

CHURCH HURT
EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP SERIES

DREW UNIVERSITY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL SERIES ON CHURCH HURT

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This project was initiated out of a concern regarding the then decline of church attendance at my church and others in the community. The project is an attempt to provide awareness, and education regarding Church Hurt as well as, a setting for engaging, support and healing can take place. The educational workshops will provide a process that is biblically supported, utilizing personal learning and improved engagement with practical practices to address the welfare of the wounded individuals, encourage behavioral change and improve member retention because of the behavioral change about acquired Church Hurt. Addressing the experiences of the wounded, in a safe space will provide our faith community and spiritual leadership an opportunity to identify ways to help in the healing process and provide support to traumatized persons. A focused educational process, equipped with basic awareness about the trauma experienced, and the effects on the individual in the healing process can result in a healthy transformation on several levels. Also, the workshops attendees will be made aware of how the relationship of the offender affects the relationship of the wounded, their faith or impression of faith-based organizations.

This project will create an awareness that will allow the participants to examine behavior witnessed or experienced in the church. The hope is that being aware of what

Church Hurt is will help to identify the behavior that constitutes it, deter the behavior and or make amends where the behavior has already occurred.

The workshops will allow participants an opportunity to discuss their experiences. Research shows that the opportunity to talk about painful and traumatizing experiences is beneficial in the healing process. In addition, through personal learning, individuals will be encouraged to reframe the story. During the workshop those with wounds and trauma will be acknowledged and participants provided encouragement towards healing. If appropriate reconciliation efforts will be offered to parties involved. Resources include scripture, books, articles, devotionals, surveys, interviews and personal experience. To maximize the workshop experience, the facilitators will consist of ministers, and ministry leadership.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the brothers and sisters that seek healing and closure to experience that made them question the love of Jesus for them and those who represent Him. To those brother and sisters that helped developed the workshops, will attend and those who will provide services to make the workshop successful. To those who prayed, my health, and strength during the time and during the pressing forward.

Finally, the project is dedicated to the future to the church and those who are encouraged to change their behavior to better represent the love of Jesus.

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Introduction

Psalm 122 A song of ascents. Of David.

¹ *I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord."*

² *Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.*

³ *Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.*

⁴ *That is where the tribes go up—the tribes of the Lord—to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel.*

⁵ *There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.*

⁶ *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure.*

⁷ *May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels."*

⁸ *For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."*

⁹ *For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.*

I agree with David when he states, in Psalm 122:1, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." The church has been considered a place of refuge to many. It was sometimes described as a hospital for the wounded and the lost. The church offers in theory, if not reality, a place of encouragement and uplifting which is now being questioned by many in our community.

Psalm 122 describes how people gathered at the temple in Jerusalem for security, inspiration and prayers for peace. It was a place where the people supported each other while fellowshiping with the Lord. The Psalmist speaks of their prayers not as individuals but as a group or congregation of those who love the Lord. There seems to be a sense of unity or coming together on one accord in their desire for each other. Not only do they pray for peace, but they also prayed for Jerusalem, security and prosperity. In the past, the Black church in my community was central to our lives. The church was where we found a place of belonging and true fellowship, sharing in day-to-day activities, and participating in decision making. The Church was a lifeline providing resources for employment, social entertainment and legal advice. People belonged to an entity bigger than themselves that provided comfort as well compassion.

The church was a place where gifts and talents were nurtured. Individuals could have and exercise authority outside of their homes, in a time where people of color had no authority otherwise. In church many had their first public speaking experience or singing debut before a very forgiving and supportive audience. For many church goers, participation was the answer to loneliness, restoration and social connections. For these reasons, David's statement supports the expectations and sentiment many have but there are some that have not had those expectations met.

While Church Hurt has occurred from the beginning of time, the term is not one frequently used. In the past toxic behavior or language was ignored, accepted or excused with statements such as, "that's just the way they are" or "that's just the way it is," and/or "they don't mean no harm," yet people have been harmed. While members in the past rolled with the behavior, today's generation is not as tolerant as those of the past. In recent years, more people have been encouraged to express themselves, release pain, express their displeasure and let their voices be heard. In addition, people are not as reluctant to share their experiences and or address them. In some cases, members have been moved to leave church due to the situations that negatively affected them and led to emotional trauma.

At the onset of this project, my church and others I frequented was experiencing declining attendance. The decline was noted before the Pandemic of 2020 but drastically increased during as well as afterwards. Reasons for the decline include the loss of life due to the Pandemic and the alternative of online services. Many churches closed and the many empty pews bear witness to a shift away from the faith community, which was once central to community, social, political and cultural activities.

An article by News Gallop statistics from 2021-2023 showed that, 3 out of 10 Americans or 21%, regularly attend church. The News Gallop article also mentioned that the Mormon church reports 67% attendance while most religious institutions see 11% attending once a month, 56% seldom attend and 31% never attend. Initially my hope was to develop a new discipleship program for young adult women that would improve attendance and discipleship. I realized that promoting and teaching discipleship requires a strategy to attract people. It became apparent that exploring why so many people have left the church, and would rather not participate in organized church, as well as practice Biblical principles would be a good place to start. The intention would be to gain a greater understanding regarding a cause for the decline and how to counteract it.

There is evidence of some change, as an increase in church attendance has been noted lately. “After many years of steady decline, the share of Americans who identify as Christians shows signs of leveling off – at least temporarily – at slightly above six-in-ten, according to a massive new Pew Research Center survey of 36,908 U.S. adults.”¹ The decline of Christianity in the U.S. has slowed and may have leveled off recently. Nonetheless, the behavior that this project is based on, Church hurt, still exists, is relevant and concerning enough to produce a positive resource to encourage further growth and church attendance.

As a minister the project is important to me for several reasons: the internal issues, the blemish on the church’s representation of Jesus, my role in church leadership,

¹ *Religious Landscape Study 2023-24.* <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/>

my personal witness and experiences with Church hurt issues and my hope to positively affect change. The reports highlight the decline slowing down which is good news but also concluded that the decline has not ended. Therefore, the efforts to address church hurt behavior is an opportunity for additional slowing and perhaps reversal of the decline.

Despite these signs of recent stabilization and abiding spirituality, other indicators suggest we may see further declines in the American religious landscape in future years. Namely, younger Americans remain far less religious than older adults.” For example, the youngest adults in the survey (ages 18 to 24) are *less likely* than today’s oldest adults (ages 74 and older) to:

- Identify as Christian (46% vs. 80%)
- Pray daily (27% vs. 58%)
- Say they attend religious services at least monthly (25% vs. 49%)
- And the youngest adults are *more likely* than the oldest Americans to be religiously unaffiliated (43% vs. 13%).
- Also, younger Americans are less likely than older adults to say they were raised in religious households.¹ And, compared with older adults, fewer young people who were raised in religious households have *remained* religious after reaching adulthood.

These are among the key findings of Pew Research Center’s 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study. Like the previous studies, the new survey offers a great deal of information on what Americans believe and how they practice a wide variety of religions. This data supports the relevancy of the topic and the need for tools to address it.

When I began the project, a major situation was taking place in my church, Convent Avenue Baptist Church. The church is in the heart of Harlem, New York and has been a part of the community for over 84 years. The situation that inspired this project, involved several individuals that included mostly leaders. The situation resulted

in a member and her daughter leaving the church. One of the leaders tried to help advocate for the wounded individual but because of how the situation was handled ultimately vacated their leadership role. Several members were hurt by the behavior of one person, both directly and indirectly which had a very negative impact. The church body loss two solid, serving members that were committed to God and the church they served. The offender was held accountable by being “sat down” which means unable to serve to 3 months and quickly returned to his position. It had not been determined if any apologies had been extended.

The incident which included both men and women, was not openly discussed, appropriately, and the manner, in which the situation was handled was disappointing. It was also disappointing that I was unclear about my role in this type of situation. The disappointment I felt led to a desire to further investigate what other behavior in the church or by church people, could be causing people to leave the church wounded.

As a result, I began to research behavior that is considered “Church Hurt”. The term was somewhat familiar, but I had no specific knowledge of what specific behaviors constituted it. Through research, observations and personal experience, I am now able to identify behaviors recognized as “Church Hurt” by individuals and the institution of the church organization or organism. I further discovered that the lack of awareness and the lack of acknowledgement in the church, is as damaging as the initial action/offense. I discovered that anyone is subject to experience some aspect of hurt regardless of age, relationship to the church, gender, and role in the church. Acquiring a better understanding of “Church Hurt”, has increased my ability to recognize it in others and myself. Church Hurt is behavior that is hurtful and grieves the Spirit of God. I’ve

concluded that an enlightened consciousness about the negative behavior of “Church Hurt”, which is often normalized, can be transformed into positive behavior. In addition, it’s my hope that the impact of “Church Hurt” has on an individual’s relationship with God and other church related participation, can be restored or healed. The spiritual and individual impact on a person who has been wounded in the church, by a church member or leader can have a devastating effect but not finding comfort or support from the church family can cause greater damage. I Corinthians 12:25, reminds us that there is to be no division in the body of Christ. I Corinthians 12:25 in the NIV Bible says, “so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other”. The NLT version, puts it this way, “This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other.” And In Luke 15, Jesus’ search for the lost sheep out of 100 compels us to search after and reach out to those who have been traumatized in or by the church.

Therefore, the goal is to uncover the hurtful behavior we knowingly or unknowingly inflict, to engage in transforming behavior, and assist wounded members to be reconciled to God, as well as the church. As shared in my research paper, as Christians we are called to be like Christ and spread His love. Diane Lansburg says, the church is to be a place where sheep can safely graze and adds, “To fail the sheep is to fail the Lord.”² Our church has begun an effort to focus on making disciples through knowledge, faith, love and service. This project would support the church’s efforts to provide knowledge, encourage faith, show love and serve one another in the process.

² Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God’s People* (Baker Books, 2024).

Most of my research was obtained via reading books that defines what is “Church Hurt and what’s not “Church Hurt”, as well as how it differs from “Church Abuse”. In addition, the sources define the role of leadership, the role of the church, particularly the African American church, healing, and theology for counseling. I also had conversations with a few members of Convent Avenue Baptist Church and other churches about their experiences with what they considered church hurt. I learned that church hurt is often ignored or attributed to the offending person’s personality and often not addressed.

The assumption is that awareness of Church Hurt behavior and its effects will lead to changed behavior and a healing process for the wounded, ultimately reducing the occurrence of Church Hurt and foster healing and reconciliations for those wounded. Optimistically, the educational workshops will develop a praxis complimentary to discipleship growth. They will focus on identifying hurtful behavior encountered in the church, the effects of Church Hurt, and the responsibility of the church leadership as well as membership.

The focus of the project’s research question is: can greater awareness of what “Church Hurt” is and an intentional effort to heal the hurt, reverse the rejection of church and Christ? My research will be used to develop Educational Workshops to explore several aspects of church hurt, such as what is church hurt, what is its relation to the decline of church attendance and membership, as well as if a healing process can be developed to effectively create healthier disciples. We will also explore if awareness can change behavior that may result the reversal or healing of the trauma church hurt causes. In addition, we will consider if awareness and changed behavior will lead to an effective evangelical resource for restoring membership and confidence in the church community.

The project will examine the spiritual, emotional and overall negative impact that the body of Christ suffers due to church hurt experiences. I will explore the scope of Church Hurt as a stumbling block, as described in Matthew 18:6-7, the accountability of being our brother's keeper, as recorded in Romans 14:13-23 and the responsibility we have to the Believer's Ambassadorship of John 23:35, as well as, to the "least of them" in Matthew 25:40 - 45. Each workshop will incorporate biblical texts as its foundation and to address the experiences of the participants. In the early workshops, church hurt will be defined, the emotional and spiritual effects of church hurt will be addressed, the role of the church, as well as the effects the church encounters will be discussed. More biblical context will be explored and used to establish the blueprint for resources or ministries to deal with church hurt occurrence and claims. The fourth workshop will allow participants and leaders to brainstorm about how churches can reform behavior and create spaces where those who have been hurt/traumatized can go. Before the final workshop there will be closing remarks, commitment to change behavior and the creation of a covenant. The final workshop will be a celebration of the shared workshop experience. It will include a worship service with praise and preaching.

Below is a general outline of the workshop format. Each workshop will open the same way and change as we move into the specific focus.

Overview of Workshop Format

- I. Five Sessions
 - a. Workshop 1 - Introduction to Church Hurt & Who Experiences It
 - b. Workshop 2 - Open Discussion about the Effects of Church Hurt
 - c. Workshop 3 - Discussion of Biblical Themes, Concepts and Examples
 - d. Workshop 4 - Introduce and Discuss Healing Processes
 - i. Storytelling and Testimonies
 - ii. Rewriting the Narrative by Retelling our Stories
 - e. Workshop 5 - Worship Service
 - 1. Conceive, Commit and Conclude
 - 2. Celebration: Preaching and Fellowship

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS CHURCH HURT?

Overview of Workshop Format

Workshop 1 - Introduction to Church Hurt & Who Experiences It

9:00 am Light Breakfast served (C- create hospitality space)

10:00 am Open with Prayer

Welcome
Introduction of Topic (include reason for workshops)
Statement of Purpose

10:30 am Defining Church Hurt & Explanations

11:30 am Questions and Answers

12:00 pm Lunch Break

12:45 pm Discussion on Who Experiences Church Hurt

Several Accounts will be shared

2:00 pm Open Discussion/Question and Answers

3:00 pm Closing Remarks & Special Prayer for Participants who shared

This chapter will describe the elements of the first workshop regarding a definition of Church Hurt, and its various types, as well as behavior sometimes mistaken or incorrectly categorized as Church Hurt. In correlation with the C.A.R.E. the first workshop will attempt to create a safe and comfortable space for sharing delicate experiences. More detail will be provided further on in the chapter.

As Christians we are called to be like Christ and spread His love. Diane Lansburg says, the church is to be a place where sheep can safely graze and adds, “To fail the sheep is to fail the Lord.”¹ The church should be ready and equipped to address incidents of church hurt but too often failed to do so. Dealing with church hurt begins with identifying and defining the behavior or situation that’s considered Church Hurt. After several discussions with various “Christians” and/or church members, it was revealed that the phrase church hurt is somewhat familiar, however the specific and various actions or behavior that constitutes it is unknown or misunderstood. Therefore, it is essential to define what church hurt is before the healing of emotional pain and change of cultural norms can begin. The central focus of the first workshop will be defining what Church Hurt is and who experiences it. The following definition for Church Hurt will be the working definition for this project.

“ Church Hurt refers to the pain inflicted by religious institutions, their members and/or their leadership - a pain that distances suffer from their communities and sometimes God.”²

¹ Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God’s People* (Baker Books, 2024).

² Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

Church Hurt encompasses negative experiences within religious institutions that have contributed to declining church attendance. Church Hurt includes spiritual or sexual abuse, church division, legalism and hypocrisy. Some individuals have left the church or attend organized, in person church, less frequently because of these experiences.

In addition, there are those who have not physically stopped attending the church, due to church hurt but limit their participation and as a result experience a lack of connection with the church community. The “church” refers to the body of Christ and as members of the body we are encouraged to maintain a connection. Hebrews 10:25 instructs Christians to assemble and encourage one another, stating, "...let us not neglect meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching". Several scriptures confirm the principle of unity amongst Christians and what we are called to do as part of the body. Written in I Thessalonians 5:11, are the instructions of supporting one another, when it states, “encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” The person that attends church and isolates themselves or feels isolated is possibly an indication of the church’s culture. Unfortunately, the lack of connectivity has been listed as one of the reasons young adults suggest for the decline of Church attendance. They have expressed that they don’t feel like a part of the church and or that their request or concerns are not taken into consideration. Therefore, they show up when they are on program or asked to make an appearance. This is another example of church hurt that we will begin to explore in the next section.

I believe that the behavior referred to as Church Hurt now, was not considered hurtful, negative or traumatic but simply what we do or the way “things” are. It was not

only tolerated, but it was also accepted. In fact, if you were wounded it was expected that you get “tougher” skin. (*Words actually spoken to me.*) The increased use of the term church hurt is likely due to the shift of individual sensitivity to negative (toxic) behavior in our society today and the lack of tolerance that has developed. Nonetheless, it is imperative to define and identify the various manifestations of church hurt.

One definition for Church Hurt “refers to the pain inflicted by religious institutions, their members, and/or their leadership - a pain that distances sufferers from their communities and sometimes from God.”³ Provided below are specific behaviors considered to be types of church hurt. The list below was largely found in “*Church Hurt: Holding the Church Accountable and Helping Hurt People Heal*” by Jerome Gay but includes additional descriptions from other resources. “Church Hurt is like a spiritual autoimmune disease with the body of Christ attaching itself and believers seeing each other as enemies instead of family.”⁴ Below are the various types of Church Hurt with brief descriptions.

Personal Hurt. One individual hurt another individual with mean treatment or abusive language. It is suggested that it may be the result of jealousy or envy. It can also stem from a lack of respect for authority or a feeling of being left out or not overlooked.

Cultural Church Hurt. “This is when people don’t love their neighbors as themselves and are never confronted about how they treat others. They may feel the need to put other people down in order to feel better about themselves. We need to concern ourselves first with how we treat others!”⁵ People who are not held accountable for their actions/bad

³ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

behavior will continue to behave badly and hurt others. This may also include the misappropriation of funds, i.e. stealing and silence.

Probably the most popular type of church hurt is complacency, when things are swept under the proverbial rug and the leadership “sees no evil, hears no evil and speaks no evil” ultimately doing nothing to address the offense and leaving the offended person(s) feeling undervalued and insignificant.

Another type of church hurt under cultural hurt may also include legalism, which focuses on rules and regulations rather than grace and compassion. This is often experienced as criticism of how one dresses or speaks. Another type of cultural church hurt is, hypocritical behavior, where what is preached is not a part of or is different from the actual behavior of leaders and/or members.

Structural Hurt. This is when leadership focuses on themselves and on winning the people to themselves. The leader sees the church as a means to be served rather than an opportunity to serve as Jesus did. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) “Leaders may also use personal issues as leverage against people. Sometimes pastors talk more about themselves, their accomplishments, and goals for personal advancement rather than the God. Their sermons become a means of controlling the congregation instead of an opportunity to teach faithfully from the text of Scripture.”⁶ Unqualified and abusive leadership also fit into this category, due to the manipulating and self-promoting nature of their ministry.

⁶ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

Unrealistic Expectations. “People sometimes think that they will join a church and they won’t encounter conflict. It’s unrealistic to think that anywhere people gather conflict won’t be present. Also unrealistic is expecting unlimited access to leadership is another unrealistic expectation. Leaders should not be inaccessible, but they need boundaries for their personal and emotional well-being, including boundaries to protect their families. People may also believe that God will send them to the perfect church, but the perfect church is found only in heaven.”⁷

Unknown Expectations. Occurs when others or standards do not meet the standards an individual has created in their minds. It could be a leader or member of the church who is not aware of the expectations. Unexpressed expectations can sometimes result in church hurt when they are not met, the same way it can in most relationships.

Sexual Abuse. When an individual or individuals are verbally or physically spoken to or touched inappropriately without consent. It includes incidents of sexual assault or exploitation within the church settings.

Church Scandal. The local church is caught up in lies, indiscretion or indecent behavior, i.e. known martial affairs & abuse (members and leadership) that ultimately discredits that organization and the overall reputation of the church universal.

Gay, and others such as “Theos Team”, argue that all forms of church hurt originates as the enemy’s handiwork. As these behaviors and their impact cause division and fighting amongst all. “Church Hurt is a weapon Satan uses to undermine a ministry’s potential. He seeks to divide, discourage and destroy.”⁸ The current state of the church supports this assessment and suggests that this tactic has proven a successful weapon. Another aspect

⁷ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

⁸ <https://www.theosu.ca/theos-resource/church-hurt>

of church hurt is a result of Division and Conflict that stem from internal strife, disagreements and spiritual immaturity which is prevalent in the church and community.

What Church Hurt is Not.

Church hurt is not disagreements, rebuke or correction, nor is discomfort a reason for isolation, or a reason for bitterness. Confabulation is a cognitive phenomenon where an individual unintentionally creates or distorts memories, filling in gaps in their recollection with false or imagined information. It is characterized by the following features:

1. False Memories: Confabulators generate memories that did not actually occur or are significantly different from reality.
2. Lack of Awareness: Individuals experiencing confabulation are typically unaware that their memories are inaccurate. They believe their recollections to be true.
3. No Intentional Deception: Confabulation is not a deliberate attempt to lie or deceive. It is an involuntary cognitive process. as a lie told honestly, where individuals replace missing information with something false, they believe to be true, often driven by emotion and self-protection.

In the Brene' Brown book "Rising Strong" she defines confabulation as a lie told honestly, where individuals replace missing information with something false, that they believe to be true, often driven by emotion and self-protection.

For example, you think that someone snubbed you or that they are angry with you because they walked past you without saying hello. Yet, in reality the person's attention was focused on something else, or they were distracted and simply did not see you. It may even seem like they did see you, as they may have looked in your direction, but it did not register. As time passes the confabulation grows and the mind provides additional

reasons for the snub to grow into something more, but none of it is based on reality.

However, the feelings of hurt and rejection are very real.

Disagreement. Groups will experience different opinions and ideas. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to agree on everything. This could become Church Hurt as in some instances aggressive dialogue may take place, making a minor disagreement personal and hurtful. It also depends on how or if the disagreement was resolved.

Rebuke or Correction. Loving rebuke is not church hurt. If you're not experiencing correction, you're probably not in real relationships with other people. If you really want to grow, there comes a time for you to be rebuked and corrected. If you don't have humility, you're operating from the idea that you're already perfect. God rebukes us as His children, and He sometimes uses people in our lives to correct us so we will become more and more like Him. Proverbs 12:1, says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid."

Hebrews 12:6–13 provides more detail on the benefits of discipline,

Dis-comfort. Following Jesus includes change and becoming more like Him. While change and growth usually result in positive outcomes, they are often accompanied by some discomfort which is a natural occurrence as we move from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

A Reason for Bitterness. Jerome Gay writes, "In my thirty-plus years in the church, I've known church leaders who left their wives for other women in the church. I'd be lying if I did not say this disappointed me and affected my view of marriage, pastors, and God.

There are also predators in the church. Pain should not be ignored, but we also should not let these realities drive us from the church in bitterness against God and others. Why?

Because you and I caused Jesus 'church hurt, and He still chose to die for us. Jesus refuses to give up on His bride, and we should not give up on her, either.”⁹ I disagree with the author on this assessment, as I would consider this Church Hurt. I think that this behavior stems more from the pain and is less about bitterness as well as a matter of trust in the leadership that is involved and has a role in their spiritual walk. I agree that the disconnect from Jesus is unfortunate and even misdirected but not unexpected when one feels betrayed by those who represent Him.

Church Hurt vs. Church Abuse

There is a distinction between church hurt and church abuse which is a matter of the severity of the hurt and intentionally. Church abuse is generally a more serious level of manipulation, misuse of power, authority and influence, as well as, premeditated assault or actions, emotional, physical and sexual. Church Hurt may include conflicts; feelings of isolation or exclusion and disappointment related to expectations and can sometimes be unintentional. Church Hurt is sometimes a matter of poor communication or an incidental misunderstanding. Church abuse however involves deliberate efforts to manipulate, intimidate and use scripture as a source of control. It is a calculated effort to gain or exert power.

This list is extensive but does not cover all types of church hurt in depth, such as sexual and physical violence. In addition, my research does not distinguish between male and female nor age groups but is comprised of a broader section of persons. It includes levels of distinction between leaders, members or laypersons which were included in the discussions.

⁹ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

The initial workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences with perceived “Church Hurt”. Each person will be provided time to be heard as the initial step to acknowledge the emotional impact experienced and their current perspective about the experience. From the various types of “Church Hurt” discussed earlier in the workshop we will identify which one best describes what the participants encountered and consider the healing process best suited to the encounters.

The space will be conducive for sharing and receiving spiritual encouragement. The workshop will replicate the C.A.R.E. model found in the book “Another Way Living and Leading Change and Purpose” by Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Grinenko Baker. The components are captured in the acronym C.A.R.E., which stands for the following moves:

- C – Create hospitality space
- A – Ask self-awakening questions
- R – Reflect theologically together
- E – Enact the next most faithful step

The workshop will ensure that the selected space will have comfortable seating and a welcoming atmosphere. The session will include praise, worship and prayer. Seating will be intimate, utilizing round tables accommodating six (6) to eight (8) people and refreshments will be served as well as handout in folders. “In the absence of “soul spaces,” we have little chance to show up for each other with what theologian Howard Thurman called “the sound of the genuine” in each of us. When that sound is lacking, we

will never hear the music of personal and social change.”¹⁰ The intention is to provide that space for our participants.

The C.A.R.E. approach is beneficial for this project because it is designed to engage people towards “profound change” while connecting people to their inner-being and their communities with an expectation of accountability. The book is designed for leaders but also contains transferable methods that facilitate change in a person. The goal of the workshops is to help participants look at their inner selves as it relates to their “Church Hurt” experiences in hopes of healing the inner self and address accountability or the lack of accountability. “People who experience CARE-infused leadership sink into their honest selves and experience a mysterious relatedness among strangers.”¹¹ These results are the same as the desired results we hope to achieve. Results such as meaningful change of the participants, empowerment and the ability to determine future action towards healing. “It is an effect at once deeply familiar and countercultural. It has a stickiness that reverberates in the communities to which people return. When we see it happening, we are reminded that people are built to experience community, to find joy in one another, and to create a better world out of a deep reservoir where the soul resides.”¹² While the initial goal is to provide awareness of Church Hurt and its impact on individuals as well as the body of Christ, the hope is that greater awareness will lead to a

¹⁰ Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Grinenko Baker, *Another Way Living and Leading Change on Purpose* (Ashland Chalice Press Ann Arbor, Michigan Proquest, 2020).

¹¹ Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Grinenko Baker, *Another Way Living and Leading Change on Purpose* (Ashland Chalice Press Ann Arbor, Michigan Proquest, 2020).

¹² Ibid.

change of individual behavior and therefore of the church culture. Ultimately causing those wounded to reconnect with the church community and rediscover joy in fellowship.

WHO EXPERIENCES CHURCH HURT

Research and personal observations reveal that there are no exceptions to Church Hurt encounters. I have had the opportunity to discuss the topic with several members of Convent as well as friends from other churches that share similar context of my church. Each of the individuals that I spoke to were asked to define church hurt in their own words. One defines church hurt as not being appreciated, spoken to badly or talked about in a way that damaged one's reputation. Another admitted to not being very clear about what church hurt was, saying that it was not discussed at all but was indirectly mentioned in sermons, workshops or other forums. She attempted to define church hurt adding that church hurt was someone saying hurtful and offensive things or nonverbal behavior that made people feel ignored and or excluded. Finally, she included how leadership was verbally abusive, misused authority and we're not held accountable as another definition of church hurt.

One individual described the experience of church hurt saying it is jarring unexpected experience that comes from someone you wouldn't expect it to come from such as people who work in the church. She goes on to explain that the motive of the offender may be to express their authority or to come off as more important than the person that they hurt. Unlike some of the others spoken to, she has heard of church hurt and she's heard of many incidents far too often.

Most of the conversations were with women but there were a few men willing to share and a few young adults as well. Common amongst the discussions was not only that

they experienced church hurt but that they have unfortunately experienced it multiple times. Amongst those spoken to, the responses to the various types of church hurt ranged from leaving the church to not addressing the situation at all. Most had never discussed their experiences and shared that they did nothing about them however felt a sense of relief when discussing their experiences with this project. The latter point is a source of encouragement regarding the workshops relevance as it reinforces the idea of how awareness and sharing our experiences can be therapeutic. The following pages are various experiences shared by several different individuals, that will be referred to during the workshop. Names have not been included and roles in church provided where necessary in conveying the proper context.

Participant #1 (E.P.)

The first conversation was about the incident that led to my workshop project. This incident includes various types of church hurt and include several leadership teams as well as the family and friends of the person most violated. This section will provide additional details about the church hurt experienced by one of the persons personally involved in the events.

Those involved included the church's leadership team, the sister and her daughter. The types of church hurt included personal hurt as one individual was reportedly verbally abusive and hostile. In this situation the male participant was aggressive with the female on several occasions. Both were trustees but it appears there was a lack of restraint and respect. The same instance included Cultural Hurt. The male trustee involved failed to treat the female with the dignity and professionalism the role they both shared deserved.

The encounters were witnessed by others and perhaps tolerated it because it was a woman under attack. Unfortunately, this behavior is not always seen as offensive or critical when the aggression is against a female therefore the male aggressor is often given an insignificant reprimand, if any. Because this behavior is not always acknowledged and accountability barely required, the behavior continues and further supports the culture. Since the incident involved several leadership teams, this church hurt also included “Church Scandal”. The effects spread amongst many indirectly and was not a good look for the church itself. In this situation the head of the Deacon Board decided to resign from her position in response to how the situation was handled. As told by the individual herself, both the head of the Deacon Board and the offended person wrote letters detailing the numerous events as well as the response to them which included, “no response”. They followed the Biblical teaching of Matthew 18:15-17. “If your brother or sister¹⁵ sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

The offender was “sat down”, in other words, not allowed to serve in the capacity of their role for three months. This meant not working or serving in the ministry for a short period of time. At the time of this report, the offender has never apologized according to this person's account. The woman eventually left the church along with her daughter. Multiple members were affected by this incident and yet it is not certain that it was properly resolved.

In this scenario everyone involved were mature members who served for several years and enjoyed membership well over 30 plus years. In this case some have raised families, married at the church and continue to serve now. Most of the details of this event were never officially or publicly shared, so there were no outcries and the amount of support that the victim was afforded is unclear or uncertain. However, what was shared word of mouth caused a quiet sadness.

Participant #2 (G.E.)

A middle-aged woman who also grew up at the church, along with her mother and sister also served, shared this next account. She has served as a trustee and is a member of and has been a member of the church for many years. It was customary for the choir to present a gift to those who were about to be married. However, in this instance it was decided that they would not present a gift to this sister because it was her second marriage. She said she understood the decision but the way the message was relayed was hurtful. After being a longtime member, she thought they would have been more considerate of her feelings. Fortunately, the whole choir was not in agreement with the decision. In this situation, the situation was well known, therefore acknowledging that the situation existed was not an issue yet taken on accountability was.

Fortunately, one person took accountability for the everyone and took the measures necessary to resolve the pain the sister experienced. The choir director wrote an apology on behalf of the entire choir, on a beautiful card and presented a gift to the bride to be. By doing so, she provided the wounded sister a level of consoling and a branch of reconciliation. The sister had a beautiful wedding which some choir members attended,

and she is still a member of the choir today. This indicates that any attempt to resolve or to acknowledge a person's feelings can result in positive outcomes.

Participant #3 (N.H.)

The next example of church hurt involves a young adult that grew up in the church. Her experience is not uncommon, inside and outside of the church but more profoundly felt in the church environment because of the expectation of belonging. The church had a large children's ministry and within the ministry there were a group of girls that were not very welcoming to this young lady. She describes her experience as being bullied by the people in her group. She admits that she did not recognize it as bullying it at the time, she just felt that she was not part of the main group. She wanted to be liked and wanted to belong. As a result, she felt excluded and struggled to find a lane to serve so she grew up around older people. She ended up spending a lot of her time around adults and missing out on activities people her age was experiencing. She had carried her feelings in silence until now and welcomed the opportunity to discuss and explore her feelings. During our conversation she also expressed gratitude for inviting her into the discussion, stating that she actually felt some relief from talking about her experiences.

As a result of our conversation, she added that there should be more opportunities to share these feelings, occasions or experiences to unburden and recognize the effect they've had on a person's life. In her opinion church hurt should not be swept under the rug, because it festers when not discussed and gets ignored. She suggests the church should not be reactive but instead proactively calling out church hurt. See further suggested that protocol should be put in place so people can get the help that they need

when they need it. Fortunately, she remains a member of the church, has found a lane of service and still fellowships with older individuals.

Participant #4 (C.N.)

Our next sister also expressed feeling isolated while growing up as well. Now in her early 60s she has also experienced abandonment while finding and maintaining a role in ministry. For many years she served in the children's ministry. Over the years she served under different leadership members where she discovered that sometimes change can be difficult. During those changes, there came a time when she felt shut out or unconnected.

She recalled an occasion when she wrote a letter to the head of the choir and requested to work with soloist so they could sound better. Instead of the suggestions or offer being taken as an effort to support to the youth, the head of the youth department read the letter, out of context to the entire choir. As a result, the children were discouraged and took offense. Whatever misunderstandings developed she took responsibility as the leader but always felt left out in the cold.

She recalls church hurt as feeling like she was being ganged up on and made a public spectacle. She lived through it until another leader addressed it and she tried to speak to the person and reconcile the situation on her own, but the other parties were unresponsive. In her opinion the leader of the choir may have been power tripping as she attempted to turn the young people against her. At the time she experienced rudeness from the members and was offended. As a young adult she thought they were mean and later she chose to avoid them rather than say something.

She gave examples of other incidents where the leadership was aware of what she was experiencing yet did not intervene. As she felt unsupported in her efforts to keep the ministry strong and a member of the church family. Later as a minister she felt ignored, excluded included, not in touch, not supported, and not encouraged. This was further felt when a new minister was hired for the youth ministry and she again was cut out of the loop and it was obvious that she was being intentionally neglected.

After serving for several years, she continued to serve with little support and with little communication things began to change while her contributions seem to be ignored. This led to her feeling unappreciated and disrespected. This is particularly common, in my opinion, for many women in ministry. To add insult to injury, there appears to be double standards as she served for free, but her male counterpart was paid for his service. On Sunday, February 15th, 2026, Rev. Dr. Howard Wesley, of Alfred Street Baptist Church, preached that the church will have to repent for three sins on judgement day and the of the three the first was the misogynistic patriarchal treatment of women. This behavior is considered Cultural Church Hurt as it systematically sustains dominance over women, such as devaluation and behavior that maintains male supremacy and protect the patriarchal order. "It operates as a structure rather than just individual attitudes, forcing women into lower status roles in workplace, home, and society." The behavior is more intensified by class and race.

As a result, she would leave the ministry and the church for a while feeling both hurt and betrayed. Like the earlier story shared she never discussed it with anyone and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss it, even at this late date. This individual also mentioned how discussing her emotions was cathartic and provided her the relief

because of expressing her strong emotions related to hurtful experiences in the church, by the church.

Ironically the individual that offended her is no longer in the church and now she is the minister over the children's ministry. She recommends that leaders make themselves more available to mediate between the situations that go on in the church. Space should be created where individuals can be confronted and situations moved closer to reconciliation. Deacons should be part of the process and responsible for holding people accountable for their actions. The church should create a way to develop a new culture, teach verbiage, and listen to both sides of a situation. The church should be the peacemakers.

Participant #5 (D.O.)

The next participant has experienced church hurt with both a male and female offender. In another case of misogynistic patriarchal treatment, a qualified woman who served as an assist superintendent was passed over for the superintendent role. A man, from outside of the ministry was appointed to the position and she recognized it as (possible) sexism. The Pastor appointed the man even though the man did not want the position but took it to appease the Pastor. Due to the inexperience and the disinterest in the position the work was accomplished by the Assistant Superintendent.

The next encounter involved another ministry that was having a meeting. The ministry had a Deacon Supervisor that rarely attended the ministry meetings but attended one. She arrived late and asked to speak at which time she requested a copy of the budget. When it was not available, the supervisor began to verbally attack the group. She

continued to be disruptive unapologetic. After the meeting the sister wrote a letter to the Deacon requesting an apology. The Deacon responded with a call and further assaulted her. She then took the matter to the Council Meeting and asked the Church Leadership team. She requested Leadership Training be provided and the request was delegated to the Head of the Deacon Board. The sister expected a better representation of leadership and felt that the Deacon did a disservice to the people. In her opinion the Deacon's behavior caused some members to decline serving further. She was able to provide some suggestions to help develop processes of teaching on how to deal with situations instead of sweeping things "under the". The Deacon would not apologize and eventually a different Deacon was assigned to that ministry. This church hurt seems to stem from abuse of authority and a lack of accountability.

Participant #6 (T.T.)

During my research I was given an opportunity to discuss my topic with one of our male Deacons. His encounter or experience with church hurt came early on in his ministry. When he was elevated to the Deacon Ministry, he felt the other Deacons treated him like a child, even though he was a grown man and older than some of them. He felt because they had been on the Deacon Board before him, they wanted to flex their tenure muscles. As a result, felt disrespected by a group of ordained leaders, that he was joining in service. In this case, I would say realistic expectations were not met. Nonetheless, he remains a Deacon today along with his wife, and yet states, he still feels like a "Toys-R-Us" kid that's still not treated as an adult.

Participant #7 (S.R.)

This church hurt experience was due to a members disillusion with leadership. This individual felt like the business of the church was not being shared and that known incidents where individuals were mistreated was not being addressed. After taking her concerns to several church leaders and seeing no action or accountability she became very discouraged. Mentioning it became unbearable to see this behavior taking place while teaching and preaching what the Bible says. As a result, the sister left the church and sadly, years later she still has not reunited with another church. From personal knowledge she maintains her faith in God but not organized church and as a result lacks that sense of community she once enjoyed.

Participant #8 (T.Y.)

Our next participant had more to say about what church hurt is not she grew up in another Baptist Church and the child abuse church hurt to maturity or the lack of. She defines it as any action physical or verbal that knowingly or unknowingly causes trauma or distress in the church body however she adds that being offended is not church hurt because it's a distinction beyond feelings. She mentions that people react to feelings all too easily and refers to the Church Covenant, where it states that we are not to be easily offended. She also mentioned that there is a distinction between people who grew up in the church and a new member, noting that newer members tend to take offense quicker. She also states that people who have attempted to hurt her failed because of her perspective, however she recalls being collateral damage. Finally, she states that she is

affected more by others being hurt than what is done to her, especially when there are children involved.

Participant #9 (K.M.)

This participant was severely hurt in her church which comprised many of her family members. She found herself in a marriage, unknowingly with a gay man and when she realized it she sought counsel with the pastor. Unfortunately, her confidentiality was compromised, and her personal information was shared amongst the family and congregation. She notes that leaders that hurt leaders is the worst.

She also encountered another incident of church hurt in relations to the pastor's wife and fulfilling the demands of the wife who tried to take advantage of her relationship to the pastor. K.M. eventually left the church and went to a new one that focused on healing. After she attended the church for a while the healing began. Overtime she was shown love and as they recognized her pain she received comfort. They did wait for her to approach her they recognized that she was in need of healing and met her where she was. She describes the church's culture as one focused on meeting individuals where they are. The process would heal her and encourage her to call her husband, apologize and foster forgiveness. She notes that the spirit of heaviness was lifted when she forgave.

Participants

Several other participants shared and discussed such things as the collateral damage that is sometimes associated with church hurt. One gentleman, discussed that his spiritual maturity doesn't allow him to feel church hurt. The lack of preparation for young adults to

serve was mentioned as a form of church hurt. And almost everyone mentioned the need to have a place or person available to offer assistance.

Observations:

Members that joined churches at an older age experience are very different from those who grew up in church, both however can experience being violated, isolated or unwelcome into popular groups. When people are hurt, sometimes the way they are hurt affects how they see Jesus. We can't just dismiss that as immaturity. For many people who experience church hurt, continuing to come to church is like coming back to see their abuser on a weekly basis. This painful experience must be confronted with understanding and empathy.¹³ By introducing some or all of these experiences with the participants I would hope to create an atmosphere where everyone can relate, see that they are not the only one and be more receptive to engage in the sharing/discussions. Several individuals stated how simply sharing their stories had beneficial results, prayerfully the participants will experience them as well and as we share support for those participants the pursuit to healing can begin.

¹³ Gay, Jerome. *Church Hurt: Holding The Church Accountable and Helping Hurt People Heal*. (pg. 17)

CHAPTER TWO

Overview of Workshop Format

Workshop 2 - The Effects of Church Hurt

9:00 am Light Breakfast served

10:00 am Open with Prayer

Welcome

Introduction of Topic

Presentation on Toxic Atmosphere

Mistrust

Loss of Faith

Loss of Membership

Young Adult – Generational Response/Reaction

12:00 pm Lunch Break

12:45 pm Open Discussion

Cultural Behavior of the Church

2:00 pm Open Discussion/Question and Answers (A - Ask self-awakening questions)

Opportunities for Participants to share

3:00 pm Closing Remarks & Special Prayer for Participants who shared

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CHURCH HURT?

The occurrence of Church Hurt can range from individual damage to church scandal that taints the reputation of the church. The damage may even spill out into the community when the hurt includes others like community leaders and or neighborhood affiliations. Church scandal negatively effects the morale and ministry of the church as it effects the trust of the members as well as their family and friends. In addition, the case of scandal perpetuates accusation that Christians are hypocrites which ultimately deters the consideration to accept an invitation to attend church and/or consider membership in that or any church. Church hurt breaks down the credibility of the church as a safe space for people already hurting and wounded people. As Disciples of Christ our role as ambassadors or representatives is what the world sees and judges. The erosion of the role that is presented is sometimes inconsistent with the character of Christ which further effects the way Christ is viewed and or related to. Poor representation of Christ can then affect the faith one puts in Him. At the very least it causes individuals to mistrust the organized church and a question whether to participate in organized church. For some, hurtful comments may be overlooked and received as a joke, others will pretend it did not hurt and suffer in silence while others will be so hurt that they'll leave the church and refusing to return.

In my early experiences at church, I recall thinking that how I was treated would never have happened in the "world" because I would have been prepared to defend myself and able to avoid it toxic or sketchy environments. Because I was vulnerable and expected different behavior from the people of God, I was caught unprepared and as a result, I was unable to trust the church with my emotional welfare. I developed a coping

defense because the church could not be trusted with my complete openness. Unfortunately, I learned that there was no place that offered a means to healing, consoling and/or compassion available. Instead, I was encouraged to develop “tougher skin.” I wondered where does it say that in the scripture? My Pastor at the time, jokingly asked but honestly, “...can’t you take a hit for me?” He had learned how to use his ministers as a buffer to take away some of the issues he often encountered. I guess that was part of his delegating practices.

The church hurt was especially challenging when the offender smiled and claimed that they were speaking in love or added more injury to insult with an unfamiliar, misquoted or out of context scripture to defend their behavior. There were occasions when I considered leaving the church and took a leave of absence for three years to regain my focus. I refused to allow anyone to chase me out of the church but there are people who have not grown up in church or been exposed to the reality of the church who would not have been able to rebound from such experiences.

Ultimately, regardless of exposure, experience and or expectations bad behavior is bad behavior wherever it happens. Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley, Pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church, stated that “you can have a building and put a cross in it but that doesn’t make it a church.” The church is more than a building, stain glass windows and piped organs. The church refers to the people, or its members that come together as a unified body representing Christ. By realizing that Christians are not perfect, but most are just striving to be more Christlike helped me to deal with some of the unwelcomed behavior. It was also helpful to better understand people and get to know them in order

to determine who was speaking in truth, in love and meant me no harm verses someone taking hurtful shots.

Another approach to help facilitate healing is to consider the emotional and spiritual maturity (life) of the person causing Church Hurt. For instance, are they themselves living a painful existence and striking out. Is the hurtful behavior consistent with their normal demeanor or regular behavior? Could the bad behavior be a case of hurting people, hurting people? The better we understand the people involved, the better we will understand how to help in the healing process.

In the book, *Broken Trust*, encourages us to understand that “Godly people can really be messed up. Just because it happens at church doesn’t mean it’s right. Trust your instincts about people...your gut sometimes really does know.”¹ The writer suggests that the “gut” is where we find our leading, but I rather credit the Holy Spirit with guiding us and helping us set healthy boundaries to avoid opportunities, people and occasions to be hurt.

As society has become more emotionally sensitive the slightest offensive, aggressive, passive aggressive and toxic behavior is not tolerated as it once was. Instead, there's a shift in how people respond to any appearance of hurtful or aggressive behavior today. Comments are no longer overlooked or ignored and the option to leave places or environments where they feel violated is more readily and easily chosen, than once before. Young Adults reported seeking counsel and healing with professional therapist rather than the church. They report finding more meaningful and adequately equipped help outside the church.

¹ Diederich, F. Remy. *Broken Trust: ...a practical guide to identify and recover from toxic faith, toxic church, and spiritual abuse* (p. 181). (Function). Kindle Edition.

In “The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans” one participant stated that the church is out of touch with many of the issues young people deal with these days. The issues included white flight in schools, racial bias, and sex traffic. Other issues included shootings and how she witnessed a 16-year-old girl that was shot in the head at school, as well as an expressed interest in government affairs, which I had not realized young adults were concerned about. The high school student, “Marissa adamantly rejected the idea that... practices such as praying, reading the Bible or talking with anyone, helped but instead referred to her therapist for help her. In addition, they mention the difficulty or lack of knowing who they can speak to because there is also a trust issue regarding conversations being kept confidential. These are only some indications of where the insufficiencies that the church exist.

In response to some of the insufficiencies some young people have turned to is social media and blogs that address things that they relate to. “Also, in contrast to the ineffectiveness of her church or faith in responding to her struggle at school, Marissa named online communities that raise awareness about sex trafficking as supporting her:”² She goes on to explain how the blog informs her understanding. This therefore is the lens in which she processes these topics without the influence of the church’s perspective.

In addition, to being out of touch with the things that concern young people the most disappointing challenge was her inability to authentically consider herself a Christian. Even though she “grew” up in church or more accurately put, attended church services most of her life she was unable to identify herself as a Christian. She questioned

² Almeda Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

if going to church was the “standard” or how one was identified as a Christian. She admits that she believes in God and gives Him credit for blessing her but is uncertain of her identity as a Christian. This young lady may be just one example of many young people that are not walking in spiritual certainty of their identity in Christ and therefore when they sometimes seem disinterested or behave out of character, it is not out of anger or rebellion but a lack of knowing who they are in Christ. The church might not recognize the lack of understanding the young members feel and what might seem as rebellion or disinterest, so they may attempt to discipline them or deny them freedom to express their faith at their level which ultimately pushes them out. One young adult said the church is always saying we need the youth, but when the youth come they chase them away. The church hurt affects the young members/people and ultimately the future of the church. A better understanding of what our youth need and what the church has to offer about their realities, might help us avoid the hurt that misunderstanding on both sides can cause and rebuild trust. The church can rebuild trust, its relevance and can be a resource for biblical living in an ever-changing world.

Church Hurt may sound like a clique to some and fail to inspire an urgency but the more research I read in addition to the interactions I have had with individuals who have experienced it, leads me to conclude that is an issue that needs to be addressed. “Church Hurt is real—its impact can be devastating. In a world of great skepticism, many are looking for an excuse not to believe, and the church witness is compromised when people are hurt in the church. Guarding against

Church Hurt requires clear expectations of those affiliated with a church, a push toward spiritual growth, a condemnation of pride, and a healing process for those who

have experienced emotional pain.”³ Church Hurt can be such that an individual may be traumatized. Unfortunately like the world, people are also traumatized and hurt all too often in the church, which may be part of or one of the reasons we’ve seen such a great decline in church attendance. The church is called to be set apart and to be different. In John 17, Christ reminds the disciples that just as He was in the world but not of the world, we His disciples are also not of this world. It may not be of much concern if people were just not attending church as a social activity because there are other places and organizations where they can socialize. Places where they can find friendship and inspiration and while the church offers all that, those places lack the Christ connection. Therefore, the concern about church hurt stems from the possible separation or rejection of Christ and the salvation a relationship with Him offers. The cost of the lost souls should inspire more interest and concern in the Christian community.

Psalms 122:6-8, describes what one should be able to expect in the house of the Lord. It says, we are to pray for peace and prosperity for the sake of the brethren and for each other. According to Psalm 122:6 - 9, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.” The text emphasizes the needs of community and not just the individual. There is a concern that the leader identifies with and prays about on behalf of the people.

In “Trauma and Grace, 2nd edition, Theology in a Raptured World”, Serene Jones connects David and the Psalms with Calvin Commentaries. She provides the similarities

³ Theos Team. Article on Church Hurt. <https://www.theosu.ca/theos-resource/church-hurt>

between David and Calvin regarding their leadership styles and their challenges. She writes that “Calvin’s own experience of persecution meant that, like David, he was also quite aware of the distinct pastoral needs of his community. He knew from the inside that their pain was not what one suffers in the wake of disease or lost love or the torture of a guilty conscience; rather, it was the pain one wrestles with when someone actively and aggressively seeks to harm you—and bewildered and angered by it, you are rendered helpless in the face of it.”⁴ When a leader has personal experiences with pain in various aspects, it can often provide a lens that can benefit how they lead and the people they lead because they can relate.

It is our responsibility to seek what's good for our brethren, therefore we can't be pleased or ignore when someone else is hurt and wounded in the house. It is my belief that it is our responsibility to understand what behavior is hurtful and develop behavior that does not continue or goes unaddressed but that as the body of Christ we participate in the healing and restoration process. “One author defines spiritual abuse as anything that keeps a person from achieving spiritual fulfillment.[16] That’s an interesting definition because abusers think just the opposite. They think they are helping you to achieve spiritual fulfillment with their heavy-handedness. That’s how they justify their behavior. But the truth is, they block people from God by eliminating people’s ability to hear from God themselves. Spiritual abuse can be subtle, but it’s always destructive. Don’t let the subtlety of it fool you.”⁵ Damage is done when a legalistic stance is cultivated and

⁴ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace, 2nd Edition* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

⁵ F Remy Diederich, *Broken Trust: A Practical Guide to Identify and Recover from Toxic Faith, Toxic Church, and Spiritual Abuse* (F. Remy Diederich, 2017).

individual need as well as compacity is ignored to meet a self-subscribed mandate. For instance, that we must do things the way we've always done it.

What are the effects to individuals:

Mistrust, Loss of Faith, Loss of Membership; Young Adult – Generational Response/Reaction

Loss of Faith

When people are hurt in the church, the effects can distort the way the injured view Jesus. This should not be dismissed as an indication of immaturity but taken seriously. “For many people who experience church hurt, continuing to come to church is like coming back to see their abuser on a weekly basis. This painful experience must be confronted with understanding and empathy.”⁶ Ignoring the occurrence compounds the initial pain which is often relived. When the church ignores the behavior or incidents of church hurt Jesus is improperly represented, the body of Christ and the church organization are damaged. In essence, Church Hurt becomes a stumbling block, which refers to something that causes someone to sin or fall away from their faith, often used in the context of actions or choices that could lead others astray. Romans 14:13, says, "Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother." A stumbling block can be a matter of words, actions or behavior that is contrary to the word of God and His principles.

The Bible warns us not to be a stumbling block and 1 Corinthians 8:9 states: "But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the

⁶ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

weak." This is warning especially for leadership who unwisely use their authority by lording over members because of their position or manipulate others for self-promotion. The effects of church hurt or being a stumbling block can include crushing someone's spirit. Proverb 18:14 speaks of a crushed spirit which is a "...state of profound emotional and spiritual brokenness, characterized but utter hopelessness, loss of passion and intense inner pain..." An individual may be better at withstanding physical pain than they can stand spiritual pain, a crushed spirit effects all aspects of a person's life. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." The heart seeks out and is set toward things that bring significance, love, security, comfort, etc. A desire or pursuit deferred, delayed, or altogether unattainable makes the heart and spirit of a person spiritually sick. This misplaced hope produces an anemic faith that leads to a crushed spirit. This spiritual sickness ends up affecting the entire being (body, mind, and soul) of a person. It is hard to know God when your knowing faculties have been disabled. "It is hard to feel divine love when your capacity to feel anything at all has been shut down."⁷ When what a person expects or hopes to acquire from the church relationship is not realized it can result in a loss of faith and spiritual sickness. Our actions go further than hurt feelings and emotional bruises when we negatively impact the faith one has in Christ. The priority of salvation and making disciples rest on faith built out of love. For God so loved the world that He gave His Son, that whosoever believed in Christ shall not die and have everlasting life. (John 3:16) Then Jesus died to

⁷ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace, 2nd Edition* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

save all and desired that not one be lost, that we all receive redemption and salvation. (2 Peter 3:9) The church priority of the church is to make disciples not break them.

Loss of Membership

As a natural progression, the loss of faith leads to a loss in membership. This loss has spiritual and practical consequences. The spiritual ramifications we mentioned in the beforehand paragraphs so we will review some of the practical challenges. For one, as the membership declines there are less people to serve in ministries, and when there are less people to serve in ministries the ministries begin to decline or even exist any longer. Loss of membership can imply to those outside that there's a problem with the church's ministry. Dwindling membership has a financial impact that not only effects running the ministries but also effects maintaining the church building and its properties upkeep. If it's a large church, the loss of members can also affect staff employment, such as cleaning, clerical and security.

Church Hurt: Unacknowledged

One of the major issues with church if not the major issue is the lack of accountability when it comes to Church Hurt. The lack of acknowledging the hurt or not having the ability to address the issue can lead to a toxic environment. When we fail to practice conflict resolution people don't worry about repercussions or taking responsibility for their actions. When there are no repercussions for hurtful and harmful behavior it tends to continue. This behavior can lead to situations where leadership is manipulative and aggressive in their dealings. Ignoring or not addressing incidents of Church Hurt sends a message to an individual that no one cares and that what was once considered a safe space is no longer safe for them. Feeling uncared for and unprotected in

the church may test one's faith and cause them to reexamine faith. It could strengthen one faith, or it may cause them to lose their faith. As a result of the latter option, and there is weaken or even destroyed, their interaction with other. Christians may become infrequent and their willingness to serve limited or a thing of the past. Depending on the experience and the spiritual maturity a person has, their confidence in the church, the leadership, the beliefs they grew up on, themselves and in even Christ Jesus can be shattered. Ultimately, as the integrity of the church diminishes, people leave the church, the church loses their gifts, all their contributions and worse of all a soul may be lost. The church would be guilty of doing the exact opposite of making disciples by breaking disciples. Galatians 5:14-15 reminds us that "...the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." And Galatians 6:7-9 reminds us that we reap what we sow; which states: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life". The text emphasis that believers to do good and be good to receive get back good. The opposite would be true as well if we sow evil and meanness, we can expect to get that back too.

The effects of church hurt run a wide range from misunderstandings, off colored comments to sexual abuse and violence. And for the most part these assaults go unaddressed or with little disciplinary action, because the offenses are not taken seriously or are not reported. Serene Jones, wrote in *Trauma and Grace*, "So, for Christianity, understanding trauma is not just a kind of secondary issue—it is rather the most central event of our faith."⁸ When the church fails to acknowledge the sins of church hurt it is not

⁸ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace, 2nd Edition* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

making God a priority. Diane Landsberg adds that, “We honor Him by caring for the wounded, dragging abuse into light, often at a great cost, and calling it by its right name.”⁹ Complacency is not of God; in fact, the risk of complacency serves to mislead those who are offensive to continue and never take responsibility for the damage they do.

The effects of Church Hurt and Church Abuse can cause psychological harm that negatively alters a person’s self-esteem depending on the extent, the level and the length of time the damaging effects have on the individual or church. The wounds from such experiences can lead individuals to distance themselves from the church or Christianity altogether. Depending on how deeply the hurt an individual experiences without a means to process the hurt, the pain may fester until it develops into deep seeded anger. In extreme situations anger fuel dangerous behavior. The placement of that anger may be towards the individual, the church and/or Jesus. Equally damaging to the individual is a broken spirit, which can develop into depression and isolation. Proverbs 18:14 says, “A person’s spirit can endure sickness, but who can survive a broken spirit? A healthy relationship with Jesus provides a sense of hope and connection, Deuteronomy 31:6 it states, “Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you” and Hebrews 13:5b says: “...be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” When that trust is broken due to being disillusioned by the church, few alternatives become available. The security of those who live a life of faith is a stabilizing source, especially in an unstable world, where time and church hurt can disturb trust and security.

⁹ Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God’s People* (Baker Books, 2024).

The church can offer the environment to build or rebuild trust.

Often times the offended never discusses the church hurt they have experienced which leads others to mistake that silence as an indication that all is well, despite the lingering pain. Yolanda Pierce references silence particularly to women of color who are often reluctant to raise their voice or lose their voices to express their feelings. This would be another case of suffering in silence but not speaking up will allow the situation to go unaddressed and totally forgotten, as if it never happened. Part of the women's reluctance stems from, woman, being labeled as annoying, troublemakers and/or delusional. The repercussions of being labeled or the having the tables turn, i.e. turning the victim into the villain results in delayed healing or healing to be achieved. If we refuse to protect the victim and neglect to hold the perpetrator accountable i.e., sweeping the incident under the rug, never meet or speak to the victim to acknowledge her/his experience we may need to consider if we are following Christ.

There is a danger in keeping silent about mistreatment, as it may be construed that "all is well" or that the pain is not real. There is no guarantee, which is an issue, that anything will change but the silence will certainly make the violation harder to forget or dismiss. Pierce implores us to speak truth and not allow ourselves be silence.

Beginnings of new life may start with speaking truth in love and affirmation which many have not been given the verbiage to do. "To be part of people's healing, we must have the compassion to run toward them and the conviction to act. You would want someone to run to you when you're hurting, so that's what you need to do for others. That's what Jesus did on the cross, and that's what He does through His church. We should all desire to be part of a church that doesn't just verbally acknowledge good doctrine but also lives it. This

highlights the concern expressed by many of our young adults. Yes, we will fall short of that goal, but the place where you were hurt is also the place where you will be healed!

This assertion is not meant to deify the church, but to emphasize the mission of the church.”¹⁰ The infusion of actions and a cultural shift that prioritizes authenticity, and behavior that exemplifies the Bible would be one step towards winning more souls for Christ. She adds that the concern to protect the offended should also be extended to the offender. The lack of accountability may lead them to losing discernment between lies and the truth. The benefits of holding offenders accountable may cause them to see the issue in their behavior and cause them to desire change. However, on the other hand, not addressing hurtful behavior may cause the offender to never see the consequences of their actions never see or feel the necessity to change. The acknowledgement of church hurt is a impactful and integral part of the healing process. The Bible reminds us that what is done in darkness will be brought to light. How it comes to light can serious ramifications especially when is exposed rather than sensitively revealed. When we control the narrative and care about the impact the experience has on everyone involved may mitigate the possible damage. While the church will be negatively affected whether acknowledged or not, but either way it the church as a role in resolving what has happened as well as develop disciples that are aware and concerned with how others are treated, especially in the house of the Lord. Colossians 3:12 reminds us that ¹² ... as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

¹⁰ Jerome Gay, *Church Hurt* (Renown Publishing, 2022).

CHAPTER THREE

Overview of Workshop Format

Workshop 3 - Biblical themes, Concepts and Examples
(R – Reflect theologically together.)

9:00 am – Light Breakfast served (C- create hospitality space)

10:00 am - Open with Prayer

Welcome

Introduction of Topic (include reason for workshops)

Statement of Purpose

Review scriptures on the Role of the Church, (Individuals and Collectively)

Psalm 122, Ephesians 4:25 – 32, Ephesians 4:2 – 5, Romans, Galatians 5:14 – 15,
John 17, Colossians 3:12

11:30 am Questions and Answers

12:00 pm Lunch Break

12:45 pm Discussion on Who Experiences Church Hurt

Several Accounts will be shared

2:00 pm Open Discussion/Question and Answers

3:00 pm Closing Remarks & Special Prayer for Participants who shared

This portion the workshop project will provide scriptures that speak to the role of the church and how Christians should exhibit a life in Christ. It will consider why people have the expectation that the church is a safe place, full of loving and compassionate people. In reviewing the scriptures, we will also explore the connection between Christ and His believers, particularly as His Ambassadors.

The church has been described as a place of refuge or a hospital where one can find healing. The following is Diane Langberg's description of the church, "The church consists of human beings created in the image of God and called by God to bear his likeness in our flesh. The church is the body of Christ—the embodiment of his character."¹ In Psalms, David describes the temple as a place of prayer. For instance, Psalm 122:6 - 8, says we are to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure." Thus supports the idea of church begin a safe place and as we are considered representatives of the church, people expect the security from us, especially from believers that belong to the organized church. The world is cold and often lonely, or harsh but the Savior promises to be with us and never leave us. He calls us to cast our burdens on Him and He expects us to be different as a people set aside. In John 17, His expectation of His disciples that are in the world but not of the world. Disciples of Christ are expected to exemplify the character of Him as recorded in the "truth of the word". So, when the church hurts an individual, they damage the image of Christ and often the faith of that individual.

¹ Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God's People* (Baker Books, 2024).

Verses 8 and 9 of Psalm 122 goes on to say, “For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.” These verses indicate the concern for the individual person and their well-being. The scripture identifies the desires for the entire nation and the community of worshippers. In the sake of one another, it includes, more than a general prosperity for includes the needs of everyone. Its emphasizes that we should be concerned about the body of Christ and that we take responsibility for those who enter the House of the Lord. Psalms 122:6-8, presents the House of the Lord as a place of provision. It speaks of the church praying for peace and prosperity for the sake of the brethren and companions (for each other). “For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.” Ps. 122:9 It connects the welfare of the House, not necessarily to the leadership or individual ministry but to those that comprise the “church”.

In addition, the text emphasizes that the welfare of the church, people and building is not the responsibility of any one person but a unified concern for the whole body. Likewise, the healing and growing process is a joint effort based on the love we have for Jesus and one another. Galatians 5:14 - 15, warns that if you bite and devour one another, you will be consumed. “For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.” The connection between one another can either work for us or against us. To hurt one individual and think that it only affects them is a misconception, as the text describes a reap and sow effect. What we do to others has a

way of coming back to us. For this reason, we are compelled to consider how we treat each other.

As a reminder we have a Church Covenant; “A Baptist Church covenant is a formal, voluntary pledge made between members and God to live out their faith together, acting as a shared promise to uphold Christian, biblical living. It acts as a moral and relational guide, focusing on unity, spiritual growth, accountability, and supporting the local church's mission.”

The Church Covenant (Baptist) was read at least once a month, as an opportunity to make a pledge to God and each other. It pledges commitment to one another, support for the church, accountability and reminded us of our responsibility of our Christian conduct, stating:

*“Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour; and on the profession of our faith having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully **enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.***

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to give it a place in our affections, prayers and services above every organization of human origin; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, towards its expenses, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world.”²

The church is responsible for maintaining the fair and just treatment of all people, believers, non-believers and potential believers. To explore behavioral change in

² Boyd Publishing, *The New National Baptist Hymnal* (Boyd, 1977).

the church culture, it is important to understand the conduct and expectations of the church universal as well as, a Christian. In addition, understanding what church hurt is, and our role in it, provides insight into developing methods for corrective measures. The Covenant sums it up for us and calls us to love one another and reiterates our relationship to Christ and each other. We hurt ourselves when we hurt each other. Not only does it present how we should behave but it calls us to pledge compliance with what it says. We pledge to walk in Christian love as described in Colossians 3:12, and calls us to remember who we are, and how we are to live a life of Christian love. It says, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” We are God’s people and as such there are characteristics that should be apparent in our lives and certainly in the life of the church. We are to wear compassion like a garment, show kindness to others, exercise humility, gentleness and patience. The Church Covenant also speaks of being slow to anger and ready to reconcile quickly. In other words, we try to choose words of encouragement, we build up and tear down, we give “our” seat up or make room for someone else, we don’t think too highly of ourselves. we invite and include instead of excluding. When these characteristics are developed in the disciples of Christ, church hurt would not be a common experience because we would have a consciousness and be convicted if we behave outside of those characteristics. Granted we are still growing and the enemy is busy, therefore church hurt will take place, but perhaps it will be handled better. In example, it would first be acknowledge, dealt with compassion and with the intention of reconciliation and/or repair. “The character of our Lord grows in our lives when we place ourselves in the soil of humility. That is utterly unlike what we have been witnessing in

much of Christendom, with its riches and fame and self-seeking pride. We are witnessing many things that are unlike Christ, who emptied himself, took the form of a servant, and took on our likeness (Phil. 2:7).”³ Therefore, the church suffers because when people step out of the world, enter into the church and expect to find Christ-like people, they are far too often disappointed.

The themes of love and connectedness are thread throughout scripture further encouraging us to care and be concerned with how we treat each other. Eph. 4:2 – 5, says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called: one Lord, one faith, one baptism...”. It says make every effort to keep the unity; therefore, it is our responsibility to address church hurt and find ways to facilitate healing. The responsibility to make aware, acknowledge and address behavior consistent with church hurt for the purpose of healing or correcting, is not specific to the individuals involved but to the entire body. The scriptures are not suggestions but commands that when followed identifies us, the Christians, the church as followers of Christ. Galatians 5:14 – 15, says, “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” And Romans 13:9b, further stretches the importance of our role to love one another as it states, “...and whatever other command there may be, are summed

³ Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God's People* (Baker Books, 2024).

up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Like the human body, when one part is hurt or wounded the whole body suffers. Injury to the church body may not be so readily obvious but like an injury that is left unattended things will get worse before it gets better. And as the wound continues to fester it will affect some of the most unexpected areas of the body, like the membership of the church.

THE REPRESENTATION of CHRIST

Repeatedly the Bible calls us to love each, and to be concerned about each other but it also causes us to remember our connection to Christ. As Christians, believers and/or followers we represent Christ.

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

The Scripture includes several points relative to this project, such as the consideration for others that Jesus exhibited and that we are expected to exhibit. It also speaks to what our priority in life should be when we become related to Christ, as it says the old is gone, and the new has come. Our old sinful nature should be renewed with the Spirit of Christ and repurposed. The goal of Christ was reconciliation and 2Corinthians speaks to the priority as it also relates to this project. To facilitate reconciliation after church hurt, the church is first

called to acknowledge the incident to begin the process. Jesus' mission to accomplish reconciliation was for the sake of sinners being reunited with God. Likewise, those who have committed church hurt need to be reconciled back to Christ just as much as the person who was wounded in the experience. "The body of Christ is called to be like Christ as individuals and as a gathered body of those who are one with him. Anything that does not look like Christ is not the church, even if it purports to be. As I learned from my father, a body that fails to follow its head is a sick body. We, the body of Christ, are called to follow our Head, be like our Head, carrying his light and truth into the world."⁴ It is a dishonor to God when we do not protect each other but instead ignore the mistreatment and hurt of others. It is our calling to follow His commandments, such as to love one another. 1John 4:12 says "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." Our love of one another is evidence that God is in us and therefore we have the capacity to love completely. We are to give as we have received from the Father, and when we fail to do that or we wound each other we are operating in our own image, in darkness and like the world. Instead, the Bible says let us consider how we can help each other with encouragement and support. Hebrews 10:24-25, says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." The text also speaks of not giving up on meeting together, but church hurt is one of the reasons

⁴ Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God's People* (Baker Books, 2024).

people stop attending church and so the text urges us to find ways to show more love. As the Bible explores us to fellowship and attend church, when we cause or are involved in one's decision to stop attending church, we are violating the instructions of the Word. We may be a participant in damaging someone's relationship with Christ and therefore effect the membership of a church as well as the body of Christ.

The Role of the Church

Ephesians 4:25 -32, provides a description of the behavior that represents Christ and is the foundation of His ministry. In doing so, it provides a model of Christian behavior that would bring Him glory and strengthen the body of Christ. The text provides a list of how-to, do's and don'ts for Christian living. Ephesians 4:25 - 32 says.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin"^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

It also reiterates that we are all members of one body in vs. 25. The following verses cover Christian speech, temperament, emotional management, treatment of the Holy Spirit and specific behavior that is characteristic of a disciple. One of what I think is the most common cause of church hurt is what is said as well as how it's said, therefore it's no wonder that Paul would find it important to instruct us about our speech. The

scripture reminds us to initiate our speech from a place of edifying and building people up. It encourages us to speak in truth as well as love. Speaking in truth includes not lying as well as giving honest opinions and constructive criticism for their benefit. In addition, the text addresses anger, another component associated with church hurt. The text says, do not sin in your anger. In some cases, anger that stems out of disagreements about church business can result in hurtful outlashes. This verse, vs. 27, warns that the devil can use our anger to get a foothold, as the enemy's goal is to create division which angry exchanges can result in. The scripture also speaks of stealing and grieving the Holy Spirit. While text refers to theft of material things, people are sometimes thieves of joy, which is one way to grieve the Holy Spirit and church hurt may be a means of that theft. Some of the other "don'ts" is laid out in verse 31, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." These are emotions that expressed, may be the cause and catalyst of church hurt. Refraining from this behavior is a matter of emotional control and the restraint developed from a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we are given the characteristics to be more like Christ. It says be kind, compassionate and forgiving as Christ has been forgiving to us. Ephesians 4, provides key behaviors to base successful behavioral change, Romans 12:9 – 13, includes additional insight to strengthen that base. Romans 12:9 – 13, adds that "*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.* ¹¹ *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* ¹² *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* ¹³ *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*" These

texts provide a road map to the security that many hope to find in relationship to the church.

Major points in this text speak of loving one another above ourselves, to be devoted to one another...in love, to share with the Lord's people and practice hospitality. The scriptures rest firmly on love, the love of Christ and serving Him as well as the love of each other, even over our love for self. It also emphasizes and stresses the unity shared amongst Christ and His disciples, which also reveals how our actions towards the least of them, are towards Him as well. (Matthew 25:40) These points or reminders are imperative in a world that is focused on self-serving, individualistic priorities and self-righteousness. The workshops are designed to bring awareness regarding how church hurt violates what is biblically expected of Christians and how to we may be able to decrease the occurrence of continued behavior such as church hurt, which contradicts the what the Bible teaches.

In many of the testimonies collected and recorded earlier in the paper, a need for accountability in the church, and establishment of places or ministries where people who experience church hurt can go to get counseling or support was expressed. The next chapter will include some of the ways help and healing may be offered to those who have been hurt.

CHAPTER FOUR

Overview of Workshop Format

Discussion on Healing Processes

9:00 am Light Breakfast served

10:00 am Open with Prayer

Welcome

Introduction of Topic

Cultural Behavior of the Church (E – Enact the next most faithful steps)

3. Storytelling and testimonies
4. Rewriting the narrative by retelling our stories
5. Journaling

Brainstorming about Healing Method

- Review ideas previously provided
- Entertain new suggestions

HEALING PROCESS

“But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,” declares the Lord, “because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.” Jeremiah 30:17

WORKSHOP DESIGN AND GOALS **Personal Learning and Improved Engagement**

The healing process will be addressed in the following categories/steps:

Acknowledgement and Accessing

Accountability and Amendments

The recommended healing process of this project includes providing a safe and supportive environment where transparency, accountability and addressing past harm is promoted. Resources on healing such as books and articles, training for leaders on how to prevent abuse and fostering a culture of empathy and understanding will be shared.

The first phase of the workshop will consist of the acknowledgement through sharing the testimonies previously provided. Select testimonies from various participants will be read and if any are in attendance they will be invited to add their thoughts and questions.

Afterwards we will ask participants to break into small groups which will encourage engagement by creating greater intimacy and participation. Roaming facilitator(s) will visit each group to help the conversations moving while pausing when necessary to support group facilitator.

In the small groups, additional insight from participant’s sharing will be collected to help develop personal teaching and learning resources. In the event, participants are uncomfortable speaking in the larger group, the smaller groups may be more comfortable

for them.

The Storytelling Session will be led by someone who is experienced in group dynamics and able to prevent storytelling from turning the session into a time of bashing leaders or the church. The intended purpose of storytelling is to open up participants and actively lead them towards healing and forgiveness. “First, the person or persons who have experienced trauma need to be able to tell their story.”¹ The experience of church hurt needs to be spoken out loud, as it relieves stress and anxiety. It also gives others an opportunity to offer help. If participants are unable to share or engage, the participant will be encouraged to assess the process or explore what’s preventing them from participating.

As the groups remain together, they will be offered an opportunity to express the emotional anger and pain that the incident have created in them. Similar to other “step” methods of healing, like the 12 Step Recovery or Healing models one of the steps, if not the first, is to admit that the hurt or anger exist. It is the prerequisite to beginning the healing process. To treat a patient, a doctor diagnosis illness is and how it developed. Likewise, to facilitate or properly attempt to heal a hurt it is necessary to acknowledge it exist and if possible, determine what caused it. In addition, to naming the pain, the participants will be encouraged time to release and grieve the pain, as well as how that pain affected their life.

Pain is an indicator of the need for remedy. The remedy for Church Hurt includes praying, growing in faith, focusing on godly desires, and having a sense of knowing what to hold on to and what to release.”² It also benefits the offended to connect with a trusted confidant to journey the path of healing. “If grace has power to reshape the imagination,

¹ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace, 2nd Edition* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019)

² Church Hurt by Theos,” n.d., <https://www.theosu.ca/theos-resource/church-hurt>.

then theology is the language that both describes that power and evokes it in the lives of people by telling grace-filled stories of new imaginings. But just as the shattering effects of trauma are painfully particular to each person who suffers them, so the healing power of grace is specific to each imagination it soothes and heals.”³ The smaller groups provide the space to discern how to approach the individual needs of its participants and explore what would best suit each participant. In each experience part of the healing process will include grieving aspects of experienced trauma.

Grieving the pain puts to death painful emotions and thus makes room for rebirth. In many cases before moving forward we must let go or put to death those things that don’t serve or make room for growth. In an article on spiritual abuse and church hurt the author states that “spiritual wounds can soften to become places of our very transformation, if we can find the support and resources to open to our healing journey to wholeness. As Rumi, the 13th century Sufi poet, says: The wounded is where the light gets in.”⁴ In *Fighting for Our Friendship: The Science and Art of Conflict and Connection in Women’s Relationships* author Danielle Jackson shares a perspective from Kobe Campbell a therapist and author of the book “Why Am I Like This? How to Break Cycles, Heal Your Trauma, and Restore Your Faith”. Campbell often works with clients who are reeling after painful friendship breakups and reminds them of the ways that grief can be complicated. When interviewed about moving forward after a friendship ends, she explains the different ways to grieve the loss. She says, “Grief is the expression

³ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace, 2nd Edition* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019)

⁴ Anne Solomon, “Healing Spiritual Abuse & Church Hurt,” *spiritual-life*, February 11, 2017, <https://www.spiritual-life.co.uk/single-post/2017/02/11/healing-spiritual-abuse-church-hurt>.

of deep sorrow. And the reason why I say ‘expression’ is because we are not grieving if we’re not letting it out. Many of us are feeling the sadness, the anger, the confusion, but if we’re not letting it out, we’re not grieving.”⁵ One exercise being considered for this workshop is as follows: we will give the participants a piece of paper and ask the participants to write down how they have been hurt. We will ask them to pray for healing and the ability to release the pain. Finally, those who feel that they can release their pain or forgive the person they’ve held responsible for the hurt will be asked to fold the paper and deposit it into a container. Once everyone has deposited the paper, the papers representing the pain of those individuals will be burnt, symbolically exhibiting the release and burning of the pain they had.

As the grieving process begins and hopefully has a meaningful impact the participants will be ushered into the next phase. The next phase like the grieving phase may not be totally accomplished but the seed will be planted and the process started. The next phase will attempt to move the participants towards forgiveness. The efforts will include the following steps:

This may seem to pertain to the offender mostly rather than the person offended however it is suggested that all parties involved consider forgiveness. The party asking for forgiveness is encouraged to acknowledge the wrongdoing, sincerely apologize and commit to change their behavior as well as seek reconciliation. With that said, one should understand that an apology may not be accepted. However, we will encourage the offended to accept the apology and extend forgiveness. Colossians 3:12-14 says, “...as

⁵ Danielle Bayard Jackson, *Fighting for Our Friendships* (Hachette Go, 2024)

God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." The act of forgiveness may seem to depend on one side; however, it benefits all involved. Philippians 3:14 says, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." The text calls for us to forget what is behind and to strain to move forward but when someone has hurt us it is often difficult to forget, and for some impossible, yet forgiveness often requires forgetting. It may mean forgetting the impact of the experience if not the person so much. The text also implies that moving forward may be difficult, requiring us to strain and to press towards the goal but it also encourages us do so to win the prize for which Christ has called us heavenward to Christ.

The act of forgiveness blesses both the one in need of forgiveness as well as the one extending forgiveness. In the event the time of forgiveness is not accomplished during the workshops, it is important to manage space between all parties. Nonetheless, if the offended follows what James 5:16 instructs us "...confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." There is the promise of healing for the confessor and prayers get answered. Therefore, we are to pray for all the individuals involved as well as the effects the situation has had on the church body/membership.

Key to the workshops and healing is not allowing the experience and hurt to stay hidden. We realize that there is a danger in keeping silent about mistreatment, as it may be

construed that “all is well” or that the pain is not real. There is no guarantee, which is an issue, that anything will change when the incidents are made known but the silence will certainly make the violation easier to forget or dismiss. However, an individual can find healing in sharing of their experience. Yolanda Pierce, author of “The wounds are the Witness” advocates that we not only find a voice but that we do not avoid raising it above the noise. She connects and recounts how silence regarding past racism led to tragedy. She implores us to speak truth as Ezekiel did when he spoke life into dry bones or dead situations. As the process of healing begins, forward moving steps can also begin.

Participants will be given time to journal after the groups have shared. They will be provided with prompts as some may not be familiar with journaling or may not know how to begin. The following questions for reflection will be offered to help with this portion of the process.

1. How did you feel going into the discussion?
2. How did you feel when the discussion ended?
3. Did you learn anything unexpected?
4. Did you learn anything new about yourself?
5. Did you learn anything new about Church Hurt?

As part of the storytelling exercises, the participants will be asked to rewrite their narrative from the vantage point of what their personal experience and how it has provided an opportunity or opportunities for growth. This will entail accessing the experience and looking at it through new eyes. For example, instead of the church hurt causing division between the person and others or the Lord, it drew the participant closer to Him. The participant will be encouraged to refocus their interpretation of the incident from a negative

and hurtful experience to whatever positive perspective they can identify. “Belief always proceeds behavior and for this reason the apostle Paul in each of his epistles addressed convictions before he addresses actions. To change the way a person responds to life, changes what a person believes about life. The most important thing about you is your healing system.”⁶ Note we will not be encouraging anyone to recreate a fictional experience but instead to see the whole experience and find what the devil meant for evil, but God used for good. Serene Jones adds that “...there needs to be someone to witness this testimony, a third-party presence that not only creates the safe space for speaking but also receives the words when they finally are spoken. The participants will be encouraged to develop a relationship with one of the other participants that they are comfortable opening up to.

Also, “...the testifier and the witness (and we are both) must begin the process of telling a new, different story together: we must begin to pave a new road through the brain. This third requirement for recovery is an extremely tricky business. It does not mean forgetting the past; rather, it means renarrating the events in such a way that agency is returned and hope (a future) is possible.”⁷ The rewriting of the story provides a freedom from the voices of our subconscious and replaces it with words are both affirming and healing.

The next exercise will provide the participants an opportunity to transform their thinking regarding how the church hurt has negatively affected their thinking and

⁶ Max Lucado and He Gets Us, *He Gets Us* (Thomas Nelson, 2023).

⁷ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

behavior. It will also provide an opportunity for them to turn their grief into growth, as they examined any positive effects the experience has had.

Finally reframing the experience through the eyes of God and His word can lead to forgiveness, freedom from bitterness and spiritual renewal. Brianna Wiest writes, “You must begin to see yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you. That is the first step of healing. Then you must learn to stop projecting altogether and regain your own perspective—not to believe you are as you imagine you’re seen, but to simply witness what’s in front of you, allowing the rest to fade away.”⁸ Reframing the story allows us to redirect our perspective and support the healing process. “What matters is that, in the end, you can tell a story that you’re proud of. That’s the light to hold all of your decisions up to: when you’re old and retelling the stories of your life, what will you say?”⁹ If the project is any way successful the new story will include a story glorifies God, reconciliation with God and the aftereffects of His healing power.

Accountability and Amendment

It is important to acknowledge the validity of a person’s experience and to listen to their concern. The actual behavior of the offender creates the hurt that produces the wound. As devastating as that pain from the wound may be, the lack of concern for the wounded, or acknowledgement of their pain and experience cuts far deeper. When unrecognized, the offended may feel like what happened to them does not matter and/or that they don’t matter. To further frustrate the offended, the refusal to hold the offender accountable for

⁸ Brianna Wiest, *The Pivot Year* (Thought Catalog Books, 2023).

⁹ Brianna Wiest, *The Pivot Year* (Thought Catalog Books, 2023).

their actions, or to impose an inadequate response of accountability, i.e. a pat on hand for totally unacceptable behavior, is a degrading and potentially diminishes one's self worth. 2 Timothy 4:16 says, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them." Paul was on trial and no one came to his defense. As he is on trial defending himself and he has no support. That is very similar to how those wounded in church often feels. We learn from Paul that while he is aware of how he's been abandoned, he does not express anger or bitterness, instead Paul says, I will not hold it against him. He forgives them and in doing so he denies the experience from creating negative energy but, instead he displays the character of Jesus in him. It is important for disciples to understand and exercise the attributes of Christ, but we are also responsible to extend that to others who are not as mature. "To be part of people's healing, we must have the compassion to run toward them and the conviction to act. Who would not want someone to run to their defense when they're hurting and that's what we are called to for each other. Jesus exemplifies that on the cross, and through His church He expects this. We should all desire to be part of a church that doesn't just verbally acknowledge good doctrine but also lives it. Yes, we will fall short of that goal, but the place where you were hurt is also, the place where you will be healed! This assertion is not meant to deify the church, but to emphasize the mission of the church." Acknowledging Church Hurt would begin by addressing Church Hurt by holding people accountable when it happens, having individuals confess their part in the experience, and discussing in the effect their behavior caused. Also, providing space and a means of healing would be a helpful component to ultimately changing behavior. Some situations may require additional steps to express remorse or reform.

Landsberg suggests that abuse is made clear to the public and admits that it occurs in church just like it does in the world. “We must face the facts, acknowledge them to ourselves, and make clear publicly that the problems of abuse are present in churches, not just “out there in the world” or in churches unlike our own. They are also here with us.”¹⁰ She adds that the concern to protect the offended should also be extended to the offender. The lack of accountability may lead them to losing discernment between lies and the truth. Somehow this may cause them to see the issue in their behavior and desire to change.

Spiritual abuse happens in community and needs to be processed in community. People like to think the consequences of spiritual abuse will magically go away but they will not. Unless we take action to make them go away hopes of change are slim. Spiritually abused people have been minimized, criticized, and dismissed but healing action includes shedding light into the darkness of abuse by letting people talk about it openly. When people are allowed to tell their stories, the following can be achieved: it offers them the freedom of expression that they haven’t had. It allows others to validate their experience and helps them to stop feeling crazy. It helps them to stop feeling isolated and alone. It shows humility when leadership is acceptable to open criticism and removes blame from the victim who is often told, “You are the problem. If you would only submit to the leadership then everything would be just fine.”¹¹ When we allow people to tell their stories we reverse this kind of oppressive atmosphere. Brené Brown speaks of the power of storytelling: When we find the courage to share our experiences and the compassion to hear

¹⁰ Diane Langberg, *When the Church Harms God’s People* (Baker Books, 2024).

¹¹ F Remy Diederich, *Broken Trust: A Practical Guide to Identify and Recover from Toxic Faith, Toxic Church, and Spiritual Abuse* (F. Remy Diederich, 2017).

others tell their stories, we force shame out of hiding and end the silence. When we reach out to others and stories are shared, we increase our power collectively and create the potential for change.

Efforts to facilitate change includes create a ministry that provides counseling and resolutions to the offended members. A ministry is needed that does not ignore or excludes individuals and understands that to do so goes against the way of Jesus. As mentioned earlier; to represent Christ, we are called to follow Him. In Luke 15, He shares a parable that illustrates how much He loved us, those God gave Him. The parable describes his position regarding the lost and how one lost sheep is important enough to leave the many, to find the one. He says, “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’”

Jesus explains that our actions have greater ramifications than we often consider. The idea that church hurt is an isolated experience fails recognize how far and deep the effects can reach. “The distrust that is generated often runs very deep, is long lasting and damaging, profoundly infecting and distorting a victim's faith in God and other people.”¹²

Jesus also illustrates the greater ramification when He tells the disciples that what was done to the least of them was done to Him. Matthew 25:40 says, “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of

¹² Anne Solomon, “Healing Spiritual Abuse & Church Hurt,” spiritual-life, February 11, 2017, <https://www.spiritual-life.co.uk/single-post/2017/02/11/healing-spiritual-abuse-church-hurt>

mine, you did for me.” David also understands and reiterates the same concept when he explains that His sins are not simply against those he wronged. He states that ultimately his sins are against God. Psalm 51:4 says, “Against you, you only, have I sinned. David understands how his actions, are disobedience to God and an offense to God. So, when someone hurts one of His children, they hurt God. The response to unaddressed church hurt is sometimes due to the idea that we are not involved, or we are not affected and so we should mind our business, but the Scriptures remind us that not taking action to restore the lost is contrary to the teachings of Christ.

Brainstorming (What can the church do better?)

In the book, *The Pivot Year*, it states that “We don’t move on when we think it’s time. We move on when we slowly allow something a little more interesting, a little more beautiful, a little more compelling, to grab our attention, and move us into a new world of our own creation.”¹³ Therefore this portion of the workshop will be bring the participants back into one large group to create ways to address church and be proactive in the approach. The group will be asked to address question such as:

- a. How can the Church better handle Church Hurt?
- b. How can we handle Church Hurt individually when it happens to us and to others?

This workshop will include an opportunity to create a covenant and a declaration of healing, that will incorporate what the participants suggest and agrees on. Suggested

¹³ Brianna Wiest, *The Pivot Year* (Thought Catalog Books, 2023).

scriptures will be provided but participants may choose one of their likings. The suggested scriptures for The Covenant and The Declaration of Healing are as follows:

Galatians 6:9-1 NIV

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Psalm 122:1

“I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

Declaration of Healing:

Psalm 26:13 NIV

“My feet stand on level ground; in the great congregation I will praise the LORD.”
 “Now I stand on solid ground, and I will publicly praise the LORD.” NLT

During the collection of testimonies participants were asked for suggestion that would help facilitate change. The first section of suggestion will apply to leadership, and the second would apply to the general church membership. A separate section will also be included to address the concerns of the Young Adults.

Suggestions for Leadership

- Several participants suggest that the Deacons and Ministers should be the first contact to addressing church hurt. Then, if necessary, the situation should be taken to the Pastor, especially when a person is considering leaving the church.
- Depending on the situation a ministry leader or president of the ministry, may address the situation.
- The next suggestion was to offer Bible Study and Preaching on Church Hurt. Bible study topics would include:

- Loving God's People
- Forgiveness
- How to be my Brother's Keeper
- Being A Peacemaker
- Cardinal-Minded vs. Christlike-Mindfulness
- Conflict Resolution

In addition, training on the use of kinder and corrective verbiage, would be helpful. The Bible says, "speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15) which is the intention of this project. There are words that help begin a conversation and acknowledge the situation. For example, like expressing empathy, and understanding why the situation is upsetting and admitting we might feel the same way; or inquiring about more details; or the person's point of view to express a willingness to listen; or addressing a situation by questioning what it was about. There are numerous ways to deescalate the situation before it becomes a greater issue.

The idea regarding corrective verbiage stems from individuals that are afraid or unsure to call out in real time when church hurt is taking place. Some have stated that out of respect and fear of embarrassing someone, especially an elder, they are reluctant to say anything. I argue that if addressed properly a situation can be handled immediately, be a teaching moment and avoid being ignored or unaddressed ever.

- One participant suggested assigning The Big Brother/Big Sister Ministry as the initial contact ministry.
- Another suggestion is that leadership be held to the same standards and accountability, if not greater, than the membership.

General Memberships

- Members should not spread rumors or gossip about church hurt.
- Depending on the relationship with an offended person, a member should approach the person to offer support and pray for them.
- When someone confides about church hurt, they should be directed to the ministry or persons who can help.
- A person should be trained or hire someone to counsel for emotional, and spiritual trauma.
- It was recommended that we institute or enforce the biblical steps are reconciliation found in Matthew 18:15-20, and make it part of a procedure and process that is clear to all.
- Church hurt should be dealt with quickly.
- Attitudes that support mindset like, “we never did it like this before”; some people are “untouchable or accountable”; “cliques”, or people who think “they're right in their own mind or own sight” or turn a blind eye to older leadership and entitlement need to be dismantled.
- General population is charged to hold leadership accountable
- Leadership must rebuild trust
- Pastor needs to be more involved in creating and maintaining more accountability church hurt.
- Church should establish a “no tolerance” policy regarding church hurt
- Church should intentionally go after lost sheep and Pastors should lead the way.
- Any efforts of healing and change must be based on general concern and love. We must cultivate a spirit of caring.

Specific to Young People

- It was suggested that the church reestablish a more structured or consistent ministry for the Young Adults.
- Be trustworthy by keeping promises made to them and more accountable by acknowledging their request.

CHAPTER FIVE

Overview of Workshop Format

Workshop 5 – Closing Worship Service

- 9:00 am Light Breakfast served
- 10:00 am Open with Prayer and Scripture Reading
- 10:15 am Engage in open discussion

This workshop will concentrate on worshipping God and giving thanks for the opportunity to present this information and share in this experience. This workshop will be divided into three objectives, first to conceive the effectiveness of the workshops, to commit to a healing progress and then to celebrate the results of the workshops as expressed by the participants as well as the time invested.

Conceive

There will discussion on how the workshops provided a clear understanding of what church hurt is and what it is not. There will be remarks summarizing what transpired in the sessions and we will allow time for a few testimonies. They will be asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What did you learn?
2. Was there anything unexpected learned?
3. Did any part of the workshop change your thoughts? Will it change your behavior or someone you know?
4. Would you share what you learned?
5. Did participating in the workshop add any healing benefits?
6. How do you think would improve the workshops?

In addition, we will introduce the prepared covenant and discuss how it was produced in the brainstorming sessions. We will also hear from participants that are ready to move into forgiveness and continued healing.

Commit to the Covenant

The participants will be asked to read aloud, in unison, as a sign of their commitment to the covenant and to each other. Then they will be provided a copy to take home.

Celebration: Preaching and fellowship

We will then proceed into the hour of worship with singing, prayer and preaching. We will request that the preacher focus on or use Psalm 122. If there are participants that are not members of a church or have attended church because of church hurt, we will extend an invitation to reunite with Christ and the church.

The service and the educational workshops will then be closed with a benediction.

Conclusion

This project has tested my perseverance and ability to finish. During the process, the initial excitement drove the outline development, but the excitement waned and frustration was overwhelming at some times. The struggle intensified as time moved on and personal challenges arose from all sides. In the midst of it all I faced uncertainty of employment and ultimately an a somewhat unexpected retirement. I fought medical challenges that affected by eyesight and ability to read or write. Apart from my church family and friends, who continued to encourage me to go on, I felt little support. As a result of this experience, I gained a greater appreciation for my church family, and an understanding of how a healthy church family can be a meaningful source of strengthen to its members. The importance of maintaining the fragile relationships of church membership became more imperative while researching church hurt. To fracture that connection with behavior described as church hurt is more than just an incident that's easy to overlook or ignore. I learned that even those who decided not to tell anyone about their church hurt, carried the pain within for years which ultimately affected their spiritual development, the way they serve and their perspective on true fellowship.

Further, I discovered that the opportunity for participants to share the details of their experience helped relieve some of the emotional residual that they had and to their surprise still existed. The reaction lends hope to the idea that the workshops will result in some level of healing and the inception of intentional or proactive ministry to address church hurt.

In anticipation of the workshops, the discussions about the project have already begun to cause our members to consider their behavior and recognize incidents of church

hurt. At the very least, the church hurt discussions have caused some to consider if certain behavior would be considered church hurt. The increased awareness seems to have already encouraged a greater consciousness that leads to more thoughtful, even kinder behavior. The desire to be better disciples is being encouraged in our church and due the reaction to the proposed workshops, I believe that the workshops will be well attended and received.

Going forward, a method of the measure such as a survey or the inclusion of role playing will be provided for feedback and to make modifications if needed. In addition, the workshops will be presented for consideration of being included as part of the Discipleship Ministry, so all members can access to the material or so the workshops can be offered on a regular cycle. Eventually, the workshops may be opened to other congregations and a greater impact.

In conclusion, the hope is that awareness and consciousness of the church's expectations both collectively and individually will lead to change, furthermore the awareness of what Jesus expects of His disciples and the desire to be an ambassador for the Lord will also result with a positive behavioral change and a culture. In To sum up the premise of this project I offer a well-known phrase from a NBC commercial that says, "The More You Know..." which implies that the power of knowledge is power and will make a difference.

Finally, may the final word of the participants on this project be "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord."

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