THE IMPACT OF SOCIETAL CHANGES ON A TRADITIONAL CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF SOCIETAL CHANGES ON A TRADITIONAL CHURCH

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The purpose of this study was to explore the changes in Civil Society that have impacted the traditional church, specifically Seminary Baptist Church (SBC). Although there is a plethora of changes in civil society, only three will be the focus of this study: generational shift, technology, and diversification. The greatest challenge for SBC was diversification. The new ethnic and cultural diversity that now exists around them has produced two significant adversaries: (1) the congregation's struggle to embrace change, and (2) failure to reconnect with the surrounding community. Thus, leading one to ask; can SBC build a church that is reflective of the diversity, while maintaining a felt experience in unity? In light of the complexity of this question, it was important to explore the historical perspective of the Baptist tradition as well as the formation of the African American Baptist Church. In addition, an examination of the changes in civil society and the direct impact on the life and relevance of SBC was explored.

Quantitative research was used, including surveys, interviews/observations with the church leadership, a sample of the church congregation, and the civil community around the church. Findings indicated that building a more inclusive church was viable for SBC. Despite the challenge of the view that the congregation sees itself as an "African American Black Church", leadership understands that change has occurred and the church needs to rebuild a relationship with the community.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my mother, Janie McMillan, who began this academic theological journey with me when I was working on my MDIV, but time did not allow her to see this day. She taught her children to embrace others and their differences. And for my daughter, Morgan, and my siblings who are so supportive.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Life changes over time and the things which we have been accustomed, may become strange and cause strained situations. Communities, families, relationships, and even how we interact with each other changes. This is also true for our faith communities. There is not one area of life that remains untouched by time and change. For instance, historically, people choose church attendance near their home. Generally, the congregants have lived in the same geographic community which made attendance and fellowship easier. People usually chose a church that teaches the same beliefs they have, and worship with people who look like them and speak their language. This combination of singularity in culture; including ethnicity and language; helps to unify the faith community. In addition, geography may support unity as those who live in the community have greater social access to each other and can informally practice their doctrinal beliefs.

However, the unity of doctrinal beliefs may become strained in practice when there is diversity in culture. The neighborhoods change over time; this evolution is related to the social, economic, and political landscape in civil society. The changes may occur so that the community becomes multiracial and multicultural. When this happens, congregations within the community change as well. Choosing a church that teaches values and beliefs with which one agrees, may mean attending worship services where diversity is common. What is the impact of this change on the traditional church? The church will become disconnected from the community. Different ethnic groups may have historical baggage between them that challenges the most basic and foundational doctrinal beliefs. Worship style and practice may become or feel uncomfortable and lacking in unity if each group is afforded the freedom to worship in their accustomed traditions. These are the challenges facing Seminary Baptist

Church (SBC). This disruption to the unity of the church is described by the senior pastor as the greatest challenge to the life and relevance of the church. The complexity for SBC is discovering ways to connect with the community, understand the needs, and assist in substantial ways. It was for this reason that I explored the issue of unity and disunity in the SBC, as well as possible ways to manage this challenge. This was implemented by interviewing the church leadership, congregants, and members of the community who may have viewed the church as a potential place of worship. Hearing the voices of all the stakeholders brings clarity to the definition of the issues and solutions.

Thus, this study will be presented in eight chapters. Chapter one is the introduction that includes the overview of the study topic. Chapter two will provide the foundational groundwork that establishes the importance of the study problem and the conceptual framework that grounds the study. Chapter three will include the literature review including global history of the Baptist Church, the African American Baptist Church, and of SBC. In addition, it will include a discussion of unity and disunity in the church, changes in civil society that impact the congregation and specific issues that have impacted and challenged them. Chapter four will present the research questions, define the research design and methodology; including a definition of the sample subjects; and the analysis. Chapter five will present the results of the study and interpretations of said results. Chapter six will include a discussion of findings in relation to SBC. In addition, it will include a presentation of limitations of the study and anticipated contributions. Chapter seven will present recommendations specifically for SBC, the universal church and future research. Lastly, Chapter eight will present concluding statements about the topic and the study itself.

CHAPTER TWO: STUDY PROBLEM

The life of the church is sustained when there is a felt unity among congregants; the unity is experienced at its' pinnacle when the church functions and messages are relevant to and embraced by the congregants. However, there is constant change in the world that impacts the faith community and may challenge or even disrupt church unity. Some societal change, such as diversification, may challenge the traditional practices and doctrinal beliefs resulting in sowing seeds of disunity. Diversification may force the recognition of real-life social issues in civil society and require the church to engage in self inventory to understand its' own culpability in relation to the issues. How the church leadership responds to the impact of civil societal change on the church gives direction to the congregant stakeholders. The leaderships' response defines the change, the meaning of the change, how to respond to the change and how the impact will be managed in order to sustain the life of the church. Any sown seeds of disunity must be transparently acknowledged and explored in order to maintain an environment of positive felt unity.

Change evokes some diversification; what does this mean to the felt experience of unity in the church? What informs the development of a felt experience of disunity in the church? What can be done to create an environment of unity and manage the felt experience of disunity in the context of diversification? How does a traditional African American Baptist Church sustain the life of the church in the context of diversification? Can a church sustain itself in such a context? What are the societal changes that might impact the church? How does one start to explore these issues?

In asking these questions, it is necessary to consider the history of the Baptist Church. The Baptist Church developed out of an experience of conflict and disunity. This will be discussed

in detail in the literature review, however, at this point it is important to note that the struggle for a unified church was the foundation in the development of the Baptist Church. Historically, the church was developed with autonomy from any governance other than the Bible. This conceptualization of autonomy provides the opportunity to use Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) as an example to begin exploration of these issues. SBC is a traditional African American Baptist Church that struggles with issues of decreased membership, diversification of the congregation and the community surrounding the church, a feeling of stagnation in some ministry activities and a division in the church related the felt experiences of unity and disunity by factions in the congregation. What has caused this internal discord and how are societal changes related to this? This study may help SBC to begin to explore these issues and meet the challenges of the church.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The History of the Baptist Tradition

In order to understand and appreciate unity, disunity, and autonomy as they function within the Baptist tradition, one needs to "reconstruct the situation out of which it emerged."[1] "Historical records clearly record that the Baptist origins grew out of the Congregationalist movement"[2]. This Congregationalist movement "arose out of a Puritan background."[3] The Puritans were a group of believers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who were members of the Church of England. They wanted an authentic "spiritual life"[4] and connection with God. After the Church of England's break with Rome, the church continued some of the practices associated with Rome, which the Puritans felt hampered them from pursuing "a deeper spiritual life"[5] and relationship with God. This led to "a movement within the Church of England to fully break away from Roman influences; like Popery- practices and ceremonies associated with the Pope"[6], and an adherence to stricter religious forms, according to the Word of God. This group of Puritans, in the beginning, were unified in their doctrinal beliefs and practices.

Eventually, this movement for stricter reforms of the Church of England did not go far enough for everyone in the group because it did not "reject two critical issues: (1) The parish church, a practice that accepted everyone, believers, and nonbelievers as members, along with

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[1] Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, rev.ed*. (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1991), 10

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[2] Maring and Hudson, "Polity and Practice," 10.

[3] Ibid., 12

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

the practice of infant baptism. (2) The right of the civil ruler to supervise the life of the Church of England."[7] As a result, this caused tension among the Puritans, and the Congregationalist Movement was born. The Congregationalists sought "a deeper spiritual life"[8] and connection with God. In essence, this group was more conservative in their doctrinal beliefs and practices. They "rejected the Church of England's doctrine of the Parish Church that automatically accepted everyone in the parish community as members."[9]

Unfortunately, this same paradigm of tension and schisms within the Baptist Church that led to the establishment of a more defined polity is seen today within our Baptist Churches, and throughout Baptist history. Tension over church polity and doctrine have caused many Baptist Churches to split and form another Baptist Church. These Congregationalists were united in their contention that the "visible churches ought to be composed of visible saints, believers. They also insisted that churches should admit to membership only those persons who could testify to their own Christian experience. "[10] This is the first real glimpse of doctrinal beliefs and practices as they took shape within the Baptist tradition. Their argument was that "with membership thus restricted, congregations were transformed into "gathered" instead of "parish" congregations."[11] Gathered congregations were churches composed of believers only, while parish congregations were composed of both believers and non-believers. It was this concept of the "gathered church" that defined and solidified what we have come to accept today in our churches; biblically, spiritually, and religiously. The word Baptist is derived from a Greek

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[7] Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, rev.ed*. (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1991), 12.

[8] Maring and Hudson, "Polity and Practice," 12.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 13

[11] Ibid.

term that means, 'to immerse,'[12] and "the adoption of baptism by immersion as the approved method of baptism by the Baptist came a few years after their beginning."[13] Prior to immersion, "baptism was done by pouring water upon the head."[14] So, I would go even further and state that rejection of infant baptism, baptism by immersion, and church authority, as well as other tenets within the Baptist tradition, emerged out of this "gathered church" concept. This probably was the genesis for the other tenets that followed. Especially, when the key factor and term was "believer". Everything hinges on the confession and status of the believer.

These Congregationalists believed in the doctrine of "sole competency, which meant that everyone must be able to make a conscious decision and confession in accepting Christ."[15] This was one of the reasons why the Congregationalists rejected the Church of England's practice of infant baptism because infants could not make a conscious decision or confession in accepting Christ. Not, wanting to exclude children, they instituted guidelines that automatically grafted or indoctrinated children into the church under the presupposition that "the church is composed of visible saints and their children,"[16] "and that when the children grew up, they would testify to God's saving work in their lives."[17]

Not long after, the issue of autonomy arose again among the Congregationalists. There was still a concern about having civil authorities ruling the life of the church. This issue brought

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[12] J. Carl Laney, "Baptism Meaning and Mode," Transformed blog, February 25, 2014, accessed January 4, 2021, www.Transformedblog.westernseminary.edu/2014/02/25/baptism-meaning-and-mode

[13] Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, rev.ed.* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1991), 9.

[14] Maring and Hudson, *"Polity and Practice,"* 15.

[15] William M. Pinson, Jr., "Is Soul Competency The Baptist Distinctive," access December 3, 2021, www.Baptistdistinctives.org/Is-Soul-Competency-The-Baptist-Distinctive?

[16] Maring and Hudson, "Polity and Practice," 13.

[17] Ibid.

tension within the group because "some still held to the idea that the civil government was responsible for the welfare of the church, and they held onto the hope of state support," which was inconsistent with the group's assertion of the gathered church being "responsible in governing their own affairs."[18] It was their contention that as a "covenant church, it is the solemn agreement between the members of the church to act together in harmony"[19] in the affairs of the church. Being autonomous, independent in one's thoughts and action, free from outside interference, and self-governing was a necessary element for the church. The "doctrine of religious liberty grew out of the conviction of the necessity for the church to be free to obey God." [20] A church cannot be free to obey God if there is outside interference.

This is relevant because Rome exercised civil authority over the Catholic Church for centuries. Even after the Reformation, that began in 1517, to change and improve practices in the Catholic Church, "Roman influence was still being adhered to in the Church of England."[21] The Congregationalists wanted complete separation of church and state. The idea of being autonomous rested on the assertion that "only Christians could offer true worship to God, and that God alone could affect regeneration by the inner witness of the Spirit, they insisted that the state should not interfere by prescribing religious beliefs or practice."[22] "They said that the church must be left free to seek and execute the will of God."[23] Autonomy was a critical issue that caused tension within the Church of England.

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[18] Maring and Hudson, "Polity and Practice," 13.

[19] Ibid., 12.

[20] Ibid., 9.

[21] Ibid., 14.

[22] Ibid., 9.

[23] Ibid.

Finally, in defiance of government authority, John Smyth and his followers broke away from the Church of England, becoming a separatist group.[24] Again, "they wanted to restrict church membership to believers only, as part of what they referred to as the "gathered church" and they hoped to safeguard the membership."[25] So Smyth instituted the "believers' baptism and rejected the practice of infant baptism."[26] 'Believers' baptism' related to believers old enough to confess their faith and were then baptized, and it applies to those who "maintain the idea of the gathered church, and emphasize the importance of the local church in governing its own affairs."[27]As a result, Smyth established the First General Baptist Church of Holland in 1609. The word Baptist is derived from a Greek term that means, 'to immerse,'[28] and "the adoption of baptism by immersion as the approved method of baptism by the Baptist came a few years after their beginning."[29] Prior to immersion, "baptism was done by pouring water upon the head."[30]

Pinn and Pinn records that

> In 1612 seeking a purer fellowship with God and fellow Christians, Smyth set out to merge with another Christian group called the Mennonites. This purer fellowship meant a strict commitment to God, and the followings of scripture and religious practices."[31] It was out of this strict commitment to God and following of scripture that the practice of baptism by immersion emerged. The strict adherence of scripture, and the Biblical passage of John the Baptist practice of baptism by immersion allowed the visitation of how baptism was currently being performed and gave credence to the decision to modify it to align with

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[24] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to The Black Church,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 63.

[25] Maring and Hudson, *"Polity and Practice,"* 14.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 15.

[28] J. Carl Laney, "Baptism Meaning and Mode," Transformed blog, February 25, 2014, accessed January 4, 2021, www.Transformedblog.westernseminary.edu/2014/02/25/baptism-meaning-and-mode

[29] Maring and Hudson, "Polity and Practice," 9.

[30] Ibid., 15.

[31] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church*, 63.

scripture.

In 1630 an English chaplain, Roger Williams, was also disillusioned with the practices of the Church of England and "rejecting the concept that Christendom was regulated by geography,"[32] traveled to the United States. Williams and his wife settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony for some time. Then, "in 1633, after adamantly protesting for complete separation from the Church of England, which meant rejection of family, friends, and civil authority,"[33] "opposition arose and Williams was expelled from the church. Some years later, with a small group of followers, Williams formed a community along the Great Salt River, which was called Providence, and later became a part of the colony of Rhode Island."[34] It was here in 1639 that Roger Williams "planted the First Baptist Church in the Colony of Rhode Island, USA. Thereafter, other Baptist churches were established throughout the country and world."[35]

Thus, the sixteenth and seventeenth century for "the Baptist was a period of organization and structural growth and intense controversy."[36] Desiring an "authentic spiritual life and connection with God," a group of Puritans formed a church and the establishment of the church being an autonomous religious entity. This formation was not without struggle and intense controversy internally as well. It underwent periods of reorganization and structure within the movement to produce what we identify with as Baptist today. In essence, Baptist identity emerged out of a movement to define itself by a theological contrast to the Anglican Church of England and commenced as a tradition in 1608 with its beliefs and practices of the gathered congregation, sole

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[32] Ibid., 65.

[33] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church*, 65.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 66.

[36] William H. Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought: A Source Book, rev. Ed*. (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1998), 16.

competency, believer's baptism (later by immersion), non-infant baptism, and church autonomy.

B. African American Baptist History:

The African American Baptist Church, also seeking an authentic spiritual life and connection with God, struggled to define itself by a theological contrast from the white mainline Baptist Church. It experienced many changes which included disunity, unity, and autonomy to produce the African American Baptist Church. Its evolution finds its place in the center of social, political, and religious resistance. The Baptist Church was united overall on doctrinal beliefs like believer's baptism, baptism by immersion, rejection of infant baptism, and practice of autonomy. However, the Baptist church was divided on social, political, and religious issues that caused tension within its traditions, as well as other white mainline protestant churches.

This tension was the result of the practice of slavery and what Michael Battle describes as the "understanding of humanity identity"[37] within mainstream churches and civil society at that time (1700). "Use of the master-slave (Philemon Book) scripture in the New Testament to sanction such deplorable practice"[38] resulted in the idea that "blacks were less than human."[39] That subservient relationship of master and slave, which included the continued practice of selling and owning slaves, harsh beatings of slaves if they tried to run away, disobey the slave master's rules, or made any independent decisions about their lives. This caused tension and division within the church because there were those who believed that slavery was contrary to Christ's gift of redemption for all humanity, which meant that slaves were equal to whites in

[37] Michael Battle, *The Black Church in America: African American Christianity Spirituality*, (Naga City/Camarines, Philippines, 2006), 62.

[38] Ibid., 48.

[39] Ibid.

the eyes of God. This was contrary to what others within the church believed and practiced in terms of slavery. They did not want to accept this Christian understanding of God's grace and redemption because they wanted to continue slavery for economic and social gains which produced tension and division in the church.

There was segregation of African Americans in church as well. All slaves were forced to sit in the balcony of the church. This caused disunity because all of this went against Christian principles that viewed all human beings as equals in the face of Christ. There were those in the church "who defined black as less than human."[40] "That they had not souls to be saved**.**"[41] However, it is critical to understand that those in power usually set the guidelines in which the powerful operate. Therefore, in this context, the power to define humanity was left in the hands of white America who violated God's view of humanity in all people, especially African Americans as was previously described. Biblical and theological arguments, though flawed, were used to defend this mentality that supported an oppressive slave system of bondage. Meaning slaves were to submit to their masters, laws that did not allow gatherings, a prohibition for slaves to read and write, and the prohibition of "true communal spirituality,"[42] or worship among slaves.

Despite the mentality and behaviors to subjugate African Americans, many African slaves were converted. Not all white churches adhered to the behavior and practices of the dominant culture. The Quakers and other white Abolitionist Christian leaders continued to evangelize and push for the end of slavery. "As a result, more and more Africans began to attend white

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[40] Battle, *Black Church in America*, 48.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 44.

churches with restrictions-in seating, communion services, and property ownership."[43] Unfortunately, "the ambivalence toward Christian salvation as truly mutual for African Americans was not evident until the first Great Awakening, beginning in the 1730's."[44] The preaching between 1786-1790 appealed to Africans because it was a proclamation of inclusion. The primary focus at that time was conversion; proclaiming the sufficiency of Christ, the assertion that the atonement of Christ was sufficient to save all human beings, not just the elect. This is relevant because this theological assertion challenged the mentality that Africans were part of the "acquisition of property", and the grace of God for all humanity was diminished by the slave system. This Spiritual Awakening addressed the grace and love of God for all human beings. Therefore, Baptist Churches appealed to many, including enslaved Africans."[45] As a result, "many Africans were converted and established their own congregations and ultimately separate denominations due to the restrictions in worship, communion, and seating in white churches"[46] "since authentic worship with whites was impossible."[47]

From a historical perspective, this is demonstrated when one examines "the origins of Silver Bluff in Beech Island, South Carolina in 1750. Historical records credit, as the first all-gathered congregation,"[48] "founded by George Liele and managed by David George."[49] It i**s** recorded that "the church in Silver Bluff was a gathered church of African Americans who

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[43] Battle, *The Black Church in America*, 50.

[44] Ibid., 46.

[45] Ibid., 80.

[46] Ibid., 50.

[47] Ibid., 50-51.

[48] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church,* 69.

[49] Ibid., 69.

began with eight believers to over thirty believers before being disbanded."[50] "After George Liele's conversion, his owner, Henry Sharp, who was a Baptist deacon, gave George his freedom so he could pursue God's call."[51]As a result, Liele traveled to various slave quarters preaching the atonement of Christ was sufficient to save all human beings until he established Silver Bluff, and David George managed it. These spiritual gatherings gave African Americans space to validate their existence and the hope they had in a God who heard them and understood their plight. This God who would one day rescue them from the oppressive state of slavery as the Jews were rescued.

The focus of the black church at this time was on the saving knowledge of Christ, salvation, and black existence as human beings. In addition, it gave hope to African Americans where little hope existed, due to slavery and oppression. Then, during the American Revolutionary War, "David George" and his followers, seeking freedom, escaped to Savannah, Georgia, and after the war established the "First African church", which in 1777 became known as "First Church,"[52] and later officially recognized as a church in 1788. Two years later, First African Church was admitted to the Georgia Association of Baptist Churches. Thereafter, unity among African American Baptist Churches continued to develop as African American Churches grew, "even under existing social restrictions and white control."[53]

There are two characteristics that were also critical in the formation of the African Baptist

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[50] William H. Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought: A Source Book, rev. Ed*. (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1998), 152.

[51] Lesley Hildreth, "Missionaries You should Know: George Liele," IMB.org series, June 26, 2018, access January 4, 2021, www.imb.org/2018/06/26/missionaries-you-should-know-george-liele

[52] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church*, 69.

[53] Ibid., 70.

Church during this time. The first characteristic is autonomy. As these African Baptist churches developed, they sought to maintain a sense of autonomy and religious freedom without outside control. This is relevant because during the formation of the Baptist tradition, autonomy was one of the primary reasons for separating from the Anglican Church of England. The principles of autonomy also helped distinguish Baptist from other Protestant churches. Even though there had been decades of internal tensions and schism within the tradition, the fundamental doctrinal characteristics remained: believers' baptism, baptism by immersion, rejection of infant baptism, and church autonomy. However, even with the reality of slavery and institutional racism, the African Baptist churches "functioned outside mainline Baptist churches, but not without white supervision and control."[54]

It was not until after the Civil War and Reconstruction (1863-1877,) that functioning as a free independent African Baptist Church; without oversight and control; became a reality. This independence and autonomy led to the development of organizations, associations, and later the formation of the National Baptist Convention. It also motivated the African American Church to come together as "a support system for each other, and in a commitment to assist the African community in more substantive ways;"[55] like providing education, providing basic needs of clothing, food, healthcare, and employment through missions. Missions in this context refers to a religious community that "exemplifies the hands and feet of Christ in its concern for others and their needs, as it witnesses the love and grace of God and points people to Christ."[56] The relevance of this in the African Baptist Church, especially at its inception, as I mentioned earlier, is that "the church wanted to assist Africans in

[54] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church*, 70.

[55] Ibid.., 72.

[56] Seminary Baptist Church, "Mission in the Church Covenant",(Paterson, NJ)

substantive ways,"[57] and ultimately communities as a whole, whether locally or globally, that needed assistance. That degree of freedom and independence allowed these African Baptist Churches to focus on social development and empowerment within communities of color. Autonomy within the Baptist Tradition was important at its inception, and it was just as important for Africans as they developed their own Baptist Churches.

The second characteristic associated with the African Baptist identity was its style of worship. Within the Baptist tradition, there is a form of worship that is uniquely associated with the African American Baptist Church. This uniqueness implies unity that is seen in congregational forms of worship. In addition to mission meetings, bible study, choir rehearsal, Sunday school or any other worship meeting, there was always a corporate meeting of worshippers on Sunday morning. This meeting was led by the pastor of the church and he delivered a spiritual message to all worshipers. This was a joyful worship service when all congregants participated**.** The "ecstatic, euphoric, celebratory worship is an important element in the black religious experience."[58] It includes a call and response style that signifies unity and solidarity. "When the pastor read a scripture or made a statement that moved them emotionally, they may have verbally, spontaneously responded with an 'Amen or Hallelujah'. This was an acknowledgement to the pastor and other worshippers of the relevancy and personal meaning. Today the service includes liturgical dancing, singing and lively oral praise."[59] This worship style is viewed as a manifestation of the church's understanding of Psalm 100.

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[57] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church,* 72.

[58] Obrey M. Hendricks, Jr, *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, The Church, and the Body Politics,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 1.

[59] Ibid.

The psalm gives life and empowerment to the worshipers by removing the focus from them and their problems, and re-centering it on God and His goodness. It helps the worshipper focus on the goodness and sovereignty of God. Theologically, for the African American Baptist church, this type of high praise and celebratory form of worship gives reverence to God the Creator and the Sustainer of life. It acknowledges God's care and control of humanity, and a community of people who seek and depend on God's care. This high praise also personifies a heartfelt gratitude to God for his goodness and mercy that moves the worshipper beyond the vicissitudes of life or his/her current life's situation. This posture of gratitude and reverence to God for his sovereignty is a primary element in the black religious experience. It is a reminder of how God has delivered and sustained African Americans throughout history. In the words of Obrey Hendricks:

> The African American church understands the centrality of ecstatic worship. They know for themselves what it means to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands!" What it means to lift up holy hands in tearful supplication … and joyful thanksgiving, and fire-kissed tongues to speak languages unknown. Yes, the euphoric and celebratory worship runs in black people as deep as marrow.[60]

This is critical to the African American Baptist Church and community, especially knowing America's history of slavery and the ways that systems of oppression manifested in modern society. James H. Cone so eloquently addresses these inequalities in his book *God of the Oppressed*. He says that God is the "God of the Oppressed, and God is celebrated and felt in the black worship experience."[61] The black hymns (Spirituals), liturgical dancing, and the proclamation of the Word, incorporates a liberation gospel that centers on social reform, equality, and affirmation and high praise. Michael Battle, in his book *The Black Church in*

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[60] Hendricks, *The Universe Bends*, 1.

[61] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 71.

America, writes:

> African American Christian Spirituality inherits from African spirituality practices and worldview for how the uniqueness of each person is affirmed and acknowledged in the community. Such inheritance informs the black church in America- how one's own individuality and freedom are always balanced by the destiny of the community. [62]

Unfortunately, in today's culture, many of our black churches have become distant from a liberation gospel that centers on social reforms, justice, and equality in exchange for a gospel that centers on the individual more than the community.

Although "African American styles of worship are unique and dynamic, which has led to the adoption of a wide variety of styles of high celebratory worship,"[63] "they are patterns typical of African religious expressions since the ancient times."[64] Both literary scholars, W.E.B. Dubois and Obrey H. Hendrick understood that the African American worship experience is a critical part of African American heritage and experience. Dubois stated that the "frenzy or shouting in worship is not new in the African world because it is believed that without the visible manifestation of God there could be no true communion with the invisible."[65] This "pattern of Spirituality has also transcended into a ministry of social healing and empowerment,"[66] for African Americans. Michael Battle alludes to this "in his interpretation of Martin Luther King Jr's sermon on Luke 11:5-6 entitled "A knock at Midnight" where King depicts one of three types of black churches whose worship is tied to a social experience, in which people from all levels of life come together to affirm their oneness and unity under God."[67] This felt oneness in

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[62] Battle, *The Black Church in America,* 2.

[63] Ibid., 92.

[64] Ibid., 90.

[65] Battle, *The Black Church in America,* 90.

[66] Ibid,, 92.

[67] Ibid., 91.

worship that King speaks of, might also be understood as having its roots in white systematic, socioeconomic, and political oppression. That sense of oneness that is felt in worship in the African Baptist Church is not only a part of the spiritual practices transcendent from Africa, but also stems from an oppressive society that forces communities of oppression into spiritual and communal solidarity. In essence, the African American Baptist Church's worship experience and practices are part of their rich history, which gives identity of who they are as African Americans and within the African American Baptist Church.

C. Seminary Baptist Church History

In the same manner, Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) also has a rich history which gives a specific identity to who they are as Baptists and as a local religious body grounded in the African American Baptist tradition. For instance, SBC has been at its current location 193 Haledon Ave, Paterson, New Jersey for 27 years. The church bought this building when the previous church leaders of Bethel Christian Reformed Church, thought they could no longer meet the needs of the community because of the large influx of African Americans. Their response to the issue of diversification was to relocate in order to retain the life and relevance of their church.

During the past two decades the landscape of civil society has evoked more changes; the community and the church are no longer unified by ethnicity, culture, language, and geography. The community and congregation now include African Americans, West Indians, Africans, Hispanics, and other immigrant groups. Although African Americans, West Indians and Africans may have similar complexions, their cultures, life experiences, and manner of worship are different. Hispanic men and women do not share these same features or beliefs. Some of the other immigrant groups are not Christians but live near the church and some of the congregants no longer live in the immediate community. Despite the unity in doctrinal beliefs and values, and

the richness of each respective culture, this new multicultural, multiracial mix is a challenge for the church. SBC is now in the same position that the Bethel Christian Reformed Church was in when SBC bought the church building. The diversity of language, worship style and cultures challenge the SBC to address the question of its readiness to serve a multiracial and multicultural congregation and community.

The church which began in the Alexander Hamilton projects of Paterson, New Jersey was made up of African Americans who immigrated from the south, and the church grew to what it is today. Families lived close, raised their children together, and attended church together, in some cases, several generations. These families worshipped, served, and held fellowship together. SBC felt unified, it functioned "as a single unit" and the church seemed to thrive. Congregants had the same doctrinal beliefs, were of the same ethnicity and culture, had similar if not the same historical life experience and lived in the same community. Thus, a felt unity existed within the congregation. SBC was a family church, where two or three, and even four generations attended. One of the ministers that I interviewed, who raised her children in the church stated, "you're going to take me back to when I first joined. I would say that we were readily accepted."[68] "But as far as us connecting with others, being a family, it was a family then and it's still a family now."[69]

However, the past two decades have changed the narrative; the felt unity that once existed in the church and geographic community is no longer demonstrably visible. During an interview with the pastor, he identified some aspects of disunity within SBC and the disconnect the church has with the surrounding community. He went on to explain that a new

[68] Interview August 18, 2020

[69] Interview August 18, 2020

paradigm had evolved. For instance, the church and the community are no longer composed of one ethnic group: African Americans. There is a new community and a new congregation. Both the congregation and community are multiracial and multicultural. Several ethnic and cultural groups across the ethnic spectrum have emerged within the church.

In light of the cultural differences, it appears that style of worship practice is the most visible thus, the primary indicator of disunity within this congregation. Regardless of the expected practices of the different cultural groups, all comply with the traditional style of SBC. One might describe this as conformity; however, this is not negative. This response can also be viewed as an investment in one's faith. The willingness to comply may be related to the doctrinal unity as all congregants are professed Christians with the same values and beliefs. Conformity is "fitting in"[70] and compliance according to the rules, standards, or accepted practices, and unity here is "when the congregation is operating in oneness and the singleness of everyone's interest."[71] For instance, culturally native Africans', and even West Indians' style of worship, ministry and practices are quite different from SBC. They are more openly active in worship; singing, shouting, and dancing loudly**,** which is part of their culture. In other words, there's a freedom exemplified in their style of worship. A minister described it like this, "when my family went to Kenya and attended a worship service, they did things quite differently."[72] "It's nothing for us to call Sister Rose and her sister or family up to sing a song. This family is now a member of the congregation of SBC. Then when they had 15-20

[70]Telford, "Conformity and Conformism," Westmont College, accessed January 6, 2021, www.Westmont.edu/work/faq/fit.html

[71] David Schrock, "What Does Unity in the Church Look Like Ten Truth from Ephesians 4," David Schrock, November 10, 2017, access January 4, 2021, www.Davidschrock.com/2017/11/10/what-does-unity-in-the-church-look-like-ten-truths-from-ephesians-4/amp

[72] Interview August 2020

family members one Sunday, at SBC, they were yelling and jumping."[73] These Native Africans' worship style is different from SBC, and yet, they comply with the practices and traditions of SBC, which is more structured. They do not abandon their culture's style of worship; they just comply with the dominant style of worship within this particular church. However, when given the opportunity, they celebrate themselves and culture in their style of worship. This is not embraced by all members of the congregation and adds to a felt sense of disunity.

In addition to the disunity within the church, there is the disconnect with the community. Historically, people attended church in their communities. The congregants represented the surrounding community. As a result, the church's ministry was reflected in the church's involvement and impact within the community. The church knew what the community needed and worked to meet those needs, whether it was food, clothes, social services, safe haven for children, etc. I remember growing up in an African American neighborhood and attending the local church and witnessing that church and community relationship/partnership. However, that narrative has changed. Economics, politics, and social issues have caused or forced individuals to migrate to other geographic locations, seeking affordable housing, communal relationships, common language, and culture, even refuge. They commute to church instead so fellowship may be time limited and may seem less natural. Congregants may have fewer intimate relationships in the church and those that are created require more effort to maintain. Thus, people may become a part of each other's church life but not a part of their civil life. Maintaining relationships in civil life requires more work.

Like many other churches today, the community around SBC is no longer African

[73] Interview August 2020

American or one single ethnicity. The congregants are not completely reflective of the diversity. As a result, there is a feeling of disconnection between the church and community; the relationship that once existed is lost. Disconnection from the community was the primary reason why Bethel Reformed Christian Church; the church prior to SBC; relocated. The Senior Pastor has decided to remain at their present location and find a way to connect with the community and resolve issues of disunity, and the board of SBC has embraced this decision.

As an autonomous church, and the pastor of SBC, in relationship to the Baptist tradition of autonomy, he has the authority to make these decisions and changes that affect the unity and ministry of the church. This is what being an autonomous church would entail. This concept of autonomy in the church dates back to the seventeenth century when the "Baptist sought complete separation from the Church of England, which is reflected in its doctrine of no ordination by the Church of England, and no infant baptism as promoted by the Church of England."[74] In other words, they "maintained and emphasized the importance of the local church in governing its own affairs,"[75] without the interference of civil government. This independence also meant they were "free from obligation to any denomination, organization, association or affiliations."[76] Autonomy was, and continues to be, essential in the Baptist tradition. The autonomy of SBC allows the pastor to make decisions about the operations and functions of the ministry of the church, including the style of worship and the inclusion of other styles of different cultural groups.

Autonomy and its governance within the local church is carried out through the senior

[74] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church,* 64.

[75] Maring and Hudson, *Polity and Practice,* 14.

[76] Ibid.

pastor as the leader of the church body. Autonomy and governance denote some form of leadership and leadership implies some kind of authority. However, before we address autonomy and governance within the local body, let us view the authority of the pastor within the Baptist tradition. The structure of the church is hierarchal. "In typical African American Baptist Churches today, the pastor is commander-in-chief by virtue of his call by God and the people, and often by virtue of his training."[77] "W.A. Criswell, a well-known pastor, at the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980's, where this was a heated debated declared: That the pastor is the ruler of the church. There is no other thing than that in the bible."[78]

Ultimately, the convention passed a resolution of such. "For many years, the most common image of the minister among Baptist was that of the pastoral rule."[79] This notion of pastoral authority is not new. "Andrew Fuller, one of the most influential Baptist ministers in the early nineteen centuries portrayed the typical Baptist minister of his time, saying: There must be a rule in the church of Christ, as well as in other societies. Members, he said ought to submit to the pastor's authority."[80] This autocratic style of leadership has been common for many years. Autocratic here means, in reference to the African American Baptist Church, that "the traditional black pastor gave orders and seldom took orders."[81] He/she was the one who held the authority. However, such authority does work when the pastor exemplifies "a servant style leadership, where integrity and character are premium qualities, and genuinely care for

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[77] Maring and Hudson, *Polity and Practice*, 109.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 110.

[80] Ibid., 10.

[81] Ibid,, 110.

others, and display a willingness to work in partnership with others."[82] This is the narrative at SBC, where the integrity and character of the pastor is seen in his willingness to work in partnership with others.

Therefore, now as we look at autonomy and its governance within the local church, it is clear that the senior pastor has ultimate authority as the leader of the church body. Although the ministerial staff and the church body, known as the Board Members, have delegated responsibilities, the ultimate power, and authority are in the hands of the senior pastor, which follows Baptist polity and practice. The pastor, believing that the church body should be aware of the vision of the church and future directions of the ministry of the church, works in partnership with the board members in support of the vision and future direction of the church. The pastor, "as the leader, works with individuals, boards in their delegated roles and responsibilities, committees, and other groups to facilitate the development of consensus about goals and programs"[83] that affect the ministry of the church and the church body. As the pastor, possessing the freedom and independence to do so in governing the affairs of the church is what being an autonomous church entails, according to the Baptist tradition. Since his concept of autonomy in the church dates back to the seventeenth century when the "Baptist sought complete separation from the Church of England."[84] autonomy and governance within the local body, even SBC, is through the senior pastor which is grounded in the Baptist polity and practice.

Thus, the pastor of SBC has the autonomy to seek methods and solutions to meet the

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[82] Maring and Hudson, *Polity and Practice*, 111.

[83] Ibid., 109.

[84] Ibid., 12.

challenge of maintaining a sense of unity within the context of the diversification of the community and congregation. Diversification brings different styles of worship and culture; thus, a felt disunity may be evoked. In order to create a greater sense of unity in diversification, the Senior Pastor can make independent decisions to restructure the worship and ministry activity of the church, as necessary, to achieve maximum inclusion and a felt sense of unity. Restructuring means "reorganizing or the modification of the existing structure in order to adapt to the social change within community and civil society."[85] This is relevant because he has the freedom and independence to restructure the church without approval of any outside authority or religious hierarchy. This is an example of the legacy of the historical foundation of autonomy and freedom.

However, the Senior Pastor of SBC believes this also requires input and participation from the church body which includes the board members, the parent body(congregation), and the deacon board. The total church involvement in the process helps to establish and maintain some sense of unity. Even the slightest degree of change affects everyone within the church. For instance, the congregation is accustomed to a particular structure and style of worship however, the congregation now includes West Indians, Native Africans, Latin Americans, and other ethnic groups whose worship styles are different from the norm at SBC. Inclusion of diversified styles of worship may require a change in the structure and style of worship and ministry activity in order to create and maintain "unity- that oneness and singleness of everyone's interest."[86] Inclusion of the entire body allows him to evaluate

[85] Brandon Boone, "Renewing The Church: Resetting, Refocusing, Restructuring," Christianitytoday.com, October 19, 2018, access February 8, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2018/October/renewing-your-church-resetting-refocusing-resturcturing.html

[86] David Schrock, "What Does Unity in the Church Look Like Ten Truth from Ephesians 4," David Schrock, November 10, 2017, access January 4, 2021, www.Davidschrock.com/2017/11/10/what-does-unity-in-the-church-look-like-ten-truths-from-ephesians-4/amp

the willingness to embrace diversification and all that it means. This is one of the necessary components in uniting the church. Another component in uniting the church, which I will address in depth later is associated with leadership. The pastor, during an interview, expressed how imperative it is for diverse groups to see others that look like them in leadership. This too requires change. This is all part of building unity in regard to the richness of each respective culture, and this now multicultural, multiracial mixed within the church.

Equally important to building unity within the church is establishing a connection with the community. The last two decades have altered the demographics surrounding SBC. The community is now diverse with a large Latin American presence. This diverse community represents a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs, and values. This is why establishing a connection with this community has been challenging for SBC. Historically, the African American Baptist Church has always maintained a presence and connection with the community, while trying to meet its needs, which dates back to the early 1800's with the establishment of African American Baptist Churches. The African American Baptist Church was "committed to assist the African American community in more substantive ways."[87] However, today there are few exclusive African American communities. Migration, economics, and politics, in the past two decades, have changed that narrative to ethnically and culturally diverse communities. Despite this demographic change, the African American Baptist Church, including SBC, is committed to maintain a presence and connection to the community. The complexity here for SBC is discovering ways to connect with the community, understanding the community needs, and assisting in substantive ways.

[87] Anne Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *The Black Church,* 72.

For example, substantive ways like provision of information concerning community resources, provision for food, provision for training, and other resources that are needed are various ways to connect with this diverse community.

Disconnect and disunity are primary concerns at SBC. Creating an environment in the church where various ethnicities and cultures are welcomed to worship and participate in a religious experience where they feel free to express themselves culturally and ethnically on one accord is paramount in establishing unity. At the same time, establishing a presence and connecting to the community is equally important. However, the question that must be addressed here is, how does one rebuild the sense of unity and connection within the context of the diversification of the community and congregation? This focused this research paper on exploring the unity and disunity in SBC and identifying possible resolutions to rebuild the sense of unity within the church and the community.

Social Change In Civil Society and the African American Baptist Church

Before we even begin to address the question of how one rebuilds a sense of unity and connection within the church and a diverse community, we need to examine the changes in civil society and the impact, if any, that it has had on the faith community. Change is constant and change in civil society from the 19th century up to the present day has impacted every arena of life, including the faith community. Although there is a plethora of things that cause change in civil society, "social research recognizes four common ones; social institutions, population, technology and the environment."[88] Social institutions here "means economy, religion, education, government, and family."[89] These four common areas impact social change in society,

[88] Lumenlearning, "Social Change/Introduction to Sociology-Chapter 3," Lumen Learning.com, February 6, 2020, access December 29, 2020, https://lumenlearning.com/courses/introduction-to-sociology

[89] www.Sociologicalguide.com , Basic-concepts, "Social Institutions, Social institution Definition, Social Institutions In Sociology."

including the church. For this research project, when referencing the church, it is in relationship to the Baptist tradition, and my current context Seminary Baptist Church (SBC), unless otherwise stated. Such changes identified by social scientists, I have discovered, are attributed to four things; migration, immigration, advanced technology, and a national pandemic; and I will attempt to address each one within the scope of this research.

Migration has been a catalyst for change in this country since the 19th century with the abolishment of slavery. History records the migration of "African Americans, in massive numbers, from the south in 1870's creating what has become known as urbanization."[90] This migration was driven by what some call the "push and pull factors". The "push factors are issues or things that push individuals or groups of people away from their home/homeland; and pull factors are the issues or things that attract individuals or groups of people to a new home for better opportunities."[91] "African Americans were pushed by Jim Crow laws- "legislation that enforced racial segregation in the south"[92], rampant discrimination, segregation- "the separation or set apart from others and from the general mass,"[93] "disenfranchisement-to deprive of the legal right to vote,"[94] and lack of employment in the south; and pulled by the growing employment opportunities, industrialism and relative tolerance in the north."[95] With the

[90] Hali J. Edison and Francis, "Cross-border Listings, Capital Controls, and Equity flows to Emerging Markets," Library of Congress, accessed January 7, 2021, www.loc.gov-classroom-material/immigration and relocation in us

[91] National Geographic Society," Why Communities Move," accessed January 7, 2021, www.nationalgeographic.org/why-communities-move

[92] Melvin l. Urofsky," Jim Crow Law: United States 1877-19540," Britannica.com, accessed January 7, 2021, www.Britannica.com/event/Jim-Crow-Law

[93] Philip Q. Yang and Starlita Smith, "Trends in Black White Church Integration- Ethic Studies Review," University of California Press, January 1, 2009, accessed January 7, 2021, www.ucpress.edu/esr//articleabstract/32/1/1/34227/Trends-in-black-white-church-Integration

[94] ProCon.Org, "Should Felons Who Have Completed Their Sentence (Incarceration, Probation and Parole) Be Allowed to Vote? Britannica.com, revised January 16, 2020, accessed January 7, 2021, www.Felonvoting.procon/what-is-disenfranchisement

[95] Carlos A. Ortiz and Raymond A. Smith, "Issue Brief: African American/ Blacks and Immigration," Columbia University, 2013, accessed January 7, 2021, http://.Academiccommons.columbia.edu

abolishment of slavery coupled with the Industrial Revolution, which was the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial one,[96] migration became rampant.

African Americans, as well as "struggling farmers, and immigrants, migrated to big cities like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago"[97] in search of employment and better opportunities. These are the primary reasons why people migrate from one geographical region to another. During this time, "many cities were not prepared for such an influx of people, and the rapid growth in the population impacted these cities significantly."[98] These big cities, according to history, could not handle the housing issue for such an influx of people, so it led to urbanization. "Urbanization is a process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas, forming cities."[99] "Tenements, "which were small three rooms apartments with many people living in it,"[100] and slums-which "were densely populated urban areas marked by crowding, and the poor"[101] "sprung up nationally"[102] in these urban communities. Many who migrated were poor and unemployed, and these tenements were probably the only residence that they could afford. These people migrated in search of better opportunities and employment and were not able to attain it.

Imagine, these communities of people that were either "unemployed, worked for reduced wages, no benefits or medical care." Unfortunately, this is the same paradigm in many of our

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[96] History.com editors, "Gilded Ages." History, revised April 3, 2020, accessed January 7, 2021, www.History.com/topic/19th-Century/gilded-age

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

diverse urban communities today. For instance, there has been an influx of Arabs, Latin Americans, Native Africans in the community surrounding SBC. Many of them have migrated to this area in search of better living conditions, employment opportunities, education, government assistance, affordable housing, and possibly religious freedom. There is a myriad of reasons why people migrate, but many find themselves struggling to maintain a basic standard of living, with food, clothes, and shelter. Even with governmental assistance, these communities still lack the basic services and assistance they need. This is where the church, across denominations, has been a visible and present resource. The African American Baptist Church is no different. It has tried to maintain a presence and connection with the community in assisting the poor and those in need with food, clothes, social services, shelter, and other services. Many African American Baptist Churches have even tried to effect change within their prospective communities, with housing for seniors, community centers for youth, and safe spaces for youth and young adults. Social change within the civil society has always impacted the faith community. Social issues in civil society evokes the need for migration, such change in civil society impacts the church.

Immigration is another common cause of social change in civil society that impacts other areas of life. Immigration is similar to migration because it too subscribes to that "push and pull factor" mentioned earlier. "Immigrants are pushed away from their country/homeland by religious persecution, political oppression-war, poverty, and alienation from families. At the same time attracted (pulled) to America and other countries, by civil rights and liberties, freedom of expression, education, economic opportunities, and better living conditions."[103] Like migration, immigration impacts the population, which impacts social institutions like the educational system, the economy, faith communities, the government, and the environment

[103] Samfunnsfaglis Enelsk, "Waves of Immigration," Norwegian Digital Learning Arena, revised January 26, 2018, accessed January 7, 2021, www.Samfunnsfaglis.enelsk-waveofimmigration

within civil society. “Many immigrants and their children have contributed to this country’s economic vitality and its’ vibrant ever-changing culture.”[104] For instance, a large number of “immigrants have embraced American identity, protecting our country through service in our military, fostering technological innovation, harvesting its crops, and enriching everything from the nation’s cuisine to its universities, music and art.”[105] Still there are other immigrants that place some degree of burden on families, friends, the community, and religious organizations for resources that will assist them for a sense of sustainability. In light of this movement towards a sense of sustainability, immigrants have transformed single racial and ethnic communities into diverse ones. This means immigrants bring their own beliefs, values, customs, and languages. This difference can have an effect on services and the church/community partnerships within those areas. Churches are challenged to either relocate because they cannot meet the needs of that community for various reasons or seek ways to partner with these diverse communities in meeting their needs. As for the African American Baptist Church, even SBC, this has been a challenge. Not because the church does not want to partner with the diverse communities, but because there are several barriers, internal and external, that need to be addressed before this undertaking. Barriers like a lack in understanding religious traditions, foreign cultures, beliefs, and what fully embracing others means, are just a few challenges for SBC. Based on the literary research, and the interview with the Senior Pastor, Rev. Steele, education is the primary tool in dismantling these barriers, internally and externally.

Another common cause that can be attributed to the social change in civil society is the advancement of technology. We are in a time when mass communication has expanded beyond

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[104] The Integration of Immigrants into American Society,” www.nap.edu/read/21746/chapter/6

[105] Ibid.

our imaginations. Information is literally at our fingertips with the press of a button or digital icon (technological symbol). The arduous time of thumbing through Britannica Encyclopedia to discover and digest information is a part of the past. The digital world of technology has changed the landscape in retrieving, disseminating, and presenting information. Technology has produced platforms; social, business, personal, religious, and entertainment, that have altered how we interact with one another and conduct business on a daily basis. It seems as if all of society has bought into the use of these platforms, especially the youth and young adults, in managing their lives. In essence, today's digital footprint has had a significant impact on the social change within civil society. There are pros and cons to this digital phenomenon.

A positive characteristic of technology is that it saves time. It reduces the time that it takes to retrieve, disseminate, present information, freeing up time for other important tasks. Another positive characteristic is that it can reach massive communities and groups of people across racial, ethnic, economic, social, and political lines, locally, domestically, and globally. In reference to the church, there are several advantages, (1) it is a great evangelistic tool in reaching the lost. (2) it allows seniors, the sick, and those with non-traditional jobs who work on Sunday morning an opportunity to still participate in worship or engage in a religious experience without being physically present. They also have the choice of viewing worship service at their leisure. (3) technology is also an exceptional tool for teaching, preaching, ministerial meetings, business meetings, ministry gatherings, and staying connected.

However, there are negative characteristics to this digital world. Many seniors, as well as other groups of people, are at a disadvantage because they are unfamiliar with today's technology and navigating its systems. Training must be available to assist those who are not technologically savvy. Another problem relates to the financial burden that is associated with this

new technology. The cost of cell phones, which has replaced many home telephones, Apple's miniature computers, laptops and desktop computer prices are astronomical. Those of meager means or fixed incomes are somewhat excluded from ownership, limiting their exposure and participation in many of the events, programs, meetings, worship services, teachings, and gatherings-secular and religious. This does not include the additional operational cost needed to make these digital/technological devices function; like Wi-Fi, (WAN-wide area network), and some other streaming services. The last issue is the impersonal aspect of it. What is meant by impersonal here is the lack of in person contact. To some degree, computers and other live stream platforms diminish human contact with one another, therefore, allowing individuals to remain aloof and hidden from the community or group. However, whether you agree or disagree with today's technology, the one thing that we can all agree upon is that it has changed how civil society interacts with one another and how people do things. Technology has significantly impacted civil society and affected every arena of life.

The Covid-19 pandemic that the world is currently experiencing has been a serious cause of social change in today's civil society. It has impacted everyone and everything. This year, four hundred thousand and twenty deaths (at the time of writing) left a somber imprint on the minds and hearts of millions of people. For the past year, the world appeared as if it had been frozen in time as a dark cloud hovered above preventing any light from filtering in. There has been a look of despondency on the face of so many who were struggling for life's basic necessities. There has been a lament of others who have lost loved ones and were denied or stripped of the opportunity to say goodbye because of this devastating deadly disease. This coronavirus, as it is also known, destroyed families, communities, cities, nations, and the social order in civil society. By social order in this context means "the way various components of society work together to

maintain the status quo."[106] The economy was impacted because of disruption in businesses, restaurants, retail stores, local shops, gyms, entertainment facilities, etc.; and the permanent closure of other businesses. People lost jobs, wages, benefits, and unemployment soared. As a result, millions were on the verge of losing their homes, bankruptcy, eviction, and struggled to feed their families.

Socially, people were restricted by many State governments to prevent the spread of this virus. Social distancing and masks became the norm for much of civil society. Hospitals were at capacity for those who were sick. Families were restricted to their households and from visitation for months. Houses of worship were closed, and eventually opened with restrictions on the number of people allowed inside. The coronavirus pandemic impacted everyone's life; personally, professionally, economically, politically, socially, and religiously. This virus changed every aspect of life, and nothing was untouched by this devastating disease. The virus also forced SBC to recognize the need to have options in providing worship service or help to the community. The church learned to use technology in combination with in-person services.

With the impact of these social changes in civil society, the church, speaking from my context, the African Baptist Church, has always been present and resilient in the wake of these changes and impact on civil society. From the migration of African Americans from the south after slavery, to the resettlements in crowded tenements in big cities in the north, the African American Church has been present supporting and establishing programs for poor communities and those in need. The church has been an advocate in supplying food, clothes, shelter, and other resources, especially in desperate and challenging times. This coronavirus pandemic has caused churches, even the African American Baptist Church, to work feverishly in assisting in the

[106] Nicki Lisa Cole, "The Meaning of Social Order in Sociology," ThoughtCo.com, September 30, 2019, access December 24, 2020 https://thoughtCo.com/social order

community. Also, if we consider technology and its imprint in civil society, the church has been impacted. Many churches, including SBC, have been forced to upgrade their churches to digital platforms that are equitable and comparable in this ever-changing technological world. Ironically, this upgrade was for the betterment of the ministry of the church by staying relevant in these times and remaining connected to its congregants.

Lastly, if we look at immigration and its impact on civil society, and its culmination in creating diverse communities in the church, especially the African American Baptist Church; it has more work to do. This is not to say that churches have not been supportive or assisted in these communities. But what is being suggested here is that a better connection to diverse communities is needed. As previously stated, the communities that we see today around our churches, including SBC, are not representative of our congregations. These communities are different from the communities of time past. The African American Baptist Church has always been in partnership with the local community. Today, this is not the narrative. These social changes are not exclusive to the Baptist Church in general or to SBC. However, the senior pastor Reverend Steele of SBC has identified the churches disconnect with the diverse community around his church and is seeking a way to unify and establish a partnership with this community. Therefore, any results of this research project may be very important to this church.

Impact of Change in Civil Society on Seminary Baptist Church

The church has always played a pivotal role in civil society. The African American Baptist Church beyond its' role of evangelizing and meeting one's spiritual, physical needs and functioning as the tool for spiritual growth, the Baptist Church has been a place for "communal spirituality"[107] for African Americans. "Spirituality here refers to a person seeking spiritual

[107] Battle, *The Black Church in America,* XV.

mutuality with God and neighbor."[108] "This awareness in human solidarity among African Americans"[109] also validated and affirmed their place in the design and purpose of God's plan in creation. From its inception in the late 1800's, the African American Baptist Church established community and has continued to reinforce this concept. This mindset of "communal spirituality-" that shared place of community and spirituality, has played a critical role in establishing unity within the African American Baptist Church. However, that narrative is being challenged by the changes within the culture in civil society. Like anything else, as time changes, culture changes. Much of this, according to the Pew Research Center, "can be attributed to the millennials (those between the ages of 23-38). They have earned a reputation for shaping industries and institutions-shaking up the workplace, transforming dating culture, and rethinking parenthood."[110] A plethora of literature has been written on this change we see today in civil society, as well as the entire faith community. However, there are three key factors that may have informed the development of disunity in the faith community: A generational shift, technology, social media, and community diversification. These factors have had an impact on today's faith community, including Seminary Baptist Church (SBC).

(1) A Generational Shift

The generational shift is one of the core factors in the development of disunity in the faith community. A number of believers, as well as some non-believers, feel the relevancy the traditional church. This attitude can be attributed to this generation (those between 43-18) who seem to lack interest in organized religion, and whose agenda differs from their predecessors. As a result, there I felt a sense of disunity, "meaning

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[108] Battle, *The Black Church in America,* XV.

[109] Ibid., 44.

[110] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomas-DeVeaux, *Millennials Are leaving Religion and Not Coming Back, www.fivethirtyeight.com*

divide; or separation"[111] in the wider culture and within Seminary Baptist Church (SBC). Although there are several reasons for this mindset, I have discovered three critical factors. One factor for disunity in this generational shift can be associated with exclusion-not being included. Examples of this can be presented from my own experience. Several years ago, while attending the National Baptist Convention, in Texas, I had the opportunity to be in dialogue with a few pastors. During this dialogue, one of the pastors stated that he recently had a "sit down" with several young adults between the ages of 25-39, and then the youth, ages 13-18, in his church about their declining interest in church activities. They told him, they "did not feel like they belonged, had no voice at the table, did not feel vested, or represented in the church's culture."[112] In other words, they were not included in the decision-making process that affected their lives. During my ministerial training, this was concern for the teens (ages 14-18) and young adults (19-35). Inclusivity for these groups is paramount if they are going to remain connected to the church.

A few of the ministers that I interviewed at SBC as part of this project, concurred. One minister, when asked if youth should have any input in ministry responded," I think that even with small groups, or when talking about family groups or life groups, youth should be included. Youth should be a group that we should consult with."[113] Another minister, who was asked the same question said, "they are the future of the church, and the last thing that we want to do is lose them. See what they want to do, even if it's a

[111] Dr. John Neufeld, "Disunity Among Believers and What It Means," Backtothebible.ca, January 18,2018, access February 7, 2021, https://backtothebible.ca/tag/disunity-among-believers-and-what-it-means/

[112] Dialogue/Pastors, National Baptist Convention

[113] Interview July 2020

suggestion box, and write what the youth are looking for."[114] The SBC began addressing these issues, and several others, in the past two decades with new leadership. However, the reality is that many of the young adults at SBC, and I would even state other churches as well, have stopped attending any religious entity or any form of organized religion that has not been vested in them or what they have to offer. From a social behavior perspective, when people do not feel a vested interest in what is being offered, their interest wanes. As a leader in ministry, I have witnessed the youth, young adults and older adults disengage when they did not feel a part of the decision-making process or final solution. This generation (millennials 1977-1995 and generation z- born 1996 to Present day) wants a voice and presence in civil society and within the church if they are going to be a part of it. Donna Freitas, in her book, *The Happiness Effect*, says it this way, "This generation of young people want creativity and opportunities for self-expression."[115] When that does not happen, it produces disconnect and disunity.

The second possible cause of disunity associated with this generational shift is cultural and moral relativism. But first, let me define these terms before we examine them in civil society and within the faith community. Cultural relativism "is a descriptive claim that ethical practices differ among cultures; that is, as a matter of fact, what is considered right in one culture may be considered wrong in another."[116] Likewise, moral relativism which is "a view that ethical truth depends on the individuals and groups

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[114] Interview Aug 2020

[115] Donna Freitas, *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect At Any Cost*, (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 2017), 10.

[116] Norman E. Bowie, "Relativism, Cultural and Moral-Wiley," Wiley.com, January 21,2015, access December 29,2020, https://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/relativism,cultural and moral

holding them."[117] It "claims that what is really right or wrong is what the culture says is right or wrong,"[118] and "the view that ethical standards, morality, and positions of right and wrong are culturally based and therefore subject to a person's individual choice."[119] For example, "If a person believes that abortion is morally wrong then it is wrong- for him/her."[120] "Each culture, meaning civil society, establishes the basic values and principles that serve as the foundation for morality."[121] This is relevant because today there are more diverse communities, intermarriages, and biracial relationships than any other generation. This changes the way individuals view traditional attitudes, social practices, and belief systems. For instance, traditional Moors look down on unwed couples living together and having multiple children. Cultural relativism views this same narrative as acceptable behavior within civil society today. Especially when one views it from the perspective that we are living in a time when there are diverse communities with different customs, practices, and belief systems. "People develop their thinking concerning morality over time. They do so as a result of interactions with individuals (socially, spiritual and culturally) and social institutions."[122] As a result, their moral compass can sometimes change and run counter to religious traditional practices in terms of relationships, sex, money, family, and marriage. This is understandable when we

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[117] Norman E. Bowie, "Relativism, Cultural and Moral-Wiley," Wiley.com, January 21,2015, access December 29,2020, https://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/relativism,cultural and moral

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Philip Pecorino, PHD, "Computers, Information Technology, the Internet, Ethics, Society and Human Values-Chapter 3 Ethics- Relativism," access January 4, 2021, www.qcc.cunny/computers, information Technology, the internet, Ethics, Society and Human Values

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

consider that we are living in a time when there are more interracial and intercultural marriages and relationships than any other time. With these relationships and connections come nuances, new perspectives, customs, beliefs, and social behaviors. As a result, there is a resistance to religious and social practices. Research explains this as a "general resistance to organized religion or to any system that tends to be formulaic, authoritative and restrictive to the decisions and lifestyles,"[123] of this generation. As previously stated, lack of attendance and involvement in traditional church is the greatest indicator of this indifference to organized religion. For many years, the youth, and young adults (13-45yrs old) were the largest population at SBC. Today, the seniors (ages 55 and above) are the largest group in attendance and involvement in the ministry of the church. The cultural and ethnic infusion that we now witness in our communities and within the wider society have shifted the mindsets and value of many in this generation. Therefore, it is not surprising that cultural and moral relativism play a role in this indifference to formal church that produces disunity and impacts the church.

The third possible cause of disunity associated with a generational shift relates to the "decline in confidence in organized religion."[124] According to the Gallup poll, "U.S. culture norms and patterns of social behavior are always in flux, and religion is part of this inevitable cycle of change in the nation's sociological fabric as years and decades go by."[125] 'American's confidence in many (but not all) institutions has been declining in recent years, and organized religions is to some degree being swept along with this

[123] Rabbi Mark Wildes, "Millennials and Religion: A New Perspective," Huff Post, June 19,2017, accessed December 25, 2021, www.huffpost.com/entry/millennials-and-religion-a-new-perspective

[124] Frank Newport," Why are Americans Losing Confidence in Organized Religion?" July 16, 2019, access January 5, 2021, www.New.gallup.com

[125] Ibid.

trend."[126] This distrust or decline in confidence can be associated with a plethora of generalities like:

> Catholic priest abuse scandals that have been recurring features in the news for almost two decades; The series on abuse coverups by Catholic hierarchy, or Allegations of sexual harassment and abuse among Southern Baptist denomination leaders; or the United Methodist Church splitting arguments about same-sex marriage and allowing LGBTQ individuals to be clergy members (at a time when Americans as a whole including in particular young people, are becoming more accepting of LGBTQ-related issues).[127]These are just a few issues that are attributed to today's distrust and lack of confidence in the church.

This is not to mention, various "stories of allegations of church leaders stealing money from the church and other unethical behavior."[128] "These stories do not help in restoring people's confidence in formal religion. If anything, these stories perpetuate a continuous spiraling decline in the confidence in religious leaders and the church. Another possible explanation for this decline in confidence and lack of interest in organized religion is that "millennials may be the symbol of a broader societal shift away from religion,"[129] Research suggests "parents of millennials were more likely than previous generations to raise their children without any connection to organized religion."[130] Therefore, "today's millennials may never have had a strong tie to religion to begin with, which means that they were less likely to develop habits or associations that make it easier to return to a

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[126] Frank Newport," Why are Americans Losing Confidence in Organized Religion?" July 16, 2019, access January 5, 202, www.New.gallup.com

[127] Ibid.

[128] ABC News," The Scandals that brought down the Bakkers, Once among US's most famous Televangelists," ABC News.Go.com, Dec 20, 2019, accessed January 9, 2021, www.abcnews.go.com/search?searchtext=jim%20bakker

[129] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion And Not Coming Back," FiveThirtyEight, December 12, 2019, accessed December 25, 2020, http://Fivethirtyeigtht.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religon-and-not-coming-back/

[130] Ibid.

religious community."[131] According to the Pew study, "17 percent of millennials said that they were not raised in any particular religion compared with only 5 percent of Baby Boomers (those born 1946-1964)."[132] "A family (parents') religious identity (or lack of) plays a role in shaping a child's religious habits and beliefs later in life."[133]Thus it follows that "individuals raised without religion or some form of it are less apt to look for or engage in it as they grow older."[134]This is not to say that all millennials who grew up in religious households or in traditional church are embracing formal religion. On the contrary, many millennials, based on the Pew Studies "are not returning to religion."[135]

Consequently, this "drop in confidence in the church or organized religion does not necessarily equate, in this generational shift, to a drop in confidence in religion."[136] On the contrary, what we are seeing is this trend toward alternatives, which are ways people engage or express their faith, as they seek spiritual care and fulfillment and eschew all that is traditional. Many individuals are embracing other ways of expressing their spirituality or faith. For example, Winnifred Sullivan in her literary pieces, "Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care," talks about how individuals do not attend traditional church like they used to, but still seek spiritual care and fulfillment. According to Sullivan, Chaplaincy has emerged as one of several alternative platforms in spiritual fulfillment. It eliminates the need of traditional

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[131] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion And Not Coming Back," FiveThirtyEight, December 12, 2019, accessed December 25, 2020, http://Fivethirtyeigtht.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religon-and-not-coming-back/

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Frank Newport, "Why Americans Are losing Confidence in Organized Religion," Gallup, July 16, 2019, access January 9, 2021, www.news.gallup.com/opinion-matters/260738/why-americans-are-losing-confidence-organized-religion.aspx

church while providing community and fellowship. Finding community means in oneness and solidarity outside of the traditional church, which has become optimum among many in this generation. Community also refers to inclusion; accepting one where they are and having a safe space in spite of one's racial, ethnical, and cultural beliefs. In addition to community and fellowship, Chaplaincy encompasses a ministry of presence, which is being present with or walking alongside individuals or groups, one-on-one, especially those dying, hurting, suffering, and those dealing with the loss of a loved one.

Another alternative to traditional religion in this generation is non-denominational churches. "Growth in religious entities has been most apparent among churches and religious groups that fall outside the sphere of what would be called organized religion."[137] In other words, according to Gallup polls, "non-denominational churches (in most cases, locally based and non-affiliated with any national denomination) are the fastest growing churches today."[138] Based on that study, "individuals involved with these types of churches are less likely to indicate a high level of trust for traditional forms of organized religion."[139]

In addition to chaplaincy and non-denominational churches, there are other alternative platforms in which people are now engaging or expressing their faith, like yoga, and spiritual meditation, and wellness retreats. This does not include those in relationships where different faiths and religious practices exist, and where they to attempt to merge the different faiths and religious practices, which is why some people disconnect. People are seeking new ways to engage and express their faith. "This generation, especially those between the ages of 25-43,

[137] Frank Newport, "Why Americans Are losing Confidence in Organized Religion," Gallup, July 16, 2019, access January 9, 2021, www.new.gallup.com/opinion-matters/260738/why-americans-are-losing-confidence-organized-religion.aspx

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid.

are leading this continuous growing shift in seeking alternative spiritual platforms due to their resistance to any system that tends to be formulaic, authoritative and restrictive to their lifestyle."[140] This shift in seeking alternative spiritual platforms due to an indifference towards organized religion has led to disunity and disconnect in the church. Consequently, this is a growing concern for many churches, including Seminary Baptist Church.

Since we are talking about alternative trends associated with this generational shift that promotes disunity, it is important to include individualism. This trend, like alternatives, has contributed to the disunity at SBC. For clarity, individualism here refers to "the elevation of individual interest above those of the collective,"[141] ; people acting as a group, which is contrary to the African American Baptist history. Historically, African Americans worship experiences were communal in nature. They shared a collective voice that resisted the social, political, and economic mistreatment and exploitations of African Americans. The black religious experience was communal from its inception because "it was rooted in their experience of political oppression and social exclusion,"[142] and "an expression of collective, communal woes as they were experienced within the community."[143]

African Americans had a common goal: desegregation, equal pay, voting rights, and affordable housing. The black church gave expression to these forms of oppression, while at the same time, "shaping the faith of blacks in ways that responded to their existence and spiritual needs. The Black Church became the beacon of expression that galvanized African Americans

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[140] Rabbi Mark Wildes, "Millennials and Religion: A New Perspective," Huff Post, June 19,2017, accessed December 25, 2021, www.huffpost.com/entry/millennials-and-religion-a-new-perspective

[141] Steven M. Lukes, "Individualism: Politics and Philosophy," Britannica.com, access January 4, 2021, www.Britannica.com/topic/individualism

[142] Hendricks, The Universe Bends, 15.

[143] Ibid., 18

in celebration of this hope in a God of the oppressed."[144] The colonial structures that imprisoned and subjugated people of color gave way to a resistance that inherently called for change and justice and produced this collective agenda.

However, the African American Baptist Church has drifted away from social issues that gave rise and identity to a community of people fighting for reform. Now, let me say that there are a number of African American Churches (across denominations) who have a social platform, but not all like their predecessors. "This culture has shifted from detailing humanity's problems and salvation to focusing instead exclusively on their personal needs and interests."[145] What is being suggested is that in this generational shift, the concept of communal worship, which refers to engaging as a group toward a common goal or in solidarity, that once typified the "black experience" has dissipated within the African American Baptist Church. Consequently, what we witness today in many African American Baptist Church, speaking from my own context, is religious experiences that are individual in nature. This generation, referring to the wider society, that attends worship service or views by some form of live stream, engage in a religious experience that is centered on their relationship with God and their individual needs: assurance, comfort, peace, direction, and affirmation. Worshipers, those that attend or view through a social network, now come with the expectation of receiving a "Word" through song or the proclamation that is self-gratifying. In other words, that communal nature within the church that fueled a community of people to seek change has changed. Worship has become individual and personal in nature. This is evident in the music that we now hear at SBC.

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[144] Hendricks, The Universe Bends, 18.

[145] Ibid., 5.

Obrey Hendricks addressed this trend in his novel, *Universe Bend Toward Justice*. He points out, "how the Black Church has shifted from the oneness in its religious experience, addressing social issues, to a more individual religious experience in nature."[146] Hendricks uses music as an example to support his perspective. For instance, he states that, "this culture and generation has shifted the spirituals, the earliest form of African American music, known as sacred music, that pricked the consciousness of Black people as a community for contemporary music that is individual in nature. "The contemporary Gospel music we hear today is applicable to an individual since it generally has a personal, individual tone. It's written out of specific personal experiences and personal realizations."[147] For instance, "Take My Hand Precious Lord" by Thomas Dorsey after the death of his young wife and unborn child,"[148] "Mary don't you weep", "His eyes are on the Sparrow and He watches me", and "Amazing Grace" are all evidence of this particular genre mirroring individualism- "the elevation of an individual interest above those of the collective."[149] There is an expressed concern with one's own individual needs and relationship with God. This generation has a different agenda and its priorities are no longer communal in nature within the church.

Unfortunately, this ideology revolving around individualism is evident in other areas of ministry in the church. This generational shift has produced a new paradigm where people's perspective and expectations in worship differ from our predecessors. In other words, many

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[146] Hendricks, The Universe Bends, 17-18.

[147] Ibid., 18.

[148] Ibid., 18-19.

[149] Steven M. Lukes, "Individualism: Politics and Philosophy," Britannica.com, access January 4, 2021, www.Britannica.com/topic/individualism

people attend church for their own spiritual fulfillment, not to participate in some communal worship experience that is rooted in political or social reforms, or some other collective agenda. That platform of social and political justice that was communal in nature within the church has changed and is now displayed within wider society. This past year has produced evidence of this in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor, and countless others murdered at the hands of white police officers. In essence, that ideology that was communal in nature, which was part of the African American Baptist Church, where people acted as a group and focused on the group's goals and what is best for the collective group, is now displayed in larger society. Again, what we see with this generational shift is religious worship or engagement that is individual in nature, which can be attributed to some of the disunity in the church.

In summary, one of the reasons for the development of disunity in the faith community is a generational shift. Within this shift there is an underlying thread of indifference or lack of interest for organized religion which may fuel disunity. For example, exclusion, cultural and moral relativism, and the decline in confidence in organized religion are just a few elements in this paradigm. However, I believe that many of us can agree that a generational shift (those between ages of 23- 43) has played a pivotal role in the changes in civil society, and in the faith community. In fact, there is more than a modicum of truth that this generation (millennials ages 45-25) has impacted civil society, and the faith community across denominations. SBC, like so many other faith communities, has gradually felt the impact. As a member and leader at SBC, I am aware of many young adults who have stopped attending SBC and do not attend any religious worship service. At the same time, I am also aware of a small number of them who attend non-denominational and traditional churches.

At SBC, this change is evident in the decline in membership, the decline in attendance, the

lack of engagement in church ministry, and every area of church life. The pastor and I have dialogued about seeking ways to reach or reclaim this group of young adults.[150] Unfortunately, "research has uncovered a mountain of evidence that suggests that today's younger generations may be leaving religion"[151] or "drifting away as young adults."[152] Whether the cause for this shift is attributed to the reasons above or because "they never had strong ties to religion to begin with, which means that they did not develop habits or associations that make it easy to return, or if they are likely to have a spouse who is nonreligious, which may help reinforce a secular worldview,"[153] many in this generation have developed an indifference or lack of interest in organized religion. This is reflective in many individuals seeking alternatives in fulfilling their spiritual needs: chaplaincy, non-denominational churches, spiritual meditation, yoga, wellness retreats, and other spiritual practices. It is also reflective in the ideology of those who engage in religious worship service. The expectation and engagement in a religious experience is removed from that communal nature of their predecessors to an individual approach that is self-gratifying. This ideological shift towards individualism, meaning the elevation of individual interest above those of the collective or the group, may provoke dissatisfaction in members and sow seeds of disunity. It is clear that the aforementioned changes and trends witnessed today in civil society, and at SBC, has caused some disconnect.

(2) Social Media: How Technology is Changing the Church Community

The second core factor that may have informed the development of disunity in the

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[150] Personal Dialogue, Oct 2019 for Congress day every year

[151] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion And Not Coming Back," FiveThirtyEight, December 12, 2019, accessed December 25, 2020, http://Fivethirtyeigtht.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religon-and-not-coming-back/

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

faith community and at Seminary Baptist Church (SBC), is technology. Social media and social networks are various platforms of technology (radio, television, internet, email, zoom, Facebook, video conference, video calls) where information and communication are disseminated through online interactions. This process of interacting and integration among people, companies and governments worldwide has accelerated in the past decade. However, with the advancement of technology in the world and how it operates, every arena of life has changed. In other words, "through the exponential rise of technology that we have seen since the 90's alone has left a mark in civil society."[154] "The major fields of society that have been impacted by technology include: transportation, education, medicine, communication, business"[155], and the faith community. Technology has a significant place in almost everything that we do. "Aworld without technology today is almost unimaginable."[156] "Innovations in technology have done wonders for the progress and accomplishment"[157] made in the aforementioned fields and industries throughout the world. However, speaking in relation to the faith community, there are pros and cons to the use of technology and various forms of social media.

There are three core advantages to using technology and other forms of social media. For instance, "the communal aspect of social media and other social networks have been

[154] Anthony Thomas Minneci, "The Positive Impact that Technology has had on Society." Penn.edu, June 22, 2016, accessed January 5, 2021, www.psu.edu/the-positive-impact-that-technology-has-had-on-society

[155] Ibid.

[156] Just Science, "What Are The Long-Term Effects of Living In A Technological World?" Just Science.com, January 15, 2018, accessed January 5, 2021, www.justscience.in/articles/long-term-effects-living-in-technological-world

[157] Lindsey Lazarte Carlson "The Importance of Human Interaction In the Age of Technology," July 22, 2018, access January 5, 2021, www.medium.com/the-ascent/the-importance-of-human-interaction-in-the-age-of-technology

beneficial to the faith community."[158] Social media has made it possible to bring a wide range of audiences and geographical locations together in community with the church. Community refers to people coming together in oneness in a particular space in spite of one's racial, ethnical, and cultural beliefs. Being in community represents one of the most important aspects in the ministry and life of the church. Historically and traditionally, from an African American perspective, gathering in corporate worship and ministry has always played a pivotal role in the life of the black church, and African American Baptist Church. However, in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, and in the attempt to minimize public exposure, the church had to rethink its position in doing ministry. Social media platforms became the mode of engagement and experience of worship (meaning religious corporate fellowship and oneness with God and each other) from the comfort of one's home. The fact that many people were able to connect in worship and communicate through various social networks: Zoom, live stream, Facebook, video voice and conference allowed the ministry of the church to continue. Social media has become a primary tool in ministry and the life of the church.

Another core advantage of technology and social media in relation to religion is associated with the ministry and life of the church: proclamation, teaching, outreach, programs, events, meetings, and various church ministries. "One of the characteristics of the prophetic churches is the use of social media."[159] It has functioned as a medium in spreading the gospel to a wider audience. For the past decade or so, churches have embraced the use of social media platforms in spreading the gospel and disseminating other religious information. In addition to

[158] Mookgo S. Kgatle, "Social Media and Religion: Missiological Perspective on the Link Between Facebook and the Emergence of Prophetic Churches in Southern Africa," Scielo.org, July 5, 2018, access December 29, 2020, www.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1848

[159] Ibid.

spreading the gospel, social networks have been beneficial economically. Technology has provided ways for people to donate, tithe, give offerings, and transfer money quickly and more efficiently. It has been useful for the accounting purposes of the church. For instance, technology and social media have made tracking and monitoring easier in the stewardship of its members and non-members financial giving. Zelle, Cash App, Venmo and other banking technology/social bank venue accessibility has made financial transactions and tracking much easier for the church. In terms of the general functioning of the church, social media has allowed the church to continue its ministries, especially in the wake of this Covid-19 outbreak. Bible Study, Sunday School, youth ministry, young adult ministry, women and men ministry, and outreach have continued in many churches due to social media. Religious Association meetings were able to proceed as well because of social media platforms. Again, social media has become an essential tool in the faith community.

The last core advantage of social media that relates to maintaining connections. "The last twenty years have been a time of enormous change in the religious community."[160] Religious institutions have become more responsive to people's needs and lifestyles."[161] For many years, seniors, and other physically disabled members (non-members) were unable to attend or engage in corporate worship services and other ministries in the church. Individuals with non-traditional jobs were also unable to participate in Sunday morning worship services on a regular basis due to their work schedules. Maintaining

[160] Thomas R. Lindlof, "Interpretative Community: An Approach to Media and Religion," Tandfonline.com, November 13, 2009, access December 29, 2020. www.doi.org/10.1207/S15328415JMR0101_7

[161] Ibid.

connections, even with these groups, are vital to the life to the church and provides the medium to stay connected and to check on their welfare. Staying connected has never been more poignant than it is today in the wake of Covid-19. Many individuals are alone and feel lonely in this quasi-quarantine. These groups need support, a feeling of community and spiritual fulfillment. Social media brings people together in many ways by allowing people to easily connect with one another. For this generation (those between 43-23yrs old) the primary mode of communication for this group is technology and various social media platforms.

Therefore, if the church is going to stay connected to this generation, whether it is personal or in relations to ministry, technology and social media will be required. This is the primary way this generation communicates and navigates life. "The internet and social media provide young people with a range of benefits and opportunities to empower themselves in a variety of ways."[162] This is today's generation (those between 43-23) mode of staying connected. The point is each group is essential to the life of the church and staying connected maintains those relationship. Social media, as well as other social platforms are doing just that in the most optimal way.

Equally important are the disadvantages of technology and social media platforms in the faith community. For instance, one of the disadvantages of technology/social media relates to human interactions. Social networks connect people, "at the same time, it has created larger gaps between one another, not necessarily in physical distance, but in interpersonal relationships."[163] In other words, those in person, face-to-face interactions

[162] Reach Out, "Benefits of Internet and Social Media/Online Behavior and Social Media," ReachOut.com, accessed January 5, 2021, www.schools.au.reachout.com/Benefits-of-internet-and-social-media/online-behaviour-and-social-media

[163] Lindsey Lazarte Carlson "The Importance of Human Interaction In the Age of Technology," Medium.com, July 22, 2018, access January 5, 2021, www.medium.com/the-ascent/the-importance-of-human-interaction-in-the-age-of-technology

are being diminished by social networks and platforms. Many individuals who attend church look for those in person face-to-face interactions. This type of interaction and fellowship is expected by many who attend church and those who do not, especially seniors, widows, and the youth. "Without physical human interactions, we fall subject to potentially losing our sense of real connection. We'll become desensitized, numb, and oblivious to the social cues that we would have witnessed had only the conversation been made in person."[164]

Another key disadvantage of technology and social media in the faith community is that it is a problem for some groups. While generations differ in their use of various technologies, "almost all millennials (ages 43-18), according to research, say they use the internet and social networks."[165] However, that silent generation (those born 1945 and before), and some of the baby boomers (those born 1946-1964) find trying to navigate the internet and various social networks problematic. In many situations they need assistance in connecting and interacting on the internet. For those who do not get the assistance or maintain some form of assistance, are left out of the community and fellowship of the church. Consequently, the Covid-19 pandemic has made it even more difficult for these groups to maintain connections to their faith community. In addition to these groups, there are other groups that find social platforms problematic. Ethnically and culturally, some groups, like some Native Africans, discover that it is difficult to engage in worship as they are accustomed. For example, based on my observation at SBC this

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[164] Lindsey Lazarte Carlson "The Importance of Human Interaction In the Age of Technology," July 22, 2018, access January 5, 2021, www.medium.com/the-ascent/the-importance-of-human-interaction-in-the-age-of-technology

[165] Emily A. Vogels, "Millennials Stand Out for Their Technology Use, But Older Generations Also Embrace Digital Life," Pew Research Center, September 9, 2019, access December 25, 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/

group's worship is more spontaneous and energetic with a constant physical flow of movement within a group. Therefore, it's quite awkward and arduous trying to engage in a praise and worship experience from a computer or some other technical device. Adapting to technology and other social platforms is not easy for everyone.

The third disadvantage of technology and social media platforms within the faith community relates to accessibility. According to the Pew Research, "more than nine-in-ten millennials own smartphones compared with 90% of Gen X (those ages 39-54), 68% of Baby Boomers (ages 55-73) and 40% of the silent generation (ages 74—91)."[166] At the same time, computer, and tablet (miniature portable computers) ownership has risen dramatically over the past decades. However, not everyone possesses at least one of these devices due to the cost. Although we are in a technological era where technology is present and woven in the fabric of our daily functions, many still do not have technological devices or equipment (computers, tablets, laptops, smartphones). It is taken for granted in this technological era that everyone owns these devices, which is not necessarily true. The financial burden of owning these devices, and the broadband service (Wi-Fi) for them to function, have produced a disadvantage among various groups and individuals. In other words, the economic disparities between different groups of people produces a hardship in owning these devices, which in turn diminishes their engagement with the faith community, as well as secular sphere. For instance, seniors, retirees, widows, and the underprivileged have fixed incomes or little income and are put at a disadvantage in terms of access to these devices. The point is, that not

[166] Emily A. Vogels, "Millennials Stand Out for Their Technology Use, But Older Generations Also Embrace Digital Life," Pew Research Center, September 9, 2019, access December 25, 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/

everyone is a proponent of technology and social media platforms because it promotes disunity and disconnections.

All in all, this technological era of social networking/social media has had a great impact on civil society, and in the faith community. The strides made in communication in promoting community, collaboration in the ministry of the church, and maintaining connections has been phenomenal. However, one cannot negate the fact that there is also a negative side to the use of technology and social media. The diminished capacity of human interaction, the difficulty in navigating social platforms for seniors, and limited spiritual engagement of worship for various ethnic and cultural groups, toppled by the limited accessibility to the necessary equipment and services to engage in the ministry of the church has been problematic. As a result, it might cause disunity and disconnect within the church and in civil society.

(3) Diversification

The third core factor that may have informed the development of disunity and disconnect in the faith community, is community diversification. As civil society changes, communities change. Consequently, as the community changes it impacts the ministry of the church. For example, in 1992 Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) purchased the current building from an Episcopal Church. According to the senior pastor of SBC, the Episcopal Church was relinquishing its building and relocating somewhere else because the community had changed. It had changed from Dutch, Irish, and Polish to an African American community, and they could no longer service the community effectively. Now, thirty years later, SBC is experiencing the same thing; community diversification. Today, the community that currently surrounds SBC is Latin American, Arab, East Indian, African

descent, West Indian, and African American. This is not an isolated issue, but a universal problem for many religious institutions. There are several reasons why communities now are more diverse than ever before. However, there are two key components attributed to this change within the community. The first reason is associated with a quality of life, and quality of life is associated with survival. A basic quality of life is a core element in community diversification. It is the central theme in understanding why communities are changing. People, no matter what ethnicity, race, culture, age, religion, and social position, want a basic quality of life.

Obtaining a basic quality of life isn't always easy, especially among the vulnerable, poor, and certain ethnic groups of people. In an attempt to obtain a basic quality of life, many diverse groups immigrate elsewhere. "Thousands of people every year immigrate to the USA and other countries."[167] They leave their native country where they were born to settle in another. For instance, "in the late 1800's at the start of the industrial revolution when America and much of Europe was shifting from an agricultural society to an industrial one, millions of people immigrated to America"[168] for a better quality of life. There are immigrants in our congregation, who immigrated to the USA for a better quality of life. Political and social oppression in their native land has made it difficult for them to rise above a particular socioeconomic level. As a result, these individuals immigrated here in search of a better quality and standard of living. Various ethnic groups immigrate to the USA not only for a better quality of life, but for better employment opportunities, better education, to be with family, religious freedom, and health care.

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[167] Ali Golchin, "The Most Common Reasons Why People Immigrate to Us," Sandiegoimmigrationlawcenter.com, May 9, 2015, accessed December 21, 2020, www.sandiegoimmirationlawcenter.com/the-most-common-reason-why-people-immigrate-to-us

[168] History.com editors, "Gilded Ages." History, revised April 3, 2020, accessed January 7, 2021, www.History.com/topic/19th-century/gilded-age

At the same time, there are numerous ethnic groups who migrate from within the country, state, and city to various geographical locations. Like those who immigrate from other countries, ethnic groups within the USA shift geographical locations for a plethora of reasons to but the core reason is for a better quality of life. For example, some people migrate from one state or city to another because the cost of living has forced them to transition. There are those who migrate from one side of the city to another because the rent has now become too expensive. Therefore, people are forced to resettle in communities that are reflective of their income and where they can survive. Young people are also components in community diversification. Surveys show that "there is a rapid increase in diversity among younger people."[169] "Experts say that cities offering this younger generation jobs and affordability can expect to attract a more racially diverse population," [170] that ultimately shapes the community. In essence, the desire for a basic quality of life has fueled immigration and migration, and the transitioning of young people to other geographical areas. As a result, they are disconnected from their new geographical community and the church.

The second reason why diverse communities may be disconnected from the church is related to social behaviors. Social behaviors are "actions or interaction that influence or is influenced by other members of the same group,"[171] or "those interactions among individuals normally within the same group that are usually beneficial to one or more of the

[169] Deidre McPhillips, "A New Analysis Finds Growing Diversity in U.S. Cities," Usnews.com, January 22, 2020, access December 24, 2020, www.usnews.com/cities/articles/2020-01-22/Americas-cities-are-becoming-more-diverse-new-analysis-shows

[170] Ibid.

[171] Delia Baldassarri and Maria Abascal, "Diversity and Prosocial Behavior," ScienceMag.org, September 4, 2020, access February 7, 2021, www.sciencemag.org/about/science-licenses-journal-article-reuse

individuals."[172] In terms of social behavior, these diverse communities are rapidly growing. Commonality is one of several social behaviors that unite groups of people. Anthropologically, we naturally gravitate to places, around people and things that are common to us. For instance, we have witnessed this pattern for decades within the African American Baptist Church and at SBC. "The church is the most segregated place every Sunday morning."[173] Most racial and ethnic groups gravitate to one another because of commonality. Another element related to social behavior is language. Communication is vital to one's survival because it lends support to that particular community of people. Communities bound by a common language assist one another in understanding the culture (civil society) and the community where he/she settles. This is why the communities are changing because people are settling where others speak their language.

However, commonality and language are not the only things that are attributed to community diversification. Culture, beliefs, values, food, and social practices all play a critical role in this composite of diverse communities. Like commonality and language, culture unites individuals and groups because it signifies familiarity and it gives identity to that group or community. It validates their existence within the community and larger culture (civil society). A biblical example of this is found in the book of Ruth. Naomi and her family, who were Israelites from Bethlehem, immigrated to Moab, like many immigrants and migrants, for survival and better conditions. Naomi's family settled among

[172] Delia Baldassarri and Maria Abascal, "Diversity and Prosocial Behavior," ScienceMag.org, September 4, 2020, access February 7, 2021, www.sciencemag.org/about/science-licenses-journal-article-reuse

[173] Ed Stetzer, "The Most Segregated Hour of the Week," Christianitytoday.com, January 19, 2015, access February 7, 2021, https://christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/january/most-segregated-hour-of-the-week.html

a people and community that was diverse and culturally different from theirs. Their ethos connected them to a geographical location and group of people so they were still connected. However,

> I want to suggest that Naomi and her family had some familiarity with the community and culture in Moab. People navigate toward what is familiar, and Moab was a descendant of Lot, who was Abraham's nephew. Although Moab was a pagan country, there was some familiarity within that culture due to the lineage of Lot and Abraham. This also may be one of the reasons Naomi and her family settles in Moab in addition to the fact it wasn't a famine there. Then Ruth, Naomi's daughter in law, immigrates back to Bethlehem with Naomi. She was married to one of Naomi's sons so she was familiar with Jewish culture. Although she adapted to the Jewish culture does not mean that she abandoned her Moab cultural roots."[174]

This is relevant because this is the same paradigm present in these diverse communities and evolving around churches. As a result, these different cultures entering the church may evoke conflict and sow seeds of disunity and disconnection that hampers ministry in reaching these local communities. This is SBC's challenge with community diversification. It is located in a diverse community and the church is becoming more diverse. The community is rapidly growing due to immigration and migration. Economic stability in securing a basic quality of life and social behaviors have fueled this mass exodus that we are witnessing from other geographical areas. SBC, like other faith communities, is trying to collaborate with these diverse communities around the church to establish unity and connections. However, ethnical, and cultural differences have created barriers that make collaborative efforts difficult; both with the church and with the community.

In summary, we have seen many changes in the twenty-first century. Change is inevitable, unity and disunity are products of change in various stages of people's lives.

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[174] Thomas Nelson, Inc, Spirit Filled Life Bible: New King James Version. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), Ruth Chapter 1-2.

However, the key principle is how to respond to it. From a historical Baptist perspective, we see how change played a role in the creation of unity and disunity within the Baptist tradition from its' inception. This struggle with unity and disunity created the formation of the African American Baptist Church, within the Baptist Tradition. In addition to the formation of the African American Baptist Church, how those fundamental principles and beliefs, like sole competency, autonomy, rejection of infant baptism, and missions-meeting the needs of the community that were established from its inception are practiced at a local level are very important today. SBC is struggling with the same challenges today because of changes in civil society. As an African American Baptist Church, how is SBC impacted by these changes, and what is its' response? This informed the research questions as the basis of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

A. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of societal change on a traditional African American Baptist Church, using Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) as a case study.

B. Nature of Study

When change occurs in the community where the church building is located, the church must respond to the change. The community in which SBC is located has become more ethnically diversified, thus diversifying the congregation of the church. This diversification has forced the church leadership to take inventory and make decisions about their relationship with the community.

Historically, each Baptist church has the autonomy to respond to this challenge in the best interest of the church; this is especially important for a traditional African American Baptist Church. Those Pastors who understand the location of the church as the work of God may struggle with finding a way to connect with the diversified community; the church may no longer define itself as 'The Black Church'. Those Pastors who view tradition as most important may move the church to a new location where the community looks and sounds like the traditional congregation; a place where traditional polity and practices are not challenged. Those Pastors, who view ministry from the context of the history of the Black Church and/or have a more social gospel perspective, may develop more ministry activities to meet the needs of the community but maintains the perspective of 'The Black Church' with clear ownership belonging to African

Americans. Regardless of which response is chosen, the church must address the challenge to the church. The pastor of SBC has chosen to remain in the community and find a way to develop a partnership with the community. To do so, he must explore the struggle in the church that has created an experience of disunity and the connection to the community in the context of diversification.

C. Research Questions

The guiding questions for this study are as follows:

1. What is the impact of diversification on a traditional black church?
2. What other changes in society are challenging Seminary Baptist Church?
3. What might it mean for Seminary Baptist Church to transition from an African American Baptist Church to a more diversified church?
4. How will this impact the community around the church?

D. Design of Study

This was a quantitative study using a sample of convenience. It was believed that in order to generate a full picture, all stakeholders needed to be included in the study. Stakeholders included church leadership, the church body (congregation) and community members. All participation was voluntary. Representatives of church leadership gave verbal and written permission to participate and interviews were recorded. Names were not used during the interview so they remained anonymous for transcription. Surveys were sent to congregants via email provided by the church without any identifying information. Surveys were also sent to other community churches and social service agencies in the immediate community and they sent the survey to community members. The congregants were given a link to the survey and were able to respond anonymously. The study included only those who responded.

The Senior Pastor was interviewed to secure permission to use the church and to garner a description of issues challenging the church. His statement of the overview of the challenges of the church gave direction to the definition of questions and issues to be explored with Ministerial and Deacon Board leadership. Responses from the leadership representatives and results of the literature review gave direction to the development of the survey for the congregation and the community. These were in-person interviews.

Content of leadership interviews were analyzed and interpreted in concert with this researchers' team. Results of the survey were analyzed using Survey Monkey. The researchers' team then created themes using the survey questions in order to provide an easier format to interpret the findings. The themes were interpreted in concert with the researchers' team.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

A. Purpose of Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and interpretations of the study. Results will be presented in the following order: leadership interviews and interpretations, survey results and interpretations and finally theme results and interpretations**.**

B. Results and Interpretations

Leadership Interviews

The Senior Pastor of Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) was interviewed to request permission to use SBC for the study and to ascertain his definition of church challenges. He gave the following vision statement, "my vision for this church is that it looks like the body of Christ." Then stated John 3:16 (KJV) "That God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [175] This is the biblical description of the church with every race, color, and creed: the world. The world encompasses a diverse group with a mixture of ages, gender, families, individuals, youth, and individuals from different socio-economic status. In other words, no one is left out. He states if the church looks like the body of Christ, everyone must be allowed to celebrate who they are in the context they have always celebrated, and as who they are in this traditional Black Baptist Church. According to the Senior Pastor, "this church cannot be viewed as a Black Baptist Church." He stated that moving the church in the direction of diversity is the challenge. "Home is now different," from what they have known. He recognized the challenges involved in this

[175] Thomas Nelson, Inc, Spirit Filled Life Bible: New King James Version. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), John 3:16

reality. He also stated, “many of the members are not ready for change, to worship with multiracial groups and those of different socioeconomic status.” He acknowledged that new people were attending the church who looked different, whose worship styles were different, who spoke different languages, were from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and were not dressed like the traditionalists within the church. He believes this congregation may not fully understand the biblical principle to “come as you are”, which is in line with John 6:36 (KJV) when Jesus says, “all the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that come to me I will not wise cast out.”[176] According to the Pastor, many don’t like the changes in civil society with moves toward diversity which changes the church; thus, new attendees are not received with love. “If they fully understood the mandate of Christ to love others, then they would exercise love and be receptive of others.”[177] He stated that it is important to be connected to the community in which the church is located so he plans to develop a strategy to meet the challenge in the context of diversity in the First Ward.

He defined his primary strategy as teaching, using in-person classes and social media. Classes would begin with the leadership (ministers, board, and directors of ministries) to create a sense of unity; retreats for the congregation (all ages), to remove members from where they are to another place, a symbolic indication of what needs to happen; and use of small groups to allow all to identify their gifts and use them. He stated that there needs to be teaching about “civil change and its’ impact on the church; then, re-teach what the Bible teaching about love.” In 1 John 4:11(KJV) “Behold, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”[178] The mission

[176] Thomas Nelson, Inc, Spirit Filled Life Bible: New King James Version. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), John 6:36

[177] Interview July 15, 2020

[178] Nelson, Spirit Filled Life Bible, 1 John 4:11

is to “Let God Build the Church.” According to the pastor, the work in dealing with this challenge, and the solution, needs to be biblical. The decisions or changes can’t be based on tradition or other preferences, but sound biblical principles.

The pastor’s vision statement identified areas to be explored. These areas were further explored with representatives of the church to ascertain whether in fact they were unified and could speak as one voice with the senior pastor. One assistant pastor, two associate ministers, director of the deacon board and director of the deaconess board were interviewed. They were asked to describe the current status of the church, future image of the church, issues of diversity in the church; especially racial tensions and inclusion; self -evaluation in regard to the challenge and self-responsibility in meeting the challenge. The findings are as follows.

The Assistant Pastor described the current status of the church as having some felt disunity related to diversity. She described “individuals coming and going, not staying because the congregation is not ready to accept them.” She further described the church as “segregated and discriminatory.” Racial tensions were described as the challenge for the church. She believes everyone should be accepted in the way “I can be included in all.” She acknowledged this was not the current reality. She hoped the future church would look like the community where the church is located. She believes the church needs to deal with the issue of social justice as well as biblical principles. She viewed herself as an individual and leader who accepts everyone and has a responsibility to help resolve the problems. She described her responsibility in this process as to help the congregation know the need to move in the direction of a multicultural church.

According to Associate Minister #1, the current status of the church was described as “a traditional church trying to make an impact”. This was further explained in terms of the need for

the church to make greater connections with the community. Connections with the community members are tenuous. She hoped SBC would become a “universal church”. She stated that to do so means the church must become more relevant in accepting new things such as technology, diverse ethnic groups and cultures, new ways of doing things. She believed the church needed to embrace the newness, not just accept them. She also stated that the church must “make Christ more relevant” to the youth and those who come to the church with no experiential knowledge of Christ. She acknowledged racial tensions within the church and in the community. She stated that the responsibility for dealing with this challenge belongs to the church. It is the responsibility of the church to stand on the side of love, and fight for justice when dealing with disparity. The church needs to deal with the real issues and get passed our perceptions of the “black church.” The issue of territoriality is a barrier to real inclusion. Despite this, the church is warm and respectful. She also stated that others must also want to be included and take responsibility for this. “One has to want to be included”. In relation to self-perspective the findings are that she sees herself as accepting. She also says, “I am part of the whole,” which is a way of saying that she sees herself as accepting, but also culpable in the function of the church. She described her responsibility as connected to Matthew 28:18-20 (evangelizing) which means everyone can be included in His presence. She believes she should teach about the cultural shift, the need to celebrate our history and the history of others. She stated that she needs to help congregants understand that, historically, the church has been our refuge, and always will be, but it has to connect with and meet the needs of the community.

Associate Minister #2 believes the church needs to be thought of in terms of the comfort and peace it gives to worshippers. She stated that SBC provides that sense of comfort and peace as well as a good place to be taught. She hoped that the church becomes more involved in outreach

and develops a greater connection with the community. She raised questions as to whether those in leadership and the members really want the connection. She also hoped the church would find a way to become more involved and discuss the racial tensions, making it primary. She believes the church is not inclusive and does not want to be inclusive. However, she feels included. She viewed herself as being accepting of change with a responsibility to help make SBC a multiracial and multicultural church. “We need to find ways to be inviting in saying: I want you.” She stated it needs to be a gradual process that is inclusive of the youth, and creative in reaching the surrounding community. She recommended engaging in activities with the community outside of the church building.

Chair of Deaconess Board viewed the current status of the church in relation to the traditional gospel of salvation and evangelism as a primary function of SBC. This is especially significant as the gospel of salvation has been the foundation of the Black church since its’ inception. The connection to a God who loved and saved Black people in spite of their station in civil life. However, she also stated that the church needs to become more involved in dealing with the racial tensions in society “find a way to meet everyone in a multicultural way,” the Church should be discussing this more than it does currently. She also believed all are welcome because this is not a “black church.” She said, “some are not receptive, but there’s a need to have people in every area in the church.” She accepts change and defines her responsibility as holding on to tradition in the context of making some changes. Her stated mission is winning souls for Christ. Finally, she stated she would follow and engage in activities of change defined by the Senior Pastor.

Chair of Deacon Board’s perception of the church was defined in terms of the congregational relationship with the Senior Pastor and the relationship among the congregants. This is also a

traditional perspective. He believed that the Pastor is deeply loved and the congregants love each other. It is because of this felt love that he believed the future of the church as overflowing with people, but he wants it flowing with "all people. If we keep God first, we will be fine." He described this as the Baptist tradition. He acknowledged racial tensions and believed that the church should be involved in dealing with this. He expressed an openness to different cultures because "that's the mission of the church". His stated responsibility was to remain the guardian and watchful caretaker. As such, he stated he must make sure the mission is met, but at the same time be watchful and guard the church. He is the watch caretaker.

Leadership Interpretations

Senior Pastor Interpretation

The Senior Pastor's vision statement, "the church should look like the body of Christ", is inclusive of various ethnic groups, cultures, ages, socioeconomic levels, and gender. It is his acknowledgement that Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) does not look like the body of Christ. SBC does not look like what he believes God intended the church to resemble. He believes that the church is culpable in its actions of not allowing the church to be what God has intended it to be. Tradition has played a pivotal role in this. SBC is beholden to a tradition which may become crippling and prevent it from growing. The church must move forward and embrace change. Civil Society has changed and that change has impacted the church, and SBC has to embrace that change. "Change is here", and the COVID-19pandemic has forced the officers of the church to engage in self-reflection and realize that the church is evolving. The church has to let go of the traditional perspective of we are "the Black Church." This type of thinking is preventing SBC from embracing diversity, internally and externally. These are barriers that must be broken. The

church has to be open to God breaking these barriers which means returning to the basic foundation of scripture.

Re-teaching the congregation the meaning of John 3:16 (KJV), "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"[179] helps the congregation to understand that Christ died for all, not just Black souls. Scripture teaches that Christ loves everyone not just Black people. "Let God build the church" through sound biblical and practical teaching is going to be crucial in moving the SBC forward toward an inclusive church. After re-teaching, the church must then teach about the changing civil society and how this impacts the church. It must help the congregation understand that the mission work is required, that the context of the world circumstance defines the needed work in the world, and evangelism means bringing' all' souls to Christ, not just Black souls. The teaching must begin with the leadership and then the congregation. Then, the church may grow and resemble the church that the pastor believes God intended.

Ministerial Leadership Interpretation

This group of leaders realizes that civil society has changed and the church has to also change. They acknowledge that the community around the church has changed, the congregation has changed and the church needs to make changes. The younger adults, the millennials and the youth have different needs that requires new, creative structures and ways of interacting. They understand that connecting with this now diverse community is important as a church and faith community. It is important in the continued life of the church. They envision an inclusive church

[179] Nelson, Spirit Filled Life Bible, John 3:16

that encompasses every race and ethnicity, age, gender, and socioeconomic level. A church that is inclusive of all people.

However, Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) being a traditional Baptist Church with the perspective of we are "a Black Church" has made it difficult for many in the congregation to embrace the move toward inclusivity. This has been a hindrance to the vision and process moving forward. It is their contention that if the SBC is going to move forward in breaking down these barriers, it is their responsibility to evangelize but also to teach new ways of practicing. They must teach by example, not only uphold Matthew 28:19-20(KJV) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whosoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."[180] They need to help develop inclusive youth activities, young adult activities and community activities that make Christ more relevant in their lives. They must be provided the opportunities to celebrate themselves within the faith community. There is responsibility and accountability in the freedom to practice one's faith. For this church, it means embracing other ethnicities and cultures, technology, new structures, and ways of worship within the church with an increased focus on the millennials and youth.

Deacon/Deaconess Leadership Interpretation

Representatives of the deacon and deaconess seem to be the most traditional in their perspectives. They acknowledge that change is here however, they do not want to make too many changes. Their primary concern is evangelism within the context of the "Black Church." They expressed more concern about the challenge of embracing other cultures and ethnicities.

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[180] Nelson, Spirit Filled Life Bible, Matthew 28:19-20

The ambivalence is apparent when they state Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) can no longer be viewed as a "Black Church" while also defining a primary responsibility of guardianship of tradition. This guardianship was described as preserving the traditional polity and practice of the Black Baptist Church. The Deacon believed that this challenge can best be met by "keeping God first in everything and everything else will fall into place; and love everyone." Although loving everyone means accepting "whosoever will come", it's a challenge to fully embrace change including other ethnicities and cultures. They both say that they are open to change but they are clearly not ready for change, only what they want to change. Therefore, inclusion is a major challenge for this group. This group represents leadership and membership who are struggling with the church moving toward inclusivity. Thus, this leadership perspective needs modification in order for the church to grow.

Survey Results

First Ward Community

Paterson, New Jersey is divided into 6 City Wards and Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) is located in First Ward. In order to gather data from the community surrounding SBC, the research team reached out to 2 churches and 3 social service agencies within the First Ward. The church pastors and agency directors acknowledged the importance of the study and agreed to distribute surveys to their membership and clients. An undetermined number of the surveys were distributed through these means and a very low number of participants responded and returned the survey. The number was so small that it cannot be considered representative of the community. Therefore, the information generated cannot be used as a statement.

It is important to note that this researcher grew up in Paterson, worked in Paterson and knows the First Ward very well. This is a diverse community with half of the population identifying as

Hispanic/Latin American. The other 50% includes several different ethnic groups. There is also a significant portion of the total population that is in immigrant status in the US. Small businesses in the area are owned by different ethnic groups and different languages are spoken. The immigrant status and possible inability to read and write in English may have impacted the number of respondents from the community. Those who are in immigrant status often fear that they may be deported so they live in the shadows, doing nothing that may leave a paper trail. It is also possible to be verbally bi-lingual and still not have the ability to read and write both languages. Thus, literacy and citizenship may have been roadblocks to participation. The demographic findings generated do not match the information garnered from the lived experience. Therefore, community member responses will not be used.

Seminary Baptist Church

Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) is comprised of 250 members. It was during the pandemic that the church realized that it only had the email addresses of 49 members due to their use of limited use of technology. After reaching out to the church body they were able to ascertain a total of 70 email addresses. Therefore, the research team sample size is predicated on the sample of convenience.

The research team sent out 70 surveys, which represents almost one-third of SBC membership, and 48 (60.3%) responded and returned the survey. The following results were generated: Participants ranged from ages 13-77+. 29.17% were 49-65, 27.08% were 66-76, another 20.83% were 36-48, and 12.50% were 77 and above. 6.25% were 13-18, and 4.17% were 19-35. Therefore, the largest number of respondents were adults between the ages of 36-77+.

The findings generated in relation to spoken language were: 14.58% spoke a language in addition to English and 83.33% spoke only English. 2.08% spoke “other” but the meaning is not

clear. Thus, most of the participants were English speaking only and a small percentage are at least bi-lingual. The other may refer to those who do not feel literate in English but are in other languages that were not included.

The findings generated for participants' ethnic identification were: 79.17% identified as African American, 41.67% identified Black, 12.5% identified Hispanic, 6.25% identified West Indian/East Indian, 6.25% identified White, 2.08% identified Latin American/Mexican, 2.08% identified Arab, 2.08% identified Asian, and 2.08% identified other.

These findings indicated that SBC is a predominantly Black church, with the largest group being African American. As this was a 'check all that apply' question, the identifications of Black and African American, West Indian/East Indian, and Black, Hispanic, and Latin American may overlap. Likewise, the White identification may actually be someone who is White and of another ethnic group or White may overlap with Hispanic/Latin American. Findings generated about gender indicated that 83.33% were females and 16.67% are males.

Results generated about church membership were: 95.83% are members of SBC, 2.08% are not members, however, attend regularly, another 2.08% self- identified as a friend of SBC and attends occasionally. No one self- identified as living in the neighborhood who chose not to attend or attended occasionally. Thus, most participants were church members and if not, they were invested attendees.

In summary, it is important to note that the church did not realize the absence of emails in member information until the development of the pandemic because technology was not the tool used for congregant contact. When emails were requested for sending out the surveys, church staff found only 49 in the records. A request for additional emails was made, however, only 21 more were available at the time the survey needed to be submitted. Therefore, despite the church

census of 250, only 70 surveys were distributed. In the interest of time, this sample of convenience was used as the study group.

To generate a demographic description of the sample, the following areas were considered: age, gender, ethnic self-identification, language spoken other than English and church membership. Results indicated most participants were age 36-77+ who self-identified as African Americans or Black. In general, most participants spoke only English while a small percentage were at least bi-lingual. Participants were predominantly female and were church members. Those who were not members were at least invested friends and visitors.

When asked about church attendance, the results were that most of the people come to church for their own spiritual fulfillment, and the smallest group said they attend for other reasons. However, coming to church to engage in fellowship and build relationships was almost equal to that of spiritual fulfillment.

When asked about their viewpoints, opinions and input, the results were that most people felt that they are heard and taken into consideration. However, the second highest group, almost a third of the church, said no; their viewpoints, opinions, and input were never heard and taken into consideration because they never voiced them. This was a large group that did not participate in the decision-making process and the question is, why?

When asked about participation and feeling included in the ministries of the church, the results showed that the highest number of respondents said that they felt included and that they participate. But one of the lowest groups responded that they do participate, but do not feel included.

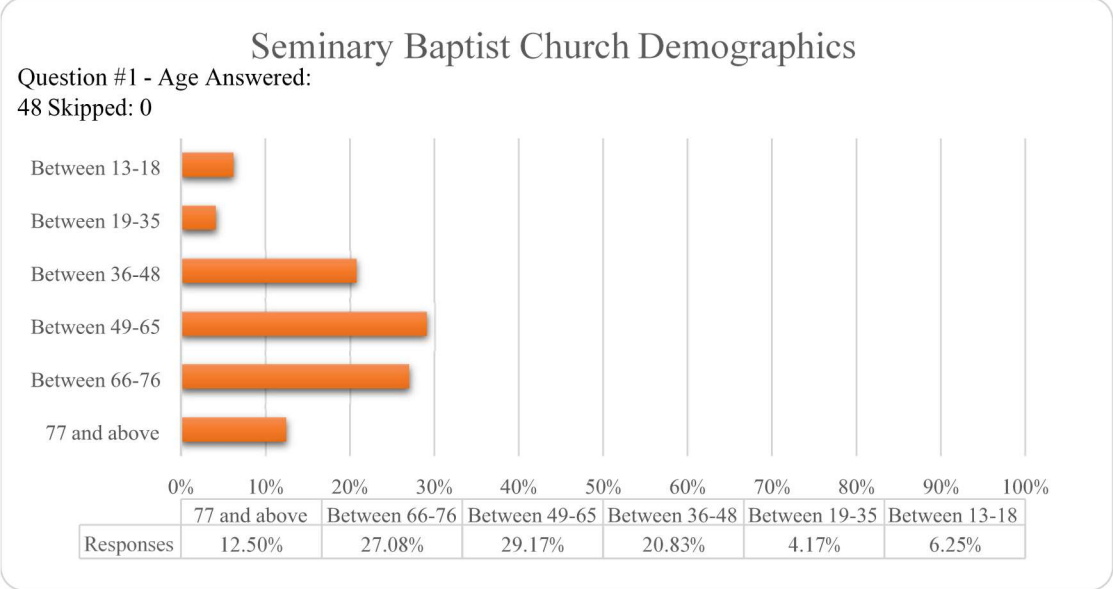
When asked about their preferences, the highest number of respondents said that they wanted a combination of both in person correspondence and social media platforms. However, an almost

equal response came from those that only wanted in person/at the church engagement in worship and ministry.

When asked about SBC becoming more diversified the results reflected that they were accepting because the community surrounding SBC and the congregation was changing. The smallest group was unsure because they didn't know how they would feel. However, the second highest group, which was more than ten percent, said they were somewhat concerned. The group, in addition to the other two groups, makes up more than fifteen percent of the congregation and are concerned.

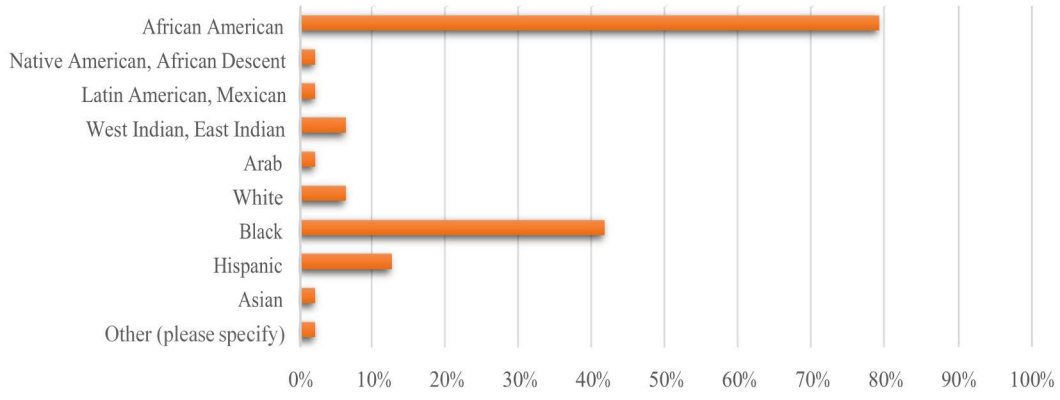
When asked about the importance of church tradition the results were that most participants responded that it was very import-but they were open to change. The lowest group responded that it was very important; but they were not open to change. No one said that it was unimportant.

The following graphs show the analysis for demographics.



Seminary Baptist Church Demographics

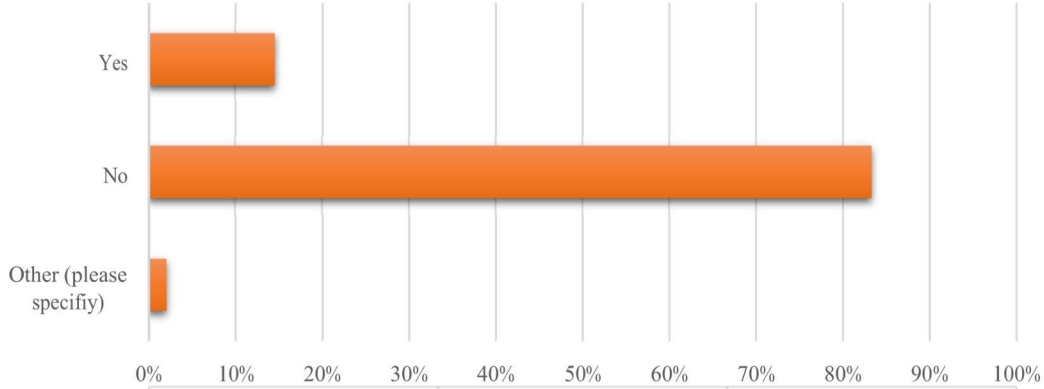
Question #3 - Ethnic Idenity
Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



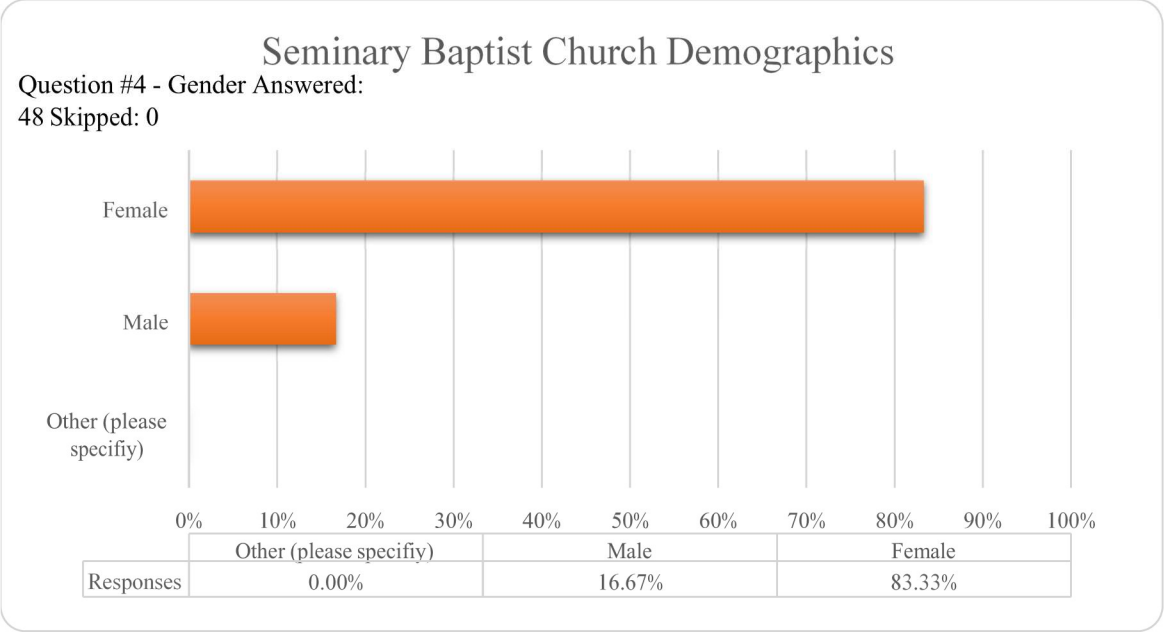
	Other (please specify)	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White	Arab	West Indian, East Indian	Latin American, Mexican	Native American, African Descent	African American
Responses	2.08%	2.08%	12.50%	41.67%	6.25%	2.08%	6.25%	2.08%	2.08%	79.17%

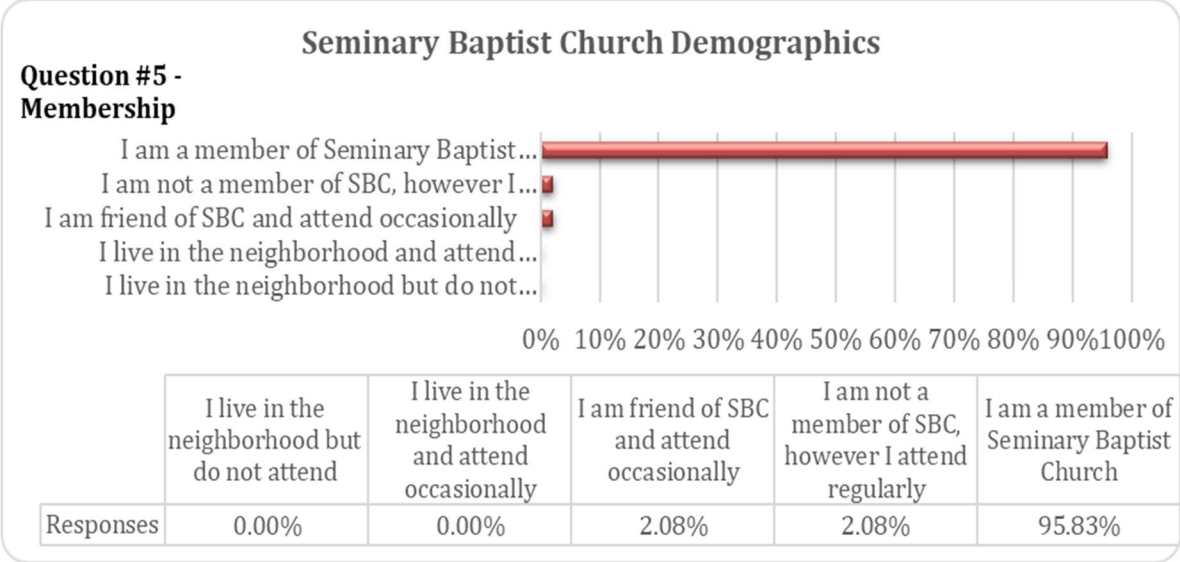
Seminary Baptist Church Demographics

Question #2 - Language Other than English
Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



	Other (please specifiy)	No	Yes
Responses	2.08%	83.33%	14.58%





Theme Results

All survey responses were organized into themes to make it easier in providing a coherent picture of the results.

UNITY- The findings for the theme of unity based on the survey showed that the church is more unified than expected. Fellowship is very important, which is not a surprise considering

that the largest group in the church are the baby boomers and seniors. The majority of the members are accepting of change.

DISUNITY- The findings here are that they are open to change, but there are still some traditional individuals within the group that are not open to change. These are probably from the baby boomer and senior generation. It is clear that there are two different generations and each of their needs are different within the church.

SOCIAL MEDIA- The findings for this theme shows how accepting people are of this new platform. It also shows that even in light of these new social platforms, people still desire that in person fellowship and contact.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT- The findings for this theme shows how the social media/technology are important to the millennials compared to the Baby boomers/senior generation. It also shows how open millennials and baby boomers are to various ways of spiritual fulfillment other than traditional ways. It even shows how the millennials versus baby boomers want to address civil issues and civil change.

DIVERSIFICATION- The findings for this theme shows that SBS is more diverse than we realized. It also shows that people are open to styles of praise and worship and that there are a small number of individuals from the community that attend SBC but are not members. However, they are vested, shown in how they keep coming back and slowly participating in the church.

Survey Theme Interpretations

UNITY: The following questions in the survey informed the development of this theme; 7, 8, 9, 11-14, and 18-23. The church was more unified than suspected. Congregants are vocal, give their opinions, participate, and feel included. This could be related to tradition and the fact that

Boomers and seniors are the largest group of congregants responding to the survey. More than 80% recognized the issue of change in civil society and the need for change in the church. They say that they are open to change, but that change is in the details. It is important to note 90% want to address social justice issues and a social justice platform, but do not want to make it primary in the church. They do not want the change in the church to become more of a social gospel message. In spite of this, they are open to change. Congregants recognized the diversity of the community and the church but some have concerns about the increasing numbers because of the unknown. How will the structure change? What will we have to give up? What will we look like and sound like? Will we continue to be SBC? Despite the concerns, they are willing to move forward under the direction of the Senior Pastor.

DISUNITY: The following numbers informed the development of this theme: 7-9, 11, 14, 18, 19, and 21-23. There are several issues that indicate possible disunity or felt disunity. More than 23% of respondents never voice an opinion. Why? Do they think their opinion will not be important? Add to this group the almost 7% of respondents who do not feel that their opinions and viewpoints are taken into consideration presents disunity. Does this mean that 30% or almost 1/3 of the congregation may not be included in the decision- making process? Or do they feel that they cannot be a part of the process? When people feel excluded, they do not become invested in the church. This can sow seeds of disunity.

The importance of the traditional perspective is another area where the seeds of disunity can be sown. Although 85% of respondents, probably boomers and seniors, indicated that tradition is very important and they are open to change, there is a 15% group who indicated they did not care and do not want change. If this 15% never challenges the tradition, things will remain the same and the church will not move forward. However, if this 15% challenges the church, conflict will

occur and the church will struggle toward a solution. In the process, members may leave, membership may not be regenerated and/or the church may become stuck in the struggle.

Styles of worship and addressing social issues are other areas that may sow seeds of disunity. When you have 30% of the church wanting to address social issues, while the rest of the church does not want it to be a primary concern, there can be dissension. The 1/3 may become angry, chronically critical, refuse to participate and/or remove themselves. If this 1/3 is composed of millennials and youth, the growth and future of the church might be destroyed. It is the same paradigm with styles of worship, when you have 20% of the church not accepting new styles of worship. Does this mean other cultures and ethnicities cannot be accepted and included? Does this mean there cannot be membership regeneration? Does this mean those who are different will eventually stop participating in the worship services or other church activities? SBC is a traditional Black church with a large group of boomers and seniors beholden to the tradition; the church is being challenged to find ways to deal with issues of societal change, diversity and inclusivity and true understanding of biblical principles and mandates. Dealing with these issues evokes a sense of felt disunity that must be recognized, processed, and resolved.

SOCIAL MEDIA INTERPRETATIONS: The following numbers informed the development of this theme: 1**,** 10-13. The pandemic is the contextual paradigm in which this theme has been understood. The pandemic has forced churches to use technology as a primary tool to provide worship service, continue ministry activities, maintain fellowship, and sustain the church. In light of the pandemic the church has been forced to change and make changes. The church recognized that it only had 49 email addresses of the congregation and had to reach out to collect more and only received 21, which we used in the survey. The church is currently trying to add email addresses to all congregant information. If Covid-19 had not hit the country, we would

have had to do this research via regular mail or some other means. It was in this context, that the church learned the importance of social media/technology. It has helped the SBC to stay connected and unified. Social Media has made it possible to engage in ministry in the midst of a pandemic, it provided an alternative to in person worship, and it has opened opportunities for others to reconnect and engage in ministries that they could not before for various reasons. Social Media is a very important platform for the church and the majority of congregants want a combination of in person and virtual activities for worship service, bible study and other church activities.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT INTERPRETATIONS: The following questions informed the development of this theme; 1**,** 6, 11, 13-17, 19, 22, and 23. There are two subthemes that are prevalent here: individualism, and alternatives. Individualism is the under-pinning thread that is seen here because there is a greater focus on self and concerns with one's own spiritual fulfillment. This group is probably comprised of more millennials and teens because they desire a more social gospel message in and from the church. This group knows the issues of social justice, they are more comfortable with diversity, change and new ways of doing things. They want more engagement between the community and the church. This group recognized the need for change and social justice and a social gospel platform. They are also concerned about the current lived experiences and they are knowledgeable about alternatives to meeting their spiritual needs other than the traditional church. Millennials and youth are the future of the church; thus, they must be given serious consideration.

DIVERSIFICATION: The following questions informed the development of this theme; 18-23. The issue of diversification must be considered generationally. SBC is a traditional church and it views itself as such. It is a clear vision that the senior pastor wants to move away

from such a perception. The fact that most of the participant members were older women who love the senior pastor, speaks of traditionalism. The boomers and seniors also carry a lived experience of overt discrimination, overt segregation of different ethnic groups, less education, fewer opportunities, with an expectation of overwhelming responsibilities and unfair accountability. This personal baggage may be the driving force in their response to any change. They have had to deal with so much in civil society that they may feel any need for change as an intrusion into their refuge, the church. I suspect that the older group is concerned more with power and authority. Will the other ethnicities take control of the church? If this is a possibility to them, then the need for the guardian of tradition is understood. The small percentage of members who view the need for more connection with the community and greater diversity may be outliers. This traditional group is less open to social justice issues and a social gospel in the church. If change is to occur; millennials and youth must take the lead with support from boomers and seniors.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION: THE CONSTANT CHANGE AND THE IMPACT ON SEMINARY BAPTIST CHURCH

It was quite interesting to recognize the historical parallel in church evolution while doing this study. Some would categorize it as history repeating itself. Whether it is history repeating or a paradigm from the pages of history, it is clear that change is a constant and provides the opportunity for growth. Civil society changes and this impacts the life and functioning of the church. Change is a part of life and its inescapable. Many people have tried to prevent, stagnate, and circumvent it, but change will always prevail progressively or aggressively. Unfortunately, two opposing polar streams are related to this thing called change: unity and disunity. Historically, the Baptist Church developed out of conflict and disunity. The schisms related to religious doctrinal belief and practices, like believers' baptism, rejection of infant baptism, church autonomy and Lordship of God were the substance of the conflict. Those who disagreed with the Church of England and the Roman influences left the church and it was this act of dissent that began the evolution of the Baptist Church and tradition. The church is all too familiar with these two polar streams. It has consistently shown patterns of unity and disunity from its inception to the present day. The book of Acts is full of examples of friction and disunity within the church as it grew. For example, the Grecian Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked in daily distribution of food (Act 6:1 KJV); Paul and Barnabas disagreed in relation to John Mark on their missionary journey (Acts 15:36 KJV); Peter went to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying he went in to the uncircumcised men and ate with them (Acts 11:2-3 KJV). Therefore, friction and disunity always exist in the midst of change. The struggle between the two polar streams witnessed today within Seminary

Baptist Church (SBC) is not surprising, we have witnessed this paradigm throughout the history of the church.

The African American Baptist Church, in the mid 1800's, emerged out of disunity and conflict. The schism was related to separation of Black people from White people because Black people were not considered human. Black people were slaves who did not have the right to salvation in the same way they had no rights in civil society. This struggle led to the acceptance of Black people in some churches and the eventual emergence of the Black church. Thus, historically the African American Baptist Church evolved out of church conflict and disunity, and so will SBC. Based on past patterns and this research, SBC will emerge from its' struggle into something greater as did its' predecessors. The senior pastor of SBC acknowledges that "there is friction in fellowship, but friction also produces growth."

There are a few findings that were surprising in the dynamics of unity and disunity within the context of the African American Baptist tradition. The first example is the impact of civil society changes on the church. For instance, "The exponential rise of technology/social media since the 90's"[181] has "left a mark in every major field in society"[182] and arena in life. Technology has a significant place in almost everything we do. However, SBC was operating with limited use of technology. Covid-19 placed a demand on SBC to recognize that it could no longer operate without the use of technology/social media. The church's lack of transition into greater use of technology meant officers were not aware they did not have email addresses in congregant information until this researcher requested the list. This may be related to the fact that the largest

[181] Anthony Thomas Minneci, "The Positive Impact that Technology has had on Society." Penn.edu, June 22,2016, accessed January 5, 2021, www.psu.edu/the-positive-impact-that-technology-has-had-on-society

[182] Ibid.

percentage of members are seniors and boomers who may fear and lack knowledge in the use of technology. They are more accustomed to in-person interactions and worship. However, based on research, the millennials and teens want technology and other social platforms because it is their primary way of communicating and interacting with others, Now the boomers and seniors are forced to engage with technology. This research found they liked the option of a combination of use in technology and in–person church engagement in worship service and ministry. This traditional group of boomers and seniors are more accepting of this new way of worship and ministry. Part of this acceptance is predicated on the demand placed on the church in using technology/social media during the Covid-19 pandemic in remaining connected with the congregation.

The second example that was quite surprising, is the generational shift. For decades, the youth and young adults were the largest group in the church. Today the boomers and seniors are the largest groups. The latter groups lived through Jim Crow, the March on Washington, economic oppression, and other political and social indignities, but probably never engaged in it as a church. In other words, SBC is a traditional African American Baptist Church where the primary concern is scripture, evangelism, and winning souls. A social gospel and social justice platform have never been a primary concern for SBC. However, this research found the millennials and teens desire church involvement in a social justice platform. Others, boomers, and seniors, wanted to address social justice issues in the church, but did not want to make them primary. However, the larger response was from the millennials who were living in the experience and looking for change. The last example that was quite surprising is related to diversification. It is obvious that the community surrounding the church has changed. Also based on this research, several ethnic groups have attended SBC but did not stay for whatever reason.

Whether they did not feel welcomed, accepted, comfortable with leadership or worship is unknown. However, based on SBC history as a traditional church, the need to accommodate new traditions may have been part of the reason. This is understandable because when the church was asked about SBC becoming more diversified, ethnically, and racially, the largest group respondents said that they were accepting of this due to the changing community surrounding the church. But other respondents expressed concern about the diversification. What's interesting is that some in this group were concerned about power and authority. They were afraid that these groups would come into SBC and take control. In addition, some of those individuals who were concerned are in positions of leadership. This is problematic because internal change in the church should come from the top.

Consequently, this takes us back to the senior pastor's vision statement "that the church will look like the body of Christ," inclusive of all people, races, and understanding SBC as an autonomous church. In other words, based on the Baptist tradition, as the senior pastor he has the power and authority to lead and make changes for the good of the church. He and the ministerial staff, are transparent about the need for change and the culpability of leadership for the state that it is in. The pastor acknowledges that SBC is a traditional church that is not ready for change, which research indicates. However, he understands the importance of embracing others and connecting with the diverse community and building relationships. The apostle Paul understood this as well on his missionary journeys. He visited various gentile towns and areas and connected with the gentile communities as he preached the gospel. Acts 15:36 records that "Paul said to Barnabas, let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."[183] This is part of our mission in the Christian faith

[183] Nelson, Spirit Filled Life Bible, Acts 15:36

and who we are as an African American Baptist Church. Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples for all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"[184] is the great, the commission, which is to evangelize. The church cannot evangelize if it is not willing to go, if it is not willing to engage, and embrace other races and ethnicities. In addition to evangelization, the mission of the church is to meet the needs of the community, whether locally or globally. At the emergence of the African American Baptist Church, it made a "commitment to assist the African American community in more substantive ways,"[185] which was the only ethnic group in the community at that time. Today that community is comprised of various races and ethnic groups, and the African American Baptist Church is committed by faith and tradition to maintain a presence and connection to these communities.

The senior pastor of SBC has made a conscious decision to remain in this now diverse community and work with the church body in establishing ways to connect with and meet the needs of the new community that has now landed at the congregation's door. The autonomy of the church allows him to make this decision and research shows that the congregation will follow him, despite their ambivalence.

Limitations of Study

There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was the small sample size of the available congregants. The church did not have all email addresses and was unaware of this until the researcher requested the list. Therefore, a sample of convenience was used. Another limitation was the lack of response from the community that limited the full picture of the church

[184] Thomas Nelson, Inc, Spirit Filled Life Bible: New King James Version. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), Matthew 28:19

[185] Ann Pinn and Anthony Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to the Black Church*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 72.

and community in terms of relationship. Therefore, their voice was not heard and represented in the research. Lastly, findings can be discussed only in relation to this one ward.

The Anticipated Contributions

It was hoped that this study would contribute to Seminary Baptist Church (SBC), the community of the First Ward and to my growth as a religious leader. The anticipated contribution of this study was to provide SBC with information that would assist the church in making necessary changes to meet the challenge of diversification. The findings may highlight those ministries where change is going to be more challenging. The findings could assist the Senior Pastor by giving him some direction in terms of where to begin in making those changes gradually toward inclusion. Lastly, and most importantly findings may assist the Ministerial staff in identifying where the church is individually and collectively. The anticipated contribution of the study for the community was to gather information that could serve to establish connections and a relationship with the church, other agencies, and organizations within the surrounding community. It was also a way of gathering information on the needs of the community. However, the responses were so low that nothing could be determined about the community. The study gave me a clearer understanding of the impact of change in the church, and in civil society. It also gave me a better understanding of why certain groups at SBC are so ambivalent about change, when change can be good. Most importantly, it aided in my grasp of the importance of leadership and its role in instilling unity in the church.

CHAPTER SEVER: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Change is a constant in life and needs to be given consistent consideration. The universal church and Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) in particular need to critically think about, and understand, the impact of societal change on the life of the church. Changes in society will always challenge the church and its' experience of unity. The components of this challenge are some conflicts and disunity. The church needs to be prepared to deal with this whenever the circumstance arises. It is for this reason the researcher makes the following recommendations for SBC and the universal church.

Seminary Baptist Church

The circumstances of change that might challenge the felt unity of the church will occur again and again. Change cannot be controlled; however, it can be managed to reduce conflict and disunity in the church. The most effective course of action is to prepare for it. The first step is to share the result of the study with the senior pastor.

In the context of this study, SBC can use the resolution of current issues as a first step. This entails learning more about the community in which the church is located and developing ways to be more responsive to community needs. The church leadership must think critically and educate itself about the congregation, as well as the external community. It would be important for the church leadership to meet with community leaders of agencies and churches to define and discuss their needs. Church leadership could use this researcher's survey as the foundation for such conversations. Leadership can then assign millennial and youth church members to develop focus groups with community members to have them define and discuss community needs and solutions. The information from leadership conversations and focus could then be used to find ways to meet the needs of the community.

If the church plans to move toward becoming more diverse, it must know its' congregation in order to make decisions about possible change. Church leadership can develop small groups to meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues of diversification and other changes as well as identify some possible solutions. In addition, monthly meetings to teach the congregation the doctrinal connections to this activity are important. The Teaching Pods should include all groups in the church: youth, millennials, boomers, and seniors. It is important to know the difference between the congregation and surrounding community however, it is also important to know the similarities. Gathering all the information, similarities, and differences, they can be identified and acted upon. The similarities can be used to manage the differences which may effectively create an environment of unity. Any conflict and disunity may be more easily explored in this context. Leadership must think more critically and find new ways of problem solving, such as creating a Leadership Pod with church and agency leaders to meet on a monthly basis, exploring issues and finding solutions.

Change in the church takes place from the top and filters downward. The leadership must teach by example. If they clearly express an investment in the community and act accordingly, the congregation will follow. The leadership also needs to reflect the community and vision of the church; this means having leaders of different ethnicities, speaking different languages. Community members will follow, then all can engage in the problem solving and decision-making process together.

Future Research for Seminary Baptist Church

Given the constancy of change and the impact of the church, further research about the struggles of the church to survive might prove helpful to the general Faith Community. Church leadership often responds to struggles within the church as if the problem is new and they are

surprised. This is really history repeating itself. As in all things, we can learn from history. Further research using surveys, focus groups, and interviews that involve all stakeholders might help leadership to feel more prepared and develop knowledgeable and informed solutions rather than temporary reactions to make congregants feel better. Such research requires more critical, objective thinking and planning. Solutions could then be developed as progressive, short term and long term. The church body might then experience change as the process it is rather than a surprising loss.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of societal change on a traditional African American Baptist church. The primary change for the church was diversification of the surrounding community. This diversification, as well as other societal changes, challenged the church and its sense of unity. A major question for Seminary Baptist Church (SBC) was related to whether it was ready to transition into a more diversified church. In addition, other challenges; which included the use of technology, the status of millennials and youth population, and the lack of a social gospel focus; have forced the church to transparently explore all issues that might disrupt church unity and sow seeds of disunity.

The identity of SBC is grounded in the global history of the Baptist tradition, as well as the African American Baptist Church. This connection has given form to the ministerial practice and structure of the church. The visible church is a covenant of believers who practice sole competency, baptism by immersion, non-infant baptism, and church autonomy. The church is hierarchal, with the Senior Pastor having complete authority over the function and decision making of the church. This form and structure grew out of doctrinal tension and conflict. However, the church has survived the struggles. Today, SBC finds itself in a struggle to define

what the visible church should look like, and what the style of worship should look like. SBC's identity as an African American Baptist Church is demonstrated in the congregation's self-image as a "black church"; a posture that is understandable in its defensive nature. The inception of the African American Baptist Church occurred during slavery when slaves were seeking hope. The church became their place of refuge. A place that they could call their own, where they felt validated and developed a communal system of support. Today that communal system includes a variety of ethnicities, not just African Americans. This is the struggle of the church. If it accepts the vision of Christ's Church, then it will include everyone. This means reaching out and saving the souls of every person regardless of race and connecting with the community "to meet their needs in more substitutive ways". If the church does not accept that vision, then it is similar to the vision of the slave master, who believes that Christian salvation is not mutual for all.

This study was developed to begin to explore these issues and to assist SBC in determining its readiness to embrace diversity and wholly become a part of its diverse community. Study results determined that SBC is a traditional African American Baptist Church that is more unified than anticipated; however, they are ambivalent about embracing diversity. Congregants say that they are open to change, but clearly indicate they are referring to the African American Baptist traditions in the church which may need to be modified, but not it's level of diversity. This may be interfering with the ability of the church to move forward in embracing diverse groups of people in the church. Equally important, was the discovery that the largest groups in the church are the boomers and seniors; the millennials and youth were the minority group. However, in order to have a regenerative church, more focus needs to be on that minority group as they are the future and life of the church. To sustain that life, SBC needs to become inclusive

in embracing diverse groups of people, embracing new ways of functioning, and investing in the millennials and teen youth of their congregation.

Research can be a powerful tool in helping the church to engage in critical self-evaluation to deal with issues of change and discord. Change is required for growth and whenever there is change there is also discord. Evaluating the cause and indicators of both can provide needed knowledge about the strengths and vulnerabilities of the faith community. This knowledge gives direction to problem solving and decision making, hopefully ending in growth.

Thus, additional research should be done to explore issues related to how the church functions and sustains itself in a diverse world. This entails involvement of pastors and the ministerial staff. They need to engage in more church studies to become keenly aware of who the congregation as a community is and become informed about the community outside.

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