrease recidivism. There was also limited research found of how participants perceive their specific church as a criminal behavior reduction tool and as a faith and prosocial capital building mechanism. The interviews herein are expected to be full of information, thus allowing future research to have a starting point on this specific topic.

### *Volunteering as Sample Uniqueness*

While yet to be confirmed or repudiated as a limitation in this study, the fact that the participating participants will be volunteers who gave consent to be interviewed raises a concern regarding sample bias. It is important to keep in mind that those who volunteer for such studies may be inherently different, as both individuals and a group, when compared to those who are not willing to volunteer. This is simply one specific example as to why generalization is difficult when drawing from non-probability sampling techniques.

### *Researcher as Tool of Measurement*

The researcher of this study will be a participant observer at the church but has no bearing interests in the results of the study. This is not so much a limitation as it is a challenge to ensure objectivity. The researcher will have to take proper measures in the writing of this study, so he does not leave out crucial information that an uninformed reader needs in order to fully understand the methodology and results (Berg, 2009). For example, it could be very easy to assume that some aspect of the church is already cognitively understood by the participants or by the readers of the study. When a person is very familiar with something or someone, lines of communication are often entrenched with implied knowledge, assumptions, or pre-conceived notions. These must be tabled for the duration of the study, so as to capture and display all elements of the church and all statements by the participants. In order to control for bias (Berg, 2009; Hagan, 2014) and any inadvertent data exclusion, the researcher will make all notes and audio recordings available to his dissertation committee.

Any researcher's personal and professional background can affect their ability to collect and analyze data and information, especially if not self-aware of biases and ideologies. A brief description of the researcher's personal life, as well as an overview of his professional life, within the criminal justice field, should be displayed. This allows readers of this dissertation to understand more about the researcher, and for the researcher to display his ability to consciously control for bias.

The researcher is a white male from a middle-class family who grew up in a small Texas town. Due to his parents divorcing when he was five years of age, he primarily attended two different, traditional Baptist churches as a child and a youth. One of his two older sisters was in and out of minor trouble with the law, including substance abuse. When the researcher was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, that sister committed suicide. The events pertaining to his sister shaped some of his interest in criminology and the criminal justice system.

Both of the researcher's parents and step-dad raised him in a relatively socially-conservative environment. The researcher is also an Eagle Scout within the Boy Scouts of America. Both of these have helped shape part of how the researcher views and navigates life.

Professionally, the researcher has been studying or working in the criminal justice field for 18 years. The first six years of that were spent earning a bachelor's and then master's degree in criminal justice/criminology. The next eight years were spent working as a police officer for a city in Texas. The researcher was a patrol officer, a member of a problem-oriented policing unit, and a part-time SWAT officer. The researcher left law

enforcement to pursue his Ph.D. in criminal justice, and has been doing so for the last three and a half years.

The law enforcement experience has molded the researcher into being culturally adroit when observing and communicating with people from a variety of backgrounds. This will be an advantage when engaging in both the participant observation and the interviewing. The researcher will need to make a conscious effort not to revert into the role of a peace officer when interviewing the participants. While this will not be an issue, in the interest of thoroughness, the reasons as to how and why this is crucial will be described. Moving out of a researcher capacity and into a law enforcement role would create tension between the parties. This would likely result in the participants feeling uncomfortable in talking about their criminal past.

Additionally, the researcher needs to be in the mindset of a social scientist, actively listening and trying to detect answers to the research questions, as well as any other emerging themes. This would be devastatingly difficult if approaching this study from the mindset of a law enforcer. The researcher's past law enforcement experience will not be disclosed to those being interviewed.

#### *Non-Probability Purposive Sampling*

The snowball technique can potentially lead to a sample of homogenous individuals in terms of their demographic makeup and circumstances (Berg, 2009; Hagan, 2014; Wright et al., 2006). The following hypothetical situation will serve as an example. A single offender that is attending in-patient rehabilitation at a private substance abuse facility may be more likely, or, in fact, only able, to introduce the



researcher to other patients in the same facility. This is not necessarily a negative outcome, although participants from all walks of life are desired for the sample.

To expound on this specific example, if this same facility is encouraging their patients to attend the church in exchange for an improved status for completion of the program, then only a certain type of offender might attend church for reasons other than progression in their faith and enjoyment of this particular church. Likewise, patients attending private, in-house rehabilitation may come from a specific demographic that has the financial ability to pay for such services. This could inadvertently narrow the sample to a specific type of drug abuser or a specific type of criminal with similar historical and psychological explanations for deviant and criminal behavior.

The homogeneity of the sample is a double-edged sword. The researcher needs participants to have some general background and contemporary circumstances that are similar, but desires to have a variety of details and specific circumstances that are heterogeneous. The nature and subject matter of this study, as previously outlined, gives the reader an idea of the type of offender the researcher seeks. However, Patton (2014) has expressed the importance of using criteria to ensure a homogenous sample. With this in mind, the following criteria will aid the researcher in selecting participants, as they are contacted via the snowball sampling technique:

- Attracted to the church because of its non-traditional reputation or delivery of religious services, and
- An offender as defined in this study, and
- Above the age of 18, and
- Is a visiting attendee or a member of the church for at least two months or five separate visits.

As previously stated, the researcher desires the participants to come from a variety of backgrounds when it comes to: levels of substance abuse or a lack thereof, severity of offending, time involved in crime, childhood, family situation, age, gender, race, and other demographic variables.

The disadvantage of achieving such diversity is that it can affect trends, patterns, and other commonalities sought from the interviews. However, the advantage is that it will allow the researcher to ensure diversity itself, which is part of the inherent nature of conducting qualitative studies. Additionally, the diversity will allow the researcher to see if there are any sharp distinctions between the participants and their individual nuances.

It is intended that at least two or three different snowball samples will be started so as to gather participants from multiple walks of life. This will be done to avoid over-representing one particular demographic category and to allow for a deeper and more accurate understanding of the overall group that the sample in this research may characterize (Berg, 2009; Brown & Preloran, 2006; Hagan, 2014). The researcher will also make note of whether one accumulating snowball can be split into more than one scheme of gathering different types of participants. For example, one gatekeeper may lead the researcher to a subset of participants that used to participate in the biker lifestyle, as previously noted. That same gatekeeper may also introduce the researcher to another group of church participants who only engaged in criminal activity with no substance abuse. Both subsets would be desired for the interviews.

#### *Interviewer and Interviewee Dynamics*

According to the dominating literature on conducting face-to-face interviews, it is a challenge to overcome pre-conceived notions that marginalized individuals or

academically untrained individuals may have when communicating with a professional researcher (Anderson, 2006; Beoku-Betts, 1994; Berg, 2009; Spradley, 1979). Potentially, offenders will be intimidated by perceived elitism from the researcher and the project goals. Offenders and addicts, though not blanketly, can easily fit into the category of being marginalized. Additionally, most of the public do not hold graduate degrees that involve research and science. It will be important for the researcher in this study to come across as not only competent, but laid-back and able to communicate with people from a variety of backgrounds. Simi and Futrell (2010) cited their successful research gathering techniques, as well as verbal compliments from those they were studying. This was due to Simi's ability to neutralize any pre-conceived or actual disparities in authority and prestige.

#### *Memory Recall & Telescoping*

Being that the interview portion of this research is asking the participants to recall various events and personal revelations in their life, the risk of inaccurate recall or telescoping exists (Becker, 1970; Hagan, 2014). Although telescoping usually refers to interviewees being given a particular time frame to consider when answering questions, the general concept applies in this research. The potential for participants to mistakenly believe that one event occurred before or after another will need to be taken into consideration. For example, an offender could be a Christian before attending the church within this research; however, the offender may have come to identify their Christian salvation as occurring after they became a regular attendee of the church. Inaccurate memory recall is rather self-explanatory, but it tends to become a greater occurrence as more time passes between the time of recall and the actual event being recalled.

Both of these can be addressed by asking time-framed questions more than once. The interviewer will accomplish this by altering the wording in each question and noting any discrepancies. If the interviewer notes a discrepancy, follow-up questions can be asked to get the most accurate answer. Additionally, the interviewer can help the interviewee narrow down a time frame on events such as salvation, sobriety, confinement, and the like, by bringing up dates to which the interviewee might be able to relate. For example, the “9/11” terrorist attack, Hurricane Katrina, popular-culture events pertaining to celebrities, or local events that the interviewees might remember, can be mentioned to help evoke specific dates or time frames.

## CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

Implied within the aforementioned research objectives and questions is that the church in this study provides research value because it has and continues to undertake initiatives quite different from traditional, Protestant churches. These unique enterprises impact offenders, addicts, the criminal justice system, and thus society. With this in mind, the church as a focal point for this dissertation was systematically observed and now must be thoroughly described to understand the contextual findings from the qualitative interviews. It is acknowledged that a case study on this church could be a research project in and of itself; however, for purposes of this dissertation an abridged account of the church will serve as a situational framework for the findings. The following findings were derived from a myriad of interviews with church staff, member-volunteers, and participant observation.

From the church leaders' choices in changing the physical location, to overhauling the internal atmosphere of the sanctuary, and re-inventing how the worship services were delivered, these non-traditional acts and in-progress initiatives are an essential aspect to serve as a foundation for the remainder of this study. They are also antecedent variables to the discoveries obtained from the qualitative interviews. After all, it is the non-traditional environment of this particular southern Baptist church that has attracted the active, recovering, and former offenders targeted in this study. How this, in combination with the participants' religious involvement and increased faith, affects their offending trajectories is ultimately what this dissertation seeks to fully explore.

What follows is a description of the church's history and transformation, including how the appearance of the previous church building and former location

compares to the intentional design of the new campus. It is also essential to note what the new church grounds and mission transformation intentionally left out of the physical design and delivery of faith-based services. When these are compared to what more traditional, Protestant churches have consistently modeled over the decades, one will better understand part of the attractions and curiosities to attend worship here for “unchurched” people, such as offenders and addicts.

Before delineating this, the relevancy of the church in its community should first be described. The objects of any research project, and therefore its subsequent findings, are essentially worthless if they either have not had an impact on society or cannot potentially have an influence. Within this dissertation, this can be demonstrated through this church’s growth in people attending worship services, participating in carrying out the church’s missional vision, and through the number of new campuses opened. The latter of which has occurred twice during the writing of this dissertation.

A second church campus was opened in 2014 on the opposite side of the city. A former nightclub was purchased and then renovated for this church location. It was no coincidence that when the church leadership was shopping for a place to hold the second church venue that they found it fitting to buy a former nightclub. The purchase and advertisement of the second church campus opening there fit in line with the church’s mission and vision statements to attract the unchurched and to reach people in a place that they might have formerly come to engage in behaviors not consistent with Christianity.

In 2017, the same church leadership bought and opened a third campus in a former bowling alley, in the county to the south of the city where the first two campuses

are located. This location is about 45 minutes away from the other two. The openings of the additional campuses were driven by demand and attendance growth of the churches. This growth is what allowed for both of them to be paid for through private tithing to the church. Each campus has its own staff and worship band, but they all have the same senior pastor who is live streamed into the latter two churches while usually preaching from the original location.

To further illustrate this growth, as of August 2011 when the author of this study first learned of the church's unique model and ability to attract addicts and offenders, the church only offered two identical Sunday services. One began at 9:30AM and the other at 11:00AM on Sundays. Both were located at the church's one and only location at the time, this being the new campus that it built after it moved out of its traditional building that was located in the downtown area.

By the beginning of 2012, the church started offering a third service on Saturday evenings, which was also identical to the other two. In the middle of 2012, the church added a fourth service that began at 12:30PM on Sundays. It, too, was an identical service, so far as everyone was hearing the same sermon and listening to the same genre of live, worship music at all four sermons. No traditional church services were offered, which is something commonly delivered at traditional churches struggling to accommodate the needs and desires of contrasting demographics, particularly a younger crowd versus an older one. The decisions to add these services were based upon what the church leadership saw as a demand for more worship services at historically non-traditional church times, and to ensure that a growing church was able to continue to minister to as many people as possible.

Late in 2013, the church was ranked in the upper one-third of the 100 fastest growing churches in the United States. This ranking was compiled by a Christian magazine and as of September 2017 this statistic is still posted online. To help ensure the confidentiality of the subjects in this study, the source is not cited. However, it can be made available upon request.

As of April 2013, the church had between 3,000 and 3,500 people coming through its doors just on the Saturday evening and Sunday services. The practicality of adding more services was not feasible, so in the latter part of 2013 the church embarked on a fundraising campaign to build another sanctuary, where the current services would be electronically fed, live into the newer sanctuary. Until this was built on a location across town, an overflow venue was constructed by remodeling an existing wing of the church. A second reason the overflow venue was built, was because it was a smaller and less intimidating than the main sanctuary which is extremely large and spread out, with the ability to hold approximately 1,300 people. The church leaders realized that some people were curious enough to want to attend and listen to the sermon, but not be directly exposed to the in-person service. The natural assumption is that people who want to attend a church service will want to participate as directly and in-person as possible. The church leaders learned differently by listening and interacting with their own congregation, as well as people still hesitant to attend their services. What they learned is that some people want to listen and observe, without feeling over-exposed to people who are more advanced in their Biblical studies and relationship with God.

To give the reader an idea of the contemporary and non-traditional means the church uses to attract more people, the overflow venue had its own live band that



performed praise and worship music. This band played its own set of four songs, while the other band in the main sanctuary had its own set. Both bands finished at almost the same time, so that the preacher in the main sanctuary could be live streamed into the overflow venue, which can seat approximately 400 people.

Interestingly, the church has had an economic impact that has been measured and recognized by a local economic development organization. In their 2014 annual report, which is currently posted online, this organization revealed that the church had raised more than \$3,500,000 towards expansion of its second campus on the opposite side of the city. This ranked the church in the top 20 out of 50 businesses or organizations that expanded in 2014. Of course, the money raised was spent on everything from construction and remodel of the new church campus, to paying full-time staff, and monthly utility bills. For purposes of anonymity of the participants, a citation of this source is not included here; however, it can be provided privately to other researchers if need be.

#### Current Description and History of the Church

The church is located in a southern state with a population of around 47,500 people, but the greater area has approximately 135,000 people. Geographically speaking, the city and church are located in the Bible belt of the United States. In or around the city, are two universities and a number of community colleges within a 60-mile radius. Multiple railroads converge in the city making it a central location for industry and transport, which have historically and currently provided jobs. The economic benefit from the two universities is no doubt a vital reason why this city and surrounding smaller towns are able to exist and grow.

The church is a Baptist church, and for decades it had the words “First Baptist” in its name and on various paraphernalia such as signs, documents, and advertisements. However, between the years 2012 and 2015 the church leadership officially changed the name of the church. The exact month and year are known to the researcher, but omission of that detailed information is necessary for identity protection of the subjects in the study. The name change of the church in the above mentioned timeframe occurred after the church began its mission and identity transformation, which occurred in 2009 when it was still at its historic, traditional location in the downtown area of the city.

The name of the church now consists of two words, and the second word is “Church.” The name is simple and precise as to the mission of the church and what people who join should expect to occur when they partner with the church. The first word in the church’s name, which can be either a noun or a verb, was decided upon by the church pastors and staff to help spell out the mission and vision of the church. Synonyms of this word, which best describe the reason it was chosen are: endeavor, journey, risk, escapade, and undertaking.

The central tenets of the Christian faith and also of a stereotypical, Protestant church did not appear to waiver with the name change. This is important to note, because had the church strayed slightly or altogether from the central tenets of the Christian faith, then the attraction to attend by people who normally would not come could easily be explained by this theological shift. The pastoral staff and the church itself are members of the Southern Baptist Convention; however, there are many non-traditional aspects of this church that do not fall in line with how most traditional Baptist churches look and operate.

Approximately nine years ago, the church underwent its initial changes in how it presented itself to the public. The fundamental Christian and Baptist denomination tenets did not change, but the way the church wanted to strategically grow and be identified by the community shifted dramatically. Historically, this Baptist church was steeped in Protestant and southern Baptist tradition. The best way to spell these out is to simply state stereotypical traditions of many Baptist churches, including this one, and then compare those to what the church is doing now. The transformation was so controversial and drastic that a book was written by the senior pastor, both as a documentary of the church's change, but also to serve as an informal guide to other church's considering or going through the same faith-led transfiguration. The book, participant observation, interviews of paid staff, volunteers, and a detailed analysis of the church's interactive website are the three primary sources of information for the above introduction and for the following paragraphs which compare and contrast this church to its former, customary self.

#### *New Campus at New Location*

When the church decided to change locations and expand its size and impact on the community, it was a design change from the inside out. The new location is a campus, not a singular looking building with four square walls. The author's first impression of the grounds and the layout of the campus is that more goes on at this church than just Sunday services. This is evident by its outdoor playground connected to its indoor daycare that anyone entering into the buildings from the east must walk by. Further evidence of that the campus' design, and thus that the church's outreach strategies include more than just Sunday services in the numerous classrooms that fill the

south wing of the campus. These rooms are used for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from Growth Groups to youth activities to community events that are not particularly related to the church, to a place for substance abusers to hold their weekly therapy meetings.

On the outside of the grounds, there is also a basketball goal with a small court, an outdoor fireplace made of stone with areas to sit close for outdoor sermons and singing. Inside the campus there is a commercial kitchen for cooking onsite, and a place to buy coffee before or after worship services exists. One can also obtain a free bottle of water here. Both coffee and water are allowed to be taken into the sanctuary during the service.

The new church is still in the city limits, but sits on the southern edge of the town. Even though it is not in the downtown area, it is still only about 10 minutes from the largest university campus in the area. It is well-centered in terms of driving distance for people from most geographic locations within the city. Multiple single-family residential neighborhoods are near the church, but none of them are directly bordering the church property. There are also a few apartment complexes within a two to five-minute drive. The church is surrounded on three sides by wooded areas, and on the other side by a highway that allows entrance and egress into the church. The highway is not a major interstate highway, but would best be described as a major thoroughfare in a non-neighborhood area, and serves as an extension from the main city to a couple of the suburban areas which have different names than the city, but are incorporated by the main township. This is important because the change in location physically and visually thrust the new direction and identity of the church upon other demographics within the community. In contrast, the former location, being settled in the older downtown area

was predominantly attended by upper-middleclass and the societal elite who regularly conducted business and government affairs in the same city center.

If one was driving by on this highway, the main church sign sits just off the roadway with the full title of the church easily readable from either direction that a car would be travelling. There is also an electronic billboard just under the sign with the title of the church. The electronic billboard displays a myriad of information depending on what is going on at the church. It does include the church service times.

The church also has an emblem or insignia that is unique to just this church. It is also on the main sign by the roadway. The emblem will be described in subsequent paragraphs in regards to how it relates to the mission of the church. It can be found printed or constructed on numerous items generated by the church.

Anyone driving to the church can enter from three different driveways off of the aforementioned highway. This is the only way to drive to the church and park in their parking lot. Signs, a paved parking lot, and paved driveways that connect to the highway make it obvious as to where to pull in for anyone interested in visiting the church or asking questions.

The church does not look like other, older Protestant or Catholic churches in this town or the larger Bible Belt for that matter. There are zero stained-glass windows at this church. There is no prominent steeple, which can often be found on top of the highest part of other churches in this region of the United States. Catholic churches typically have a cross with a replica of Jesus being crucified on the cross, overtly being displayed on the outside and the inside of the church structure. Protestant churches typically have a cross without a replica of Jesus on it being displayed in an overt manner on the outside

and inside of the church structure. The cross, as a Christian emblem, can definitely be found in numerous places at the church in this study, but there is not a central or main cross that can be seen on the outside of the campus when simply driving by the church. The absence of this is quite different than most traditional churches. The researcher suggests that these differences are one a myriad of reasons why offenders and addicts are drawn to initially visit this church.

Traditional emblems and artifacts displayed on the outside of older churches were intentionally left out of the design of the new campus. This was not done to misrepresent the church at hand or as a rejection to traditional churches. Rather, it was part of a greater plan to assist the community in identifying the church as different and modern in its approach for reaching the unchurched and caring for all people, not just those with socioeconomic connections. The church leadership realized that all people have personal and family struggles, even those who appear to “have it all together,” but who only display their front stage persona. The church understood that simply not showing signs of hurt, addiction, worry, deviance, or not possessing a criminal history, does not mean that those people do not have the same needs, to be met by the church, as people who want to attend a church but have many tattoos, piercings, lack of formal clothing attire and the social skills considered normal by the middle and upper classes. Accepting this, and making it part of their mission and weekly way of communication and worship is part of what has led to this church’s ability to attract people with deviant, criminal, and substance abuse trajectories.

While these exterior visuals have both Christian symbolism and western culture faith-based traditions within them, they can also be intimidating to people who did not

grow up in a church attending family. Furthermore, they can be daunting or confusing to people who know they have led a life not consistent with Christian principles, but who are curious about attending church and seeing if Christianity is a way to turn their earthly life around.

With the above in perspective, the entire church structure was designed to look more like a secondary or higher-education campus than a church. Describing its appearance as resembling a small, private school would also be fair. The roof is relatively flat and sprawls across the structures. It is a bright, light blue, inviting color, not made of shingles, but of a metal alloy. This is in contrast to older, traditional churches who often have high rising, steep roofs made of shingles, where once inside the sanctuary vaulted ceilings are on display.

Typically, traditional churches have an easily identified main building, which is where the sanctuary usually exists. Sometimes that is the only building or structure on traditional church properties. Other times, smaller structures or wings of the church can be seen, but take a back seat to the prominence of the sanctuary. The sanctuary of the church in this study cannot be readily discerned from the highway or even from the parking lots on either side of the church. There are three buildings on the campus, and all three are connected through corridors. The exterior walls of all three are a mix of colors ranging from off-white to cream and light brown. The stereotypical reddish or orange-colored brick commonly used to build traditional churches is not present on this campus anywhere. For context, that was exactly the color and type of building material used at the previous location of this church, pre-transformation.

The main parking areas are on the east and west sides of the church, and there is also limited parking on the back side of the church, mainly for staff and volunteers.

There are two main entrances to the church, also on the east and west sides. Neither one of them lead directly into the sanctuary; rather, both of them lead into large hallways or corridors that allow access to different parts of the church.

The parking lots are relatively large compared to most churches. To describe them as approximately one and a half football fields in size on *each* side of the church gives one a visual of how far some people have to park when the doors are open for worship services. It is common for the parking lots to be full when services are being held.

Observing the campus from online aerial photographs allows one to compare the size of the parking lots to two nearby football fields. The comparison of all can be seen on the computer screen within one aerial shot, without having to scroll or move the map. Church leadership recognized that because of the sprawling size of the entire campus, hesitant visitors, the unchurched, and simply people new to this particular venue might not know exactly where to walk to get into the sanctuary. Because of this, every time the doors are open for worship services, at any of the three campuses, there are parking lot greeters who attempt to make eye-contact and verbal contact with everyone walking towards the church. These greeters do not remain stationary by the doors of the church; rather, they are mobile walking or driving golf-carts into the far reaches of the parking lot. They offer rides to the church doors, while answering questions and simply greeting people. This style and level of service is executed in an attempt to make visitors and regular attendees feel welcome within seconds stepping out of their vehicles. The



greeters' style of approach is not pushy and does not involve asking the people questions. On the other hand, the greeters' duty is simply to be welcoming, offer a ride, a smiling face, an umbrella if it is raining, and to humbly be there in case someone needs assistance.

All of the main entrances to the church have glass doors and glass windows on both sides of the doors that allow anyone on the outside to see what is going on inside and vice versa. Traditional Christian churches, especially older ones, often times have large, solid core doors that do not allow for anyone on the outside to readily or easily see inside before actually entering the church. Additionally, these doors often lead directly into the sanctuary or into a lobby immediately outside the church sanctuary. This type of immediate entrance into a sanctuary, without being able to ease into it, can be intimidating to guests and the unchurched. On the other hand, anyone approaching the church in this study can see what is occurring inside the hallways and large lobbies as they walk from the parking lot. The same is still true once inside. The church and the sanctuary can be entered and exited from more than three locations, all of which require dozens of steps to actually get to the sanctuary. This distance and myriad of entrances allows for people to blend into the crowds of people who are coming and going from the various services, children's daycare, bathrooms, coffee bar, guest services, and Growth Group rooms. It makes it easy for the unchurched and new attendees to not stick out or be singled. Instead of immediately feeling trapped or enclosed near the front doors of a sanctuary at a traditional church, a person who attends here can easily become one of the crowd and do their own visual surveying of the church campus and all it has to offer.

In summary, the outside of the sanctuary and the greater campus does not look like a typical, traditional church. While the structures and grounds are massive in size, the imposing demeanor that many traditional churches might have on someone is less apparent with this studied church. One can still easily surmise that this church and its campus is a religious location, and anyone that can hear or read will know that it is an evangelical, Protestant church. It is not as if the church is trying to hide anything, but the outwardly design of the church is noticeably more modern and utilitarian. While the church grounds could be described as well kept, the functionality and simplicity of the campus grounds is more apparent than traditional churches, which typically display more overt, religious imagery and symbolism. Oftentimes these things are extremely ornate and expensive. These artifacts do not exist on the inside or outside of the church in this study.

#### *Non-Traditional Symbolism*

The emblem of the church has a cross in the middle of it. The cross, while being the center-piece of the emblem, may not be easily or immediately seen by the untrained eye or the casual observer. Rather, there are four parts or sections to the emblem that have meaning to the church. These four parts of the emblem work together to catch the eye of the viewer. Once someone has attended the church for a while they will have likely heard through formal or informal means what each part of the crest represents. If they do not hear it in this manner, when one goes through the process of becoming a partner (member), the four sections or parts of the emblem are explained. These four aspects of the emblem are no secret, and anyone can find out what they mean by visiting the church's website or by asking a regular attendee or a church member, also referred to

as a partner. The church chose to use the word “partner” instead of member as a way to invite and demonstrate religious involvement and participation as a part of this church’s journey “to lead people to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ.” This is interesting because terms like religious involvement and participation were consistently identified as variables in the literature review of this dissertation.

Each section of the church’s emblem is represented by a different color, and all four parts are equal in size and identical in shape. One color represents the term “impress,” another color represents the term “invite,” another color “invest,” and the final color “ignite.” This emblem serves as a primary artifact for the church and is intentionally printed on documents or constructed and physically placed throughout the church’s interior. The church also makes small stickers that are given to its church participants and partners. Many of the members put these stickers on their vehicles, or in other areas that are within public view. The stickers simply have the emblem on them, but no words or numbers.

It is quite *uncommon* for churches to create their own logo. Sometimes traditional churches will use a crest that belongs to their particular denomination, but that is usually the extent. These type of emblems typically are not tweaked or added to by an individual church, except for maybe adding their specific name. For example, the logos of the Methodist and Episcopal churches tend to be more widely used by individual churches that fall under those denomination’s governance. However, to create and then disseminate on a mass scale, through bumper stickers, decals, and other artifacts, a unique and never before seen insignia to spread the vision and advertisement of the church was yet another distinctive step taken by this church. It was something they did to

further distinguish how it was internally operating and reaching out to others, in a manner likely never experienced by unchurched people and/or people with a background in crime or substance abuse. This church was and is trying communicate to people to come join their movement, and to not let past indiscretions, current struggles, or appearances deter you from a life guided by Jesus Christ.

#### *Personal Appearances & Characteristics of Those Who Attend*

At the old church in its former downtown location, a clean-cut, conservative look by both men and women was highly recommended. The same can safely be asserted of many traditional, Protestant churches in operation today. Men were not to have hair that was too long, though no specific guidelines were officially in writing. This was an informal expectation. It would have been safe to say that men were not to have hair that goes down or past the shoulders, and if their hair could have been braided or arranged in a manner similar to a woman with long hair, then that would not have fit with what was a welcome norm in the church. Consistently, women were to maintain a feminine appearance by dressing up, styling their hair, and wearing make-up. To refuse or to be unable to do any of these, would decrease one's chances of feeling welcome and being accepted.

It was also expected that when you attend Sunday church service that you wear your best Sunday dress clothes. It was severely frowned upon to not dress in a more formal or stylish manner. Wearing jeans, shorts, a non-collared shirt, or anything that is considered casual was informally unacceptable. Under certain circumstances, a person that did not dress accordingly might be overtly snubbed or verbally corrected in a manner ranging from a polite suggestion to improve their attire to an impolite chastisement.

Women were expected to wear the nicest clothes in their closet. If anybody had a tattoo or piercings in other places besides the ears, it was expected that this would not be shown or flaunted.

However, at the church in this study, the leadership staff worked diligently to create an environment that allowed people from all walks of life and appearances to feel welcome. While the post-transformation staff did not go out of their way to dress bizarre or in a distracting manner, many of the paid and volunteer staff would wear casual clothing in order to make people who are intimidated by a “suit and tie church” to feel welcome. This mentality came from their purposeful shift to the Celtic model of evangelism from their past, Roman evangelism model.

The Celtic model can be summarized as creating an environment and welcoming strategy that does not require the unchurched people to fall in line with subcultural norms and/or faith-based mores before participating and then ultimately believing in the tenets of Christianity through Jesus Christ as your Savior. On the other hand, the Roman model of evangelism historically and typically requires, or at least pressures, foreigners, the unchurched, or anyone “different” to first conform to the way that the members of the church look, act, and believe before: participating, then becoming a believer, and finally joining the existing membership for fellowship (Cahill, 1995; Hunter III, 2000). This difference is perhaps the most essential, summarized aspect of the church in this study compared to other religious institutions who have and regularly do fail at attracting the very people who are in the most desperate need for an honorable belief system and extended network of prosocial peers.

### *Tithing as Power in the Former Church*

Historically and typically, church members who tithe larger amounts of money have more of a say in how traditional churches functioned. Specifically, those small numbers of members who generated the largest portions of the church's budget, formally and informally, received and exercised more power in constituting the type of music that was played, the type of sermons that were preached, and the type of community activities that were conducted. In general, but with some exceptions, the leadership roles and one's status in the church were determined by a small group of people, who tended to be a part of the socio-economic elite and were usually also part of the older demographic in the church.

The church in this study lost the majority of its older demographic, who were also the largest and most consistent tithers. This occurred when it began its transformation and physical move out of the historic, downtown church. This was a financially uncertain time for the senior pastor and those who had bought into the makeover. Ultimately, the church survived by attracting so many new members that the few and large donations lost were recouped through exponentially more donations, just in smaller dollar amounts. For the most part, this is how the church is funded now; however, as it has grown and succeeded, new wealthier people have joined and thus they have contributed proportionately larger donations (J. Golden, personal communication, August 2016).

### *Deacon Leadership*

Before its transformation, deacons in this church, as well as deacons in most traditional, protestant churches usually fit the above description regarding the social and

financial elite. They participated heavily in the strategic planning and mission of the church, including budget decisions and how church services would generally look and feel. Deacons in the traditional version of this church tended to be older or even elderly. Most of them were in their 50s and older.

In the current church, multiple deacons are in their 30s and 40s, and there are certainly still older deacons too. Almost all of them have duties for the church that result in them doing volunteer or missions work in the community. This differs when compared to the pre-transformation, in that being a deacon in the new church is about service and volunteering in the community on behalf of the church, as opposed to simply being a stakeholder in the old version of the church, determining how it was operated when its doors were open on Wednesdays and Sundays.

#### *The Preaching and Sermon Style*

A critical theme was identified in this research from the interviews of the participants. They overwhelmingly cited the senior pastor's ability to tie Biblical directives and wisdom into modern society, with the talent to do so in a direct, but loving and non-judgmental manner. In summary, the lead preacher could show that modern-day problems and tribulations were also obstacles during Biblical times. Additionally, the same Godly wisdom used to prevent or overcome these problems during those times can still be applied in today's American society.

Furthermore, the church sermons that the senior preacher gives almost exclusively focus on God loving us unconditionally, regardless of our past. It is imperative to note that the church in this study, and by extension, its senior preacher, do not promulgate or preach the concept of universalism. Nor do they support any other belief system that

allows people to behave how they want and then say to one another that God condones such behaviors because he loves us unconditionally. So while the sermons at the church in this study do not regularly use fear, they do preach to the congregation that if you have a Christian, spiritual awakening and gain or want salvation that at some point you will want, or be forced through religions convictions, to improve your life choices because of your new found belief. When the senior preacher does mention the consequences of Hell for lacking salvation, he does so in a direct but low-key manner, not through threats, screaming, and other dramatic styles. Overall though, the point of his sermons is *not* to simply get more people into Heaven. Rather, it is for the preacher and the church's partners to show and demonstrate the Christian joy that can be had in their earthly life if they buy into the Biblical teachings and worshiping that occur at this church. Then, those same unchurched people, now with their new spiritual conversion, will continue to spread their faith to more and more lost people, thus creating better communities on earth and increasing the number of people who have gained salvation.

The senior pastor's sermon delivery was a major theme detected from the in-depth interviews and from the participant observation. Due to this, more description helps to illuminate his sermon style and how it impacted the participants in this study. A distinct difference in sermons from this church compared to traditional, Protestant and Catholic churches, is that the preacher spends time and passion into providing wisdom and guidance from Biblical scripture but for contemporary life challenges. One of the consistent trends in the qualitative interviews for this study is that the former and current offenders appreciated and were drawn back to the church by the senior preacher's ability to tie the Christian faith into the problems and trials faced by the participants. Every



participant (n=15) except for one, told me that they could not relate to other churches, their pastors, or sermons because the messages seemed inapplicable to them. The one participant who did not say this was actually a preacher himself, who before becoming a preacher had led a life of criminal stealing and drug abuse.

The other 14 participants related to me that the senior preacher's sermons gave them hope and a plan of faith for their current life struggles, such as violence, drug use, being hurt by others, hurting others, and having financial and family woes. The preacher did so by using stories and parables from the Bible to equate to modern life issues. It should be noted that the senior pastor is the overwhelming sermon deliverer every week. There are very few times that he is absent, and when he is another associate pastor of one of the three campuses will give the sermon. These occurrences are sparse. The consistent style and main idea of the senior pastor's sermons were recognized by the researcher as something that almost all of the participants felt drew them to the church and helped them decrease their offending trajectories.

#### *Alternatives to "Sunday School" and Other Traditional Services*

Church services at traditional Protestant churches are on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings. Generally speaking, church services are rarely offered on Saturdays. More times than not, the church is not open for activities and events during the week. As previously described, the church in this study has broken from that tradition. The church does not have a Wednesday church service or a Sunday evening service. There are functions throughout the week that the church hosts or helps to execute in other parts of the community, and these range from youth activities, to child daycare, to Bible study groups called Growth Groups, to a widely popular and growing,

Christian therapy session called Recovery, which is held weekly. Recovery offers faith-based and professionally licensed, psychological treatment for people who are trying to overcome anything from addiction, to the grieving process of losing a loved one, to going through a divorce, or other major life catastrophes. Recovery will be thoroughly described later in this chapter when the findings from the in-depth interviews are divulged.

Growth Groups are this church's replacement for what is normally called "Sunday School" at most Protestant churches. One goal of the Growth Groups is to allow church participants and members to connect with other people on a more informal and personal level. Because weekend services have such large turnouts and also due to the church's fast growth over the last several years, it can be difficult to meet people and establish healthy, prosocial Christian relationships. This is especially true if the only aspect of church where a person participates is a weekend church service.

Growth Groups are about one academic semester in length, and usually mirror the two universities' academic calendars for the spring and fall semesters. Historically, there have been over dozens upon dozens of Growth Groups in which a person can pick one to attend. It is not uncommon though, for an individual to participate in more than one Growth Group at a time.

Some of the Growth Groups are dedicated for a certain demographic, and thus the topics correspondingly relate to that particular group. For example, there are groups for newlyweds, newly divorcees, parents having their first child, widows, newly saved Christians, college aged-students, and so on. As an example, the goal of the Growth Group for newly married couples might be designed to learn from what the Bible and

other Christian texts have about how a husband and wife should treat each other and grow in their faith as a single unit.

Other Growth Groups are open to anybody who wants to attend no matter their age, gender, or circumstances, and might focus on a particular book of the Bible, story within the Bible, or a particular person. Other Growth Groups may have specific topics on traditional concepts within the Bible such as Old Testament teachings. Other titles of Growth Groups are more contemporary such as the difference between Christianity and other world views, or how sex and lust have been and always will be an enormous temptation for men. Because there are so many Growth Groups, some of them are held at the church on any given day of the week, including some that occur while one of the four other church services are being conducted. Other Growth Groups are hosted at church members' homes or a neutral location like a park or a restaurant. Pertaining to this study, there are even Growth Groups for people battling addiction or a past filled with hurting others or being hurt.

#### *Worship Service, Music, & the Sanctuary*

The worship music during the service at the church, prior to its transformation, was almost exclusively gospel songs or ones that can be found in church hymnals. In terms of the age of these songs, they range from anywhere between 30 years old to over 200 years old. The songs are usually very slow in terms of the beats per minute, and are accompanied by a piano and/or organ, with a full choir wearing robes and standing on stage towards the back.

The worship music at the church examined in this study has been different for approximately seven years. In order to depict the uniqueness of the church and its

sanctuary, these will be partially described along with the worship music. The music is always performed by a live band. The band is made up of church volunteers, with the exception of the music minister who is paid and is also a full member of the band. The artists that play for the church take turns, so it is not always the same exact people on stage. Around 25 people alternate services or months in which they will perform. Most of them are young, in their 20s and 30s. When the band performs at the beginning of a church service, there is almost always two or three singers, who may or may not also play an instrument. There is almost always a lead guitar, an electric guitar, a bassist, a drummer, a digital pianist, and sometimes there are other instrumentalists for specific genres of songs. The type of music they play is broadly labeled as contemporary worship or Christian praise music. The secular genres that this type of music most closely sounds like include but is not limited to: rock, pop, soft-rock, and alternative music.

From time to time, the band will do a cover version of a traditional hymnal. When they do this, the band usually adds something edgier or a twist from their own musical or poetic liberties. The band plays cover songs by contemporary Christian artists, and from time to time an original song will be played that someone who attends the church and/or plays in the band has written.

The band members are not the only people volunteering to create the praise music section of the service. Videographers record each music session of each service. These are broadcast on two large screens that are located to the left and right of the stage. The video shots of the band performing live resemble that of an actual concert that someone might attend outside of the church. There are also elaborate lighting systems and sometimes dry-ice smoke machines used. The visual effects, through lighting, appear to

be very high-tech and are choreographed to the music. An audio and visual booth is located in the center, back part of the sanctuary. This is where the loudness and mixing of the live band is controlled, as well as the visual effects for both the video screens and the lighting.

The band plays on a stage that has a floor that is black in color and is larger than the front stage area of most traditional churches. The stage can best be compared to that of a platform used for musicals and Broadway-type plays. There are no typical church artifacts or symbols in or around the stage, unless they are projected on the video screens, which does occur. At traditional Christian churches, it is common to see a cross on or above the stage, as well as artist renderings of Jesus, Mary, or other well-known scenes from the Bible. Also, the front flooring of most traditional sanctuaries is made up of carpet or a fancy hard-wood that has a shiny finish on it. All of these aforementioned, traditional descriptions are absent at this church. Some, like the flooring on the stage are clearly not central aspects of the faith. Other artifacts and symbols can be argued as being important representations of the faith, of which to pay attention during worship times.

This following explanation outlines why the above contrasting descriptions are important to notate. Whether deemed as essential or for appearance purposes only, the church leadership wanted the stage and all the areas of the church that the public sees to be something that is not intimidating, distracting, or difficult to understand to the person who has not been in a Christian church. In summary, the stage area of the sanctuary was designed to allow for any number of stage productions to occur. Because of this, it is very utilitarian in its look, as opposed to traditional churches that seek to provide an aura

or vestibule to invoke a sense of reverence to God or the faith in general. It can be argued that the church in this study is attempting to do the same thing, but through a visual and audio medium that is more easily relatable to modern society, especially to the younger demographics and unchurched.

There is also no pulpit or podium that is permanently affixed to the stage. This area or fixture is typically what a preacher stands behind while giving his sermon. Instead, after the music is over, a simple stool and book stand are brought out to the center, forefront of the stage. This is where the head pastor gives his sermon, usually while sitting on the stool in a casual manner. The pastor wears a discreet microphone fastened around his head similar to headphones. No microphone is held or mounted to a stand on the stage. When the sermon is given, it is simply the pastor on the stage sitting on the stool. He often wears jeans and an un-tucked collared shirt that may be short or long-sleeved.

There are two, rather large screens that are utilized when the pastor speaks. They are located on the left and right sides of the sanctuary and show a zoomed in version of the preacher as he talks. These are for people that may be sitting further away from the stage, or who prefer to watch a video screen instead of the pastor in person. Key points to the sermon, as well as Bible verses are overlaid on top of the videoed preacher while he speaks. This provides visual wording in conjunction to what the audience is listening to and watching in person.

### *Summary*

As outlined above, there were several very intentional steps that were taken by the church's leaders to create an environment that was welcoming to people who might not

otherwise ever attend a Christian church. The church leaders have made it clear that they will constantly be re-evaluating how they deliver worship services and other outreach strategies to the community. What has worked over the last seven years, might continue to work for several more decades, but if it does not, the current church leadership is willing to evolve its delivery of services and worship styles in order to reach the unchurched.

Any number of these aforementioned steps, when isolated individually, do not appear to be revolutionary. However, when added together, they do appear to be greater than their sum, thus influencing the church's ability to attract criminal offenders and substance abusers. The question remains: do the participants in this study see themselves as becoming more law-abiding and prosocial due to their initial attraction to this church and, of course, due to their on-going and consistent, religious participation?

#### Research Question #1 Results – Why Do The Offenders Attend This Church?

Before the social science community can understand the impact that churches, faith-based entities, religious participation, and church involvement have upon substance abusers and offenders, it is important to first understand what it takes to attract these two groups of people to such places. This is why research question number one was posed, and this is why it will be answered first. This chronological context is essential.

#### *Positive Feelings Attract Initial Visitation, Repeated Attendance, and Involvement*

One of the overarching themes garnered from the interviews was how the church made the participants feel, after they initially visited the church. Seven of the nine broad, reasons given as to why the participants attend this church center on the positive feelings that the substance abusers and offenders felt. Although the participants had their own

way of wording their answers to this research question, the seven aforementioned themes were identified and are categorized as such:

- The People – those who already attend, work, or volunteer at the church.
- Non-Traditional Church Environment – as previously described
- Feeling Non-Judgement – participants did not feel judged, stared at, or out of place
- Feeling Loved/Welcomed – participants genuinely felt wanted, relaxed, and valued
- Simply Enjoyed the Church Service – liked the presentation, entertainment, atmosphere
- The Positive Reputation of the Church that Preceded Their Visitation
- Friends/Co-Workers Told About Church or Invited

Each of the seven categories above are interrelated and overlap, but individually they provide unique insight given by the various participants as to their individual experiences. Additionally, these themes were identified as explanations given for when the subjects were talking about being an initial visitor at the church and for why they stayed and continue to attend. It is clear that these seven reasons work separately and together to build an atmosphere and a reputation for the church that attracts the unchurched. As previously outlined, the “unchurched” population regularly include substance abusers and criminal offenders who do not have prosocial examples in the form of people. They also generally do not often subscribe to a belief system that can first convince them to change their lifestyle and then subsequently aid them in doing so.

Of the seven categories listed above, the one that participants cited the most was the *people of the church*. Twelve out of the 15 interviewed, referenced how the church membership and its staff made them to feel welcome, not judged, and provided an atmosphere that was enjoyable. A specific and interesting example of this was noted when five of the 15 specifically mentioned that they were greeted in the expansive



parking lots of the two Hattiesburg church campuses. A reminder to the reader is that all names cited in the Findings and Discussion chapters are pseudonyms. One participant, Harriet Ames, said that she “was greeted in the parking lot and at the door and [it was] made sure you knew where you were going.” Another female participant, Frances Trask, jokingly but accurately illustrated that she recognized the efforts of the church staff to make people feel welcome by having Christian music playing in the parking lots while walking towards the church. Trask said about her overall hospitable experience “[The] people, smaller venue [at the new campus] is more intimate [compared to the original campus], and the music in the parking lot at Hunt Club is better than the music inside.” She sheepishly grinned when stating this.

Another participant, Davy C., opined that in his formative years he, “experienced conditional love growing up and as a young adult.” Therefore, he was unexpectedly surprised when he experienced the welcoming hospitality at the church in this study. Davy C. went on to say, “I had no reason to be loved by this church and Recovery (which is the name of one of the church’s ministries for people who are addicted or going through some type of grief), but the people did [love me].”

Continuing with the seven categories associated with positive feelings by the offenders, 10 of the 15 stated that one reason they attended this church was because they felt loved and welcomed. Nine of the 15 stated that they either did not feel judged or experienced nonjudgment. The areas of their life where they were anxious or expected to be looked down upon tended to be one or a combination of the following: their physical or clothing appearance, their history of drugs or crime, or simply their lack of not knowing how church and the Christian faith worked. Similarly, six of the 15

acknowledged that they had heard of the positive reputation of the church, in part meaning that anyone who was interested in Christianity was welcome. Eleven (73%) said they either found out about the church or were invited or encouraged to visit due to friends or co-workers. It was interesting that no family members made up these particular eleven participants, and only three of the 15 participants cited family members who encouraged them to go to the church or invited them to come along for their first time.

The final two categories that participants named as giving them positive feelings about regularly attending the church were that they simply enjoyed the church service (53%) or appreciated the non-traditional environment of the church grounds and the sanctuary/service (66%). The following paraphrases and partial quotes can best illustrate these two identified themes, which are undoubtedly interrelated but due to the words used by the participants to articulate their experiences, they were categorized separately.

According to Stephen Austin, he goes to the church because he gets “fed there,” referring to religious knowledge and spiritual guidance and healing. Stephen bluntly stated that his participation at the church has “nothing to do” with the “building” or “the pretty women”, but simply because he can relate to the message. He went on to say that this was the only church where the people did not act like “their crap didn’t stink.”

Davy C. had similar sentiments when he said that the “lights, smoke [dry ice machines] are appealing, but they probably don’t increase his faith, but that he does like them.” Samuel H. said the, “music and coffee draw you in at first, but they wear off and then you are drawn in to see what the message by Jeff will be.” He went on to say that he did not want to be misunderstood, because the music is “awesome.” Samuel H. made it

point to tell me that he could tell that they, being the musicians, staff, and volunteers who put on the service had “practices and put time in” to make it as entertaining and high-tech as it was. In conclusion for the seven identified themes above, every participant interviewed cited at least one, if not more than one, of the seven categories that related to making them feel some type of positive feeling when they first visited the church.

It is essential to note that the top two themes identified for the first research question were not part of the above seven answers related to the participants’ positive feelings. Additionally, the two top answers do not appear to be interrelated like the above seven are. The overwhelming, number one reason given by the offenders as to why they attend this church was due to the senior pastor’s sermons. The second most cited answer was the Recovery program. The senior pastor’s sermons and preaching style will first be dissected, then the answers about Recovery will be delineated. For purposes of protecting the confidentiality of the subjects, a pseudonym has been assigned for the senior pastor. He will be referred to as Pastor John Seguin.

#### *The Senior Pastor’s Sermons*

The participants’ most common answer to research question number one was very easily and directly given by 13 out of the 15 participants (86.67%). When asked why they keep coming back to this church, the participants excitedly and with hope would talk about the preaching. When asked to expound on what it was about Pastor Seguin’s sermons that drew them in and kept them coming back, the following explanations kept surfacing. According to the interviewees, Pastor Seguin’s style is:

- down to earth,
- humorous,
- direct but not hateful, and

- relatable in that he gives examples and reasons as to how and why his Biblical teachings apply in a modern society with a culture quite different than those cultures that existed within the setting of the Bible.

Pastor Seguin's sincerity was also cited as a common perception. It is important to note that every single participant talked about having been deceived and let down at some point during their life, especially when it came to them trying to rid themselves of addiction, their own criminal lifestyle, and those associated with either. All of the participants expressed apathy and skepticism with either past experiences at churches and/or with faith and religion in general. This was also true when it came to individuals or groups who they had encountered in the past that expressed the desire to want to help the participants rid themselves of their unhealthy or deviant lifestyles. In this instance, when approached or assigned to work with individuals or organizations, the participants in this study were not automatically trusting and did not assume that the altruism on the part of the assistors was unpretentious.

With Pastor Seguin's sermons, however, the participants felt that he genuinely cared about them as individuals even though he was on a stage and preaching to hundreds of people at a time. Related to this was that the participants did not feel that Pastor Seguin was a phony. His sermons made them feel his sincerity, and then understand why he and this church were on a mission to lead people to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ.

Davy C. said that the sermons were easy to follow, implying that he did not feel like he was intellectually outmatched by Pastor Seguin's knowledge of the Bible and maturity in his faith. Moses Austin said the "pastor talked to you, not above, and where you could understand." James Bowie echoed these when he said "the pastor puts it in

terms where someone without knowledge of the Bible can understand.” He went on to say that most churches cannot get their message to folks, but that Pastor Seguin “can hold [J. Bowie’s and others’] focus.” James Fannin stated he never got bored during the sermon, and that Pastor Seguin could make you cry with how relevant his sermons were to today’s culture and Fannin’s lifestyle. Harriet P. said that all of the three main preachers who deliver sermons teach “on relevant topics that apply to living today.” The other two pastors referenced by name, were the head pastor at the second campus and an associate pastor who fills in for Pastor Seguin when he is gone and is also the executive pastor at the original campus.

One of the female participants, Frances Trask, said that preachers in the past would put her to sleep. However, the sermons at the church in this study were not overly long, thus she was able to better pay attention. William Travis can be summarized as stating that the Christian message that he received from every sermon series, spoke to him about things he was going through at that very time. Although he did not mention any pastors by name, participant John Coker, said that the church in this study “gives hope and solutions for modern trials.” Paraphrasing Coker further, he said that there was less brimstone and fire preaching, and more addressing of topics that are normally “taboo.” He stated that this is where traditional or “old-school” churches lose people, because they refuse to talk about and preach sermons that help people address controversial topics. On the other hand, Coker, enjoyed the church in the study because it “brings them [the taboo subjects] out.”

### *Recovery Program as Why They Visited and Keep Returning*

The second most cited reason as to how and why the participants came to visit and attend the church was due to a venture, known as Recovery, started by the leadership team. The Recovery Program was completely operated and funded by the church. No government entity funded or administered any aspect of it.

Eleven (73.33%) out of the 15 participants advised that they had visited or become a part of Recovery first, and then that drew them further into other church activities, including and primarily Sunday worship services. The Recovery program was regularly cited throughout all four research questions, so much so that it became an easily identified, major theme of the findings within this research project. Due to this, an overview of Recovery is necessary.

Recovery was launched in early 2015, and was designed to offer an hour and a half long, weekly time for people recovering from various hardships. These struggles and life woes include addiction, grief, divorce, and other devastating obstacles. When the church was ready to start hosting the weekly Recovery meetings, it advertised this initiative through emails using printed words and video, along with announcements during worship services. To describe the goals of Recovery, excerpts and other facts have been taken from these announcements and emails and delineated below. Additionally, the researcher of this dissertation corresponded through email with the original lead pastor and co-creator of Recovery.

Recovery was originally led by a professional and licensed counselor who is also a Christian. He does not live in the city where the two church campuses are, but rather lives about two hours northwest in another metropolitan area. Once a week, this

professional counselor drives to the second campus of the church to help deliver the Recovery service. In their message to the masses on what the purpose of Recovery was, the church and this pastor drafted the following:

“...we live in a broken world. As a result of this brokenness, all of us are in recovery from something. Broken relationships, depression, infertility, addictions, insecurity, anxiety, grief...we have all felt the weight of our fallen world. Shame, pride and denial can keep us from addressing these issues. At [church’s name omitted] however, we don’t want to look past these things. We want to cannonball right in the middle of them! *Recovery* will be a safe place to come and be accepted where you are and to leave with hope. Recovery isn’t a program; it is a place to find life-change.”

Recovery involves a time of worship through music, a short sermon, and then breakout groups divided up by gender and specific recovery issues, such as the ones listed above. Each breakout group is led by a trained leader who has successfully navigated through that same issue or struggle.

Eleven of the 15 participants in this study, all of whom were either current or former addicts or offenders, first participated in Recovery meetings before ever going to Saturday or Sunday worship services. Recovery was a routine, weekly part of their journey to desist from crime and/or substance abuse. Of these 11, four were women and seven were men. All of these 11 made it clear to me during my interviews that the Recovery ministry, as a part of this church’s outreach initiatives, was self-perceived as a potent, instrumental tool that they needed to become more prosocial, thus steering them away from a trajectory that involved crime or substance abuse.

To illustrate the linear, sequential impact that Recovery had on traditional church attendance during worship services at this church, participant Emily West

told me that she started going to Sunday services after about a month of already attending Recovery sessions. A second woman, Frances T., said that she connected with people in Recovery who were struggling like she was, so then she started attending the church's Sunday services to strengthen and expand her "social structure." When Frances T. used the exact words of social structure, a term well known in the criminology discipline, this rang true to the researcher. It would later be proven as a microcosm for a major theme identified by the participants.

This major theme was that most of the participants, at different times during their interviews, would talk about needing to get away from temptations and triggers that kept them addicted or involved in crime. These lures could be people or a geographical area where the participants lived, worked, or socialized. From the participants' perspective, the church in this study provided a welcoming environment, as well as utilitarian tools, such as Recovery and Pastor Seguin's sermons to aid them in desistance. In addition to these things, the people they met at worship services, Growth Groups, and Recovery gave them a new, diverse social structure. Some of this new social group was made up of church staff and volunteers who were prosocial, living examples of a law-abiding life that the participants could aspire to. Likewise, the participants were meeting other people similar to themselves and their backgrounds, who had struggled with a criminal or deviant behavior; but who were searching for the same earthly and spiritual goals within the physical grounds of this church. This major theme will be discussed in



later sections of this research project, but it is necessary to point it out each time it appears in the findings of each research question.

## Research Question #2 Results – How have their church experiences affected the offenders?

This research question explored two broad categories of the offenders' church experiences, those being all of their church experiences excluding the church in this study, and then naturally their experiences from the church in this research project. To stay within the scope of this question the researcher did not make inquiries or statements to the participants about how their church experiences affected their substance abuse or criminal trajectories, due to that being part of the focal point of research question three.

The first objective was to unearth how past church experiences elsewhere, if any, had impacted the participants. The depth explored on this specific inquiry ranged from the participants' childhoods through the last church attended prior to becoming involved in the church that is a sub-study in this dissertation. The second objective was to uncover how the participants' experiences at the church in this study have affected them, be it positively, negatively, or in a more mundane manner.

The following are initial descriptive statistics related to research question number two, which helps put the participants' answers in context. Nine (60%) of the 15 participants described negative church experiences as children. All of these nine described various events or circumstances that pushed them away from wanting to be involved with a church. Conversely, five (33.33%) of the participants advised that they had positive church experiences in their childhoods. All of these five described parents that were loving and strict when it came to church involvement. When they described the

strictness of their parents, these were not negative or harmful memories for them. Lastly, only one of the participants stated that they were raised by atheist parents and that the atheism remained a part of her life until recent years.

Five (33.33%) of the participants advised that they were “saved”, also more formally referred to as having experienced Christian salvation, prior to attending the church in this study. Four (26.67%) others advised that they had experienced Christian salvation while attending this church, some during the aforementioned Recovery program, and others as a result of attending and being involved in weekend worship services. Additionally, one participant revealed that one of their immediate family members had experienced Christian salvation while attending the church in this study. The family member was attending the church due to the participant’s initiative to attend. The participant and the family member did not experience salvation at the same time, but the participant expressed pride and joy that their family member came to know Jesus Christ as a result of the participant initiating involvement at the church in this study.

Equally important as to what was answered for research question number two when it came to past church experiences is also what could not be answered due to a lack of church involvement and experience by the participants once they were adults. Nine of the participants said they had negative church experiences as children which either solely or in conjunction with other reasons led them away from faith and church involvement as adults. This number combined with the one atheistic participant with no church experience in her childhood or young adulthood meant that 10 (66.67%) of the 15 participants had not being involved in any type of organized religious functions as adults. It was not until they visited and became regularly involved in the church within this study

that they were able to provide answers for this research question. However, the participants' willful lack of church participation and religious involvement also speaks volumes in providing results for research question two.

*Juxtaposing the Church in This Study to Past Churches and Past Perceptions*

When discussions with the participants about their experiences at the church in this study arose several of the participants expounded on their answers from research question one, as it pertained to not feeling judged or out of place while worshiping. Extracting these additional details helps answer research question two and further provide qualitative insight to the overall objectives of this dissertation. Seven (46.67%) of the 15 participants reasserted that they feel welcome at the church and are more likely to participate and volunteer. The primary reason they felt this way was because they did not have to dress a certain way or look a certain way to attend and feel received.

Participant Emily West, the former atheist, stated that things were “completely different from what [she] expected, [and] from what others said about [going to] churches in general.” E. West went on to describe that this church was probably the only worship site that she could go to and get a hug from the local district attorney whose husband is also a federal investigator. E. West thought that this was humorous and ironic, given her criminal background, and that the type of people who have prosecuted her in the past would make her feel welcome and actually interact with her at this church. To emphasize the salience of this for E. West, it should be noted that she used the phrase “blows my mind” when referring to the above. To use such a common phrase may seem inconsequential, but it is quite insightful coming from a self-admitted drug abuser who had experienced “the highs” from said drug use hundreds of times over a two-decade

period. She stated that “Christianity was an equalizer,” meaning that no matter your past transgressions or present situation, anyone who walked through the doors at the church in this study had an opportunity to grow spiritually and form relationships with people from all walks of life.

Similarly, participant Sally Vince, a former substance abuser but still struggling thief, said there is a specific police officer that works security at the church during the weekly Recovery program. Vince’s son had developed a friendly, encouraging relationship with the officer. Vince implied that this had never occurred before and that she would not have thought such a thing would have transpired by attending church and practicing her new faith.

Participant D. Crockett, a male struggling with depression, alcohol abuse, and losing his marriage due to past deviant (but not criminal) behaviors, stated that his experiences at the church in this study were initially “shocking but good” in regard to the non-traditional aesthetics, music, and preaching style. He went on to say that all of his experiences at past churches were “very formal.” Crockett said he grew up in a Baptist church and came to hate “religion” because of his experiences growing up. It should be noted that when Crockett was referring to religion, he was referencing what he calls man-made doctrine or tradition for the sake of tradition that really do not have a Biblical basis.

Crockett said that he was baptized too young at the age of 10. He did not grasp Christianity or the concept of salvation, and when he realized this, he was 17 or 18 years of age. This is when he knew he was not really a Christian, yet he did not tell anyone at his childhood church because he felt he would be judged. After a failing marriage, financial trouble due to addictions with mixed martial arts, a fishing hobby, and

pornography, Crockett turned back to Christianity. He found a spiritual home with the church in this study.

A testimony that parallels this from one of the female participants, Angelina Eberly, should be noted. Eberly stated that once she began regularly participating at the church in this study, she realized through building Christian-based relationships with others who attended the church “that God could still use her even after her sex addiction.” Eberly was raised in church and regularly attended a few churches in college and young adulthood. Even while doing this, she became sexually promiscuous and eventually was addicted to having sex with men.

After a few months of attending the church in this study and building relationships with others, she began to realize that this was a place for her to serve God regardless of her past sexual addiction. From this point on she began telling the men that she had previously had casual sex with that she would no longer do so. She described a spiritual transformation that “made her willing to serve” her faith without letting the guilt of her addiction suppress her calling to serve. She attributed this turning point to the church in this study helping her to grow her faith and communication with God through prayer. She met many people at the church from numerous backgrounds and realized that a lot of people had broken pasts, some considered worse than hers, accordingly to societal norms. Eberly said that she would not have been able to talk about her sex addiction with people who attended the churches that she went to in the past. This is why she did not serve at those churches, and this is why she was not able to mature as a Christian and stay away from the sexual addiction.

Another negative experience with past churches was delineated by participant William Bryan. He said that his faith in Christ had ever hurt him or pushed him back towards stealing or drug abuse, but that “religious people” not acting like Christ did not help his new salvation. He came to Christian salvation after decades of drug abuse and crime commission. W. Bryan advised that he did not attend church or Christian religious events the first five years after his salvation. He said this was due to seeing religious leaders be some of the meanest and unethical people he had ever encountered. W. Bryan is now a preacher himself, operates an international missionary organization, and attends the church in this study when he is living in the U.S., which is about six months out of the year.

*Positive Church Experiences Lead to Maturing Faith and Increased Prosocial Behavior*

Emily West spoke about how her Christian walk, which started through visiting and attending the church in this study, had affected her drug abuse trajectory. She said that the “guilt and shame” she felt as an adolescent through adulthood was formerly attenuated by “the needle.” She now realizes she was actually feeding that shame and guilt instead of facing it to solve it. Now that she is a Christian, Emily stated that she realizes that Jesus Christ has already paid her debts and she genuinely believes that. She said that it is “unconscionable” for her “to nurture and foster guilt” when it has already been metaphorically washed clean by Jesus’ crucifixion. Turning to drugs and deviance “was an I thing”, all about herself. E. West said it was “selfish” and all “about poor pitiful me.” Now she says she is not allowed to have that mentality because “Jesus Christ bought it.”

Participant Stephen Austin, a convicted sex-offender and recovered methamphetamine addict, echoed similar sentiments about no longer being selfish due to his new Christian path. He stated that when he chose to attend the aforementioned Recovery program that this was the first thing he did as an adult that was not for his own self-interest. He said the primary reason for going to the Recovery program for the first time was that he kept seeing the advertisements for volunteers to help implement the program on a weekly basis. The church advertised that they needed people to lead the sub-groups within the program, and that they preferred people who were saved and had recovered from a past addiction or life tragedy. Austin felt a spiritual urge to engage the program and see how he could help lead; thus he was going for altruistic reasons to help others who were further behind the same recovery path that he was already on.

*Negative Experiences from the Church in This Study.*

One of the sub-topics of discussion within research question two pertained to whether the church in this study, or these participants' new-found faith as a whole, had ever contributed to any negative experiences that potentially pushed or actually pressed them back towards crime or deviance. None of the participants had anything negative to say about this church as a whole or its individual leaders and volunteers.

One participant did acknowledge that sometimes during the Recovery program that the participant's old way of life and the temptations thereof are put into the forefront of his mind. He said this causes those temptations to slightly resurface in addition to the guilt of leading a past life that involved hurting others. The participant qualified these negative feelings obtained during the Recovery program by saying that life is not easy, and there is no better place than church to face those things. He said that it is still

sometimes difficult to confront his past temptations, but that is okay because the Christian faith does not guarantee an easy life path.

### Research Question #3 Results – What religious/faith factors have affected their offending or law-abiding trajectories?

During the interviews for this research question, the investigator initially and intentionally did not use verbiage that implied or asked outright if religious or faith factors decreased criminal offending, substance abuse, or deviant behavior. This was done so as not to bias the participants' answers or line of thinking. Instead, the researcher asked questions and engaged in semi-structured interviews about the participants' faith and religious participation and how it has affected their outlook on life and their actual behaviors in any direction. However, if a participant began speaking about how their faith or religious involvement positively affected the aforementioned trajectories, then the researcher asked follow-up questions. In contrast, participants were asked explicitly if they had experienced any negative outcomes attributable to religious participation or a growing faith. These latter answers were reported in research question number two. Questioning that pertained to negative outcomes was undertaken in order to detect and report all aspects of the influence of increased religious participation and faith.

Six themes were identified after analyzing the data for Research Question Three. These themes were mentioned by at least one-half or more of the participants (n = 15). Some of these overlap with each other or logically flow from one to another due to temporal order. These relationships will be further explored below. Other responses from the participants will also be discussed below; however, these responses were not mentioned frequently enough to be considered themes or patterns. Throughout Research



Question Three, the non-themed responses will simply be referred to as “answers” given by the participants.

Six themes identified as affecting the participants’ law-violating or law-abiding trajectories are listed as follows, starting with the most frequently reported:

- the Recovery program offered by the church (73.33% of participants),
- church participation leading to a healthier lifestyle (66.67%),
- increased self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) (66.67%),
- Growth Group participation (60%),
- preferring to serve or volunteer over being served (53.33%), and
- the sermon message aiding with law-abiding behaviors (53.33%).

As one can see, this research question attempts to identify *what* aspects of religious participation and faith have affected their law-violating or law-abiding trajectories. However, to cease inquiry there would be a disservice to this dissertation and the spirit of social science research. It is only natural and prudent to also ask *how* those elements have affected the aforementioned trajectories. Throughout the findings section for this question, both the *what* and the *how* will be explained.

#### *Church Participation Leading to a Healthier Lifestyle*

Six of the 10 male participants reported that their church participation at this congregation equated to them having a healthier lifestyle, and four of the five female participants responded affirmatively too. Church participation, for purposes of this dissertation, refers to the participants attending, worshiping, and sometimes helping at religious events such as the traditional Sunday services and weekly Recovery or Growth Group meetings.

Other specific aspects of church participation, which qualified as themes in and of themselves, will be explained later within Research Question Three. Examples of this include the Recovery program and the senior pastor’s sermons as a part of the overall

delivery of weekend worship services. Immediately below, however, are examples of how and why the participants believe they are now healthier due to church participation. For purposes of this dissertation, *healthier* and *healthy*, refers to the self-observed status of physical well-being such as feeling and looking more medically sound.

Female participant, Harriet Ames, said that she consumed less alcohol because her church participation has increased. She elaborated on this by saying that church participation has improved her relationship with Christ, and she has learned that earthly love and lust from people is not as important and necessary as before. Harriet abused alcohol for years, and this was exacerbated after separating from her husband. Before her relationship with Christ improved, due to church participation, she was traumatized by her ex-husband's departure. No longer being needed by him was "devastating," she said. However, now that she regularly attends church she has learned that she does not need what she thought she had to have. "Christ is now my security blanket," according to Harriet, and as a result, her desire for alcohol has decreased. This in turn has made her healthier. She said that her dependence on alcohol was just a coping mechanism for being abandoned by her ex-husband and not being able to face this rejection and his infidelity betrayal. Put simply, she said her desire for alcohol was replaced by a desire to rely on Christ.

W. Bryan said that attending this church has "enhanced" his life, even though he had only been participating for three months. He had already been sober for years. This was due to his Christian faith well before attending this church; however, his participation over the last three months has allowed his life to continue improving.

Participant John Coker said that his involvement at the church by regularly worshipping God, combined with a substance abuse rehabilitation program, has helped him “walk a good life and get away from alcohol.” He further stated that God and the church in this study give him the “ultimate guidance.” From his perspective, anyone with an addiction must have both a formal rehabilitation program in conjunction with the desire to genuinely participate in a church’s religious functions and worship services.

#### *Volunteering and Serving Others*

Yet another interesting relationship between a lesser mentioned answer and an identified theme pertains to service work and volunteering. Eight (53.33%) of the participants stated that serving others, as opposed to being served, was an effect of their increased faith and religious participation. This helped them to lead a more prosocial path and/or steered them away from criminal offending and substance abuse. However, only three of the eight advised that they actively volunteered at the church in this study. The remaining five participants mentioned serving in various capacities across the community, some in secular settings and others in non-secular environments. The following case examples reflect the theme of volunteerism and service in which these variables helped participants flee from crime and substance abuse, thus altering their trajectories. Some of these examples illustrate acts of service both at the church in this study and elsewhere. First, a dissection of service and volunteering at the church in this study is below.

Female participant Angelina Eberly stated that she currently leads a weekly Growth Group and a breakout group within Recovery. Angelina said she feels spiritually led to do so, but she also recognizes that staying busy with church keeps her mind off of

being single at age 40 with no current prospects of finding a boyfriend or husband.

While difficult for her to acknowledge, part of Angelina's past deviance was that she was addicted to sex. Angelina expounded on this by saying that she "can't be a leader" of church groups and also "be living the way that I was." She said this would make her feel guilty, and as a Christian, she could not do this. If this was the case, she would be a "stereotypical hypocrite."

Another female participant, Frances Trask, said that she volunteers at the coffee bar on Wednesday nights at the church. She said it makes her feel good to serve, but it also helps steer her away from addiction and stealing. By helping in this capacity, she recognizes that even simply serving coffee just outside the sanctuary casts her into a leadership position, especially in the eyes of visitors to the church and other former and current addicts struggling to recover. This helps Frances stay accountable to herself and others. She said that if she was to falter on her sobriety that she would have to tell her accountability partners since she holds a volunteer role at the church. Frances said the legal system would give her "a slap on the wrist," but she would be "terrified of having to confess" this to her Recovery breakout group. In summary, Frances has the impact of positive peer pressure acting upon her, as well as having internalized the importance of taking on a Christian service role within the church.

Samuel H. recognized that the church offers a lot of opportunities to engage in volunteer work. Partaking in these opportunities helps keep Samuel busy doing things that are more prosocial around different types of people as compared to those with whom he formerly associated. Samuel explained this by saying that being around a diverse group of people who are not engaged in deviance and crime opened his eyes to different

lifestyles than those in which he had been living. He went on to say that nothing was more fulfilling than volunteering, and that it was both “therapeutic and supernatural.” When asked what he meant by supernatural, Samuel paraphrased as saying that volunteering made his soul feel like it was in a state of where it was supposed to be.

Harriet Ames, previously introduced, stated a similar view. Harriet said that once she became a Christian, she and other Christians, who had also previously abused drugs, became accountable to one other. While she does not volunteer at the church in this study, she went on to say that it was her responsibility as a Christian to “stay on the right track” and to help do the same with her fellow Christians. For Harriet, this is one way that she serves others and prevents herself from relapsing. Her life choices were no longer just about her; rather, she had acknowledged that by making poor choices she could negatively affect others who were trying to both improve their relationship with God and maintain sobriety. While this is not a traditional form of volunteering, it nonetheless represents a form of service that she and other participants had adopted. This theme of service due to accountability appears to be directly related to another theme, that of social structure, where the participants have gained social capital from their increased religious participation and faith.

Male participant Stephen Austin echoed this when he intentionally joined the Recovery program to serve and not be served, despite being a former substance abuser. Emily West also demonstrated signs of having internalized the concept of serving because it was an essential element of her Christian identity. She said that it is imperative for her good works to be seen by others as a positive example of what a recovering addict and a former criminal must do as a born-again Christian. She does not

want to make her faith look bad, and that “helping and serving” others is a pathway to leading those people to their “Christian salvation.” As a former atheist, West went on to say that doing good and helping others was just a nice feeling she and her family retained from their acts of service. It ended there though. West went on to state that now understands that doing those same things as a Christian means glorifying God and helping bring non-Christians to their salvation.

D. Crockett made the most poignant summary statement in helping the researcher understand why the participants would agree to divulge their past for the purposes of this project. This also pertained to the service mentality mentioned above. He said that before he became a Christian, he was covered in shame regarding his past behaviors, which included experimenting with drugs and alcohol and being addicted to pornography and two of his hobbies. The two latter being addictions that led to him depleting his paychecks and savings account. Intermingled with all of this was depression. D. Crockett said that he would have never shared any of this before his salvation as an adult. After this event, he realized that his story was not simply his; rather, it was God’s story and Crockett’s testimony, which was no good towards leading others to Jesus Christ if hidden away.

Moses Austin connected how the church changed his viewpoint on volunteering and service. He said the “entire aspect of” the church in this study is “about giving and serving”, and that before participating regularly at this church he never enjoyed service-work. After he was saved, he began understanding the value of service and now “feels compelled to do so.” Moses attributed this change to God only. He went on to say that he only makes approximately \$1,200 a month and could probably make more money, but

he spends his spare time serving others as a part of representing his faith. The church in this study helped instill this.

A summary of volunteerism and service can be best illustrated by participant W. Travis when he spoke on the roles of faith as they pertained to serving others. He said that he would not go back into his past and change a thing, despite his addiction and criminal offending. He said that God “pruned” him “to become a better man”, and God gave him a vision of what his true purpose was. Travis understands now that he is meant to be a *servant-disciple*, but that would have never occurred in his past life due to him having “too much of the world left” in him. This same or very similar statement was given by every participant who cited volunteering and service to others as a result of their increased faith and religious participation.

#### *Social Capital Resulting from Growth Groups and Recovery Program*

Twelve (80%) of the 15 participants reported that they had gained what criminologists call social capital as a result of their religious participation in Growth Groups and the Recovery program. This pattern was an overwhelming finding during the qualitative data analysis. While social structure and social capital are not faith or religious factors, they are essential variables to be analyzed in any criminology study. In this research project, they are crucial due to the participants’ own beliefs that gaining them is the primary reason as to how they stay away or begin to desist from substance abuse or crime. Had it not been for the participants’ increased religious participation and exercising of their Christian faith, their social structure would likely not have improved and grown with prosocial peers and mentors.

The increases in social capital and social structure, according to the participants, had resulted in them offending less, decreased their specific acts of deviance, and increased behaviors that are more prosocial and law-abiding. The origins of how social structure and social capital were gained, leading to these altered trajectories, appears to be related primarily with the participants joining Growth Groups and the Recovery program. Nine (60%) of the participants cited their involvement in Growth Groups as helping to either decrease their criminal/deviant behavioral trajectories or increase their chances of becoming law-abiding and engaging in prosocial behaviors. Eleven (73.33%) of the 15 participants stated the crucial importance of the Recovery program in helping them to do the same. The following paragraphs will detail the participants' answers and place into context the roles of Growth Groups and the Recovery program as dominant themes which lead to increased social structure and social capital.

For historical perspective and context, Growth Groups, according to the church's advertisements, as well as based upon the researcher's participant observation, aim to connect people beyond the massive church services. This is a goal of the church so that the individuals build relationships with one another, thus helping each other with the following: their Christian journey, with life in general, and to spread the mission and vision of the church. Growth Groups are thus an essential piece of gaining social structure and capital for these participants and anyone else who attends this church.

The same can be said for the Recovery program as a dominant answer for this research question, but also for it as a subset of the social structure and social capital theme. An overwhelming number of statements in regard to Recovery pertain to the participants gaining accountability by meeting others who are going through similar



personal battles or who have already conquered them. Additionally, the participants expressed the importance of being mentored in Recovery by those who have already successfully navigated such trials. These relationships equate to a new-found social structure in the lives of the participants that they did not previously have until attending this church and participating in its religious functions.

The following participants' statements will further deconstruct the findings for this portion of Research Question Three regarding the interrelated themes of social structure/social capital with the Recovery program and Growth Groups. Broadly referring to a change in social structure and building social capital, participant Harriet Ames stated, "It helps to have Christian friends, because you have to change your people, place, and things" referring to how she is in the process of desisting from crime and drugs. Emily West said that she personally has more people that she can turn to at two o'clock in the morning from relationships built during church service attendance than she does in the Recovery program. She further clarified that if she feels tempted to abuse drugs late at night, or when alone, that she would call or contact her friends from the church services who are not in the Recovery program, because she would not want to tempt those people who struggle like her. At the same time, by contacting her Christian friends from the general church services, she feels more confident that they would be able to assist her during high-temptation moments. West believes this is the case due to their demonstrated strong faith and reliance on Biblical wisdom. West went on to confidently say that if the church in this study was taken out of her life, but the relationships she had made from the church stayed the same, she could probably still stay away from drugs due

to the relationships built. In the same breath, she also implied that she would immerse herself into another church.

Frances Trask said that God has helped her make the right decisions in regards to her mother and her ex-boyfriend. She has reinvested time in taking care of her mother whose health is failing, and she has chosen not to communicate with her ex-boyfriend who is involved in crime. Trask also said that she has been able to rid herself of her ex-husbands' bad friends, with whom she used to abuse drugs and engage in crime. Since she has gotten out of jail, she refuses to see or speak to her former drug dealers and fellow addicts. Her new support group is made up of people who attend the church in this study, and that have helped replace her old habits.

#### *Growth Groups as Social Capital*

Sally Vince said that having a physical place like the church, with a consistent group of people, is a tremendous help. Specifically, Vince said that having peers with whom you are accountable, where you can verbally say what problems you are having, is essential. She said that she is not proud to admit her past transgressions or her current struggles and temptations, but to be in a group of women with similar issues, who she knows are not judging her and who have a sense of humor about it all, helps her to stay accountable and mend. Vince's group of women that she was referring to was an all-female Growth Group related to mending and moving forward from past hurt.

Regarding an increase in law-abiding social capital, Angelina Eberly said, "Growth Groups put people in my life that have been good mentors...especially ladies and other Christian singles that struggle." She said these people know her past and do not judge her because they have been in similar situations. This allows them to hold one

another accountable, giving all of them social capital to rely upon, as opposed to trying to be sober and stay away from crime on their own.

A previously introduced male participant, William Bryan, echoed the above and expounded further on Growth Groups. He likes the variety of the subject matter offered from the numerous Growth Groups. This, in combination with a more intimate setting and a smaller number of people, results in him building Christian relationships that can be relied upon, all because of the subject matter that is studied, discussed, and prayed upon.

*Recovery Program as Social Capital.*

The following quotes and paraphrased statements explain why the Recovery program was the most frequently identified theme for Research Question Three. The participants' answers also give insight as to the benefits of gaining social capital upon getting involved in this church and increasing their faith. To help further describe Recovery's approach to healing, participant Moses Austin made the following observation. He said that "Recovery is about now [the present] and the future in order to make people better, as opposed to NA (Narcotics Anonymous)" where his experiences with that group were simply sitting around talking about what he had done in the past... and beating a dead horse." Moses went on to say that the Recovery program helps him the most because he has the leaders' phone numbers, and he can call them when he is tempted to relapse. Moses concluded this part of his interview with a confident look in his eye when he said, "But it ain't going to happen," referring to succumbing to temptations.

How and why Recovery serves as social structure for the participants is best displayed by their own statements. The consistency in their words, given by these quite different participants, who were all interviewed separately, was an interesting and affirming observation. Participant William Travis said that before joining the Recovery program that he had “waves of being” prosocial, which would come and go. However, after he began building relationships in Recovery, Travis advised that he loves and supports those friends [in Recovery] and is compelled to check on them, invest in them, and connect with them.

Sally Vince also talked about her ability to pick up the phone and call accountability partners from her women’s subgroup within Recovery. She said the “Recovery program has given me the tools to use” like being able to “call Angelina, Emily,” and others. Both Angelina and Emily are participants’ pseudonyms in this study, and each of them have been previously described and quoted. However, Sally said that due to shame, she has not followed through with calling anyone yet, referencing past times when she was tempted to steal inside of a store. Sally described herself to the researcher as a kleptomaniac, who primarily steals by shoplifting, usually animal related products, from pet stores. She does this even though the pets that she owns are already fully supplied and cared for.

James B. said of the Recovery program, “to see that many people in one place with issues like me makes me want to come back.” He said that Sunday services do not assist him very much, but Recovery “really helps.” As a result of the relationships made at Recovery he knows that he is not alone. He too named accountability partners, who are also participants in this research project, as people he relies upon. Expounding on

knowing that he is not alone, James said that he has friends like Stephen and Sam, who are a part of his support structure, and that Stephen comes over [to James' residence] and helps keep James out of trouble.

James B. also told of how and why he came to attend the Recovery program and how the relationship he built with the pastoral leaders of Recovery have provided him with social support. James said that in 2011 he was working at Goodyear Tires. There was a slow business period one day when there were no customers, and his co-workers left to conduct errands. James said that he walked the pastor who at present day is in charge of the Recovery program. At that time in 2011, the Recovery program did not exist, but this same minister was an associate pastor at the church before it underwent its second name change. James felt comfortable opening up to the pastor since no one else was present. James told the pastor that he recognized him from the church, and after a few minutes of talking they prayed together in the Goodyear business. James said that this pastor was responsible for getting him into the one and only Growth Group that he has ever participated in, that being one entitled Manhood Restored, based upon a similarly named book and DVD. James said he never missed a meeting for that Growth Group.

James then began attending Recovery once it was created at the church. James said that every time he goes to Recovery, the messages given by the aforementioned pastor, as well as the professional counselor who also leads Recovery, "speak" to him and his specific struggles. James said that the one-on-one counseling sessions that he has with the therapist at Recovery are a tremendous help as well.

Frances Trask cited the entire program of Recovery, and her breakout group for addicts, as having helped her decrease her substance abuse. She said that now she is “fairly stable” with her sobriety, “but during rough times” she has options because of this church. She went on to say that her options are to call or talk with her Recovery friends and that she also has “a lot of support outside of this church” with people who are not addicts. Frances ended this portion of the interview by saying that her conversations with her Recovery breakout group allow her to compare her journey to others’, which gives her hope and perspective. Harriet Ames also cited the breakout groups within Recovery. She said that the small groups in Recovery “are the best,” and that she attended for months straight and cried in those meetings, which was part of her healing and sobriety process.

Participant W. Bryan offered a perspective that is consistent with the other responses, but is also unique given that he is now an ordained pastor, despite being a former addict and someone who had been sentenced to prison for fraud and theft. He said that the Recovery program was another “tool in the war chest” for Christians to help them fight their battles and succeed on their faith journey. W. Bryan said the fact that Recovery has leaders of the breakout groups who were addicted or severely hurt in the past, is unquestionably the best strategy to attract, retain, and heal other substance abusers and offenders. W. Bryan said there is an “absolute and utter empathy and understanding that one addict has for another that cannot be matched, even by the most well-intentioned Christian leaders who have not led that lifestyle.”

He said that his role in the Recovery program is that of an informal leader, and because he has been sober and ministering for years, he can help mentor those who are

struggling with addiction and hurt. Thus, W. Bryan engages in a volunteer service he wholeheartedly believes changes lives. W. Bryan went on to say that “the impact and help of accountability between addicts is way more potent than the support of well-meaning church folks.” He said that the strong Christians who do not have a background of addiction or criminal involvement usually cannot help the substance abusers and criminal offenders who struggle with those things. W. Bryan qualified that statement by saying that the Christians who have not been addicts or offenders definitely have other niches within the church to help the struggling substance abusers and lawbreakers grow in their Christian development.

*Self-Control is Both a Faith/Religious Factor and a Reason for How Criminal Trajectories Were Altered*

Tied with *church participation leading to a healthier lifestyle* as the second most frequently identified theme is that of *increased self-control* (66.67%). On the surface, this theme may appear to only be a possible result of increased religious participation and a growing faith. While an increase in self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), according to criminology theory, logic, and the participants’ interviews, can lead to less crime and more prosocial behaviors, *increased self-control* is also a tenet of the Christian faith. Thus, increased self-control is also a faith/religious factor, and was identified as such by the researcher from the analyzed data. Stated simply, if someone genuinely prescribes to the Christian faith, then at some point in their conversion or increasing faith, they must internalize and exercise certain Biblically prescribed parameters that require self-control. Like most organized religions or faiths, there are behavioral directives of what a person should and should not be engaging. To illustrate *increased self-control* in

both of these regards, further findings and specific statements by the participants will now be parsed.

Participant W. Bryan advised that he had no level of self-control before sobriety and salvation. He said that he was completely chaotic and impulsive, but the self-control that he has developed over the last decade is completely “God-centered.” W. Bryan prayed for the first time on a beach in the Bahamas when he was “at rock bottom” in his adult life. At this time, he was addicted to drugs and engaging in stealing and fraud to support his habit. When he said his first prayer, he absolutely had a salvation experience. This is when he began gaining self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi), but not to the levels that he has today. He advised that he did not attend a church until five years later. However, in between his salvation and regular church attendance, his self-control increased incrementally due to his participation in the spiritual-based 12 step program, Alcoholics Anonymous. After his salvation experience and before regular church participation, he attributed his “prayer life” as the next most potent reason for his higher levels of self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Once he finally started attending a church, his levels of self-control continued to strengthen. W. Bryan explained this by saying that there was no way that his self-control could do anything but increase, because it was “directly proportional to my connection with God and sobriety.”

William Travis echoed the same linear path between salvation and self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) when he said his, “self-control since salvation is unbelievably high.” He also had a salvation experience during what he referred to as the “lowest part of his life.” He told a story of being in a shed in a backyard due to being physically sick from being high on drugs. This was due to frequent use for months at a



time. W. Travis said that he was on the ground praying in this shed, when he felt a new spirit enter his body upon salvation. He literally vomited, and in his mind, this was him getting rid of the demon or evil spirit that controlled his life through addiction. W. Travis said that after this occurred he began to cry uncontrollably, and to this day he has never cried to the same extent. He also noted that his levels of using and manipulating others decreased at this time, and he attributed that to the satanic spirit that left his body that night.

Conversely, participant J. Bowie stated that his salvation experience was a factor in changing his offending trajectory, but he did not notice an increased level of self-control after being saved. He stated that his salvation occurred during his one and only Growth Group participation at the church in this study, but that he still struggles with the temptation to abuse drugs. He feels there is still a “final hurdle” to aid him into less temptation, but he does not know what it is.

The previously referenced female participant, Angelina Eberly, said that her “self-control increased dramatically after more and more religious participation.” She admitted that she still has struggles with her sex addiction and temptations. However, she has such a high level of self-control now that she can consciously not put herself in tempting situations, thus avoiding certain places, environments, and people. In this regard, self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) is a result of increased faith and religious involvement.

She also said that she has a duty to protect males who may want to have sex with her. Even though the males may see nothing wrong with it and would probably scoff at the idea that she was protecting them, she understands the negative effects of

promiscuous sex outside of marriage, both on the body and spiritually. Her desire to possess self-control in order to help and protect others, who may not even subscribe to the same set of Christian beliefs, is an example of self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) as a faith factor.

Participant James Fannin articulated a similar sentiment. He can be paraphrased as saying that his self-control increased due to being around more Christian friends. In addition to this, the church environment and hearing Christian sermons and messages every week have reinforced his accountability through the relationships made at church.

*Sunday Sermon Messages Helping with Law-Abidance*

As it has already clearly been identified and reported in the findings of the first two research questions, Pastor Seguin's sermons during weekend worship services resonate amongst the unchurched, specifically those struggling with substance abuse, grief, and/or the criminal offending that so often coincides with addiction and victimization. Any reader of this research project only has to revisit those findings to see why the participants also cited the Sunday sermon message by Pastor Seguin in Research Question Three. Therefore, tied for the fourth most prevalent religious or faith factor that has helped change their criminal or law-abiding trajectories is that of Pastor Seguin's sermons. Eight (53.33%) of the fifteen participants reported this. All of them made statements consistent with D. Crockett's parsimonious one-line answer, "Brother Seguin [pseudonym inserted in place of actual last name] preaches on real world issues that other churches avoid." Crockett went on to say that these sermons aid him on a "daily basis," by helping him to:

- work through temptation,
- work through the guilt from past failures or wrongdoing, and
- have examples and stories from the Bible to rely upon that do have applicability in today's American society.

Research Question #4 Results – When, if ever, did the offenders perceive a turning point(s) in their lifestyle?

The researcher did not assume that turning points, also known in the criminology literature as hooks for change, had occurred in the lives of every participant. This is why the “if ever” qualification within Research Question Four exists. Similarly, the researcher did not assume that the participants in the study would be able to recognize or articulate any or all turning points. This is an important concept to keep in mind when reading the results.

Additionally, in order to not bias or influence the participants into falsely creating turning points during the interviews, the researcher did not directly question them using this term or similar phrases. Because this was the last research question to be investigated during the interviews, the researcher was able to refer to previous answers provided by the participants so as to naturally transition into a conversation about life changing events. If the participant had not clearly mentioned life altering events during the first three parts of the interview, then the researcher would discreetly start inquiring about major life events that pushed or pulled them towards or away from crime and substance abuse.

As a reminder, the 15 participants self-identified on where they were within their law-violating and law-abiding trajectories. Eight (53.33%) advised that they were actively in the process of desisting from crime and/or substance abuse. Those eight are

made up of two females and six males. The other seven participants (46.67%) reported that they had fully desisted from crime and/or substance abuse. Four of those seven are males and three are females.

The responses yielded for Research Question Four were the most heterogeneous compared to the other three research questions. Seventeen different turning points were reported by the participants; however only one distinct trend or theme was identified. This theme was the *attribution of God or salvation through Jesus Christ* as a turning point in the lives' of nine (60%) of the participants. Two females and seven males stated unequivocally that they believed that the overwhelming reason and event that either started steering them away from crime and addiction, or that helped them to finally cut off that lifestyle was God or their salvation experience through the son of God, Jesus Christ. Specifically, seven of these nine cited salvation through Christ. Of these seven, two of the participants are females and five are males.

Of the participants who cited God or salvation through Jesus Christ as their turning point, participant W. Travis best summarized their answers when he said, "God can release someone from drugs. Humans cannot do it on their own. Him [God] helping me was the most supernatural experience I have ever had."

Another male participant, S. Austin, said he "owes God everything, and that is all it is about." He said he does not wear his addiction on his sleeve. As a Christian, he has other concerns and goals, like helping others. He does not necessarily talk about his addiction every chance that he gets, because serving others is not about him and his past struggle. He said that he is able to relate to struggling addicts because of his past, but that he does not think about himself as an addict anymore. Instead he thinks of himself as a

servant [of God]. Furthermore, S. Austin is a group leader in the Recovery program. This was a prime example of a participant demonstrating the cognitive creation of a replacement self as coined by Giordano et al. (2002). Similarly, Davy C. said that his faith has convicted him to become a better person according to Christ's standards in order to be a role model for his kids.

One of the female participants, A. Eberly, said she received a spiritual message from God while at a crossroad between her increasing Christian faith and her lifestyle at that time, which involved sex addiction and heavy alcohol consumption. Eberly said she had been praying for God to give her a sign and the peace to be able to move away from her sex addiction, because she knew she could not stop herself. Also, a part of those prayers was that she wanted this one particular boyfriend, of who she really liked and had been sexually active with, to start attending church with her. One Sunday morning before church, she invited him to go with her. He mocked her invitation by making a joke about them "holy rolling" together, referencing having sex, before going to church with each other. Eberly said she was humiliated and angry that he would make fun of her genuine attempt to grow closer to God; however, she knew she could not have her life both ways. When he made that joke, Eberly said she was immediately able to fend off her sex addiction, as well as the nightly game and weekly chase of trying to secure a new man with whom to have sex. She said that she was still tempted, but that she knows for a fact that the joke made by the boyfriend was God's way of speaking and reaching her in a way that gave her spiritual strength to cease her risky behavior. From that point on, Eberly cut extra-marital sex and alcohol consumption out of her life. The researcher

identified this as a knifing off point, as referenced in developmental theories of criminology.

Another turning point told by male participant, S. Austin, was the manner of how and why he first started attending church. He was motivated to do so by a female for who he had intimate feelings. He said she once told him that all she ever wanted was a man who would do what God said a man was supposed to do. S. Austin really liked this girl so he became curious as to what she meant with her statement. He started attending church and studying the Bible to better understand. He said that this venture changed his life and converted him to a Christian. S. Austin went on to say that this particular girl had “been out of the picture” as a potential girlfriend for a long time, yet his faith and religious participation remained.

*Turning Points That Occurred Before and After Participation at the Church in This Study*

Eight (53.33%) of the 15 participants reported positive turning points away from drugs and crime *before* they ever attended the church in this study. Two of these eight are females and six are males. Of these specific turning points, there was no dominant theme or pattern as to whether they were related to anything spiritual or secular. It should also be noted that some of the participants reported more than one turning point prior to attending the church in this study.

Also, two of the males in the study reported turning points both before and after attending the church. Thus, six males stated that they had turning points away from drugs and crime after immersing themselves in this church. With the addition of two more females, a total of eight (53.33%) participants said they had positive turning points away from drugs and crime *after* becoming regularly involved in this church.

While not qualifying as an identified theme in this particular research question, it should be noted that six participants specifically cited the Recovery program as a turning point. This is essential to report due to the strong dominance of the Recovery program in the other research questions. Two of these participants are females and four are males. Participant D. Crockett said that prior to attending Recovery that he was medicated for depression and anxiety. He said that those prescriptions were “only a Band-Aid” and did not cure him. However, the Recovery program was counseling for him of which he had never had. Crockett went on to say that this and “Jesus Christ cured him from depression.”

Participant W. Travis similarly stated that his participation in the Recovery program gave him “an overwhelming desire to want to stop” [abusing substances and stealing to support his habit]. He could not articulate exactly how this worked, but attributed it to the Holy Spirit working in his life through the Recovery program.

One of the female participants, Frances Trask, said that as soon as she started the Recovery program that “it was almost instant” that her past and current boyfriends involved in crime “had no influence over her.” She said that she began picking the Recovery program over them, and like W. Travis, could not explain how it happened. She simply knew that her ability to do this only began occurring after she started attending Recovery. She ended her statement about this by saying that she “needs to be in Recovery.” The researcher identified this as a knifing off point for Trask, a central tenant of developmental criminology theories such as Life-Course.

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Overview of Findings – A Linear Progression Away from Deviance and Crime

The four research questions were intentionally ordered in the manner they are so that their answers will help depict a timeline showing the series of events and themes on how and why the participants would:

- have first come to visit the church,
- then secondly how and why they became consistently involved at the church, and
- then thirdly how and why they were impacted by their increasing faith and religious participation.

With this in mind, a summary of the findings for each research question has been compiled into one consolidated essay to help depict what was learned from this project.

In the findings chapter of this dissertation, each research question was analyzed separately. While it is quite informative to isolate the findings for each question, the macro-view of the results from this study is what the researcher was ultimately seeking. This 40,000 feet view of the findings will help contribute to the gaps in research knowledge that exist within this sub-field of criminology.

Before the participants, or the community in which they live, could ever benefit from the offenders' change in trajectory away from substance abuse and crime, they first had to be attracted to the church in this study. Without this, it is unlikely that most or none of the subsequent findings for the other three research questions would have occurred. Overwhelmingly, the participants initially visited and then returned time and again due to Pastor Seguin's ability to reach their desire for change while providing a method to do so. The talent within Pastor Seguin's sermon delivery spread by word of mouth within this specialized subgroup who attends this church. These people, and other



demographic groups quite different from them, came to the church to hear him preach. After initially experiencing these sermons, they came back for more.

The second reason that the participants became engaged with this church was the Recovery program. Some of the participants started in the Recovery program and then began attending weekend worship services, while the other participants had the exact opposite route as previously mentioned. Conducting quantitative studies at this church, and others similar to it, using a more powerful sample, could delve out which, if either, of these routes were more prevalent. One finding is for certain though, Pastor Seguin's sermons and the Recovery program were constant themes within all four research questions. According to the participants' perceptions, these two influences are what attracted and retained this unique, unchurched population.

The above two most dominant themes were predicated, and in co-existence, by seven other themes all of which resulted in the participants receiving positive feelings upon their initial visits to either the church services or Recovery. These seven themes when combined appear to have a whole that is greater than the sum of their parts, and this was in large part why the participants chose to return and invest themselves into the church, thus increasing their faith and religious participation.

A summation statement of these seven themes is written below to illustrate how, why, and in what chronological order this unchurched population has come to visit and then participate regularly within this church. The seven themes are italicized and were previously delineated in the Findings chapter.

First, the *positive reputation of the church* preceded the participants' initial visits, which occurred due to being *invited by friends and co-workers*. Upon going to the church the first few times, the participants could see and feel

that *the people* who regularly attended, who were paid staff, or who volunteer at the church had worked diligently to create a *non-traditional church environment*, which made the participants *feel welcomed, loved, and not judged*.

Transitioning into the findings for Research Question Two occurs here which was apropos being that nine (60%) of the 15 participants reported having negative church experiences as children. This was pivotal knowledge because these nine participants had to not only overcome their own discomfort in attending church given their lifestyles of deviance and crime, but the church's presentation of worship services also had to overcome these participants' pre-conceived notions of how church looks and feels due to the negative experiences they had as children. While five (3.33%) other participants advised that they had positive church experiences as children, they had since traveled a road that was immersed in either substance abuse and/or criminal activity. Thus, regardless of their positive or negative church experiences as children, most of the participants cited guilt and shame as a major hurdle for them before being able to alter their lives of crime and addiction. This was the case regardless of whether they were trying to do so through faith and religious participation or some other means of desistance. It was very difficult for them to get to a point emotionally where they felt like they could join a venture, such as this church, as opposed to only being worthy of a life of deviance and illegal activity.

Additionally, some of the participants cited that in their past at other churches, regularly attending members, in addition to some church leaders, had conducted themselves in one of two ways which pushed the participants away from faith and religious involvement. This contributed to stopping or slowing their trajectories away

from crime. One of those ways involved the participants feeling like they were mistreated or not valued as highly because of the way they looked and/or their past or current lifestyles of addiction and crime. The second way involved the participants watching, from a distance, regularly attending church members and its leadership behaving in ways not consistent with Biblical teachings. Enter the findings from Research Question One, which is where the participants reported finally feeling welcome and worthy of God-centered change at the church in this study. It should also be noted that none of the participants reported negative experiences from the church in the study, not as a whole or against any of its individual leaders and workers.

Not only is it important to know how former and current church experiences have emotionally affected populations such as these participants, it is also essential to know which religious and faith factors have affected law-abiding and law-breaking trajectories the most. This is what Research Question Three sought to explore within the context of the church in this study and from the perspective of the offenders.

The researcher identified six themes of religious or faith factors that the participants felt impacted their offending or law-abiding trajectories. Those six themes have been worked into a summation statement for Research Question Three, similar to the summation statement for Research Question One. Each factor is italicized.

Participants advised that the social structures and networking built from consistent involvement in the *Recovery program* and listening to *Pastor Seguin's sermons* helped increase their law-abiding trajectory. Partaking and/or leading in *Growth Groups* supplemented the above two primary themes. As a consequence of these, the participants' law-violating trajectories decreased in correspondence with lowering levels of alcohol and drug use. The participants felt that the positive peer pressure and constructive mentorship from leaders of the church, in the above three settings, as well as a growing relationship with God through faith, has

*increased self-control, has led to a healthier lifestyle, and has given them the desire to serve others through volunteering.* This is in contrast to their past motives and behaviors that primarily consisted of only seeking what could be given to them. These new factors did not exist in the minds of the participants before their religious participation and faith in Jesus Christ began to grow.

These factors have now not only been identified but also explained from the perspective of the participants. This helps to fill some of the large gap in the research knowledge about *how* and *why* the relationship between religion and faith correlates with deviance, crime, and prosocial behaviors (Levin, 2018).

In order to be thorough and not negate past research knowledge in regards to this study's theoretical framework, that of life-course criminology, the participants were interviewed about any and all turning points in their life, be they related to their religious involvement or not. Due to this broad, life-history based approach, 17 different turning points were given by the 15 participants. However, only one turning point was identified as a theme among the participants, that being the *attribution of God or salvation through Jesus Christ* as a seminal point in the lives of over half of the participants. According to them, this aided them in turning away from a life of addiction or crime.

This overview provides a series of events that gives unique insight into one viable way to lead people away from deviance and crime, while also providing ways to engage in prosocial behavior. It is essential to recognize that none of these participants were compelled to visit or participate in church events or exercises of the Christian faith. Instead, the participants appear internalize the tenets of the Christian faith and reap the benefits thereof, which are in contrast to their previous lifestyles.

## Future Research

The above described chain of events, and of course the research methods used to obtain them, can act as a blue print for future studies. This type of study should be replicated numerous times over across all geographic and demographic areas of the United States. Particular attention should be paid to the gender, race, and socioeconomic upbringing of the participants, as well as to the varying impacts other religions have on deviance and crime. Christian denomination should also be accounted for when considering the type of church or FBO that is attempting to attract and reform similar populations as the one in this study. Coupling results from these type of qualitative studies with the relatively larger body of existing quantitative data, should prove useful for criminal justice policy and faith-based initiatives.

Not enough prior research has sought the perspective and understanding of those being studied. Instead, academia has primarily tried to extract known and established variables in order to apply them to commonly accepted theoretical frameworks. This is short-sighted, obtuse, and not thorough enough. Longitudinal studies and life-history analyses seeking qualitative data will allow researchers to understand the mindset of the offender and not just variables that academics theorize as influencing offenders. Future research on this topic must seek to understand what attracts and repels law-abiding citizens and offenders to and from prosocial behaviors and criminal acts. To further understand and establish the relationship between increasing faith and religious involvement with decreasing deviance and criminal activity, qualitative studies must increase in number and rigor.

### *Qualitative Comparative Analysis*

One systematic strategy that qualitative studies can utilize is that of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) developed by Ragin (1999). This advanced technique, specifically designed for qualitative studies, would attempt to identify all the plausible themes that helped lead an offender or addict away from crime or substance abuse, but only in the context of how influential they were as a combination, not in isolation as traditional quantitative models do. Using this approach to the relationship between religiosity and crime should no doubt also incorporate the many established, traditional independent variables within criminology recognized as increasing or decreasing a person's or group's criminality.

QCA could also be used on the intra-exploration level of the numerous themes within religiosity to better understand how they work in combination with one another to impact prosocial behavior and decreasing deviance and offending. For instance, take the various dominant themes from this research project such as:

- the Recovery Group,
- the pastor's sermons,
- the atmosphere designed by church staff and volunteers to make the unchurched feel welcome,
- Growth Groups,
- the ability for participants in this study to volunteer at the church,
- a growing faith in God,
- consistent religious involvement, and
- law-abiding social capital

Analyzing them with QCA would not attempt to isolate and quantify them as traditional independent variables. Instead it would see which combinations of these themes, as well as others identified from similar future research, have the most impact on preventative and reforming effects away from substance abuse, criminal offending, and other forms of

deviance. Likewise, future research should also identify which combinations of these variables lend the most contribution to increasing prosocial behaviors.

### *Case Studies of Churches*

Perhaps one of the most obvious and important endeavors for future research on this topic is the need for in-depth, systematic case studies of churches like the one in this project. These could be dissertations and publishable research projects in and of themselves, which would further dissect the thematic and inconsequential steps taken by churches to attract offenders and addicts. After all, churches like the one in this study entice and retain the referenced population and that is often what starts a chain of desistance-events. Learning what churches like the one in this study intentionally execute and purposefully avoid when carrying out their organizational mission will also help inform other FBOs with similar goals and for parallel pathways.

Case studies should also be done for more traditional churches that have not been successful at attracting the unchurched. Participant observation and interviewing strategies of these churches' leaders, their staple membership, and guests at these churches would yield a wealth of information as to why they may struggle at gaining new attendees who may come from a life of addiction or crime. Furthermore, such case studies would help juxtapose non-traditional Christian churches, similar to the one in this study, with those who are engaging in the same, decades old outreach and missional techniques. This comparison and contrast would further illustrate how to engage, and ultimately obtain buy-in power, from offenders and addicts who are curious about their faith and church involvement.

The same call for cases studies of both types of churches should also be applied to the various types of FBOs. This particularly includes FBOs trying to reach the unchurched such as drug-rehabilitation facilities, food pantries, at-risk children and youth centers, pro-life pregnancy centers, homeless shelters, and the like. Much like traditional churches that fail to attract and retain a diverse membership demographic, the same may be true for FBOs. Case studies on FBOs engaging in strategies that parallel traditional churches may find that a massive overhaul of their mission and approach is needed to truly attract the people most in need of their services.

#### *Future Research Conclusion*

There are numerous paths, secular and non-secular, that have contributed to leading people away from lives of crime and addiction. The research literature demonstrates that religiosity is not only a reasonable pathway, but a potent one. All criminology research that seeks to understand how to lead people away from deviance and criminality should factor religiosity variables into their initial research planning. To not do so ignores large pieces of the puzzle, which all criminologists claim to be trying to properly construct.

The same is true for studies that concentrate on preventing youth and adults from ever engaging in substance abuse or crime. These law-abiding life trajectories that involve religious participation and an increasing faith in a higher being, which then protect individuals and groups from deleterious outcomes, are also understudied. Crime prevention is rarely as stimulating of a topic when compared to crime-fighting or rooting for the underdog who is going through the desistance process. For anecdotal proof just pay attention to television or Internet news or see what topics get the most attention



within social media. However, the financial and emotional savings for the individual, the family unit, the criminal justice system, and society would no doubt be healthier if the preventative effects of religiosity were better understood through future research, then applied to government and NGO policy. As the famous quote goes, which is credited to one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, Benjamin Franklin, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” (Franklin, 1735).

The literature review demonstrated that more than adequate, empirical evidence exists to demonstrate the preventative and reforming effects that increased faith and/or religious participation can have on both youth and adults. While dozens of individual studies and multiple meta-analyses show such correlations, the criminology academic community has yet to embrace the in-depth study on how and why religious participation and increased faith can prevent crime and help reform substance abusers and offenders. Even less acknowledged and researched is how and why these factors increase prosocial behaviors among both youth and adults who have never engaged in crime and also in desisting offenders or addicts (Levin, 2018).

This call-to-arms for criminology academia to lead an organized onslaught of further study on this topic is not just the opinion of the relatively few scholars who study the relationship between religiosity and crime. Leading scholars in both criminology and religious studies (Cullen, 2012; Jang and Franzen, 2013; Johnson 2011; Levin, 2018), have urged individual scholars and administrators over colleges and schools of criminology to take up this endeavor. Additionally, past studies have cited the necessity of future qualitative inquiries so as to further

discover and comprehend the details within the concepts of turning points and human agency (Chu, Sung, and Hsiao, 2012; Kirk, 2012; Mus & Eker, 2011; Salvatore & Taniguchi, 2012).

### Theoretical Implications

In Akers' and Sellers' (2013) criminology book entitled *Criminological Theories: Introduction, Evaluation, and Application*, they provide a multi-page table that outlines all the dominant theoretical approaches within criminology. It is Table 14.1 in their 6<sup>th</sup> edition book, and it has columns that summarize the following: Main Concepts, Main Proposition(s), Empirical Validity, and Main Policy Implications. Specifically, they disseminate which types of crimes, individual offenders, and groups of people each theory attempts to better understand in terms of crime prevention and desistance processes.

What is alarming within this table is that out of 22 separate theoretical frameworks, which address deviance or criminal activity, 15 of them are deemed to have varying levels of weak empirical validity. The spectrum of weak empirical validity range from "no validity" to "very weak" to "weak" to "weak to moderate" (Akers & Sellers, p. 276 – 279). With well over half of our fields dominant theoretical approaches not carrying enough statistical weight to be considered moderately or strongly able to explain or predict crime and deviance, our field has crucial shortcomings. These shortcomings cannot simply be blamed on its relative academic youth, albeit that is factor. Other understudied variables and phenomenon exist, and the role of faith and religion on individuals and sub-groups within any society is one of them.

Equally alarming is that only two of the remaining 7 theories in Table 14.1 are deemed by the authors as having “moderate” or “moderate to strong” empirical validity, those being Age-Graded Informal Social Control theories, such as Life-Course used in this dissertation, and Social Learning theories, respectively. None of the 22 theories were assessed as having a standalone strong empirical validity. So the question must be posed, how much empirical validity would be strengthened for several of these theories if researchers started incorporating variables into them such as religious participation, spiritual conversion, faith in a higher being, volunteerism/prosocial behavior due to participation in a structured religion, Christian-based counseling/rehabilitation, and so forth? Maybe an even more daunting question is how many of the above theories might lose credence because their theoretical framework was designed in such a fashion that it does not allow for incorporation of these variables?

None of the theories in Table 14.1 specifically center the role of religiosity in the forefront of their theoretical approaches when it comes to better understanding how to protect youth and young adults from starting trajectories in crime and deviance. Furthermore, none of the listed theories primarily utilize the role of religiosity in crime desistance and recovery from substance abuse as a staple concept within their theoretical frameworks. Of course, a few researchers within some of the listed theories have dabbled with the use of religiosity variables, but not to the extent necessary for full comprehension.

According to Akers’ and Sellers’ table, not one criminology theory surpasses moderately-strong explanatory or prediction power for crime. Many of

the theories fail to achieve minimally or moderately-low empirical validity for how and why crime and deviance occur. How can it be that with all the technological advancements in the last few decades with statistical software, data collection by government agencies and non-government organizations, and a blooming, but still relatively young academic field of criminology and criminal justice that only one or two theories approach or obtain strong explanatory or prediction abilities?

While the following theories were not utilized in this research project, it is imperative to demonstrate the potential role of religiosity variables on many other criminology theories. While addressing unapplied theoretical frameworks in the Theoretical Implications section of the final chapter may be atypical, conducting this theorization exercise will provide insight into the aforementioned empirical validity shortcomings of the criminology field. Could it be that as researchers we have locked into only one or a few theoretical frameworks and variables, and thus failed to consider how understudied factors could be applied to other theories that we do not typically consider as the foundation of our statistical inquiries? With this in mind, please immerse yourself into the following exercise.

At some point in an individual's growing religious faith, a required internal buy-in to the formal, structured religious tenets of which the person is trying to adhere must occur. Every person will at some point, maybe even multiple times throughout their lifespan, have to decide if they are going to fully adopt their faith's tenets or decline them through a gradual easing away process or certain knifing-off moment. Take for example Nye's (1958) contributions to

Social Control Theory. The most likely guarantee that one will not engage in criminal or anti-social activities is if they have internalized that those actions are inherently wrong. Individuals and groups must adopt this inheritance from somewhere. This is exactly what most peaceful religions are trying to instill in their followers, thus religiosity variables should be more wholeheartedly applied to research projects that use Social Control as their framework.

Internalization of not harming oneself or others, due to an increase in peaceful religious participation and a growing faith/spiritual conversion, provides a trickledown effect on several other criminology theories:

- It acts as a general deterrence for *Classical* based theoretical approaches.
- It helps to increase the *Rational Choice* of one's rewards versus costs, both on Earth and in the afterlife, for someone considering whether to cause harm or be prosocial.
- It can decrease motivated offenders due to their internalization and/or attempts to adhere to the central tenets of peaceable religions. It can also decrease vulnerable victims who may be engaging in self-harm from addiction or other choices that have increased their exposure to street crime. It can also increase the number of capable guardians for those who are more helpless like children and the elderly by solidifying the family unit or neighborhood, thus religiosity has a role to be studied in *Routine Activities*.
- For *Biosocial* policy implications, religiosity variables could result in better or increased prenatal care, which can stave off biochemical and neurological developmental deficiencies. It can also increase prosocial behavior such as volunteerism, which could potentially increase the amount of community programs designed to protect genetically, neurologically, or biologically underdeveloped persons.
- Many peaceful religions acknowledge the antithesis of their respective gods in the form of an evil being which uses demons, evil spirits, or the like to control human beings outside of their own consciousness. Religiosity variables can be used to study the ameliorating effects on *Psychoanalytic, Personality Trait, and Psychopathic disorders* that may be caused or influenced by negative spiritual existences.

Likewise, faith-based counseling can be more often implemented into studies using these frameworks, in addition to or as an alternative, to traditional, secular counseling practices.

- *Social Learning* theories are perhaps one of the easiest frameworks to apply religiosity variables. Children and youth raised in peaceful religious environments should be studied from a crime and prosocial perspective. Additionally, adults who adopt new social circles, away from lives of deviance and crime, as a result of increased religious participation and/or a spiritual conversion, should also be studied more regarding what and how they learn from their social environment.
- *Social Bonding* theories are also an obvious framework, whereas conformity, attachment, and commitment to one's faith and religious community work cyclically with belief and internalization of being prosocial and straying away from criminal or harmful behavior.
- Most peaceful religions teach and promote *Self Control*.
- Non-traditional churches, like the one in this project, have been successful at not engaging in the detrimental behaviors that *Labeling* theories warn against; thus, creating environments that foster Reintegrative Shaming and Restorative Justice. Restorative justice, within the confines of religiosity variables, may not involve specific, offenders mediating with past victims; however, those offenders can discover ways to be restored with society as a whole, due to their increased religious participation and new-found or restored spiritual conversion.
- *Social Disorganization, Strain, and Anomie* theories also allow for an easy application for religiosity variables to be tested and theorized. Peaceful religions promote structured and organized: family units, houses of worship, faith-based activities, platonic relationships, and neighborliness. This is the antithesis of social disorganization, which influences an increase in gangs, self-harm, drug dealing, stress, property crime, and assaults. These become generational and cyclical, but structured and peaceful family units and neighborhoods can also become generational and cyclical with the help of increased religious participation and more spiritual conversions on the part of individuals and sub-cultures.
- Inequality theories such as *Conflict, Marxist, and Feminist* are neutralized due to peaceful religions teaching contentment, joy, and peace within the confines of one's situation. This is accomplished through trust and faith in their higher-being, not a reliance on a specific economic system or culture to help one person or class prevail or make reparations for historical events.

### Discussion on Research Question #1 – “Why do the offenders attend this church?”

To fully explore the findings of research question number one, it is interesting to also point out answers that were *not* given. The absence of certain answers and trends is telling. For example, not one single participant stated that the reason they first attended or continued to attend this church’s activities was because they were getting some type of benevolence or free, material handouts. It is a natural assumption in our culture to believe that if you give things to people that an organization, be it a church, social club, or business, will attract membership or participants. While this may result in some temporary sustainment of people joining or being involved with an organization, it is argued that this does not foster long-term commitment to the goals of the organization, nor to the relevant success of the individual enticed by free things. On the other hand, the participants in this study visited this church, and then returned and invested themselves into the church because of what they were getting out of it, from a spiritual and emotional standpoint. None of them were compelled to attend by any criminal justice agency.

Additionally, it is quite common for churches to have a benevolence fund, where on certain days of the week or month, they delve out money to people in need. This type of financial assistance can range from paying for groceries, utilities, rent, and so on. The church in this study does not have such a program; yet they are able to attract and retain people who are often in such financial hardships, including several of the participants in this study.

Another lower than expected answer for research question number one is that only seven (46.67%) of the 15 participants cited the music and hi-tech entertainment aspects of the worship service as why they attended. Based upon the participant observation conducted within this study and having lived in the city where the two church campuses are located, it was expected that this might be a top tier answer. It was not. This reason did qualify as a second-tier response due to just under half of the participants either citing the live music performance and/or the hi-tech visual entertainment displays as one reason why they attend.

The above is not necessarily a negative mark against the church. It does not mean that the quality of the music and lighting technology is low. Rather it helps demonstrate that there are other, more salient reasons for attendance that provide spiritual and emotional support for those struggling. One participant, Davy C., best summarized this when he said that he really likes the music and entertainment, but those things probably are not doing much to increase his Christian walk in life, thus they are not why he continues to attend.

A final response that did not qualify as a theme should still be discussed. Six (40%) of the 15 participants stated that they first attended the church's Growth Groups and then began getting involved in the Sunday worship services. This type of response is to be expected based upon how the church encourages newcomers to engage. The church's general expectations and strategy is to draw visitors in for the professional, quality music and entertainment during weekend worship services, in addition to Pastor Seguin's well-received sermons. After this, due to the large number of people who attend each worship service, the church is very intentional in advertising and encouraging



attendees to “get plugged in” to a Growth Group, where friendships and emotional support groups can be made and fostered. With this in mind, it makes logical sense that participants in the study first found the Recovery program, then the Sunday services, and finally the Growth Groups. Remember that Growth Groups were not designed necessarily to pertain to addiction, grief, or some type of negative life circumstance. Rather, most of the Growth Groups’ subject matter offer Biblical based studies on a large variety of topics.

Discussion on Research Question #3 – “What religious/faith factors have affected their offending or law-abiding trajectories?”

It is essential to note what answers were mentioned less often. While these responses did not qualify as themes, this is not to say that the following responses are not valid variables to be utilized in future quantitative or qualitative projects. The following aspects of the Christian faith and/or religious events at the church in this study were mentioned by less than one-half of the participants, but were reported as having impacted their law-violating or law-abiding trajectories:

- praying multiple times daily (40%),
- a salvation experience/being saved (40%),
- the two primary ministers that lead the Recovery program and their impact on the participants (33.33%), and
- church services becoming engrained in the participants’ routine lifestyle (33.33%).

Some of these responses are essential aspects of the more dominant themes already delineated in the findings chapter for Research Question Three. An example of this is when five of the participants specifically mentioned the positive impact that the two lead ministers of the Recovery program had on their lives. Their interactions with

the two ministers made such an impression that the participants genuinely felt that the ministers were actively helping them stay away from drugs and crime. Even though only five out of 15 participants specifically mentioned the two lead ministers, 11 out of the 15 participants stated that the Recovery program was a primary reason that was positively influencing their law-abiding trajectories. As previously noted, the Recovery program received the highest frequency of answers for Research Question Three.

The leadership of Recovery, like any other organization or program, no doubt shapes its reputation and impact, be it positively or negatively. It should be noted that not every participant in this study was involved in the Recovery program. Four of the 15 participants were not a part of the Recovery program, meaning that all of the remaining 11, who were actively involved in Recovery, listed the program as an aspect of religious participation that had either aided in increasing their law-abidance or helped in decreasing their law-violating.

Another relationship such as the above was detected between the second-tier response of *church service participation becoming a way of life* and the fully identified theme of *church participation has had a self-perceived direct impact on the participants, leading to an all-around healthier lifestyle*. While only five (33.33%) stated that church participation had become engrained, ten (66.67%) felt their lives had already become healthier due to church attendance and participation. The latter answer was tied for second as the most common theme for Research Question Three.

#### *Notable Nuances*

There were other interesting distinctions within the data analysis that were not frequent enough to be labeled as themes, but that should still be reported because they

likely resonate with other people in this church and across the country, specifically those who find themselves in similar situations as these participants. Likewise, what is *not* discovered through qualitative interviews can be just as much of a finding as what is, especially when exploring both grounded theory and adding to established theoretical frameworks. As noted at the beginning of this section, the researcher intentionally avoided the assumption that only positive outcomes would result from an increase in church participation and the practice of the Christian faith. Unexpected negative effects reported by these participants should also be noted. The following paragraphs will help demonstrate the lack of response for expected or assumed salient factors and also what negative outcomes were reported.

#### *Reading the Bible and Praying Regularly*

Only four (26.67%) of the 15 participants stated that regularly reading and studying the Bible aided them in decreasing offending and/or increasing law-abiding or prosocial behavior. Similarly, only six (40%) participants mentioned that praying multiple times a day aided them in the same. Interestingly though, all participants in the study regularly attended at least two or more of the following: weekend church services, Growth Groups, and/or the Recovery program. All of these functions involve reading and studying the Bible every time they are held each week. Future studies on this topic should further parse the differences between participants who only study the Bible and pray in their organized groups versus others who also practice this aspect of their faith during their alone time.

While certainly not a trend in the analysis of this research question, participant W. Travis offered a tool that aided him in improving his law-abiding trajectory by growing

this particular Christian religious habit. He said that the lead counselor in the Recovery program gave him a book entitled The Search for Significance. W. Travis said he did not open the book for a month, but that once he did “it was a huge help.”

### *Salvation Experiences*

Having a spiritual salvation experience is a cornerstone act for multiple religions including Christianity. Not all the participants reported being saved or having a salvation experience. Specifically, nine (60%) out of the 15 participants advised that they had been saved. Of these nine participants, six (66.67%) contributed their Christian salvation as a religious/faith factor that affected their criminal or substance abuse trajectories in a decreasing direction. The other three did not reference their salvation as a factor that changed their offending trajectory in either direction. It should also be noted that the age range of when the participants were saved varied greatly. This spanned childhood into their teenage years and as adults before and after their criminal lifestyles existed.

The below paraphrased statements represent what the participants as a whole reported when referring to their Christian salvation. When asked what it means to be a former addict who is now a Christian and attends church events regularly, William Travis said that because of his salvation and God’s grace and love, he has eternal life. He went on to say that nothing sinful that he does in the future or that he has committed in the past matters in terms of making him feel guilty and pushing him towards crime or deviance. He said that he does not have to think about the fact that he is a former addict who participates in religious functions. It never even crosses his mind anymore. William T. then stated that God can release people from drugs, and that individuals cannot do it on

their own. God helping William T. obtain sobriety was the most supernatural experience he has ever had.

Participant Moses Austin said that the day he was saved is also the day he obtained sobriety. He was homeless and living in a garbage bag tent, and he told God to get him out of that situation and location. He was a methamphetamine addict who had also been a dealer of the same drug. Moses said that he woke up in his garbage bag tent due to the cops being there. They took him to a rehabilitation center instead of charging him with the approximately two ounces of methamphetamine in his possession. He had no other explanation, besides God and his salvation experience, as to why the police did not arrest him. Prior to this, Moses had attempted suicide eight times.

*Potential Negatives from Religious and Faith Factors.*

Two negative effects were reported to have occurred while the participants were engaging in religious participation or the practice of their faith at this church. However, none of the participants cited these negative effects as impacting their criminal or substance abuse trajectories in either direction. One effect was mentioned one time each by two female participants, and the other effect was mentioned once by a male participant. Due to this, they are not considered to be themes, but are noteworthy.

The two females acknowledged that discussing and thinking about old memories related to their past offending and deviance causes them emotional hurt. They both said that this occurs during the Recovery program when divulging their past and contemplating what they formerly engaged in. They realized that this was part of the recovery process, but did not like having to think about their past while engaging in the practice of their faith. Emily West explained this with the following quote:

...but memories are triggers, memories trigger pain and pain leads to possible relapse or addiction, sometimes sermons bring that out and I have to confront it. It's not always rainbows and butterflies...if you are going to be triggered, church is good place for it to happen; God handles it mostly when those triggers occur.

The one male participant stated that sometimes during weekend church services, the light shows and visual technology effects, used during the music worship, can be distracting. The distraction takes away from his ability to worship by him not being able concentrate on the musical lyrics.

Discussion on Research Question #4 – “When, if ever, did the offenders perceive a turning point(s) in their lifestyle?”

#### *Traditional Turning Points Listed by the Participants*

As discussed in the literature review, a medley of turning points have been identified in past research. The nature of this study did not avoid or deny the reporting of those turning points by the participants. It should be noted that the below turning points, at face value, may appear to have no relationship to the participants' Christian faith. However, some of the participants felt that that the below events were used by God to either introduce or strengthen their relationship with God.

Participants reported both positive and negative events of which they considered turning points away from crime or addiction. Examples of negative turning points include, but are not limited to, the death of a loved one, the ending of a relationship at the dismay of the participant, being confined in jail or prison, or a series of negative life events that happen in relative succession. When these would occur, they would sometimes be what pushed the participants to start visiting or participating at the church in this study. The result of them visiting and participating at the church would be an

increase in religious involvement and strengthening faith. This would act as support or continuance, from the original turning points, to help the participants heal and change their life trajectories away from crime and drugs.

The below responses were given as turning points by the participants, but not at a rate that resulted in them being identified as themes. Due to this they will simply be listed for contextual purposes.

- Death of Loved One = 2 Females & 3 Males
- Birth of Child = 3 Females
- A New Boyfriend, Girlfriend, or Engagement = 3 Males
- Prison/Jail = 1 Female & 4 Males
- A Lost or Ended Relationship = 2 Females & 2 Males
- Negative Career/Job Event = 1 Male who this occurred twice to
- Positive Career/Job Event = 1 Female who this occurred twice to & 4 Males
- A Series of Negative Life Events = 1 Female & 4 Males
- Serving at Church in this Study = 1 Female
- Caretaking of Older Relative = 1 Female & 1 Male
- A Near Death Experience with Drugs = 2 Males
- Almost Losing Wife or Family Member = 1 Male
- Confronted by Fellow Addict to Change Ways = 1 Male
- Rehabilitation/Counseling = 1 Female & 3 Males

#### Policy Implications

It is not enough to simply acknowledge that there is an inverse relationship between religion/faith and deviance/offending. How and why these relationships occur is what will precisely inform criminal justice agencies and non-government entities, specifically but not limited to faith-based organizations (FBOs), on how to heal and reform offenders in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. For FBOs, they will also benefit from learning how to reach people before they enter criminal career paths so as to decrease the chances that such youth simply become

just another case file within the criminal justice system. FBOs can also use these types of research results to better draw in, retain, and then help reform offenders.

FBOs are non-profit organizations whose actions can benefit criminal justice agencies within local, state, and federal governments that are increasingly under fiscal constraints, skepticism from public opinion, and caught within the windstorm of political ideologies. There is evidence in this study that FBOs, who intentionally try to reach the unchurched, can do so with results that involve changing criminal and substance abuse trajectories. The study of how religiosity can benefit the criminal justice system, and more importantly society as whole, is an area of research that is not fully developed.

This study, in addition to the literature review, has demonstrated that there is policy relevance. When repetitive, criminal offenders or those with substance addiction cite the initiatives of such churches as the one in this study as a means to help them recover, the impact is no doubt substantial. The success of contemporary churches and other FBOs that cater to those who are uncomfortable relating to a traditional church atmosphere have far-reaching policy changes for the criminal justice system. The monetary savings and efficacy need not be explained.

The correctional divisions of the criminal justice system could choose to partner with such churches on a formal or informal basis. Formally, these types of churches could lead Bible studies, grief and recovery groups, sobriety classes, faith-based life skills courses, and the like, all inside jails and prisons. Doing this while implementing similar attraction and retention strategies as the church in this study would be crucial. Churches and FBOs almost always engage in the above type endeavors on a volunteer basis. That means the program is funded by the



religious institution for free and the workers are not being paid. This will result in either the ceasing increase of costs for government entities to provide these courses and activities, or it will actually decrease costs because correctional agencies can reduce their own employment and program expenditures.

Even if no formal partnership is achieved, correctional agencies could make it known to offenders that these types of non-traditional, religious entities exist and have demonstrated elements of success for those struggling with reentry woes. Educating confined offenders about the benefits obtained from such FBOs via social capital, social glue, faith-based counseling, and spiritual healing can help lead them to such churches as this one in this study.

The cyclical and generational effects of society's increased religiosity in preventing initial criminal behavior, substance abuse, and deviance could be astronomical in terms of fiscal government savings and private-business economic creation. Decreased criminal behavior and thus decreased arrests due to those actions means less money spent downstream in the criminal justice system. Law enforcement agencies are known as the gatekeepers of the system. If they are not detecting as much crime because less crime is being committed then the subsequent financial expenditures also decrease for the law enforcement agencies, the jails, the courts, probation offices, prisons, reentry programs, and all the elements of recidivism that the criminal justice system has in place.

A similar path can be seen for non-criminal, deviant behavior such as many forms of substance abuse and juvenile delinquent behavior. Less substance abuse will lead to less crime. It will also lead to savings within the healthcare system, resulting in less money spent on the short-term effects of addiction in emergency rooms, along with the

long-term effects in medical hospitals, behavioral hospitals, and pharmaceutically because of the chronic disorders and diseases from years of harming one's body. The criminal justice system would likely see a major decrease in low-level offenses usually associated with drug-abusers and for serious felonies usually associated with drug-dealers.

Cities, counties, and states also operate tax-funded drug rehabilitation prisons, institutions, or hospitals. If more studies were conducted on FBOs that also provide similar entities, then both styles could learn from one another on how to be more effective and reduce recidivism. Of course, if FBOs were deemed to be the more efficient and effective option, then the state-operated facilities could explore shutting down, thus saving taxpayer money, or invoking elements used by the FBOs. The same would be true for therapeutic communities, half-way houses, or similar.

Overall, lower levels of recidivism and crime prevention equate to less burden on law enforcement simply due to lower numbers of people committing fewer crimes. The preventative effects of staving off the next generation of criminal offenders could have a ripple effect for generations after that. Also to be taken into account is that there are existing churches and FBOs not practicing the outreach and retention strategies as the church in this study is able to execute. More studies like this one would help delve out what changes traditional churches and FBOs need to make to help reach offenders, addicts, and other unchurched groups.

In conclusion, houses of worship and FBOs are uniquely situated to meet the above proposed needs. Almost every community and neighborhood can be found to have a plentiful number of churches, faith-based organizations providing

needs to the impoverished, faith-based drug rehabilitation centers, and the like in close proximity to high crime neighborhoods and under-served populations (Levin, 2018). These buildings and landmarks are often more physically accessible to victims, substance abusers, and offenders than government buildings which have elements of security and bureaucracy that can be cumbersome. If continued research on this topic establishes that offenders feel, or directly know, that their increased religiosity and strengthened faith helped them to recover or desist, a symbiotic relationship between the criminal justice system and similarly structured churches would prove most impactful.

## APPENDIX A – History of Religion in United States

- 1598 & 1607 - Spain and England, respectively, send groups to modern day New Mexico and Virginia, in part to spread their denominations of Christianity.
- 1620 & 1630 – The Pilgrims, then the Puritans, disembark in modern day Massachusetts, desiring religious freedom from what they see as an immoral Church of England.
- 1634 – Catholics began colonizing modern day Maryland.
- 1654 – First Jewish colony is established in modern day New York City.
- 1682 – William Penn establishes modern day Pennsylvania and openly invites people from all faiths.
- 1701 – Upon the passage of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel, missionaries begin to proselytize Christianity to African slaves.
- 1734 through 1760s – The First Great Awakening results in Christianity being heard by many colonialists, whom may not have otherwise been exposed. The idea that individuals can have a one-on-one relationship with God spreads among the masses.
- 1769 – Approximately 20 Catholic missions are established in modern day California.
- 1776 – Inalienable rights are ordained, or God-given, is promulgated in the Declaration of Independence.
- 1784 – Americans come into contact with Asian religious practices due to the establishment of consistent trade between the continents.
- 1791 – With the passage of the Bill of Rights, individual liberties are further protected. The First Amendment stated that the government will not have a state-run religion, and that the practice of any religion for individuals is protected.
- 1790 through 1840 – The Second Great Awakening, in combination with mass exploration of the western frontier, results in the growing popularity of non-state operated churches. Protestant denominations increase their numbers.
- 1800 through 1840s – Evangelical Protestants push for societal changes, including but not limited to: abolition of slavery, better prison conditions, Native Americans' rights, ending poverty, feeding the hungry, increasing literacy, women's rights, and abstaining from alcohol.
- 1830 – Over 1,000,000 Bibles are printed in the U.S.
- 1850 through 1900 – The number of Catholic priests increased by a multiple of 10, and nuns increased by a multiple of 25. There were three times as many nuns in the U.S. as there were Catholic parishioners.
- 1861 – The Civil War begins with inter-denomination and intra-denomination fighting and organizational splitting due to slavery.
- Late 1800s thru early 1900s – Protestantism has the strongest foothold in the U.S.; however, there are large geographical populations that practice Judaism and Catholicism. Catholicism is the single largest denomination in 1890.
- 1906 – San Francisco is the first city to have a Hindu sanctuary.
- 1920 – Both alcohol prohibition and women's right to vote are codified. Both are championed by many Christian denominations and religious-based social groups.

- 1924 – The U.S. has received a mass number of Jewish people who are escaping oppression in Europe. As a result, the U.S. leads the world in being the home country of the most Jewish immigrants.
- 1945 – Religious participation increases sharply after WWII. This is in part due to the emerging cold war where communism is viewed as anti-religion, and the U.S. capitalistic system, which is diametrically opposed to communism, is booming.
- 1950s onward – Billy Graham’s evangelical movement spreads across the country, and the term, Judeo-Christian, becomes commonplace when describing America’s value set.
- 1956 – The U.S. national motto is coined, “In God We Trust”.
- 1960s – Religious broadcasts on radio and television are in full swing.
- 1963 – The U.S. Supreme Court rules that public schools cannot require students to pray or read from the Bible, *Abington School District v. Schempp*.
- 1964 – The Civil Rights Act is passed. Many key leaders in the movement come from a religious background, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.
- 1976 – *Time* magazine declares 1978 as the “Year of the Evangelical”, due to rising numbers of people joining nondenominational churches.
- 1979 through 1980s – Both fundamental and evangelical Protestants increase their involvement in political affairs. Fundamentalist leader, Jerry Fallwell, fully engages in what Billy Graham and the evangelicals have been doing for approximately two decades.
- 1990s – The Asian-American population grows so much in the late 80s and early 90s, that substantial growth is also seen among Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. They are all still in the minority of religious and philosophical outlooks in the U.S.
- Late 1990s – The concept of spiritual, but not religious begins to spread across the U.S.

## CHAPTER VI – REFERENCES

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