

PASTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN SELECTED SOUTHERN
BAPTIST CHURCHES: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

PASTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN SELECTED SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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The purpose of the dissertation is to identify how selected Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability. Three churches served as cases for the study. The pastor and a lay leader from the churches provided data through the interview responses. The churches also submitted organizational documents to give supplemental data through a document review process. Two churches permitted on-site observations of an official meeting to offer further data. Particular attention focused on how churches understood the concept of pastoral accountability, communicated their expectations regarding the concept, and the methods the churches used to ensure pastoral accountability. Temi Transcription Service transcribed the interview responses, and Delve Qualitative Analysis Tool assisted with data analysis, resulting in identifying twelve themes. The findings indicated the presence of pastoral accountability in the selected churches; however, the findings also noted significant gaps in the accountability framework. The research offered practical implications for pastors and churches as well as denominational leaders and entities. The study concluded with suggested recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On March 31, 2021, the Jude 3 Project aired an episode in its *Why Don't I Go* series to answer questions asked about the Bible, the Christian faith, and the Church. In episode three, one panelist posed a question about pastoral accountability. Referring to the corporate business environment, the panelist asked why pastors were not held accountable in similar ways to business executives in the corporate world. Three of the other panelists expressed gratitude for the question and proceeded to answer it. In their answer, each respondent acknowledged the need for accountability in the pastorate. Since the name of the series is *Why Don't I Go*, the purpose of the program is to facilitate dialogue with people who may not go to church services or participate in congregational life for a variety of reasons. The content of this episode communicates that some people, unchurched and de-churched, avoid participation in Christian community because they see a perceived lack of accountability concerning the pastoral office.¹ Pastoral accountability impacts public perception of the minister.

Background of the Problem

Pastoral accountability is garnering more attention in religious and secular contexts alike. Positive attention regarding pastoral accountability arises out of an effort to promote healthier

¹ Jude 3 Project, “How Do You Hold Pastors Accountable?” panel by Lisa Fields, *Why Don't I Go*, YouTube, March 31, 2021, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_h_o-TP6wQw&ab_channel=Jude3Project.

and more effective ministers and ministry practices. For example, some pastors encourage their colleagues to pursue accountability to facilitate longevity in ministry.² Other leaders call upon churches to help pastors remain in ministry by having written job expectations, following transparent church discipline processes, and avoiding unrealistic expectations of the pastor.³ In these cases, the purpose of the call for accountability arises out of an effort to honor the work of faithful pastors and ensure its continuity.

Negative attention of pastoral accountability arises out of an effort to address clergy misconduct and the perceived lack of discipline for clergy guilty of such conduct. A US district court convicted a United Methodist pastor of financial impropriety, which resulted in confinement.⁴ The churches formerly led by James MacDonald and Mark Driscoll terminated their pastoral leadership after the churches received reports of toxic leadership.⁵ The global pastor of Australian-based Hillsong Church, along with other pastoral leaders, was exposed for

² Steven Blake, “8 Ways to Persevere in Ministry,” Lifeway Research, Lifeway Christian Resources, January 13, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/01/13/8-ways-to-persevere-in-ministry/>.

³ Scott McConnell, “12 Ways to Help a Pastor Stay in Ministry,” Lifeway Research, Lifeway Christian Resources, January 6, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/01/06/12-ways-to-help-a-pastor-stay-in-ministry/>.

⁴ Adelle M. Banks, “Former Megachurch Pastor and Presidential Adviser Kirbyjon Caldwell Enters Prison,” *Religion News Service*, June 23, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/06/23/former-megachurch-pastor-and-presidential-adviser-kirbyjon-caldwell-enters-prison/>.

⁵ Kate Shellnut, “Harvest Elders Say James MacDonald Is ‘Biblically Disqualified’ from Ministry,” *Christianity Today*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/-2019/november/harvest-elders-say-james-macdonald-biblically-disqualified.html>; Ruth Graham, “How a Megachurch Melts Down,” *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/11/houston-mark-driscoll-megachurch-meltdown/382487/>.

sexual misconduct.⁶ Polls over the past few decades demonstrate the public's view of clergy has declined; people are less likely to look to pastors for leadership.⁷ Given the surge in reports of pastoral misconduct, society seems to be justified in being cautious in trusting clergy.

Statement of the Problem

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is wrestling with the state of pastoral accountability among cooperating churches and its impact on the public's perception. In 2019, the SBC experienced a watershed moment when the *Houston Chronicle* published a list of 380 Southern Baptist ministers and volunteers accused of sexually abusing more than 700 individuals during their practice of ministry.⁸ In the same year, the messengers attending the SBC's annual meeting passed a resolution clarifying their understanding of the compatibility of pastoral accountability, local church autonomy, and interchurch cooperation.⁹ The calls for greater pastoral accountability are clear: pastors need greater accountability, and churches should

⁶ Ruth Graham, "Hillsong, Once a Leader of Christian Cool, Loses Footing in America," *New York Times*, March 29, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/29/us/hillsong-church-scandals.html>; Bob Smietana, "Few Americans Look to the President or Preachers to Solve the Nation's Challenges," Lifeway Research, Lifeway Christian Resources, January 5, 2017, <https://research.lifeway.com/2017/01/05/few-americans-look-to-the-president-or-preachers-to-solve-the-nations-challenges/>.

⁷ Yonat Shimron, "New Poll Shows Growing View That Clergy Are Irrelevant," *Religion News Service*, July 16, 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/07/16/new-poll-shows-growing-view-that-clergy-are-irrelevant/>.

⁸ Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco, "An Abuse of Faith: A Chronicle Investigation," *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 2019, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/local/investigations/abuse-of-faith/>.

⁹ Southern Baptist Convention, "On Local Church Autonomy and Accountability," <https://www.sbc.net/>, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.sbc.net/resource/library/resolutions/on-local-church-autonomy-and-accountability/>.

provide greater accountability. However, scholars have not researched pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches extensively.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine how Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability. In *Accountable Leadership*, Paul Chaffee defined accountability as “the obligation one assumes in accepting the prerogative to lead the community in one way or another, make decisions, and act in its behalf.”¹⁰ He later provided a shortened definition, defining accountability as “being answerable for your actions.”¹¹ In this study, pastoral accountability refers to the pastor’s responsibility to his local church for his ministry practice through congregationally sanctioned processes and methods, which was operationalized to conduct this research study.

The current research follows a qualitative approach, specifically a multiple case study. The case study method was appropriate to use for two reasons: the lack of scholarly research on pastoral accountability in the SBC and the instrument to gather the data. Case study research is appropriate for studying subjects about which little is known or understood.¹² In addition, the researcher is the primary instrument to collect data, which is characteristic of qualitative case

¹⁰ Paul Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership: A Resource Guide for Sustaining Legal, Financial, and Ethical Integrity in Congregations*. rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 7.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, with Laura Ruth Johnson, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 12th ed (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2019), 231.

study research.¹³ Therefore, the data collected via interviews and document reviews provided a greater understanding of pastoral accountability in SBC churches.

Furthermore, the identifying any underlying theological and philosophical foundations undergirding the employed practices of the selected churches was an additional objective. The study explored whether church practice aligns with beliefs and written expectations. In addition, the analysis considered whether the church's accountability practices are informal or formal.

Contribution of the Study

Pastoral accountability is a growing area of concern in the SBC, as several stakeholders want greater pastoral accountability.¹⁴ However, various camps have divergent views about what pastoral accountability is and how the SBC should handle it. This study positively impacts the discussion in five ways. First, the study investigated pastoral accountability in three churches at the same time. Second, the study took a multi-pronged look at pastoral accountability. Third, denominational leaders and organizations may use this study to develop resources for churches and pastors to create, implement, and build strong and healthy systems of accountability for their pastors. Fourth, the study has the potential to help abuse survivors heal as churches begin to insist pastors live up to the biblical standards as communicated by the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Churches and pastors may find ways to strengthen accountability while maintaining deeply

¹³ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 15–17.

¹⁴ Since 2018 messengers to the SBC's annual meeting have passed four resolutions addressing some aspect of pastoral ministry. The resolutions speak to holiness and integrity, pastoral qualifications, pastoral sexual abuse, and balancing local church autonomy and accountability. The frequency of resolutions, nearly one every two years, indicate the significance of the topic to the messengers of the annual meeting.

held beliefs in local church autonomy. Fifth, the body of Christ may demonstrate to the world that it genuinely believes that Christ calls the church and church leaders to a higher standard of ethical living.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

- **RQ1:** How do selected Southern Baptist churches understand pastoral accountability?
 - How do pastors describe their understanding of pastoral accountability?
 - How do pastors describe their churches' understanding of pastoral accountability?
 - How do church leaders describe their understanding of pastoral accountability?
 - How do church leaders describe their churches' understanding of pastoral accountability?
- **RQ2:** How do selected Southern Baptist churches communicate their expectations about pastoral accountability?
 - How do pastors describe how their churches communicate expectations about pastoral accountability?
 - How do church leaders describe how their churches communicate expectations about pastoral accountability?
- **RQ3:** How do selected Southern Baptist churches ensure pastoral accountability?
 - How do pastors describe how their churches ensure pastoral accountability?
 - How do church leaders describe how their churches ensure pastoral accountability?

Process to Accomplish

The goal of this research was to examine how the selected churches provide accountability for their pastor. Given the limited research on pastoral accountability, the approach used to answer the research questions was a qualitative research methodology. Moreover, the qualitative research methodology involved a multiple case study method including an in-depth description and analysis of selected SBC churches.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and field notes. Two interviews—one with the pastor and one with a lay leader—took place for each church. The interview process included audio recording and transcribing each interview session, with the permission of the respective interviewee. The churches provided operational documents as requested, such as bylaws or employment procedures. Field notes from site observations supplemented data from interviews and document reviews as applicable.

Data analysis followed data collection. In particular, the data analysis process included coding and theming the collected data. A variety of methods ensured the validity and reliability of the data analysis, including triangulation, member checking, and an expert panel. Data analysis concluded with a report of the significant themes discovered through the analysis process.

Conceptual Framework

Despite passing resolutions affirming pastoral accountability, the SBC has yet to define pastoral accountability or recommend best practices for congregations to implement sound organizational structures to facilitate stronger accountability within their pastoral ministry. The various types of relationships involved in pastoral work complicate the ministry practice by

increasing the lack of clarity. Personal, congregational, collegial, and community relationships impact the pastoral work on a spiritual, ethical, professional, and interpersonal level.

Congregations govern themselves and manage their affairs without interference from denominational bodies. Southern Baptist churches are not *members* of the SBC or their respective state conventions. Southern Baptist churches *cooperate* with the SBC and their respective state conventions for ministry purposes, such as missionary endeavors and theological education. The SBC's constitution and statement of faith recognize that local churches are autonomous bodies directly ruled by Christ through the church's membership.

Congregations have several options to structure their organization and accomplish their programs. For example, some churches structure their organizations with committees, while others use ministry teams. Some churches have congregational meetings monthly while others have them quarterly. The primary lay leadership in some churches is deacons, while other churches have elders. Congregational polity allows for such variety among the churches.

Congregational polity produces a variety of approaches to church ministry, including pastoral accountability. No Baptist organization, local association, or state or national convention has mechanisms or processes to enforce standards upon a local congregation, including ministry standards. The absence of such processes or mechanisms has come into the spotlight as the public has shown concern about reported ministerial conduct, including abuse and moral failure. Furthermore, congregational polity can breed tensions and lend to tensions between pastoral leadership and congregational control, as Baptists do not have a central authority to state the boundaries of pastoral authority within a congregational context.

Religious liberty is a core principle in Baptist theology and the American legal system. Baptists eschew state-established churches, believing that individuals are accountable to God—and God alone—for their religious beliefs. Having experienced governmental interference in Europe and colonial America, Baptists lobbied the Founding Fathers to craft a government recognizing religious freedom.

The US Constitution, specifically the First Amendment, is the foundational law for religious liberty in the United States. The First Amendment protects not only individual religious freedom but also corporate religious freedom for churches and religious organizations as well. The Constitution precludes governmental support and obstruction of religious practice. Religious liberty and legal obligations have come into conflict with state interests in recent years. Laws requiring mandatory reporting, equal employment, and nonprofit compliance have been challenged on the grounds of religious liberty. Individuals and groups have filed lawsuits in court, even the Supreme Court, to determine the limits of religious liberty and governmental authority.

Courts have been reluctant to rule against religious liberty, opting instead to defer to ecclesiastical authorities except in the cases of criminal law. Courts have dismissed civil cases regarding employment, clergy malpractice, and privileged communication routinely. Despite judicial abstention from certain religious liberty cases, legislatures have continued passing laws impacting religious liberty, such as requiring clergy to report suspected abuse situations. While some legislatures permit exceptions for clergy-penitent situations, other states do not permit those exceptions.

Churches are classified often as 501(c)(3) organizations in the IRS code. As nonprofit organizations, churches are subject to many of the exact requirements as similarly classified organizations. The public expects churches to exercise financial responsibility, comply with nonprofit laws, and conduct operations with transparency. However, churches are exempt from certain practices, such as submitting a Form 990. This exception does not preclude the public from expecting churches to conduct business above reproach.

The best practices in nonprofit governance cover board structures, financial oversight, and conflict of interest policies, among other topics. Effective nonprofit organizations require boards to take an active role in governing the organization and act in its best interest. A critical component of the board's oversight activities is selecting and monitoring the organization's executive leader. In addition, society holds the board responsible for ensuring the fiscal integrity and strength of the organization. Consequently, nonprofit law and best practices require board members to declare conflicts of interest and recuse themselves from such deliberations to avoid self-dealing.

Baptist churches, as nonprofit organizations, may have governing boards. If they have governing boards, those boards are elected by the congregation and subject to the congregation's will. Consequently, self-perpetuating boards are antithetical to Baptist doctrine. While the board may have significant influence, the congregation decides the most significant directional decisions in church life, such as acquiring or selling real property, approving the budget, and calling the pastor.

Discussions about the efficacy and applicability of using nonprofit best practices in churches have been robust. Advocates encourage churches to have formalized processes for

personnel, finance, and property administration. Additionally, they encourage churches to have intentional plans for leadership development, succession, and objective performance evaluation. Opponents have trouble understanding the value of adopting those nonprofit practices for the church. They see those practices as good for the secular world but not for the church because they are unspiritual and unscriptural. They prefer relying on the Scripture alone to establish processes.

Ministry training in the Southern Baptist context centers on the local church. While the denomination provides formal theological education, the denomination does not nor cannot mandate the training for ministers. The local church decides who may be its minister. No Baptist association or convention has any say in who may serve a local church. The result is a highly localized, relational, and non-standardized approach to ministry training, standards, and certification. Some churches require seminary training and proven service, while others may not. Some ministry training emphasizes pastoral leadership while others emphasize pastoral care or preaching.

Though ministry training and certification may vary between Southern Baptist ministers, some ministers have experienced professional training and standards through professional chaplaincy. Southern Baptist ministers in military chaplaincy and hospital chaplaincy must meet specific standards to practice chaplaincy ministry. Additionally, chaplains have structured formal frameworks to ensure they are accountable for their practice. They must adhere to codes of ethics and maintain specific standards to maintain their chaplaincy role.

Outside of professional chaplaincy, Southern Baptist ministers are not subject to universal standards or continuing education requirements. Holding the ministers to standards is left to the

local churches at best or the ministers themselves in the worst-case scenario. While denominational bodies cannot mandate churches to implement standards, they have an opportunity to provide resources to help churches raise ministry standards, including recommendations for ordination procedures, voluntary peer reviews, and ethical codes.

Definitions of Terms

An *accountability group* is the team designated by a local church to provide administrative oversight to the pastor on its behalf. This group consists of church members, and many Southern Baptist churches refer to this group as the personnel committee.¹⁵ Other Southern Baptist churches use a church board to ensure pastoral accountability.¹⁶

A *church* is “an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”¹⁷

¹⁵ James A. Sheffield and Tim J. Holcomb, *Church Officer and Committee Guidebook*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Convention Press, 2011), 22–23.

¹⁶ Aubrey Malphurs, *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 70.

¹⁷ Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, “Article VI: The Church,” SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#vi>.

Congregational polity is “that form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision making except when such decisions have been delegated by the congregation to individual members or groups of members.”¹⁸ Congregational polity may be referred to also as *congregationalism*.

Malpractice is “falling below the established standards of conduct for a particular profession.”¹⁹ While *malpractice* usually refers to a legal concept, this study uses the term to refer to conduct unbecoming as a minister according to Scripture as interpreted and practiced by local churches; however, the term does not preclude legal implications.

The *pastor* is the “minister in charge of a Christian church or congregation.”²⁰ In Southern Baptist practice, the pastor is “responsible for leading the church to function as a New Testament church.”²¹ Johnathan Leeman defined a pastor as “a man authorized by God, affirmed by the congregation, to lead the congregation in the way of Christ through preaching, prayer, and general oversight.”²² For this study, *pastor* refers to the minister holding the senior or lead pastor

¹⁸ Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, eds., *Perspectives on Church Government* (Nashville: B&H, 2004), 157.

¹⁹ Joe E. Trull and James Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 155.

²⁰ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²¹ Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 70. The SBC does not have a universally accepted definition for pastor; however, the SBC’s Sunday School Board, an accepted and trustworthy source within the SBC, published the cited resource.

²² Brandon Porter, “What Is a Pastor?,” *Baptist Press*,” September 27, 2022, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/sbc-life-articles/what-is-a-pastor/>.

position, including partially funded pastors. The term does not refer to staff pastors occupying associate pastor positions.

Pastoral accountability is the pastor's responsibility to his local church for his ministry practice through congregationally sanctioned processes and methods.²³ This definition explicitly addresses a pastor's obligation to practice ministry faithfully, ethically, and competently. The definition implicitly addresses the church's responsibility to develop and maintain sufficient organizational and administrative structures to monitor the pastor's ministry practice. Since Baptist churches are autonomous, the term or study will not refer to any judicatory accountability to any ecclesiastical body external to a particular local church.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The selected churches affirm the authority of Scripture as the inerrant and infallible Word of God. *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (BFM)*, the confessional statement of the SBC, states that Scripture is "a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction . . . totally true and trustworthy . . . and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried."²⁴ The SBC does not require cooperating churches to adopt the *BFM*; however, it does require that cooperating churches "have a faith and practice which closely identifies with the

²³ The SBC's messengers have passed several resolutions on accountability in past annual meetings; however, the SBC has not defined accountability for common use. The lack of a consensus of definition prompted to developing one to use in this study.

²⁴ Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, "Article I" SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#i>.

Convention's adopted statement of faith."²⁵ Therefore, cooperation with the SBC demonstrates an agreement with the convention's stated belief about Scripture.

Similarly, the participating churches affirmed and practiced congregational polity. The *BFM* defines a church as an "autonomous local congregation of baptized believers."²⁶ Furthermore, the SBC agrees that local church autonomy means that "each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes."²⁷ Consequently, participating churches in friendly cooperation with the SBC indicate agreement with congregational polity as described in the *BFM*.

Flowing out of the first two assumptions, the participating churches demonstrate congregational polity and pastoral accountability by the congregational approval of calling and dismissing pastors. The SBC and *BFM* do not stipulate how churches must secure pastors; however, congregational polity as historically practiced by Baptist churches—including Southern Baptist churches—has affirmed that the gathered congregation alone has the authority to call and dismiss the pastor of a church.²⁸ As a result, the participating churches call and dismiss their pastors by congregational action.

²⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, *Constitution*, <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/legal-documentation/constitution/>.

²⁶ Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, "Article VI: The Church," SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#vi>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/faq/>.

Furthermore, the pastors participating in the study would be exclusively male. Though autonomous, Southern Baptist churches affirm an exclusively male pastorate.²⁹ Recently, Southern Baptists have debated the meaning of pastor in the *BFM*, primarily whether the word refers to the lead pastor or all pastors. In the 2023 SBC annual meeting, messengers provided clarity regarding the pastorate by revising the *BFM*, approving a resolution, and initiating a constitutional change requiring an all-male pastorate for cooperation.³⁰ Notwithstanding, the lead pastor in most Southern Baptist churches is a male. As a result, the participating churches would have only male pastors.

The interviewees would participate in the study with integrity. Prior to participation in the study, interviewees agreed to participate in the study by reading and signing an adult informed consent form, which the seminary's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved. Consequently, the interviewees' participation in the study was voluntary. Furthermore, the interviewees provided data and responded to interview questions with honesty to the best of their knowledge and experience.

²⁹ Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, "Article VI: The Church," SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#vi>.

³⁰ Scott Barkley and Brandon Porter, "At SBC '23, messengers continue to deal with abuse reforms, take stand on pastoral convictions," *Baptist Press*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/at-sbc-23-messengers-continue-to-deal-with-abuse-reforms-take-stand-on-pastoral-convictions/>. The messenger who introduced this motion wanted to amend the SBC's constitution to codify limiting cooperation to churches that have only men in all pastoral positions, including non-lead pastor positions. However, the proposed amendment failed to reach the required majority threshold for second year, which is necessary to change the document.

Lastly, the expert panel members have the knowledge and experience to function as an expert panel for the study. The expert panel provided consultation and feedback on the interview guide. The panel members demonstrated professional expertise in church ministry, leadership, or qualitative research by achieving a terminal degree.

Limitations

The research is not statistically generalizable. Qualitative research endeavors do not produce statistically generalizable results.³¹ However, the results may be analytically generalizable and form the basis for a future statistically generalizable study. The lack of scholarly research on pastoral accountability in SBC churches made a qualitative approach more appropriate than a quantitative approach.³² Consequently, a qualitative case study approach was appropriate for the study.

Delimitations

Only churches cooperating with the SBC participated in this study. While other denominations adhere to congregationalism, the study focused on the system of pastoral accountability as practiced in Southern Baptist churches. Consequently, other churches following congregationalism, including other Baptist churches, were not appropriate for this study.

The examination concentrated on the pastoral accountability of the lead pastor position. The study did not address other pastoral, ministerial, or administrative staff of the church. The

³¹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 239.

³² John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 4th ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 39–40.

lead pastor is the “chief administrator of paid staff” in Baptist churches; therefore, the lead pastor supervises the entire staff, sometimes through intermediate staff leaders.³³ In other cases, administrative support staff may be supervised by the church’s personnel committee or similar team in the church.³⁴ Similarly, denominational staff of the local association, state convention, or national convention bodies were not a part of this study unless the individual was a pastor of one of the participating churches.

The study concerned pastoral accountability only. Despite the myriads of issues involving pastoral and church ministry, those issues were outside the scope of this study. The study did not cover other matters of pastoral ministry, such as preaching or staff leadership, except as they intersect with pastoral accountability.

Lastly, the study included churches cooperating with the Louisiana Baptist Convention. The state convention has approximately 1,600 churches as potential cases for the study.³⁵ Furthermore, the churches cooperating with these associations provide significant diversity in size and ethnic makeup of the congregation. Lastly, the churches in Louisiana were reasonably accessible for in-person interviews and site observations.

³³ William G. Caldwell, “Personnel Administration,” in *Church Administration Handbook*, 3rd ed., ed. Bruce Powers (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 99–100.

³⁴ Bruce P. Powers, ed., “Organizing for Mission and Ministry,” in *Church Administration Handbook*, 3rd ed., ed. Bruce Powers (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 69–70.

³⁵ “About,” Louisiana Baptist Convention, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://louisianabaptists.org/about/>.

Chapter Summary

Pastoral accountability is a critical subject in the American context. Public moral failures and scandals pose a credibility crisis for ministers, particularly when coupled with the decline of confidence in clergy. The SBC is not immune to the crisis. Reports of clergy sexual abuse in the SBC as well as the health of ministers all point to a need for greater pastoral accountability in the SBC; however, the SBC's congregational nature makes denominational structures for pastoral accountability difficult. Moreover, while SBC churches receive criticism for a lack of adequate pastoral accountability, little is known about the existence, nature, and effectiveness of pastoral accountability in SBC churches. In chapter 2, the study will review existing literature informing research on pastoral accountability in SBC churches.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pastoral accountability is a significant topic for the SBC. Various groups of stakeholders want SBC churches to exercise greater pastoral accountability.¹ Pastors and churches see significant value in strong accountability systems for personal growth and professional competence. Abuse survivors and advocates see greater accountability as essential to prevent abuse and expose abuse when it occurs. The nature of pastoral accountability within the SBC is difficult to grasp without understanding Baptist congregationalism, religious liberty, nonprofit leadership, and professional standards. The following section will survey the relevant literature in the aforementioned areas as they relate to pastoral accountability.

Ecclesiastical Accountability and Congregational Polity

Historical and Theological Foundations

Baptists have affirmed congregational polity “since their beginnings.”² A church can practice congregational governance without being Baptist, but being Baptist necessarily requires

¹ Since 2018 messengers to the SBC’s annual meeting have passed four resolutions addressing some aspect of pastoral ministry. The resolutions speak to holiness and integrity, pastoral qualifications, pastoral sexual abuse, and balancing local church autonomy and accountability.

² James Leo Garrett, “The Congregation-Led Church: Congregational Polity,” *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (Nashville: B&H, 2004), 176.

congregational governance.³ Understanding pastoral accountability in the Baptist context requires a basic understanding of ecclesiology from the Baptist perspective, particularly congregational polity. Like believer's baptism, congregational polity is one of the key distinctives of the Baptist tradition. Baptists affirm congregational polity because they believe the New Testament Scriptures demonstrate it, and the primitive church practiced it. Historically, Baptists recognized the primary and exclusive authority of Scripture to inform, instruct, and guide the church's practice of Christianity.⁴ The Didache, one such early church document, has instructions for churches to "elect therefore for [themselves] bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord."⁵ While projecting modern concepts of congregationalism onto the early church may be anachronistic, the Didache infers those early churches selected their leaders through election. A cursory reading of historic Baptist confessions affirms Baptist appeals to Scripture, especially the Second London Confession, the New Hampshire Confession, and the Baptist Faith and Message.⁶ In *Leading Leaders*, Aubrey Malphurs stated that Baptists, Evangelical Free, and other congregational churches affirm congregational polity based upon their reading of Scripture,

³ James Leo Garrett, "Affirmation of Congregational Polity," *Journal for Baptist Ministry & Theology* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 38–55.

⁴ R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 11–12.

⁵ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70.

⁶ William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 285–86, 382, 515–16. The SBC recently updated the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, its confession of faith, during its annual meeting in New Orleans. The updated confession clarifies Baptist belief that elder, bishop, and pastor are coterminous. Article VI, *The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000*, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#vi>.

particularly the New Testament.⁷ In *The Baptist Way*, R. Stanton Norman advocated for congregationalism by appealing to Scripture.⁸ Simply put, Baptists embrace congregational polity because they believe the Scriptures teach and demonstrate congregationalism.

The core of congregationalism has to do with the seat of human authority in church matters. According to Norman, congregationalism located “the ultimate authority for decision making resided within the gathered congregation.”⁹ James Leo Garrett defined congregationalism more comprehensively as “that form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision making . . . except when such decisions have been delegated by the congregation to individual members or groups of members.”¹⁰ Notwithstanding slight differences in the foregoing definitions, both scholars agree that the gathered congregation is the highest level of government for a particular congregation. No other ecclesiastical group or organization, whether internal or external to the church, can overrule the decision of the gathered congregation. Thus, no local association, state convention, or national convention can compel a church to take or refrain from taking a specific action. Similarly, internal subgroups, such as elders, deacons, or other church officers, are subject to the will of the congregation as expressed when it makes a corporate decision.

⁷ Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 161.

⁸ Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 88–93.

⁹ R. Stanton Norman, *More than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity*, (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 118–19.

¹⁰ Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 157.

Congregational polity determines how a congregation relates externally to other churches and organizations and internally among members. Externally, autonomy signifies no external organization has the authority to dictate the affairs of the congregation, be it another congregation or denominational body.¹¹ Internally, congregational polity signifies that each member of the congregation is responsible and authorized to participate in the direction of the church.¹² Furthermore, in the *BFM*, the SBC declared that churches operate “under the Lordship of Christ through *democratic processes*” (emphasis added).¹³

The Scripture makes the congregation responsible for the quality of ministry practiced within the congregation. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul provided the qualifications for pastors, which implies a congregational assessment of ministry candidates.¹⁴ In congregational polity as practiced by Baptists, “local churches are responsible for fulfilling Christian ministry.”¹⁵ As a result, the local church oversees and facilitates pastoral formation of its ministers. Affirming the pastors God sends to lead the congregation is an integral component of

¹¹ Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, “Article XIV,” SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xiv>.

¹² Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, “Article VI,” SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#vi>.

¹³ Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, “Article VI,” SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#vi>. The article demonstrates Southern Baptist belief that members are individually and corporately responsible to the Lord for participating in congregational life.

¹⁴ 1 Tm 3:6; 5:22. All Scripture references will be from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Keith Harper, “Decently and in Order: The Philadelphia Association and the Search for a Usable Polity,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 32, no. 3/4 (2013): 395.

the church's ministry responsibilities.¹⁶ The writer of Hebrews enjoined the believers to follow their pastors; however, pastors do not have unlimited authority.¹⁷ On the contrary, the pastor's authority is derived from and defined and limited by Christ and the congregation.¹⁸

Congregational oversight of the pastorate includes discipline. According to Scripture, the congregation has a duty to correct errant pastors. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses instructed the Israelites to evaluate prophets and, if necessary, discipline any false prophets found among them.¹⁹ Furthermore, Paul instructed the church to discipline errant pastors.²⁰ Both John Hammett and John Bisagno agreed that pastors are subject to, not exempt from, congregational discipline.²¹ Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones rebuffed attempts to excuse pastors from accountability. They asserted that “no church member may claim immunity from accountability, regardless of his or her position within the community.”²² The local church—in the Baptist tradition—remains the sole ecclesiastical court empowered to discipline members, including

¹⁶ Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership Christ-Centered Followship* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 176; Stanley Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), 64.

¹⁷ Heb 13:17.

¹⁸ R. Robert Creech, *Pastoral Theology in the Baptist Tradition: Distinctives and Differences for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 204.

¹⁹ Dt 13:1–5; 18:15–22.

²⁰ 1 Tm 5:19–21.

²¹ John S. Hammett, “The What and How of Church Membership,” in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 184, 187; John Bisagno, *Pastor's Handbook* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 12.

²² Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes*, 76.

pastors.²³ Edward Hiscox outlined procedures that local churches can use in the case of an accused minister, including seeking the assistance from the local association and deciding the severity of discipline to impose.²⁴ According to Hiscox, expelling a pastor from church membership necessarily includes removing him from office and is the most severe action a church can take against a pastor.²⁵ However, Jere Phillips noted that the only church that can revoke a pastor's ordination is the church that ordained him; however, such revocation rarely happens.²⁶ Disciplining an errant pastor is important because of the negative impact of the sin on the health of the congregation.²⁷ Even in cases of revocation, the church only speaks for itself.²⁸ Furthermore, the church does not have a mechanism to ensure the defrocked minister returns his ordination certificate, nor can a church prevent another church from calling him to serve as pastor.²⁹ Wilder and Jones warned churches not to exceed their ecclesiastical authority by delving

²³ Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* (Kregel Publications, 1980), 209–215.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jere L. Phillips, *Pastoral Ministry for the Next Generation* (Collierville, TN: Innovo, 2014), 66.

²⁷ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes*, 75.

²⁸ Hiscox, *Principles and Practices*, 215.

²⁹ Baptists hold various opinions about the process and efficacy of revoking the ordination of Baptist ministers, as evidenced by articles by media outlets such as *Baptist News Global* and *SBC Voices*. Baptists seem to agree that the ordaining congregation is the only body that can revoke the minister's credentials. Furthermore, Baptists have consensus regarding the causes that warrant the revocation of ordination. However, Baptists do not have a common method for rescinding a minister's ordination practiced by their churches.

into criminal or legal matters. They noted that church discipline “does not allow churches to attempt to handle criminal matters internally instead of reporting accusations to appropriate authorities.”³⁰ Therefore, churches need to recognize the limits of their authority just as pastors should.

Mechanisms of Accountability

The congregational meeting is integral to congregationalism and pastoral accountability, as these meetings are perhaps the most demonstrable indicator congregational governance.³¹ The congregational meeting is vital because it is the natural outworkings of the doctrines that affirm congregational polity. Baptists believe the New Testament reveals congregational structure and require congregational action for receiving members, disciplining members, electing officers, commissioning missionaries; and cooperating with other local churches.³² In addition, they are likely the most common markers of churches that espouse congregational governance, including Southern Baptists.

Though akin to organizational meetings of non-church organizations, congregational meetings hold a deeper meaning and significance. They are more discernment meetings as opposed to decision-making meetings. Historically, Baptists viewed congregational meetings as “occasions for the people of God to determine the mind of Christ for his people.”³³

³⁰ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes*, 79.

³¹ Steve Echols, “The Role of the Business Meeting in a Healthy Change Process,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 96–97.

³² 2 Cor 2:5–11; Mt 18:15–19; 1 Cor 5:1–8; Acts 1:15–26, 6:1–7, 15:1–35, 13:1–3.

³³ Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 58.

Congregational meetings were as vital to congregational life as worship services for “seeking the mind of Christ.”³⁴ The purpose of the meeting was seeking and obeying God rather than simply making decisions.³⁵ Several scholars have noted the high view of the congregational meeting has declined among Baptists. James Leo Garrett cited the rise in megachurches, the influence of elder-rule ecclesiologists and seminaries, and the perception and/or experience of inefficiency of the practice.³⁶ On the other hand, Karen Smith asserted the influence of Western political and philosophical ideals contributed to a lower view of congregational meetings.³⁷

Congregational polity set the conditions for a variety of organizational structures among the churches.³⁸ Despite these growing misperceptions, these scholars still call Baptists to remain committed to congregational meetings in view of their higher purpose.

The congregational meeting is critical in Baptist life because it is how Baptist churches declare their interpretation of God’s will, especially for their most important decisions. Churches decide membership matters, ministry and budget priorities, pastoral leadership, property, and rules of order via congregational decisions.³⁹ Regarding pastoral leadership, the congregation plays an integral role in helping members discern a call to ministry, as prospective ministry

³⁴ Karen E. Smith, “A Baptist Vision of the Church,” *Journal of European Studies* 15, no. 3 (2015): 16.

³⁵ Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 106; Smith, “A Baptist Vision,” 17; Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 58.

³⁶ Garrett, “An Affirmation,” 38–55.

³⁷ Smith, “A Baptist Vision,” 16.

³⁸ Garrett, “An Affirmation,” 45.

³⁹ Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 58.

candidates submit “their subjective sense of calling to the church for confirmation.”⁴⁰ The congregation’s discernment process has significant Christological and ecclesiastical depth. Robert Creech explained that “Christ’s authority expressed through the church authorizes those the church calls to be its leaders. The call to serve a particular congregation is a significant dimension of the Baptist insistence on a ‘called ministry.’”⁴¹ Typically, churches call a pastor for an indefinite period of service; however, both J. M. Pendleton and Edward Hiscox confirmed that some churches were known to call their pastor for a more defined period, such as an annual term.⁴²

Another deliberative mechanism for accountability among and within Southern Baptist churches is internal groups of the congregation, such as the diaconate, committees, or boards. Which internal group, if any, is present in a congregation depends on how a particular congregation decides to organize and structure itself. As the other recognized biblical office of the local church, Baptists have viewed the diaconate as the pastor’s primary partners in ministry, providing support and counsel to the pastor. Accountability through the diaconate has come under scrutiny among contemporary Baptists because some church diaconates believed their role was akin to a corporate board of directors elected to govern the church and supervise the pastor. Consequently, many Baptists moved to return the diaconate to its biblical position of serving the membership through benevolence and pastoral care. The influence of Reformed theology and

⁴⁰ Creech, *Pastoral Theology*, 25, 34, 37, 39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

⁴² J. M. Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman, 1966), 29; Hiscox, *Principles and Practices*, 108.

non-Baptist pastors has made a plural-elder model concept attractive among contemporary Baptists. While a plurality of elders is not a new concept to Southern Baptists, more churches are adopting this model. For this model to work in a Baptist context, the elders must be approved by and subject to the congregation. An elder model that holds to a self-perpetuating elder board that governs the church is antithetical to Baptist doctrine and cannot rightly be called Baptist.

Advocates for a plural-elder model commend its capacity for mutual accountability among the elders within the same congregation. In some Baptist churches, the elders function like a corporate board but with its powers limited by the congregation. Authors like Aubrey Malphurs ascribe to this model of congregationalism. Traditional churches provide accountability through various committees, which may relate to the pastor in a supervisory capacity. In many Southern Baptist churches, the personnel committee may represent the church's oversight function of the pastorate. Some churches do not assign a committee to monitor the pastor's work; however, the other church officers, leaders, or any member in the congregational meeting may call the pastor to account.

In addition to deliberative accountability mechanisms, congregations may use written documents as mechanisms of pastoral accountability. The Holy Bible is the document with the highest authority in Baptist faith and practice. Following the Scriptures, churches might appeal to the corporate charter or articles of incorporation, constitution, and/or bylaws. These documents are congregationally approved documents that establish the foundational rules governing the congregation. These documents have legal weight, especially the corporate charter, which must be filed with the state government for recognition. Baptist churches also have used church covenants as instruments of accountability, as Baptists believe congregations are formed based

upon a covenant of mutual responsibility among the members.⁴³ Church covenants set expectations for members by broadly stating the responsibilities of church members. In previous centuries, churches used covenants as formative and corrective discipline. Also, churches may use other written documents in their accountability framework, such as policy and procedure manuals, call letters, and job descriptions. Policy and procedure manuals set standards for carrying out the church's regular and routine activities, such as having an event on the church's property. While not as fixed as other documents, policies and procedure statements approved by the church also set expectations the congregation requires its members to follow. Call letters, also called pastor-church covenant, usually occur when a church extends a call to a pastor to serve their church. Like an employment offer letter in other contexts, the call letter states the expectations of the working relationship between the pastor and church. Once the call is extended and accepted, the pastor and church are mutually accountable to the terms.

A third mechanism of accountability is informal review practices. Unlike the formality of deliberative bodies and written documents, informal accountability rests upon the freedom to address concerns without interpersonal confrontation with the pastor. Individuals or groups of members may demonstrate their dissent or displeasure with pastoral leadership by withholding financial support and/or withdrawing their membership.⁴⁴ While the pastor may remain in office, his leadership and influence may be impacted negatively by the informal exercise of power.

⁴³ H. Wayne House, "Church Discipline and the Courts," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 62.

⁴⁴ Jon Young and Michael Firmin, "Qualitative Perspectives toward Relational Connection in Pastoral Ministry," *Qualitative Report* 19 (2014): 2.

Challenges

Congregational governance in the Baptist tradition allows considerable freedom in the type of congregationalism a particular church may practice if the congregation remains the highest seat of human ecclesiastical authority. While allowing for other types of congregationalism, Danny Akin asserted that a single-elder/pastor congregationalism “is an acceptable and biblically defensible position.”⁴⁵ On the contrary, James White contended the “biblical evidence of the existence of a plurality of elders is incontrovertible.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Garrett advocated for congregation-led congregationalism.⁴⁷ While these three Baptists advocated for different styles of congregationalism, they affirmed congregational polity as the biblical form of church governance. In other words, congregations direct their own affairs under the Lordship of Christ alone. The autonomy of churches affects the occurrence of church discipline. Hammett noted that church discipline has declined drastically among Baptist churches since the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ The decline and variability of church discipline among Baptist churches naturally lead to the decline and variability of pastoral discipline among the churches.

The flexibility and variability among congregationally governed churches are simultaneously one of the system’s strengths and limitations. Local churches may structure their

⁴⁵ Danny Akin, “Single-Elder-Led Church,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2004), 26.

⁴⁶ James White, “Plural-Elder-Led Church,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2004), 284.

⁴⁷ Garrett, “Congregation-Led Church,” 157–94.

⁴⁸ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005), 125.

internal organization according to their needs. On the other hand, the underlying foundations and evident variability of the polity prevent ecclesiastical enforcement by denominational bodies outside of the local church itself. Denominational and ecclesiastical organizations may advise or encourage, but they cannot make demands on local churches. The most severe action a denominational body can take against a local church is to exclude the church from its association; however, the church still has all the rights and privileges of an autonomous church, and the exclusion of the church does not remove the pastor from office.

Congregational governance also may breed tension between pastoral authority and congregational control. Norman acknowledged that mistreatment, toxicity, and abuse have happened and could happen in the context of congregational governance but noted that “the problem is carnal individuals taking ungodly actions against others ‘rather than polity.’”⁴⁹ As stated previously, Baptists believe the Scriptures teach pastoral authority and congregational governance. Therefore, strong pastoral leadership is compatible with congregational governance.⁵⁰ James Baucom asserted that the pastor and the church are mutually accountable.⁵¹ The framework of mutual accountability between the pastor and the church under the lordship of Christ should alleviate the perceived tensions.

⁴⁹ Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 107.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 102–103.

⁵¹ James E. Baucom Jr., “Collaboration among Baptists: Free Church Congregational Polity, Church Size, Clergy Accountability, and the Priesthood of All Believers” (DMin project, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1998), 10–18, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Religious Liberty and Legal Accountability

Baptist Theology of Religious Freedom

From their origins in Europe to their expansive growth in the Americas, Baptists have been ardent supporters of religious freedom. In the United States, Baptists were instrumental in securing religious freedom for citizens, as evidenced by the establishment of Rhode Island and petitioning the Founding Fathers to codify religious freedom in the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Baptists assert that God alone can bind a human conscience; therefore, the government has no business meddling in matters of the conscience, especially faith and religion. While recognizing the divinely instituted nature of civil government, Southern Baptists assert that “church and state should be separate” and “a free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.”⁵² Consequently, Southern Baptists reject state-sanctioned religion as invalid. Recognizing the possibility of governmental overreach, Southern Baptists adamantly reject external interference in congregational matters. They reject governmental attempts to promote or penalize religious beliefs.⁵³

Baptists have been wary about any possible intrusion on congregational matters by external parties, whether ecclesiastical or governmental. As mentioned earlier, Baptists protest even the thought of denominational agencies meddling in congregational affairs. They protest even more adamantly against governmental intrusion.⁵⁴

⁵² Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, “Article XVII: Religious Liberty,” SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xvii>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 174–76.

Legal Dimensions

The Constitution prohibits the government from favoring one religious tradition over another and from antagonizing another religious tradition. This neutral posture aligns with Baptist belief and practice. Historically, Baptists have believed that the “church and state should be separate” and “a free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.”⁵⁵ H. Wayne House asserted that the American system of government is set up to prevent the state or the church from dominating the other.⁵⁶ When the government is neutral, civil power is not a tool to promote or hinder religious purposes.

While laws that affect faith groups exist, the government must avoid making religious practice more difficult. For example, the government does not regulate ministry credentials as it does other professional credentials because that would give the government the authority to decide fitness for ministry, an explicitly spiritual matter. Additionally, churches are tax-exempt entities because—as Chief Justice John Marshall said—“the power to tax is the power to destroy.” If the government wanted to promote or shut down churches, the government would only have to lower or raise taxes on churches. Since people have the freedom of religion and association, the government would have the prerogative to violate those rights by using its taxation powers unconstitutionally.

The government still may enact laws to govern the non-spiritual activities of churches. Paul Chaffee stated that “most religious groups are organized as nonprofit corporations, so

⁵⁵ *Baptist Faith and Message*, Article XVII.

⁵⁶ House, “Church Discipline,” 60–75.

nonprofit law typically applies to them.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, church leadership may bear the same legal responsibility for the church as the leaders of for-profit organizations.⁵⁸ In other words, churches are not exempt from similar legal limitations and requirements of similar nonprofit organizations simply because they are churches. The separation of church and state has significant implications for church governance. The First Amendment prohibits governmental interference in spiritual matters. However, religious liberty can clash with civil obligations, such as mandatory reporting, employment law, and nonprofit requirements.

Clergy-penitent privilege is one of the ways religious liberty clashes with civil obligations. Clergy-penitent privilege, also known as religious privilege or clergy privilege, is like other types of privileges recognized by law, such as attorney-client privilege.⁵⁹ Advocates and opponents of clergy-penitent laws have sought relief through the judicial process when clergy privilege clashes with state mandated reporting laws. Clergy-penitent privilege prevents the government from requiring a minister to reveal information received from a parishioner or penitent during the minister’s pastoral practice or counseling.⁶⁰ Unlike other professions with legally recognized privilege, the clergy are not subject to state-imposed legal regulations due to

⁵⁷ Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁹ Christine P. Bartholomew, “Exorcising the Clergy Privilege,” *Virginia Law Review* 103, no. 6 (October 2017): 1020.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

constitutionally protected religious freedom.⁶¹ Every state and the District of Columbia have passed a version of clergy-penitent statute.⁶² In some jurisdictions, the privilege is absolute, meaning the law does not provide exceptions to the rule. The absolute nature of religious privilege has moved some people and groups to lobby to revise the law, especially in cases involving child abuse about which clergy persons are knowledgeable. Some opponents argue that an absolute privilege interferes with the state's ability to protect abuse victims against perpetrators. Other opponents assert the laws should be changed because a substantial number of clergy are willing to testify in certain trials, rendering the privilege flexible. Some people challenge the standing of religious exemption in the law as unconstitutional, as they claim the law prefers clergy and, therefore, establishes religion. Others say the privilege should be limited like doctor-patient and attorney-client privileges. The US Supreme Court—while mentioning religious privilege tangentially—has not ruled specifically on the constitutionality and extent of the privilege.⁶³ Furthermore, the courts have hesitated to limit religious privilege of clergy-penitent relationships, partially because doing so may infringe on the religious liberty of the penitent, and for the purpose of this study, the clergy person.

The ministerial exception is another area in which religious liberty and civil obligations clash regarding employment law. Churches and religious organizations ordinarily employ

⁶¹ Mark H. Butler and Justin P Zamora, "Ethical and Legal Concerns for MFTs in the Context of Clergy-Collaborative Care: Is What I Share Really Confidential?," *American Journal of Family Therapy* 41 (2013): 87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2012.677713>.

⁶² Bartholomew, "Exorcising the Clergy Privilege," 1020.

⁶³ Ibid.

ministers to advance the mission, espouse the values, and teach the doctrines of the organization within the community.⁶⁴ Religious employers in the United States, including churches, must follow the same laws applied to similarly structured organizations with one caveat: religious discrimination.⁶⁵ The law, as interpreted by the courts, allows churches and religious organizations to make employment decisions based upon religious doctrine. Ordinarily, employers cannot impose religious requirements upon their employees or ask religious questions of potential employees; however, churches and religious organizations can do so without legal recourse.⁶⁶ *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC* is a significant case that not only demonstrates this legal reality but also allows religious employers to claim the protections of the ministerial exception to other areas of employment law beyond the narrow scope of religion. In the case, a former parochial schoolteacher argued the church wrongly and illegally terminated her employment due to a disability.⁶⁷ However, the federal court ruled in favor of the church's right to terminate the teacher's employment.⁶⁸ The court determined that the plaintiff was a minister according to the church's definition and stated that only the church could determine who may serve at its

⁶⁴ *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, 565 U.S. 171 (2012) at 188, 192.

⁶⁵ Rachel Barrick, "The Ministerial Exception: Seeking Clarity and Precision amid Inconsistent Application of the Hosanna-Tabor Framework," *Emory Law Journal* 70, no. 2 (November 2020): 467, <https://scholarlycommons.law.emory.edu/elj/vol70/iss2/5>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

minister.⁶⁹ Consequently, the court would not decide whether the terminated teacher was in fact wrongfully terminated.⁷⁰ Barrick noted differing opinions following the Supreme Court’s ruling. Opponents argued the ruling could invite greater government entanglement into the internal affairs of churches, overemphasize the title rather than legitimate function, lead to inconsistent application of the ministerial test, and devalue discrimination laws.⁷¹ Supporters argued the ruling encouraged pluralism by recognizing differences among religions, upholding constitutional limitation on governmental involvement in religion, promoting religious liberty, and narrowly applying to religious discrimination suits only.⁷² In subsequent cases, such as *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, the court reaffirmed the role of the ministerial exception in maintaining the separation of church and state for cases of ministerial employment.⁷³ Allison Ferraris argued the court expanded the exception in *Guadalupe v. Morrissey-Berru*; however, she contended that lower courts had the authority to interpret the exception narrowly.⁷⁴

The ministerial exception even impacts how the government relates to the ministers it hires as chaplains. The government employs chaplains in several agencies, most notably the

⁶⁹ *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Barrick, “The Ministerial Exception,” 484–85.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 485–86.

⁷³ *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 591 U.S. 732 (2020).

⁷⁴ Allison R. Ferraris, “The Expansive Scope of the Ministerial Exception after *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*,” *Boston College Law Review* 62, no. 9 (2021): 300–302.

military and Veteran Affairs hospitals. Due to the First Amendment and ministerial exception, the government “cannot make rules and regulations dictating what a chaplain should believe or how the chaplain should conduct ministry.”⁷⁵ Consequently, the government instituted the endorsement process in 1901, which “provides the government with a means of employing chaplains without the government attempting to decide the validity of a chaplain’s religious identity or faithfulness.”⁷⁶ The government is not qualified to make such judgments, and therefore it properly turns those judgements over to the endorsing faith groups.”⁷⁷ From a military chaplaincy perspective, Page Brooks asserted that “no military chaplain can be forced to perform any religious function outside of his doctrinal convictions or the policies set forth by his or her denominational endorser.”⁷⁸ By this process, the government depends on each faith group to determine which individuals are duly credentialed ministers, which relieves the government from such evaluation.

Limits and Implications

The courts consistently interpret the Constitution as limiting state intervention in ecclesiastical affairs. However, the state is not totally restricted. The court interprets the

⁷⁵ Mark A. Jumper, Steven E. Keith, and Michael W. Langston, *Chaplaincy: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024), 88.

⁷⁶ “Our History,” National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces, accessed May 9, 2024, <https://www.ncmaf.com>.

⁷⁷ Jumper, Keith, and Langston, *Chaplaincy*, 87.

⁷⁸ Page Brooks, “In Affirmation of ‘Cooperation without Compromise’: The Chaplaincy in a Pluralistic Society,” *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 12, https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/JBTM_9-1_Spring_2012.pdf.

Constitution as allowing the government to intervene in cases examining secular concerns that do not involve deciding on religious doctrine or practices.⁷⁹ Legal scholars and theologians acknowledge the delicate nature of religious freedom and the interest of the government.⁸⁰

The rise of abuse accusations involving clergy and religious organizations add complexity to the debate around religious liberty and legal accountability. Barrick noted concerns about religious liberty perpetuating abuse in the context of religious organizations.⁸¹ In her research on spiritual abuse, Karen Roudkovski asserted a “lack of leadership accountability allows for bullying behavior to be perpetrated with little to no consequence to the perpetrator.”⁸² House noted that society has growing “sympathy for victims of clergy exploitation.”⁸³ Religious liberty will continue to impact pastoral accountability.

Nonprofit Leadership and Organizational Governance

Governance Best Practices

Accountability within nonprofit organizations begins with the governing board. The law requires the board to act as fiduciaries, meaning board members must be loyal to and work in the

⁷⁹ Banks, “Kirbyjohn Caldwell Enters Prison.”

⁸⁰ Barrick, “The Ministerial Exception,” 60.

⁸¹ Ibid., 518.

⁸² Karen Roudkovski, “The Development of the Spiritual Abuse Assessment: A Modified Delphi Approach” (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 20, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁸³ House, “Church Discipline,” 68.

organization's best interest.⁸⁴ The governing board defines the organization's mission. Thomas Wolf stated that "the board's role includes . . . articulating mission and vision statements."⁸⁵ Similarly, Peter Drucker stated that the board "helps think through the institution's mission."⁸⁶ John Carver added that "the most important work of any governing board is to define and redefine the reason for organizational existence."⁸⁷ The board has an existential responsibility to define and articulate the organization's mission. In other words, a clearly defined and articulated mission is the organization's heartbeat. Without a mission, the organization dies.

The board not only articulates the organization's mission, but it also ensures the organization performs in harmony with the mission. Drucker claimed that nonprofits exist "to bring about a change in individuals and in society."⁸⁸ He reiterated that "non-profit institutions exist for the sake of their mission."⁸⁹ Since organizations exist to accomplish a mission, that mission must be achievable. The mission "has to be operational," or it will be nothing more than a nice-sounding statement.⁹⁰ Boards that fail to keep the organization on mission contribute to

⁸⁴ House, "Church Discipline," 7.

⁸⁵ Thomas Wolf, *Effective Leadership for Nonprofit Organizations: How Executive Directors and Boards Work Together* (New York: Allworth, 2013), 97, Kindle.

⁸⁶ Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices*. (New York: HarperCollins e-Books, 2010), 157.

⁸⁷ John Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 79.

⁸⁸ Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit*, 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

wasted resources.⁹¹ As “the guardian of [the] mission,” the board must ensure the organization is not wasting resources on matters that do not contribute to accomplishing the mission.⁹² Many nonprofit organizations depend on volunteer labor and generous donations to carry out their work. Consequently, boards are responsible for ensuring the organization responsibly manages its human and financial resources.

The board, as a unit, should establish and practice accountability of the executive. For most nonprofits, the executive works for the board and is the board’s “one employee.”⁹³ Carver asserted that the executive’s “only accountability should be to the board as a body, not to the officers of the board nor to board committees.”⁹⁴ Wolf noted that “multiple boards, staff, and supervisors not only can provide difficult challenges to an executive director, but they can be problems for one another.”⁹⁵ Addington reminded readers that “no employee should have more than one boss.”⁹⁶ In other words, the executive works for the board. While the executive may work occasionally with individual board members or with board committees, he does not take directions from them. The board provides directions and instructions to the executive when it acts corporately as a unit.

⁹¹ Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit*, 141.

⁹² Ibid., 157.

⁹³ Carver, *Boards*, 159.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁹⁵ Wolf, *Effective Leadership*, 167.

⁹⁶ T. J. Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, (Oakdale, MN: Sandbox Resources, 2006), 188.

The most consequential way the board oversees and monitors the executive's position is through the selection process. The board hires the executive, and the board has the power to fire the executive. William Lathen asserted that one of the keys to building a trustworthy organization is ensuring the "board hires, oversees, and annually evaluates the chief executive's performance."⁹⁷ Consequently, the board's selection of the executive is the starting point of the accountability structure and process in which the executive will function.

The board should utilize the best accountability processes in monitoring the executive's performance. Best practices include several components, such as establishing policies, communicating openly and regularly, and providing objective assessments of the executive's performance. The board must communicate its expectations of him or her. Evaluation is possible only with clearly defined standards.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the board should describe what it considers unacceptable actions from its executive. By setting executive limitations, the board communicates "an entire range of unpalatable circumstances" to its executive.⁹⁹

The board should communicate regularly with the executive. Communication is essential to the quality of any relationship, including the relationship between a board and executive.¹⁰⁰ Wolf stated that a healthy board-executive relationship is one in which "each side generally shares

⁹⁷ William C. Lathen, "33 Keys to Building a Trustworthy Organization," *Nonprofit World*, May–June 2008, 19–22.

⁹⁸ Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit*, 119.

⁹⁹ Carver, *Boards*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ Wolf, *Effective Leadership*, 29.

their ideas, impressions, and concerns with the other.”¹⁰¹ Drucker stated that “leadership is accountable for results.”¹⁰² As a result, the board must ensure the executive is achieving the results he or she is expected to produce.

The board’s monitoring of the executive should include a formal annual evaluation. Since the executive works for the entire board, the entire board should contribute to the evaluation. Harold Weissman called for boards to implement a process to assess performance.¹⁰³ Marc Pilon and François Brouard signaled the how of accountability is a critical aspect of the process.¹⁰⁴ Nonprofit boards have multiple tools to aid in the evaluation of the executive’s performance, such as job descriptions, written policies, and negotiated goals. In assessing the executive’s performance, the board should “define quality first.”¹⁰⁵ Standards must be clear to make evaluation possible.¹⁰⁶ The board should expect the executive to meet clearly communicated standards.

¹⁰¹ Wolf, *Effective Leadership*, 105

¹⁰² Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit*, 47.

¹⁰³ Harold H. Weissman, “Accountability and Pseudo-Accountability: A Nonlinear Approach,” *Social Service Review* 57, no. 2 (1983): 323, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30011643>.

¹⁰⁴ Marc Pilon and François Brouard, “Accountability Theory in Nonprofit Research: Using Governance Theories to Categorize Dichotomies,” *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 34 (April 2022): 585, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00482-7>.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

Theresa Beyerle noted that “an ill-defined relationship between the CEO and the board” contributes to the difficulty in appropriately evaluating the executive.¹⁰⁷

Churches as Nonprofit Organizations

Churches are charitable or nonprofit organizations. Chaffee noted that “most religious groups are organized as nonprofit corporations, so nonprofit law typically applies to them.”¹⁰⁸ Brand and Ingram articulated six types of church corporations. Of those six types, the sole, trustee, and membership corporations are roughly analogous to the episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational polity, respectively.¹⁰⁹ The nonprofit reality of church impacts the pastorate, as the pastor becomes a nonprofit leader. Jon Young and Michael Firmin noted that “pastoral ministry leadership involves a distinctive of being a not-for-profit entity.”¹¹⁰ Since churches are nonprofit organizations and pastoral ministry is a nonprofit enterprise, the public’s expectations for churches to have accountability structures like other nonprofit organizations seem reasonable. However, some differences do apply.

Though churches are charitable or nonprofit organizations, they face considerable challenges in adopting the best practices of nonprofit operations, particularly regarding the accountability of the executive—in this case, the pastor. Beyerle noted the difficulties of

¹⁰⁷ Theresa S. Beyerle, “The Accountability of Nonprofit Executive Directors.” (PhD diss., University of Akron, 2006), 7, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁰⁸ Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Norton F. Brand and Verner M. Ingram, *The Pastor’s Legal Adviser* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1942), 49–52.

¹¹⁰ Young and. Firmin, “Qualitative Perspectives,” 2.

performance reviews in the nonprofit context because of the lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the board and the executive leader.¹¹¹ Regarding churches, Addington asserted that churches have difficulty in holding leaders accountable.¹¹² Robert Welch commented, “Churches, for the most part, are lousy employers.”¹¹³ Young and Firmin recognized that pastoral leadership has unique elements compared to other contexts and involves an inherent spiritual dynamic.¹¹⁴ Additionally, Michael Anthony and James Estep cited a lack of managerial training for ministry along with the spiritual and relational nature of ministry as causes for the neglect of formal performance assessments in churches and religious organizations.¹¹⁵ Some Christians, pastors and laypeople, mistakenly believe the pastor is accountable to God alone.¹¹⁶ However, as Floyd Massey and Samuel McKinney asserted, “Church officials should feel an obligation to give a strict account to those who have placed them in positions of trust, for today’s world and God’s work demands [*sic*] accountability of those who would lead.”¹¹⁷ Anthony and

¹¹¹ Beyerle, “Accountability of Nonprofit Executive,” 7, 9–10.

¹¹² Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 152.

¹¹³ Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 106.

¹¹⁴ Young and Firmin, “Qualitative Perspectives,” 1–2,

¹¹⁵ Michael Anthony and James Estep Jr., eds., *Management Essentials for Christian Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 387.

¹¹⁶ Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 70.

¹¹⁷ Floyd Massey and Samuel Berry McKinney, *Church Administration in the Black Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 87.

Estep offered a view that performance reviews are pastoral care and based on biblical principles.¹¹⁸

In many churches, the pastor is the designated executive leader of the congregation as the chief of staff.¹¹⁹ In churches organized according to the board concept, the church board—commonly called session, elders, directors, trustees, or stewards—manages the pastor. Chaffee said the board plays a “critical role [in] ensuring that its employees are accountable for their work and regularly evaluated. In larger congregations, the board often evaluates the senior clergy, who in turn receive authorization to evaluate others on the staff.”¹²⁰ Malphurs asserted that “the board is responsible for overseeing the pastor’s leadership and ministry, and he is responsible to the board for that ministry.”¹²¹ He further suggested that one or two board members could be responsible for “meeting with the pastor monthly for accountability purposes.”¹²² The purpose of the meeting with the pastor is caring for the pastor rather than controlling the pastor. The meetings provide an informal setting for the board to ensure accountability of the pastor on behalf of the organization. T. J. Addington called out the lack of accountability practiced by church boards and staff.¹²³ He noted that “only one person reports to the board and the board is

¹¹⁸ Anthony and Estep, *Management*, 388–90.

¹¹⁹ Powers, “Mission and Ministry,” 90.

¹²⁰ Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 47.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²² Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 70.

¹²³ Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 153.

accountable for only one person: the senior pastor.”¹²⁴ Chaffee, Malphurs, and Addington highlighted the board’s role in monitoring the pastor’s performance. Two of the authors, Malphurs and Addington, asserted that the board model could function within the context of congregational polity with the board subject to the rule of the congregation.

Transferability and Tensions

Nonprofit governance practices raise significant challenges for Southern Baptist churches. The corporate board is the governing body of nonprofit corporations, including in independent churches organized with a board. However, Baptists form their congregations as membership corporations in which the entire membership holds the corporate power and the corporate officers are subject to congregational action.¹²⁵ The congregation, gathered for decision making, is the sole governing body in Southern Baptist churches. Consequently, board governance is a strange concept to Southern Baptists. In the same way that denominations do not govern Baptist congregations neither do church officers or internal groups, such as committees or boards. Internal bodies are subject to the orders of the congregation as expressed in a vote.¹²⁶ In practice, Baptist customarily organize their church structure with committees rather than boards.¹²⁷ Congregational governance via committee structures affect pastoral accountability.

¹²⁴ T. J. Addington, *High Impact Church Boards: How to Develop Healthy, Intentional, and Empowered Church Leaders* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010) 188.

¹²⁵ Brand and Ingram, *The Pastor’s Legal Advisor*, 52.

¹²⁶ C. Barry McCarty, *A Parliamentary Guide for Church Leaders*, silver anniversary ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 117.

¹²⁷ Church administration books and manuals in the Southern Baptist tradition trend heavily toward church organization by committees rather than boards.

In the few churches organized with a board, the body performs administrative and advisory functions rather than governing functions.¹²⁸ For example, Southern Baptist churches may elect a board of trustees to comply with state nonprofit laws; however, the trustees' only function is representing the church in legal matters as required by law and directed by congregational action.¹²⁹ While Malphurs asserted even congregational churches are governed by a board, Addington rightly noted that congregational governance means the congregation has to approve senior leadership, governing documents, annual budgets, and buying and selling property.¹³⁰ The implication is that congregation has the final say in the affairs of a Southern Baptist church.

The limited authority of internal bodies within Southern Baptist churches affect how pastoral accountability occurs within said churches, especially in the selection of officers, authority of internal groups, and the call of the pastor. The typical nonprofit governing board is a self-perpetuating body. However, committees or boards in a Baptist church are not self-perpetuating, as the congregation has the power to elect and remove officers, including committee or board members.¹³¹ Customarily, the nonprofit board has full authority to govern

¹²⁸ McCarty, *A Parliamentary Guide*, 120; Henry M. Robert III, Daniel H. Honemann, and Thomas J. Balch, *Robert's Rules of Order: Newly Revised*, 11th ed. (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2011), 9, 481–83. Both sources refer to two types of boards: a board that full authority over the organization and a board that is subordinate to the organization.

¹²⁹ Powers, "Mission and Ministry," 64; Sheffield and Holcomb, *Church Officer and Committee*, 14–15.

¹³⁰ Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 39; Addington, *High Impact Church*, 186.

¹³¹ Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 51.

the organization. In a Baptist church, the congregation retains governing authority but may task a board or committee to supervise church business between congregational meetings.¹³²

Nonprofit boards have the authority to select the executive leader for the organization. In a Baptist church, the congregation alone has the authority to select the executive leader, the pastor.¹³³ Similarly, the congregation alone has the authority to dismiss the pastor.

Professional Training, Standards, and Credentialing

SBC Seminary Education and Ordination

Southern Baptists have a complex relationship to education, especially theological education. Their confession of faith, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, indicates a robust theology and philosophy of education.¹³⁴ In addition, they support several higher learning institutions throughout the nation.¹³⁵ In fact, Southern Baptists train over twenty thousand theological students for ministry.¹³⁶ Unlike hierarchical denominations, the SBC does not impose

¹³² McCarty, *A Parliamentary Guide*, 120; Robert, Honemann, and Balch, *Robert's Rules of Order*, 9, 481–83.

¹³³ Brand and Ingram, *The Pastor's Legal Adviser*, 82–83.

¹³⁴ *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article XII, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xii>.

¹³⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, “SBC Entities,” <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/sbc-entities/>. The SBC operates six seminaries that train “pastors, missionaries, and church leaders.” Five seminaries have undergraduate colleges that confer undergraduate degrees in various majors. Additionally, several state conventions own and operate colleges and or universities as well.

¹³⁶ Southern Baptist Convention, “Fast Facts,” <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/fast-facts/>.

a denomination-wide requirement for ministers to have a seminary education to practice ministry.¹³⁷ On the contrary, local churches decide whether to require theological education for their ministers.¹³⁸

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and Chaplaincy Models

Another means through which Southern Baptist ministers experience accountability is specialized clinical ministry, such as chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and professional therapy. These ministry specializations are clinical because, like similar professions, they focus on “the application of one’s discipline within the locus of its practice.”¹³⁹ Furthermore, ministers who want to practice clinical ministry specialization must experience clinical supervision prior to full entrance into professional practice. In general, supervision is an educational process through which a supervisor promotes a student’s professional growth by facilitating the student’s critical reflection on the student’s clinical activity.¹⁴⁰ Janine Bernard and Rodney Goodyear defined clinical supervision as,

an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member or members of that same profession. This relationship is evaluative; extends over time; and has the simultaneous purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the more junior person(s), monitoring the equality of professional services offered to the

¹³⁷ John C. Garrett and Christopher A. Shaffer, “Congregational Polity, Religious Freedom, and a Nontraditional Student Body as Factors Affecting Financial Training,” *Theological Education* 51, no. 1 (2017): 106–7.

¹³⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/faq/>

¹³⁹ David A. Steere, ed., *The Supervision of Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 40.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

clients that she, he or they see; and serving as a gatekeeper for those who are to enter the particular profession.¹⁴¹

Bernard and Goodyear added quality assurance and professional gatekeeping goals to clinical supervision. In clinical supervision, an experienced member of the profession is involved significantly in the professional development of candidates for the profession. The experienced member has a duty to the candidate, the profession, and the clients under the care of the trainee.

Pastoral supervision is clinical supervision in the context of training clergy to practice ministry in various settings, usually as chaplains or pastoral counselors. David Steere defined supervision as “an extended relationship in which supervisor and supervisees agree to meet at regular intervals for systematic reflection upon the concrete practice of pastoral care in which supervisees are engaged in order to focus all available resources on each supervisee’s personal growth in the pastoral role.”¹⁴² Also adapting clinical supervision to the pastoral context, the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* defines pastoral supervision as “a dimension of the overall ministry of the religious community carried out by a pastor who offers both administrative oversight and a pastoral relationship to one or more persons engaged in developing ministerial competency and identity through actual ministerial practice.”¹⁴³ Like clinical supervision, pastoral supervision has the goal to grow ministers in their pastoral role. Unlike clinical supervision, the foundation of pastoral supervision is ministry rather than merely

¹⁴¹ Janine M. Bernard and Rodney K. Goodyear, *Fundamentals of Clinical Supervision* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2004), 3.

¹⁴² Steere, *Supervision of Pastoral Care*, 66.

¹⁴³ Rodney Hunter, ed., *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 1239.

professional intervention. The spiritual nature and motivation of pastoral supervision are integral to its function. Agreeing with the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, the *Journal of Pastoral Care* commented that a “supervisor who fails to examine thoroughly with his supervisee either the actual task of ministry or the personal growth of the minister performing it has not offered genuine pastoral supervision.”¹⁴⁴ Additionally, the pastoral supervisor is at once both a pastor and an administrator. The dual role of a pastoral supervisor is different from the role of a non-ministry-related clinical supervisor, who is solely an administrator. On the other hand, non-ministry-related clinical supervision and ministry-related clinical supervision (including pastoral supervision) are similar in that supervisors fulfill their responsibilities on behalf of a larger community. Clinical supervisors work on behalf of the trainees’ clients and other members of the profession. Because pastoral supervision is “a central concern of the Church,” pastoral supervisors work on behalf of their faith community in addition to the trainees’ clients and the professional guild.¹⁴⁵ The goal of professional supervision is professional growth to the end that the supervisee can practice independently without supervision.

In clinical ministry fields, professional associations permit the candidate to practice the profession unsupervised for a limited period. Candidates pursuing therapeutic professions submit to a state licensure process, while candidates pursuing chaplaincy or pastoral counseling submit to a certification process as determined by their professional association. The difference between the state licensure and certification stems from the constitution prohibiting the government from

¹⁴⁴ “Pastoral Supervision—A Ministry of the Church,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 25, no. 3 (September 1971): 146, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234097102500301>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

determining the requirements and qualifications for ministers. Consequently, the government can prescribe requirements and qualifications for a professional counselor because the profession is secular in nature, regardless of whether the practitioner is a person of faith. Therefore, the paper will address only certification of professional chaplains and pastoral counselors.

After a period of clinical pastoral supervision, chaplains and pastoral counselors may pursue professional certification with their respective professional association.¹⁴⁶ The National Commission on Credentialing Agencies defines certification as “a standardized process, often voluntary, by which individuals who have demonstrated the level of knowledge and/or skill required in the profession, occupation, role, skill, or specialty area are recognized and identified to the public and other stakeholders.”¹⁴⁷ During the certification process, certification candidates may demonstrate their competence in various ways: clinical ministry records, standardized examinations, pastoral care simulations, and appearing before a certification panel. In addition to demonstrating competence, certification candidates must provide evidence of connection to their

¹⁴⁶ The Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC), Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC), and Canadian Association of Spiritual Care (CASC) comprised a Council on Collaboration to develop a code of ethics for spiritual care professionals. AAPC merged with ACPE in 2019. The Association of Certified Christian Chaplains (ACCC), Evangelical Board of Certified Chaplains (EBCC), National Association of Veteran Affairs Chaplains (NAVAC), and the Spiritual Care Association (SCA) did not exist when the other associations participated in the Council on Collaboration. However, the ACCC, EBCC, NAVAC, and SCA provide professional certification for chaplains.

¹⁴⁷ National Commission for Certifying Agencies, *Standards for the Accreditation of Certifying Programs* (Washington, DC: Institute for Credentialing Excellence, 2014), glossary.

faith tradition.¹⁴⁸ Chaplains and pastoral counselors who successfully navigate the process receive certification to assure the colleagues and the public of the newly certified individual's professional competence.¹⁴⁹

Once a chaplain or pastoral counselor achieves certification, the individual can practice the profession without a pastoral supervisor's oversight. The lack of a pastoral supervisor does not indicate a lack of accountability. On the contrary, the certifying professional associations maintain professional accountability of their certified members by requiring them to maintain certification by various means.¹⁵⁰ Failure to meet the certification maintenance requirements results in a loss of professional certification status.

Professional Accountability Gaps

The congregational polity of the SBC precludes a denominationally imposed standard for credentialing.¹⁵¹ Certain Baptist churches seek the support of associational bodies to discern the fitness of ministry candidates and ordain them into the ministry.¹⁵² However, Southern Baptists

¹⁴⁸ The professional organizations require certified members to have an ecclesiastical endorsement from a recognized faith group prior to receiving certification as well as to maintain their certification status once achieved.

¹⁴⁹ L. L. McGee, "Certification," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, ed. Rodney Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 135.

¹⁵⁰ Professional associations require certified members to pay annual dues, submit continuing education reports, adhere to a professional code of ethics, maintain good standing with their faith group, and complete a periodic peer review process.

¹⁵¹ William M. Pinson, "A Response to 'Ordination in the Larger Baptist Tradition' by William H. Brackney," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 3 (2002): 243.

¹⁵² William H. Brackney, "Ordination in the Larger Baptist Tradition," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 3 (2002): 239; Creech, *Pastoral Theology*, 66.

consistently have considered ordination as a matter for the local church.¹⁵³ Furthermore, Southern Baptists avoid maintaining or publishing a roster of ordained pastors due to congregational polity, to avoid the perception of certification, and to reject any claim of legal liability for a minister.¹⁵⁴

Southern Baptist denominational bodies have an opportunity to learn the best practices of accountability in professional chaplaincy and recommend them for local churches and associations. For example, associations could promote voluntary peer reviews for pastors of cooperating churches. The national convention could recommend ordination best practices for churches without requiring churches to follow those practices, such as the American Baptist Churches in the USA. Additionally, the national convention could provide churches with a suggested professional code of ethics for pastors and vocational staff ministers.¹⁵⁵

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed relevant literature related to pastoral accountability. Topics included congregational polity, religious liberty, nonprofit leadership, and professional credentialing. Congregational polity limits the ability of denominational enforcement of ministerial conduct. The doctrine of religious liberty prevents the government from imposing qualifications and standards for practicing professional ministry. Trends in nonprofit organizations impact society's expectations of how local churches monitor accountability as

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Brackney, "Ordination," 241.

¹⁵⁵ The North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention has a code of conduct by which endorsed chaplains are required to abide.

nonprofit entities. Professional credentialing, particularly in theological education and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), provides a framework for pastoral accountability in local churches. The next chapter will present the methodology used to answer the research question.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The Southern Baptist Convention is grappling with calls for greater pastoral accountability from people and groups from within and outside of the convention. Among the calls for greater accountability, some denominational leaders and local church pastors respond that only local churches can hold a pastor accountable, as the convention has no authority over local churches. SBC messengers have responded by passing resolutions at past annual meetings.¹ However, resolutions are not binding on local churches.² Still, little extensive research investigates the methods SBC churches use to maintain pastoral accountability. Consequently, the subject remains unclear.

The purpose of this study was to examine how selected Southern Baptist churches held their pastors accountable for their ministry. The following three questions guided the research:

(1) How do selected Southern Baptist churches understand pastoral accountability? (2) How do

¹ Southern Baptist Convention, “On Local Church Autonomy and Accountability,” <https://www.sbc.net/>, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-local-church-autonomy-and-accountability/>; Southern Baptist Convention, “On The Sexual Integrity of Ministers,” <https://www.sbc.net/>, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-the-sexual-integrity-of-ministers/>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Ministerial Integrity,” <https://www.sbc.net/>, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-ministerial-integrity/>; Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on the Autonomy of Baptist Churches and General,” <https://www.sbc.net/>, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-the-autonomy-of-baptist-churches-and-general/>.

² Southern Baptist Convention, “Legal Documentation,” <https://www.sbc.net/>, accessed July 2, 2025, <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/legal-documentation/>.

selected Southern Baptist churches communicate their expectations about pastoral accountability? and (3) How do selected Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability? Data collection involved multiple methods to answer the research questions. This chapter presents the methodology chosen to examine the phenomenon. The chapter is organized into six sections: (1) research design, (2) interviewee selection, (3) data collection, (4) data analysis, (5) validity and reliability, and (6) researcher bias and assumptions.

Research Design

This study was a qualitative multiple case study of selected Southern Baptist churches. Semi-structured interviews with the pastor and a lay leader of the selected churches were the primary means of collecting data. Secondary data, from official church documents and observations from site visits, further buttressed the data collected from interviews. The selection process involved two-tiered sampling to find participating churches and interviewees for the study. Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell noted that “nonprobability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research”³ and “two levels of sampling are usually necessary in qualitative case studies.”⁴ Selecting a case or cases for examination necessarily proceeds selecting the sample to examine.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary approved the research proposal and process for this study. To grant approval for the research, the IRB required that the study includes protocols to ensure the rights, safety, and privacy of the

³ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 95.

⁴ Ibid., 96.

interviewees. A thorough examination of relevant literature covered pastoral accountability as impacted by congregational polity, pastoral supervision, nonprofit accountability, and legal framework. The pastor and a lay leader from each participating church participated in one semi-structured interview each, according to an interview guide vetted through an expert panel. The pastor and lay leader permitted the audio-recording of their interviews with two devices, one of which served as a contingency plan in case the first device failed. A third-party transcription service transcribed the audio-recording of the interview sessions.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

Qualitative research focuses on “understanding [a] phenomenon of interest from the interviewees’ perspectives.”⁵ John Creswell defined qualitative research as “a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand.”⁶ Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod identified qualitative approaches by two common factors: “they focus on phenomena that are occurring or have previously occurred in natural settings” and “they involve capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena.”⁷

Creswell claimed qualitative research is appropriate when researchers identify “a problem or issue [that] needs to be explored,” “want to understand the context or settings in which interviewees in a study address a problem or issue,” or “because quantitative measures and

⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 39.

⁷ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 228.

statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem.”⁸ Leedy and Ormrod encouraged qualitative research “when little information exists on a topic, when variables are unknown, or when a relevant theory base is inadequate or missing.”⁹ They also promoted the ability of qualitative study to “help define what is important—that is, what needs to be studied.”¹⁰ The nature of the study met several characteristics for a qualitative method. The research focused on pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches, a topic with little scholarly investigation. Moreover, the study can help clarify aspects of pastoral accountability that need to be addressed by churches and the denomination. Lastly, a quantitative study could not answer how churches hold pastors accountable for their ministry.

Rationale for Multiple Case Study

Case studies are in-depth investigations of a unit of analysis, such as an individual, program, incident, process, or organization. Robert Yin defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.”¹¹ Creswell defined case study as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through

⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 39–40.

⁹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 228.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 16.

detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.”¹² Leedy and Ormrod commended a case study research approach for “learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation.”¹³ The disagreement between various stakeholders about pastoral accountability in the SBC demonstrates a need for in-depth, contextual investigation to facilitate a greater understanding of the phenomenon. The various internal and external stakeholders have different opinions about the state of pastoral accountability within the convention, the boundaries of local church autonomy, the role of denominational bodies, and the extent of spiritual abuse in churches, to name a few examples. Therefore, the case study approach served as the method to analyze pastoral accountability.

Case study researchers may examine one case or several cases. A multiple case study, also known as multi-case or collective case study, involves investigating more than one case. Multiple case studies examine one issue across several cases to shed light on a particular concern.¹⁴ Also, multiple case studies afford the opportunity to show different perspectives of an issue by using multiple cases.¹⁵ Multiple case study research allows the researcher “to make comparisons, build theory, or propose generalizations.”¹⁶ A multiple case study was appropriate

¹² Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 73.

¹³ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 231.

¹⁴ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 74.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 231.

for this study because one issue—pastoral accountability—across several cases was examined. A multiple case study approach facilitated the demonstration of different perspectives concerning the phenomenon. Furthermore, a multiple case study approach provided a framework to share analytical—not statistical—generalizations about pastoral accountability among Southern Baptist churches for strong accountability systems.

Participant Selection

Case study research necessarily requires selecting a case or several cases appropriate for the investigation. Creswell asserted that “identifying the case is an inherent challenge in case study research.”¹⁷ He further claimed that a researcher needs to “establish a rationale for his or her purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the case.”¹⁸ Leedy and Ormrod noted that “researchers may choose to study two or more cases.”¹⁹ Creswell agreed with Leedy and Ormrod but stated that most researchers choose five cases or less.²⁰ Therefore, five churches were the maximum limit for participation as research cases.

Case Selection

Local churches selected as cases for the study had to meet the following criteria: (1) be in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention, according to Article III, Section 1 of

¹⁷ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 75.

¹⁸ Ibid., 76

¹⁹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 231.

²⁰ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 75.

the Constitution of the SBC; (2) be a self-supporting, self-sustaining, and self-propagating church; and (3) be led by its current pastor for a minimum of one year. The first criterion ensured the selected cases were Southern Baptist churches in faith and practice. According to the Constitution of the SBC, a church in friendly cooperation must have faith and practices that closely identify with the SBC's adopted statement of faith, formally approved its attention to cooperate with the convention, made undesignated financial contribution to the Convention, and reflected the convention's posture toward sexual abuse and racial discrimination. The second criterion ensured the selected cases were fully autonomous churches by excluding mission churches and church plants.²¹ Established churches start mission churches or sponsor church plants in unreached or underreached areas. Mission churches and church plants are not organizationally mature enough to support themselves structurally or financially, so they are dependent upon their more established sponsoring churches. In addition, the sponsoring churches may appoint a mission pastor or church planter to lead the congregation, so the staff person is accountable to the sponsoring church rather than the mission church or church plant. Therefore, fully autonomous SBC churches could participate in the study. The third criterion ensured the pastor had sufficient tenure at the church to acquire sufficient knowledge and experience of the church's pastoral accountability framework. Pastors in office less than a year may not have

²¹ John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, eds., *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 208–9, 306–7. Missionary societies, influenced by missiologists Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn, used the “three-self” formula as a gauge to assess the autonomy of indigenous churches and a goalpost for missionaries to work toward.

completed an annual evaluation cycle with the church, if the church provides annual assessments.

Selecting cases began with contacting five local Baptist associations, via their Associational Mission Strategists, to gather information for the research.²² Of the five associations contacted, only two associations agreed to provide the requested information. One hundred thirteen churches met the initial criteria for participation. Twelve churches, or 10 percent of churches, were contacted to participate in the study. Of the twelve churches contacted, four churches agreed to participate, six churches did not respond, and two churches could not be reached due to incorrect contact data.

Recruiting churches to participate commenced with contacting their respective pastors. Once they gave verbal agreement to participate, the pastors received a church site permission form and an informed consent form.²³ When the pastors completed and returned the forms, they confirmed their interview times. Four pastors agreed that their churches would participate in the study and returned the required paperwork. Churches received requests initially through phone calls. If the initial call failed, the churches received contact through an email. Churches that failed to respond to both attempts did not participate in the study.

Interviewee Selection

The study included two interviewees from each local Southern Baptist church: the pastor and a lay leader. The pastor was recruited as the churches were recruited. Churches could serve

²² Appendix A.

²³ Appendix B; Appendix C.

as cases only if the pastor agreed to participate in the study. Interviewing the pastor was appropriate because the pastor is best positioned to have the most knowledge and experience of the church's pastoral accountability practices. At the conclusion of the pastor's interview, the pastor provided the contact information for a lay leader who served on the pastor's accountability group. The lay leader's participation in the study was appropriate because the lay leader could provide a perspective of pastoral accountability from a church member's standpoint. Lay leaders had to be members of the respective participating churches for at least one year, so they were familiar with the congregation's culture. Furthermore, they had to serve on the accountability group for at least one year, so they were familiar with the church's pastoral accountability structure. Likely, lay leaders would be familiar with the church's accountability practices as well. Lay leaders received invitations to participate in the study, to which three lay leaders agreed. The lay leaders that agreed to participate in the study received an adult informed consent form, which they were required to complete and return no later than the date of their scheduled interview. Six individuals in total agreed to participate. Interviewees received briefings about the purpose and procedures of the research study and signed the adult informed consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board. Both the pastor and lay leader had to be available and willing to represent their church in the study. Should either one of the individuals refrain from participating in the study, the selected church was excluded as a case for this research study.

Instrumentation

The pastor and a lay leader from each participating Southern Baptist church took part in one semi-structured interview, resulting in a total of six interviewees and interviews. The interview guide was the primary instrument for data collection. The interview guide consisted of

eleven questions. The first two questions covered general information about the interviewees and the church. The second two questions concerned the concept of accountability held by the interviewee and the church. The fifth question inquired about how the church communicates its expectations about accountability to the pastor and church. Questions 6 through 10 focused on the church's particular practices around accountability. The eleventh question offered the interviewee to expound upon earlier answers or provide further information relevant to the subject. The interview guide was approved by the Institutional Review Board of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary along with the research procedures.

The interview questions were developed and refined in three phases. Initially, development began by experimenting with qualitative inquiry, particularly interviewing, in a doctoral seminar in Pastoral Leadership. During that seminar, three pastors and denominational leaders from different Baptist denominations participated in a 30-minute semi-structured interview about pastoral accountability in their respective denominations. In the second phase, interviewing to collect research data was a requirement for an Advanced Qualitative Methods course. The interview guide in the second phase focused on the local church's practices rather than a denominational-wide focus. This third phase included an expert panel to the initial interview guide and provide feedback about the clarity, focus, and design of the guide. The expert panel suggested several changes that led to revising the interview guide before conducting the interviews.²⁴

²⁴ Appendix E; Appendix F; Appendix G.

Data Collection

Research data on the identified cases came through multiple sources as is customary in qualitative research. Leedy and Ormrod stated that “researchers often use multiple forms of data in any single study.”²⁵ They asserted that multiple forms of data provide credibility of the data the researcher collects.²⁶ Creswell supported that assertion: “Researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.”²⁷ Data collection involved three long-recognized methods of qualitative research: interviews, documents, and observations. Both Leedy and Ormrod and Creswell acknowledged those forms of data as accepted in qualitative research.²⁸

Interviews

Three categories of interviews are common in qualitative research: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. In structured interviews, the interviewer follows an interview guide or schedule without deviating from it. Semi-structured interviews include an interview guide, but the interviewer is allowed to follow the ebb and flow of the conversation. Unstructured interviews do not have a prescribed interview guide with questions. As a result, the interviewer and interviewee decide the boundaries of their conversation in the moment as they

²⁵ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 238.

²⁶ Ibid., 240.

²⁷ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 208.

²⁸ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 231; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 129–44.

converse. This research study included semi-structured interview, according to an interview guide, with the pastor and lay leader of each selected church.

The interviewees selected one of three ways in which to participate in the interview: in person, virtually, or telephonically. The interviewees consented to the interview being recorded via two audio devices as a failsafe. Prior to beginning the interview session, the interviewees gave their permission for their interview session to be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The interviewees verified the accuracy of their interview transcripts.

Documents

Selected churches provided official documents as supplemental and secondary data for the study. The documents sought were official records that provided general information about the church or information about the church's pastoral accountability framework. Two churches submitted their governing documents, such as constitution and bylaws. Another church submitted its personnel manual. Every church submitted its annual church profile (ACP) report, which is a voluntary denominational statistical report. No church submitted a pastoral job description or business meeting minutes in which the church called or recalled the pastor.

Submitted documents were read and analyzed for any information related to pastoral accountability. Any reference to the pastor's role, authority, or competence was noted and compared to the interview responses.

Observations

Churches were asked to invite the researcher to a congregational or pastoral accountability group meeting. The purpose of the request to attend those specific meetings was to

observe how the church exercises pastoral accountability in the context of a meeting.

Congregational meetings have been the expressed way a Baptist church exercises governance.

Seeing the interaction between a pastor and congregation during such a meeting would provide insight into the pastoral relationship. On a smaller scale, an accountability group meeting would provide insight about the pastoral relationship between the pastor and the group the church empowers to monitor the pastor's performance, especially if the group is a polity group like the personnel committee.

Two churches permitted the researcher to attend an accountability group meeting. One church did not have any congregational or accountability group meetings scheduled during the data collection phase of the research. Since these meetings of the accountability group or congregation were at quarterly intervals, the researcher could attend only one meeting per church to observe the dynamics within the meeting. The pastors of the churches whose meetings the researcher attended made introductions of the researcher to their respective accountability group. The researcher greeted the group members, stated the purpose of the visit, informed them of the data to be collected and how the data were going to be collected. Finally, the researcher informed the group that anyone can withdraw their consent to his presence, which would be followed up by the researcher departure. The researcher did not use any protocol or checklist to document the visit.²⁹ However, field notes were taken during the meeting and analyzed following the meeting. Lastly, the researcher collected data through field notes. The field notes were the researcher's

²⁹ Appendix H; Appendix I.

impressions, opinions, and interpretation of the observations made. The researcher carefully separated his observations from his opinions in his field notes.

Research Procedures

Five local Baptist associations, via their Associational Mission Strategists, received requests for assistance in identifying churches to participate in the research study. Of the five associations contacted, only two associations responded affirmatively to the request. The other three associations did not respond. The two associations that responded sent a combined list of 113 local churches that met the following criteria: (1) friendly cooperation with the SBC, according to Article III, Section 1 of the Constitution of the SBC; (2) self-supporting, self-sustaining, and self-governing; and (3) had a pastor with a tenure exceeding one year at the church.

Twelve churches received requests to participate in the study. Churches received requests initially through phone calls. If the initial calls failed, the churches received contact through an email. Churches that failed to respond to both attempts did not participate in the study. Four churches, via their pastor, agreed to participate in the study. The pastors received a church site permission form and an adult informed consent form once they agreed to participate. The pastors had to return the completed site permission and adult informed consent forms before their churches could participate in the study.

Pastors participated in a semi-structured interview on a mutually agreed date and time. They had the option to participate in the interview in person, via a virtual platform, or by phone. One pastor participated in person and three pastors participated virtually. The pastors answered the questions listed in the interview guide, and their responses were recorded using an audio

recording device for transcription. After completing their interviews, three of the four pastors provided contact information for a church lay leader to participate in a semi-structured interview as well. The pastor who did not provide a lay leader for the study received three requests for a lay leader to participate in the study before removal from the study.

The lay leaders nominated by the pastor received requests to participate in the study from the researcher via email, which included the adult informed consent form. The lay leaders returned their consent forms prior to participating in the interview. Like the pastors, the selected lay leaders had the option of conducting the interview in person, virtually, or telephonically. Two lay leaders elected to participate virtually, and one elected in person. Lay leaders responded to the same questions the participating pastors were asked in a semi-structured interview. The lay leaders' responses were recorded by audio for transcription.

Data Analysis

Research includes data collection and data analysis. The researcher must analyze the data collected. Qualitative researchers have several means of analyzing data. One method is coding. This research study used coding and theming to analyze collected data.

Temi Transcription Services, which claimed a 90 percent accuracy rating, transcribed the audio recordings. After receiving the initial transcript back, the researcher reviewed the transcript in tandem with the audio recording, making any necessary corrections. The interviewees verified the accuracy of the transcripts following the researcher's initial review. Once the interviewees verified the transcript, the researcher analyzed the transcript using *in vivo coding*, which uses

“the exact words used by interviewees” as the basis of the codes.³⁰ Analyzing interview transcripts involved the *Delve Qualitative Analysis Tool*, a web-based computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program. Each transcript went through three rounds of review to ensure consistency and accuracy of the coding. Following the third review, the transcripts went through three rounds of theming. Following the third theming, the codes and themes went through analysis and synthesis.

The document review followed a similar analysis process to the transcription analysis process. The exception was that the church’s documents did not undergo transcription. However, the documents passed through the coding process and the theming process three times.

Themes included in this report include themes within cases and themes across cases. Themes within cases required both interviewees within a case to make statements related to the theme. The study excluded themes mentioned by one interviewee within a case. Themes across cases required at least one interviewee in each case to make a statement related to the theme for inclusion in the study. Themes across cases did not require that all interviewees across the cases or every interviewee in the case to make statements related to the theme. The theme had to show up at least once in each case for a total of three statements to be reported as a theme across cases.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure their research is credible. Unlike their quantitative counterparts, quantitative researchers do not ensure credibility

³⁰ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 153.

numerically or statistically.³¹ Creswell argued for credibility in qualitative research.³² Qualitative researchers can use several strategies to validate their findings. Creswell recommended “qualitative researchers engage in at least two [strategies] in any given study.”³³ This study utilized four validation and credibility strategies: triangulation, interviewee feedback, peer collaboration, and reflexivity.

Triangulation required multiple sources of each case to validate the data. Data triangulation helps researchers guard against accepting a premise based upon the analysis of one source. Creswell explained that triangulation involves “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective.”³⁴ The goal of triangulation is “finding consistencies and inconsistencies among the data.”³⁵ Data sources for triangulation included the pastor’s interview, the church officer’s interview, the document review, site observation, and field notes.

Feedback from interviewees was another means to validate findings. Seeking feedback from interviewees is known as member checking. Leedy and Ormrod stated that in member checking “a researcher asks interviewees to review interview transcripts in order to double-check their accuracy; sometimes a researcher also seeks interviewees’ feedback and possible validation

³¹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 239.

³² Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 202–20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁴ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 208.

³⁵ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 240.

regarding findings.”³⁶ Creswell said member checking “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the interviewees so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account.”³⁷ As opposed to Leedy and Ormrod, Creswell stated that he does not seek interviewee feedback on his transcripts or raw data but on his preliminary analyses.³⁸ Interviewees provided feedback on the transcript of their individual interview sessions only.

Feedback from professional colleagues was another strategy to validate the findings of the research. Leedy and Ormrod suggested enlisting the help of a colleague about data analysis and interpretation to increase the strength of the research.³⁹ Eight individuals accepted the invitation to comprise an expert panel for the research effort.⁴⁰ The panel provided consultation at two points during the research process. First, the panel reviewed the interview guide before the researcher conducted interviews. Second, the panel reviewed the researcher’s data analysis to ascertain the soundness of the researcher’s interpretation. Members of the expert panel had to be familiar with Southern Baptist churches, possess a terminal degree, and have at least five years of experience with pastoral accountability or a related field. Six panel members were members of Southern Baptist churches, and two members were formerly Southern Baptists.

Reflexivity was the last strategy for validation and reliability. Leedy and Ormrod explained reflexivity as trying to “identify personal, social, political, or philosophical biases that

³⁶ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 241.

³⁷ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 208.

³⁸ Ibid., 209.

³⁹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 241 356–57.

⁴⁰ Appendix D.

are likely to affect [the] ability to collect and interpret data.”⁴¹ Researchers practice reflexivity to resist biases to provide sound research findings.⁴² Creswell confirmed “clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important.”⁴³ He further noted that some researchers disclosed influences that could have manipulated the study. Consequently, this study details any past experiences and philosophical orientations that could have an impact on the interpretation and approach to the research project.

Ethical Issues

Researchers have a moral and academic responsibility to conduct and report their research in an ethical manner. The responsibility involves integrity in drafting the report, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting research findings. Furthermore, researchers are responsible for ensuring the safety of interviewees physically and psychologically.⁴⁴ In this study, the researcher engaged in ethical research practices in the following ways. First, the seminary’s IRB approved the study prior to the interview sessions occurring. Second, the interviewees consented to participate in the study prior to data collection via the semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and site observations. In addition, the interviewees consented to their sessions being audio recorded prior to the beginning of the interview. Moreover, the interviewees learned they could withdraw from participating in the study at any time without

⁴¹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 240.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 208.

⁴⁴ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 239.

recourse prior to the submission of the dissertation. Individuals observed during site observations learned about their right to meet in executive session without the presence of the researcher or to state any items they did not want published. Third, the study maintained the privacy of interviewees by taking measures to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees' personally identifiable information and their responses to interview questions. Interviewee names and churches remained confidential by using pseudonyms in their place on transcripts and field notes. The names and identities of the participating churches and interviewees were accessible only to the researcher and the dissertation committee. Furthermore, the study assigned alphanumeric identifiers to the interview transcripts and field notes to ensure the privacy of the interviewees and their churches. Moreover, the study secured research data with a username and password protocol on a digital platform and an electronic storage device.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

The researcher has lifelong Baptist roots. Ordained by a local church affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated, he is now a member and leader in a local Southern Baptist church. Additionally, he practiced ministry as the pastor of a local Southern Baptist church for six years. He is now practicing ministry as a full-time professional chaplain. In his chaplaincy practice, he received his ecclesiastical endorsement from the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the SBC and is board-certified by the Board of Chaplaincy Certification, Incorporated, which is an affiliate of the Association of Professional Chaplains.

The researcher's association with Baptist tradition holds to a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Moreover, he espouses congregational polity as the most biblical and historically accurate model of church governance in the New Testament. Furthermore, the

researcher, having served as a pastor in an SBC church and as a current member in an SBC church, believes most pastors and churches are faithful to their understanding of their responsibilities to Christ and the church. While acknowledging that deceitful pastors and churches exist, the researcher assumes most pastors and churches attempt to do right and will fix errors when brought to light.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodology employed to answer the research questions. The rationale for a qualitative multiple case study approach was given. Additionally, the process for selecting congregations as cases and pastors and lay leaders as interview interviewees was discussed. The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and—when permitted—site observations. Data were analyzed using an in vivo coding and theming process. Furthermore, the chapter covered validity and reliability of data, ethical issues, and researcher bias and assumptions. The next chapter will discuss the results of the research, including the selection process and findings within and across cases.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this multiple case study is discovering how Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability. In *Accountable Leadership*, Paul Chaffee defined accountability as “the obligation one assumes in accepting the prerogative to lead the community in one way or another, make decisions, and act in its behalf.”¹ He later provided a shortened definition, defining accountability as “being answerable for your actions.”² In this study, pastoral accountability is the pastor’s responsibility to his local church for his ministry practice through congregationally sanctioned processes and methods. Congregational polity, religious liberty, nonprofit leadership, and professional standards within the United States fostered ambiguity regarding how Southern Baptist churches hold their pastors accountable for their ministry practice, especially senior or solo pastors. This chapter describes the data, analysis, and results of the study.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this research: (1) How do selected Southern Baptist churches understand pastoral accountability? (2) How do selected Southern Baptist churches communicate their expectations about pastoral accountability? and (3) How do selected Southern

¹ Paul Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership: A Resource Guide for Sustaining Legal, Financial, and Ethical Integrity in Congregations*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 7.

² Ibid.

Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability? The first research question concerned the concept of pastoral accountability in each church. Respondents answered two questions related to their perception of pastoral accountability. The first question was related to the respondents' personal view of pastoral accountability. The second question was related to the respondents' opinion of the church's multiple understanding of pastoral accountability.

The second research question examined the methods the church employed to communicate its expectations of accountability to its pastor. Respondents answered one question from the interview guide related to communication. The answers to the questions indicated how the pastor and lay leader perceived the church communicates its expectations.

The third research question involved discovering the methods or elements the church uses to ensure accountability of its pastor. Interviewees responded to five questions focused on current church accountability practices. Interviewees also responded to two additional questions related to accountability practices; however, the additional questions did not focus on current practices.

Interviewees also answered an additional four questions to provide general information regarding the interviewee and the church. One question concerned the interviewee's role in the congregation. Two questions concerned the congregational make up and organizational structure. One question concerned the interviewee's observation of the church's pastoral accountability measures. The final question concerned the interviewee's general opinions regarding pastoral accountability. The findings for the study are listed below.

Selection Process

Five Southern Baptist local associations received an email request for a list of churches for the study.³ Out of the five associations contacted, two associations responded affirmatively to the request. The remaining three associations did not respond. One hundred thirteen churches were provided to meet the initial criteria for participation. Twelve churches from the list, amounting to 10 percent of eligible churches, received contact about participating in the study. Four churches responded affirmatively. Three of the responding churches originated from one association. The pastors of the participating churches completed one semi-structured interview each, equaling four interviews in total. Once the pastors' interviews were completed, the pastors provided the contact information for a lay leader familiar with the church's accountability practices and structures. Only three of the churches complied with the request. The fourth church did not provide a lay leader after three requests; therefore, the fourth church did not complete the study. Three lay leaders completed one semi-structured interview each. Consequently, the three remaining participating churches are all from the same association. Time restraints precluded recruiting one or two more churches before completing the study.

Participant Descriptions

The participating churches were all Southern Baptist churches in an urban-suburban context in southeastern United States. Each church ranges from 50 to 150 years of existence. Using the Sunday morning worship attendance numbers, the churches ranged from 80 to 400

³ Appendix A.

people in size. While two of the churches had some racial diversity, each church primarily identified as African American, Anglo, or Hispanic.

The participating churches self-identified as Southern Baptist and cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention. Though congregationally governed, each church structures itself differently. First Church practices congregational governance in a pastor-diaconate model, in which the deacons are the key lay leaders in the congregation.⁴ Second Church practices congregationalism with a pastor-deacons-committees structure. In this structure, the pastor, assisted by professional staff, provides spiritual leadership to the congregation. The deacons assist the pastor and staff in providing pastoral care to church members. The committees assist the church in governing functions by engaging in in-depth study of assigned areas and recommending actions to the congregation. Third Church practices congregationalism with a leadership team model. The pastor provides the leadership to the church with the assistance of a leadership team, formerly referred to as a church council in the Southern Baptist and other Protestant church traditions. The leadership team is composed of the primary ministry program lay leaders in the congregation.

In addition to internal structures, each church has different governing and operational documents. First Church and Third Church both have formal governing documents vesting final authority for ultimate decisions of the congregation into the churches' membership. First Church has a constitution and bylaws last updated in 1995. Third Church has a constitution adopted in

⁴ The researcher designated participating churches according to the order in which the respective interviewees completed their interviews to protect the church's identity.

2014. Second Church did not have any formal constitution or bylaws; however, they have a personnel manual, which was adopted in 2023.

While the churches served as cases and sites for the study, the pastors and lay leaders of the churches served as interviewees. The pastors were African American, Anglo, and Hispanic according to the churches they serve. Each pastor had decades of pastoral experience. The pastors at First Church and Third Church had been at their current churches for over thirty years, while the pastor at Second Church had been serving his current church for four years. In addition, every pastor obtained some level of formal theological education. One pastor earned a bachelor's degree in ministry, another earned a Master of Divinity, and the third earned a doctoral degree. By age, one pastor was in his mid-forties, another in his late fifties, and the third in his early seventies. As is customary in Southern Baptist churches, all three pastors were male.

The lay leaders had various tenures in their respective churches as members and lay church officers. One lay leader had been a member of his respective church since his youth and was serving as the chair of the personnel committee. The second lay leader had been a member of the church for five years and was serving as a lay preacher. The third lay leader had been a member of his church for ten years and was serving as a lay preacher. The lay preachers were ordained ministers; however, they did not have any paid professional status on church staff. One lay leader worked in the trucking industry. Another lay leader worked in the transportation industry, and the third lay leader worked in the medical field.

Findings within Cases

Temi Transcription Services transcribed the audio recordings of six interviews as the primary data source for the research. Participating churches provided additional data in the form

of relevant organizational documents, such as their bylaws and annual church profile (ACP). Furthermore, two of the churches permitted a site visit to observe a meeting in progress, which provided content for field notes to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The findings within cases include accountability team, pastoral initiative, performance review, well-being, sufficiency, business meetings, lack of mechanism, and training.

First Church

First Church is an African American congregation in a major city in the southeastern region of the United States. Established in 1960, the church is sixty-five years old. The church has a membership of 300 people with an average of 85 people regularly attending worship services. The congregation has several activities, including Sunday School, age-graded ministries, and men's and women's ministries. The church has liturgical dance and outreach ministries as well.

First Church's pastor has been in ministry for three decades. Prior to becoming the pastor at First Church, he served as an associate pastor and pastor in other churches. He also planted a church as well. He has been the pastor of First Church for twenty years. He has extensive formal theological education evidenced by earning his doctoral degree from an accredited seminary.

An analysis of responses from the pastor and lay leader from First Church resulted in the discovery of three themes: accountability team, sufficiency of practices, and business meetings. Among these themes, accountability team was predominant with both interviewees making four comments. Sufficiency of practices and business meetings were tied for second most predominant theme with both interviewees making two comments per theme each.

First Church's pastor and lay leader discussed the significance of having an accountability team for the pastor. The pastor stated that he gives the "deacons permission to question" him.⁵ The lay leader reported that he and the deacons could "pull the pastor to the side" if something is "out of bounds."⁶

Interviewee responses regarding sufficiency of accountability and business meeting were tied. Here the pastor and the lay leader had different opinions regarding whether their church's accountability structures were sufficient. The pastor commented that "the methods are efficient, but they're not unchangeable."⁷ On the contrary, the lay leader "it [is] not sufficient because it's one sided."⁸ He expounded on his statement by describing by giving an analogy detailing the lack of stated expectations to which to hold the pastor accountable.

The interviewees from First Church also discussed the role of business meetings in maintaining pastoral accountability. When asked how the church makes decisions, the pastor simply stated, "Well, we have meetings, church meetings."⁹ The lay leader confirmed the utilization of "an annual church meeting" during which "folks will get filled in on information."¹⁰

⁵ Interview with First Church's pastor, January 17, 2024.

⁶ Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

⁷ Interview with First Church's pastor, January 17, 2024.

⁸ Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

⁹ Interview with First Church's pastor, January 17, 2024.

¹⁰ Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

An analysis of First Church's constitution and bylaws relayed significant information about the church's accountability structure. Regarding governance, the church constitution states, "The government of this church is vested in the body of believers who compose it. Persons duly received by the members shall constitute the membership. All internal groups created and empowered by the church shall report to and be accountable only to the church, unless otherwise specified by church action."¹¹ While acknowledging the importance of cooperative relationships to other churches within the denomination, the constitution maintains that the "church is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body."¹² First Church's bylaws articulate how the church operates. The bylaws reiterate that the church is,

a sovereign and democratic Baptist church under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The membership retains unto itself the exclusive right of self-government in all phases of the spiritual and temporal life of this church. The membership reserves the exclusive right to determine who shall be members of this church and the conditions of such membership.¹³

Regarding member rights, the bylaws state that "every member of the church is entitled to vote at all elections and on all questions submitted to the church in conferences. . . . Every member of the church is eligible for consideration by the membership as a candidate for elective offices in the church."¹⁴ Regarding church discipline, the church empowers the pastor and deacons to "take every reasonable measure" in resolving any issue "which would cause a member to become a

¹¹ First Church, *Constitution and Bylaws of First Church*, August 1995.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

liability to the general welfare of the church.”¹⁵ The rights and discipline of members are significant because the bylaws require all “officers of the church [to] be members of [the] church.”¹⁶ The pastor is listed as a church officer.

According to First Church’s bylaws, the pastor is “chosen and called by the church” and continues in office if the pastor and church mutually agree.¹⁷ Similarly, the church can terminate the pastor’s call by an “affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the members present” at a special called meeting.¹⁸ The meeting to terminate the pastor’s call may be requested “upon the recommendation of a majority of the Personnel Committee and the deacons or by written petition signed by not less than one-fourth (1/4) of the resident church members.”¹⁹ The members in such a meeting have the power to designate a moderator, which “shall be someone other than the pastor.”²⁰ The bylaws imply that the pastor may be removed for a variety of reasons because the document states that the church will compensate the terminated pastor for one month’s pay “except in instances of gross misconduct by the pastor.”²¹

¹⁵ First Church, *Constitution and Bylaws of First Church*, August 1995.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Second Church

Second Church is an Anglo congregation located in a major city in the southeastern region of the United States. The church had about seven hundred resident members with an average worship attendance of 370 in 2023. The church is over one hundred years old and one of the prominent churches of the denomination in its area. The church was involved in mission work throughout its area. The church was active in the local association and state convention as well.

The pastor had led the church less than five years. Though his tenure at the church had not been long, he had considerable experience in ministry, having previously served as a staff minister and pastor at other churches. He also had formal theological education, having received a graduate theological degree.

The lay leader, a church member since his childhood, served as the chair of the personnel committee, one of the significant standing committees of the church. In addition to his committee service, he also had several years of service as a deacon. The lay leader worked in the medical profession as well.

An analysis of the responses from the pastor and lay leader from Second Church resulted in the discovery of four themes: accountability team, pastoral initiative, performance review, and well-being. Among these four themes, accountability team was predominant with both interviewees commenting twenty-two times. The interviewees reported the presence and involvement of a group within the congregation charged with monitoring the pastor's performance and holding him accountable. Second Church's pastor mentioned that the personnel committee is responsible for providing him professional accountability, which he distinguished

from pastoral accountability. He stated that Second Church had “committees that help provide what [he] would say [is] accountability.”²² The lay leader agreed, noting that Second Church is “a church of committees.”²³ He further explained that the “various committees will bring items or vote on items and decide items that would come to a full business meeting to be adopted by the church.”²⁴ He also said, “It’s mostly the personnel committee who is conducting annual reviews and checking in with all of the staff and checking in with each of the team leaders on staff who are working directly with our senior pastor.”²⁵

The next predominant theme in Second Church’s responses was pastoral initiative. The pastor and the lay leader commented twenty-one times on the pastor’s initiative concerning pastoral accountability. When asked about the reason he established certain elements of accountability, the pastor of Second Church responded, “That’s just something that I have done because I know that it’s important.”²⁶ Later in the interview, he said, “It’s all self-imposed.”²⁷ In the lay leader’s interview, the lay leader expressed gratitude that the “senior pastor has felt compelled and convicted to proactively implement the strategies that [they] have and the policies

²² Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

²³ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

²⁷ Ibid.

that [they] have and the reviews [they] have.”²⁸ Later, the lay leader affirmed the pastor, who “has from the beginning, implemented processes that will allow for and ensure accountability.”²⁹

The third predominant theme under Second Church was tied between performance review and well-being. The pastor and the lay leader of Second Church commented on performance review and well-being fourteen times. Speaking of performance reviews, the pastor shared that he believes that performance reviews should be “scheduled at least annually, if not twice a year, by the personnel committee for the senior pastor.”³⁰ He further commented that “for the church’s health . . . the committee needs to know this is [its] responsibility.”³¹ The lay leader agreed. As mentioned previously, the lay leader articulated the personnel committee’s involvement in conducting annual reviews and check-ins with the pastor and staff.

Second Church was the sole participating church without a constitution or bylaws and the sole church with an adopted personnel manual. The personnel manual did not include much information about the church’s governance practices that facilitate pastoral accountability. However, the manual did make comments that describe some level of accountability practices with the church. For example, the manual indicated that “senior pastor vacancies will be filled in a manner approved by the church body.”³² Additionally, the manual indicated the church body

²⁸ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Second Church, *Personnel Manual of Second Church*, February 10, 2023.

can override the personnel manual adopted by the personnel committee stating “if there is a conflict between the provisions, benefits and policies in the manual and those set forth in the terms of the Senior Pastor’s call or an ordained staff member’s engagement, the terms of the call or engagement shall prevail.”³³ The church also set standards for ministerial staff, which includes the senior pastor. The manual states,

Ministerial staff members shall be members of [Second Church] and shall be active in Bible study ministry and worship services, except in cases approved by the Senior Pastor or his designee. Each ministerial staff member is also expected to be a cheerful, regular, and sacrificial giver in the expression of his/her genuine love while recognizing the tithe as the New Testament minimum.”³⁴

Third Church

Third Church was a Hispanic congregation in a suburban context in the southeastern region of the United States. The church was established in 1998 and has an average worship attendance of eighty people.³⁵ Like most Southern Baptist churches, the church had a Sunday School, music ministry, men’s ministry, women’s ministry, and youth and children’s ministries.

Third Church’s pastor was in his sixties and has pastored the congregation for over twenty years. He earned his bachelor’s degree in a ministry-related field and was pursuing graduate theological education. Like the other pastors, he was active in local and statewide denominational activities.

³³ Second Church, *Personnel Manual of Second Church*, February 10, 2023.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Text communication with Second Church’s pastor, December 24, 2024.

An analysis of interviewee responses from Third Church resulted in the discovery of four themes: accountability team, accountability mechanisms, well-being, and training. Of these themes, accountability team was predominant with both interviewees contributing eight comments to the theme. Well-being and training were tied for third most prominent theme with both interviewees making three comments on the theme.

Third Church's interviewees reported the presence and involvement of a leadership group that provided accountability for the pastor. The pastor indicated that the church had "a group of leaders" with whom he met regularly.³⁶ He stated the church "used to work for years with deacons" but now had "a core group of leaders."³⁷ The lay leader confirmed the pastor's comments, stating that the church had "a leadership group" that met periodically "every two or three months, depending on the need."³⁸

Interviewees also discussed accountability mechanisms employed by the church to ensure pastoral accountability. The pastor said, "There's nothing implemented" in his church to ensure pastoral accountability.³⁹ Commenting further, he said, "There's not a structure or group" dedicated to helping the church maintain accountability of the pastor.⁴⁰ The lay leader

³⁶ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview with Third Church's lay leader, February 22, 2024.

³⁹ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

commented that church members “don’t use any metric tools to size the pastor.”⁴¹ He believed the congregation had such a close relationship with the pastor that members “can let him know directly” if they saw a problem.⁴²

Interviewees also discussed well-being and training in their responses. Both the pastor and the lay leader connected pastoral accountability to church health. The pastor remarked that pastoral accountability is “important because what can happen in the setting of the church can damage not just the church itself, but it would damage society and the people’s beliefs.”⁴³ The pastor also connected pastoral accountability to church growth “not just numerically, but spiritually according to [their] ministries of how people are growing in every way.” The lay leader had a similar statement. He said pastoral accountability was “essential for the church, I mean for pastor management or church development.”⁴⁴

Concerning training, the pastor indicated that he was “going back to seminary to take a little more study and get a little more acquainted to [his] whole studies.”⁴⁵ When asked whether he received any training on pastoral accountability, the pastor replied negatively. The lay leader

⁴¹ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁴⁴ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁴⁵ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

stated he “never received information about” training opportunities in pastoral accountability.⁴⁶

He said the church provided pastoral accountability instinctively.

An analysis of Third Church’s documents provides evidence of a congregationally governed church with a built-in pastoral accountability structure. Similar to First Church, the church’s constitution gives membership rights to “those who are in full communion with the church and enjoy a good reputation before the brethren and the world and attend faithfully, have the right to voice and vote in the deliberations of the church and can be elected to exercise church functions as deacon, pastor and other positions, and/or for any organization relevant to the work of the church.”⁴⁷ The church retains unto itself the right to accept and excommunicate members. The church is responsible to “examine believers who wish to be baptized with respect to their faith and testimony and if found acceptable they will be approved by baptism and membership.”⁴⁸ The church also has the duty to “put the members of the congregation under discipline and to restore them.”⁴⁹ The church requires that the administration of the church “be carried out only by members in full communion.”⁵⁰ In addition, “church offices will be entrusted only to members of the church who have voice and vote and who are spiritual and competent.”⁵¹ The constitution requires that “the calling or dismissal of the pastor will be made by vote of the

⁴⁶ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁴⁷ Third Church, *Constitution of Third Church*, January 11, 2014.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

church.”⁵² The church meets quarterly to “receive the report of the pastor” among other business items.⁵³

Findings across Cases

Temi Transcription Services transcribed the audio recordings of six interviews as the primary data source for the research. Participating churches provided additional data in the form of relevant organizational documents, such as their bylaws and annual church profile (ACP). Furthermore, two of the churches permitted a site visit to observe a meeting in progress, which provided content for field notes to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Two sections comprise the findings across cases section: findings across cases by position and findings across cases in general. In findings across station by position, relevant themes include pastoral initiative, accountability team, sufficiency of practices, training, and business meetings. In findings across cases in general, relevant themes include accountability team, pastoral initiative, accountability training, business meetings, performance review, difficulty for members, and definition.

Pastors

An analysis of pastor responses resulted in the identification of three themes: pastoral initiative, accountability team, and sufficiency of practices. Among these three themes, pastoral initiative was predominant, with all three pastors making twenty comments. The next

⁵² Third Church, *Constitution of Third Church*, January 11, 2014.

⁵³ Ibid.

predominant theme was accountability team with nineteen statements. The third predominant theme was sufficiency of practices, which amounted to ten statements.

The pastors indicated they seek accountability by giving others permission to confront them, as necessary. First Church's pastor recounted that he gave the deacons permission to hold him accountable. He said, "I told my deacons . . . you don't have the right to tell me what to do, but I give you permission to tell me if you think I'm doing something that's not conducive to the ministry."⁵⁴ Likewise, Second Church's pastor does the same with people he refers to as his "accountability partners." He said, "I've given permission to my accountability partners" to confront him when they feel he is in spiritual danger.⁵⁵ He also said that the personnel committee "know[s] who those men are in [his] life, and they have permission to go to them."⁵⁶ He later reiterated that if the personnel committee "ever [has] concerns or questions or whatever, they have permission" to confront him.⁵⁷ Third Church's pastor stated, "From time to time . . . I will, you know, seek some help with the other pastors and other leaders who I counsel with in events or situations where I think that I need a little more wisdom."⁵⁸

Pastors also indicated initiative by proactively implementing accountability measures. Second Church's pastor made nine statements articulating his reality of initiating accountability

⁵⁴ Interview with First Church's pastor, January 17, 2024.

⁵⁵ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

for himself. He admitted “that’s just something that [he has] done because [he] know[s] that it’s important.” Later, while discussing certain accountability measures, he stated, “It’s all self-imposed.” Third Church’s pastor also shared that he took initiative to talk about accountability at his church. He recalled telling his congregation at a meeting, “We’re gonna work on putting some measures on how you’re gonna hold me accountable to the church as a pastor.”⁵⁹

In addition, pastors reported a degree of self-awareness that facilitated their initiative. First Church’s pastor said, “I have a relationship with my deacons, who is [*sic*] the persons that I utilize to keep me in check, you know, because I’m [name]. And sometimes, you know, you got to come to the realization that if [name] don’t check [name], [name] might tend to do what [name] want to do.”⁶⁰ Similarly, Second Church’s pastor articulated a measure of self-awareness, “I just also know myself.”⁶¹ He explained further that he learned his “best protection was having other brothers that [he] could just admit weakness to and have accountability with.”⁶²

The second predominant theme among pastor responses was accountability team, which numbered at nineteen significant statements. The pastors acknowledged the existence, presence, and involvement with some type of accountability team or group within the congregation. As mentioned above, First Church’s pastor reported a close working relationship with the church’s diaconal body. Second Church’s pastor shared some ways the personnel committee holds him accountable for his ministry performance. He stated that the personnel committee is “the only

⁵⁹ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁶⁰ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

⁶¹ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

⁶² Ibid.

group that would be the group that if the church was like, who's dealing with this? That the answer's gonna be, well, the personnel committee should be dealing with this. If there was something with me, like, if I stop showing up on Sundays, who's gonna deal with that? Probably [the] personnel committee is gonna be the ones to do that."⁶³ In addition, he also revealed that "there are committees that help provide what [he] call[s] accountability."⁶⁴ Third Church's pastor also reported the presence, existence, and involvement of an accountability team. While initially stating "there's not a structure or group" to provide formal accountability, Third Church's pastor then said,

Well, we have a group of leaders. We used to work for years with the deacons, you know, but after I think the last eight years or so, we've come to do a leader group led by leaders. So, we have a core group of leaders. They are either leaders in a group with the cell groups of Sunday School teachers or another other ministry. All those are kind of head of a leader group. So, every ministry that we have placed in at the church, it has a leader and that leader is part of a leadership group. I am the senior pastor, so I bring the ideas of vision and, you know, before them and we discuss it, whether it is something the church wanna go with or, you know, something that is viable for us or not examining the, you know financially beneficial to the ministry. And then we take it from there.⁶⁵

Every pastor indicated some understanding of responsibility to a group internal to the congregation for accountability purposes.

The pastors discussed the insufficiency among their church's accountability practices. Collectively, the pastors contributed ten statements related to the sufficiency of their churches' accountability practices or methods. Two pastors opined their churches' practices were inefficient. Second Church's pastor remarked that his church's practices are "inefficient in the

⁶³ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

sense of like, helping [him] develop as a pastor in the ways that God's work speaks of."⁶⁶

Likewise, Third Church's pastor said his church's practices are "not probably efficient, you know, the way that they should be efficient."⁶⁷ In another part of the conversation, Third Church's pastor made two comments, saying "there's not a structure" for accountability practices at his church.⁶⁸ He also said he did not believe his church sees pastoral accountability "as a mechanism of something that's important to [implement formally], but it should be."⁶⁹ He further commented that "they need to understand, you know, the importance. Although [I would] like to say all we are, most of our Hispanic churches is [*sic*] kind of driven and work that way. I think it's a cultural thing, but nevertheless, I don't think the church has a vision clearly of what it should be."⁷⁰ To the contrary, First Church's pastor commented that "the methods are efficient, but they're not unchangeable."⁷¹

Lay Leaders

An analysis of lay leader responses in the interviews resulted in three themes: training, accountability team, and business meetings. Among these three themes, training was predominant with all three lay leaders contributing eighteen comments to the theme.

⁶⁶ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

⁶⁷ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁷¹ Interview with First Church's pastor, January 17, 2024.

Accountability Team was the second predominant theme with fifteen statements. The last predominant theme was business meetings with six comments.

First Church's lay leader commented that "the whole concept [of pastoral accountability training] is foreign."⁷² Further elaborating, he said,

I think the whole, I mean, hearing you talk about it is a breath of fresh air because it does exist. But the concept is foreign. So, because the concept is foreign, nobody trains for it. It's unknown. So, there is no training on that. Now, there's some evangelism training. There's some compassion training. There's been a bunch of training like that. But I've never seen a training on how do we hold the pastor accountable. It doesn't exist.⁷³

First Church's lay leader noted that comprehensive training in a variety of subjects is available to church members but expressed a lack of training in pastoral accountability. He found encouragement that training in pastoral accountability is possible.

Second Church's lay leader replied, "Your question about formal training intrigues me, and I wonder if there could be something—and I might have to ask you off the record what you would recommend—because I'm curious if there is an option to get some formal training to just improve our ability as a [personnel committee]."⁷⁴ While commending his pastor for implementing accountability practices, he admitted the lack of "formal training for implementing pastoral accountability."⁷⁵ The only formal accountability training he could recall was *Ministry*

⁷² Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview with Second Church's lay leader, March 12, 2024.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Safe. Third Church's lay leader stated their church "never received information about [training]. We do [pastoral accountability] by having instinct."⁷⁶

The lay leaders reported significant involvement by an accountability team with all three lay leaders commenting fifteen times in reference to the accountability team. When discussing who is responsible for holding the pastor accountable, First Church's lay leader commented,

It would probably be the deacons or myself. And again, that accountability would just have to be something that's out of bounds or something that just wasn't right. Okay, so in that sense, for an example, let's say . . . the pastor said something one day, right? Myself or a deacon could pull [him] to the side and be like, "Hey, you know, that wasn't right. You know, maybe that shouldn't have been said that way." So, you have that sort of accountability.⁷⁷

While the lay leader and deacons are not formally designated as the pastor's accountability team, the lay leader expressed the ability to provide corrective accountability to the pastor.

Second Church's lay leader, who chairs the church's personnel committee, reported significant involvement in holding the pastor accountable. Concerning committee work, he said, "It's mostly the personnel committee who is conducting annual reviews and checking in with all of the staff and checking in with each of the team leaders on our staff who are working very closely with our senior pastor."⁷⁸ He also stated that Second Church has "a formal personnel committee meeting about every three months." While Second Church has deacons, the "deacon body is really more of a servant role than [a] leadership role."⁷⁹ Third Church's lay leader

⁷⁶ Interview with Third Church's lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁷⁷ Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

⁷⁸ Interview with Second Church's lay leader, March 12, 2024.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

mentioned the presence of a leadership group that has “periodic meetings every two [or] three months, depending on the need.”⁸⁰

The lay leaders made six significant statements regarding the presence and role of business meetings as an important aspect of their churches’ accountability framework. When asked about the church’s decision-making process, First Church’s lay leader responded, “So, what will happen is they’ll do like a church meeting, an annual church meeting, and folks will get filled in on information.”⁸¹ Second Church’s lay leader responded,

Yea, So, our church is, so we do have committees. And so, I think we would be considered a committee, you know, led church. I mean we certainly have a senior pastor who is the under-shepherd for our church. But we are a church of committees. And so, the various committees will bring items or vote on items and decide items and then would be coming to a full business meeting, a formal business meeting to be adopted by the church.⁸²

In Second Church, the committees study an issue and bring recommendations to the church for action. The key factor is the congregation decides how to act on an issue, not the committee.

When asked how often the congregation meets for decision making, the lay leader responded, “I believe it’s quarterly. I think it’s four times a year.”⁸³ Third Church’s lay leader indicated the significance of the business meeting to the life and accountability of the congregation as well. He

⁸⁰ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁸¹ Interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

⁸² Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

⁸³ Ibid.

said the church holds “a special meeting with the whole congregation.”⁸⁴ The topics the members discuss include programming and ministry decisions.

He makes a meeting showing how we used the money in the past three months. And also, he submits to the congregation a few programs. I mean, you know something like when we make a decision on the budget or whatever program he submits to the church, and the church have a choice to accept or deny that, or modify in case in case they believe something is gonna have to be modified or rejected.⁸⁵

Third Church’s lay leader’s response demonstrates the church has a quarterly meeting during which the pastor submits reports and recommendations to the church for examination. In addition, the church has the authority to approve, amend, or deny the pastor’s recommendations.

Collectively

An analysis of all six interviewee responses from all three church cases resulted in the discovery of twelve themes: accountability team, pastoral initiative, accountability training, business meetings, performance review, guiding documents, member difficulty, significance, denominational influence, limited scope, peer relationships, and accountability concept. Every interviewee made significant statements about accountability teams and pastoral initiative. Five interviewees addressed training and business meetings. Four interviewees mentioned performance reviews, guiding documents, member difficulty, significance of accountability, and denominational influence. Three interviewees spoke about the limited scope of accountability in churches, peer-relationships for pastors, and the concept of accountability.

⁸⁴ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Table 1. All Interviewees

Themes	Interviewees	Statements
Accountability team	6	38
Pastoral initiative	6	32
Training	5	10
Business meetings	5	8
Performance review	4	16
Guiding documents	4	14
Member difficulty	4	11
Significance	4	7
Denominational influence	4	6
Limited scope	3	10
Peer relationship	3	5
Accountability concept	3	4

Interviewees contributed the most significant statements concerning the theme accountability team with all interviewees contributing thirty-eight significant statements. Each interviewee, pastor and lay leader, recognized the vital role of an accountability team to facilitate and ensure pastoral accountability. The interviewees identified the accountability team at their church. First Church’s pastor and lay leader identified the diaconate. The pastor and lay leader of Second Church named the personnel committee. Third Church’s pastor and lay leader said the leadership group provides pastoral accountability. Every interviewee demonstrated an understanding of the functions of the accountability team, including how the team provides pastoral accountability. First Church’s pastor and lay leader said deacons have “permission to question” and point out “something that’s out of bounds.”⁸⁶ Second Church’s pastor and lay leader said the personnel committee provides accountability by handling “all the HR kind of

⁸⁶ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024; interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

stuff” and “conducting annual reviews and checking in with all of the staff.”⁸⁷ Third Church’s pastor and lay leader indicated the leadership group facilitates pastoral accountability by “meet[ing] with the leaders” and by having “special meeting[s] with the congregation” to discuss church programs and finances.⁸⁸ Interviewees’ knowledge of the accountability team extended to requirements and processes for joining the group. When asked about how the deacons, his accountability team, were selected, First Church’s pastor responded, “Just like many pastors, most of them are adopted.”⁸⁹ First Church’s lay leader said “the qualification for the deacons would be, a lot of it’s based off character.” The pastor and lay leader from Second Church mentioned a candidate’s membership record and the nomination process. Second Church’s pastor said accountability team requirements include “regularly attending [worship services].”⁹⁰ Team members must be “engaged in ministry in some way. That could be small group or serving or something.”⁹¹ He also mentioned a discussion as to whether the nominee for the accountability team contributed financially to the church “because [they] don’t wanna put people on committees that just aren’t willing to contribute also to the ministry and support the ministry in that way.”⁹² Second Church’s lay leader mentioned being a “member in good standing” and “faithful giver in

⁸⁷ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023; interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

⁸⁸ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁸⁹ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

⁹⁰ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

terms of tithe.”⁹³ He also mentioned that “the nominating committee would bring those names [to the church] and then [those names] would be voted on [by the church].”⁹⁴ The pastor and lay leader from Third Church also knew the requirements of accountability team members. The pastor stated accountability team members must be “a [church] member who participates in one sort of ministry.”⁹⁵ The lay leader said team members are “selected by how involved they are in any ministry.”⁹⁶

The interviewees contributed the next most predominant theme of pastoral initiative. Six interviewees made thirty-two significant statements about pastoral initiative. Pastoral comments regarding initiative arose from the pastors’ self-awareness. For example, First Church’s pastor and Second Church’s pastor made comments about their self-awareness prompting them to engage actively in seeking stronger accountability. All three pastors made comments indicating they sought out accountability for themselves. The lay leaders recognized their pastors’ initiative. Expressing gratitude, Second Church’s lay leader said, “I think we’re so blessed that our pastor is so proactive in this whole arena of accountability, that he’s leading the charge in terms of implementing strategies and policies that would protect our church and protect our staff and provide transparency for our senior pastor and a way to review him.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

⁹⁶ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

⁹⁷ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

The third most predominant theme dealt with formal training in pastoral accountability. Five interviewees made ten significant statements about the training they received on the subject. Five out of the six interviewees said they had not received formal, structured training in pastoral accountability. First Church's pastor was the lone interviewee to state that his church had received training. He said he invites the state convention to "come in and teach the church that word *ought* . . . They teach what we ought to do."⁹⁸ First Church's lay leader answered differently. He said, "the concept is foreign . . . Now, there's some evangelism training. There's some compassion training. There's been a bunch of training like that. But I've never seen a training on how do we hold the pastor accountable. It doesn't exist."⁹⁹ The pastor and lay leader from Second Church reported they lacked formal training. However, Second Church's pastor mentioned he "personally read the book and watched some videos of *Dangerous Calling* by Paul David Tripp."¹⁰⁰ Second Church's lay leader mentioned the *MinistrySafe* training to prevent child sexual abuse, but said he could not "think of actual formal training."¹⁰¹ Third Church's pastor admitted his church never received pastoral accountability training; however, he said he is

⁹⁸ Interview with First Church's pastor, January 17, 2024.

⁹⁹ Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Second Church's lay leader, March 12, 2024.

“going back to seminary to take a little more studies.”¹⁰² Third Church’s lay leader said they “never received information about [pastoral accountability training].”¹⁰³

The fourth most predominant theme concerned business meetings. Five interviewees made eight significant statements contributing to the theme of business meetings. Interviewee responses indicated the significance of business meetings in their church’s pastoral accountability framework. Interviewees provided a variety of details about how their churches used business meetings as an accountability tool. For example, First Church’s pastor acknowledged simply, “We have meetings, church meetings.”¹⁰⁴ The lay leader from First Church expanded that detail in his interview sharing that First Church has “an annual church meeting [at which] folks will get filled in on information.”¹⁰⁵ Second Church’s pastor did not make any significant statements about business meetings at Second Church; however, the lay leader made four significant statements. He mentioned that Second Church has business meetings “four times a year” and that committees would “bring items . . . to a formal business meeting to be adopted by the church.”¹⁰⁶ His most significant statement included a vignette of the church’s process to call the pastor.

The pastor search committee . . . identified [the candidate]. . .and then it was voted on by the church. And so, I think that is probably a good example of most everything. So, for instance, the finance committee would go through the budget and formulate the budget

¹⁰² Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

¹⁰³ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

and work with the budget, and then present that budget to a business meeting and would be voted on to adopt it.¹⁰⁷

Third Church's pastor and lay leader offered similar perspectives of the business meeting in Third Church's accountability structure. The pastor indicated he felt the expectation of "accountability for the financial aspect" of ministry in business meetings.¹⁰⁸ Third Church's lay leader said the church has "a special meeting with the whole congregation" during which the pastor reports program and financial activities of the church during the previous quarter.¹⁰⁹

Performance reviews were also significant to pastoral accountability. Four interviewees contributed sixteen significant comments toward this theme. Second Church's pastor and lay leader contributed fourteen statements toward performance reviews. The pastor asserted that performance reviews should be "scheduled at least annually, if not twice a year, by the personnel committee for the senior pastor."¹¹⁰ He also said he would "much rather have feedback that's objective." Second Church's lay leader shared information about the components of the pastor's performance review. He stated performance reviews "include [the pastor's] attitude and willingness and quality of his work and conditions with which he works."¹¹¹ Second Church's lay leader also indicated that the personnel manual historically did not include a requirement for the senior pastor to have a performance review, so he commended the pastor for doing a "great

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Second Church's lay leader, March 12, 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Third Church's lay leader, February 22, 2024.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

job of including himself” in performance reviews.¹¹² Second Church’s lay leader took personal responsibility for the quality of performance reviews stating, “I could implement more formal assessments and lay those out in our personnel manual for future chairs and future committees.”¹¹³ First Church’s pastor did not contribute any statements toward the theme; however, the lay leader did. First Church’s lay leader indicated that people give the pastor performance feedback in informal ways. “People that give a pastor a failing grade, they’ll fail him on a review. You’ll never hear about it, but you know what’ll happen? They never come back to church again. They just left a review. They just did an evaluation.”¹¹⁴ Third Church’s pastor did not offer comments on a performance review, but the lay leader did. Third Church’s lay leader admitted, “We don’t use any metric or tools to size the pastor.”¹¹⁵

The sixth theme discovered from the data was the presence and reliance upon guiding documents as a foundation for pastoral accountability. Four interviewees contributed fourteen statements referring to written guidelines. The pastors mentioned the role of the Scriptures in providing the framework for pastoral accountability. First Church’s pastor commented that he sets boundaries for himself based on what he “wanted to do biblically and what [he is] called to do.”¹¹⁶ Second Church’s pastor asserted that “God . . . is the one through his Word that ought to

¹¹² Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

¹¹⁶ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

establish the criteria by which one is called and remains [in ministry].”¹¹⁷ Third Church’s pastor expressed a commitment to “making sure that what I teach and what I preach is according to the Bible and not anything else.” First Church’s pastor was the sole interviewee to mention the church’s bylaws. He recognized that bylaws can be empowering or limiting. Referring to the empowering quality of bylaws, he remarked, “*Robert’s Rules of Order* and bylaws, that’s wonderful.”¹¹⁸ Referring to the limiting quality, he mentioned having to check the bylaws because it “says that you can’t or we can’t or we shouldn’t.”¹¹⁹ Third Church’s pastor was the only interviewee who mentioned a church constitution, simply stating, “We do have a constitution.”¹²⁰ Second Church’s pastor and lay leader mentioned their church’s personnel manual. Second Church’s pastor, in discussing the personnel committee, said, “Their scope is a 33-page personnel manual that deals with more HR.” Second Church’s lay leader mentioned the role of the personnel manual in “speak[ing] to [the church’s] expectations.”¹²¹

Interviewees recognized that holding the pastor accountable may be a difficult experience for some members. All three pastors and one lay leader made eleven comments about the difficulty church members experience in providing pastoral accountability. First Church’s lay leader attributed the difficulty to fear. He said he thinks “there’s a fear of, can I say anything bad

¹¹⁷ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

¹²¹ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

about the pastor's job?"¹²² Second Church's pastor offered the most comments toward this theme. He asserted that member difficulty in providing pastoral accountability arises from two areas: structural difficulty and experiential difficulty. Structurally, he noted that Second Church "only call[s] one pastor. All other staff is hired by the pastor, who has a lot of liberty to build the staff how he deems appropriate for the needs of the church."¹²³ Consequently, "it would be difficult for people that I've hired to hold me accountable when I have sole hiring and firing authority in this body."¹²⁴ He asserted that "it takes a pastor to understand a pastor in fullness."¹²⁵ Church members have a limited concept of what pastoral ministry entails, which limits their ability to provide comprehensively holistic accountability. Third Church's pastor expressed member challenges with pastoral accountability arise from a limited view and culture. He said, "They know that I should be accountable, but probably haven't opened that understanding well."¹²⁶ Culturally, he said "most of our Hispanic churches is [*sic*] kind of driven and work that way. I think it's a cultural thing."¹²⁷

Interviewees reported their belief in the importance of pastoral accountability. Four interviewees, three pastors and one lay leader, offered seven statements related to this theme.

¹²² Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹²³ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

First Church’s pastor commented “it is important” while referring to advice he received from “a wise man” about accountability and boundaries.¹²⁸ Second Church’s pastor said “that’s just something that I have done because I know that it’s important.”¹²⁹ Third Church’s pastor said he would “like to make [pastoral accountability] a part of our ministry and show the importance of it.”¹³⁰ First Church’s lay leader was the sole lay leader to make a statement related to the importance of pastoral accountability. Recalling a family experience, he said, “And I’ll tell you, man, it’s important, bro. I watched my uncle sharing a church with a group and I watched it happen with them. I watched the pastor die and the church die.”¹³¹

Interviewees reported the influence and impact of other congregations with four interviewees making six statements toward the theme. First Church’s pastor mentioned inviting the state convention, a statewide association of Southern Baptist churches, to “come in and teach the church.”¹³² Second Church’s pastor and lay leader referenced the practices of other churches during their separate interviews. The pastor—referring to how churches hold their pastors accountable—said “a lot of churches don’t do that either.”¹³³ Second Church’s lay leader admitted “there may be some churches that are unhealthy where a senior pastor might be untouchable or just sort of operating without any sort of checks and balances or any oversight.”

¹²⁸ Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

¹²⁹ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹³⁰ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

¹³¹ Interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹³² Interview with First Church’s pastor, January 17, 2024.

¹³³ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

While recognizing this possibility, he also admitted he did not “know how other churches might handle [pastoral accountability],” but he expressed interest in reading the findings of the research project to learn.¹³⁴ Third Church’s lay leader reported a role for the denomination in advancing pastoral accountability “to share [the principles] and to apply it in all congregations.”¹³⁵

Interviewees reported a limited scope of pastoral accountability in their churches. Three interviewees, two pastors and one lay leader, made ten significant statements toward this theme. They saw pastoral accountability as restricted to certain areas of ministry rather than encompassing the entire pastoral ministry practice. For example, First Church’s lay leader asserted churches limited pastoral accountability to preaching and finances. He said, “I think a lot of times when people think about pastoral accountability, and even our church, when people think about pastoral accountability, I think it’s the ability to preach.”¹³⁶ Regarding financial accountability, he asserted, “Everybody has [accountability] on financial, making sure there’s no financial misappropriation. That’s what people watch. You’re always going to have that, so that part is solid.”¹³⁷ Second Church’s pastor made similar statements. “I think [pastoral accountability] probably would be reduced to ethical, like accountability not to misappropriate funds that are given to the church or accountability not to make the work culture a toxic work culture by being inappropriate either toward interaction with employees that would be

¹³⁴ Interview with Second Church’s lay leader, March 12, 2024.

¹³⁵ Interview with Third Church’s lay leader, February 22, 2024.

¹³⁶ Interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

unbecoming of a minister or anybody.”¹³⁸ Third Church’s pastor said his church’s view of accountability is shaped by “expectation of what’s happening to the church.”¹³⁹

Interviewees reported a need for peer-pastor relationships. Three interviewees, two pastors and one lay leader made five comments toward this theme. First Church’s lay leader asserted, “Pastors should always have a group of peers, mentor group, or however we decide to align it, where you gotta check in with these folks regularly just to see where your head is at.”¹⁴⁰ Second Church’s pastor asserted pastoral accountability is “best accomplished through a peer pastor relationship.”¹⁴¹ He stated he thinks pastoral accountability ideally “takes place in a plurality of elders context, where there’s other pastors in that same local congregation to whom you submit yourself for matters of holiness, matters of godly living, matters of work ethic, and doing your job. Those sorts of things.”¹⁴² He said it would be wise for pastors in a single-elder or solo pastor context to find other pastors with whom they could meet regularly for mutual accountability.¹⁴³ Third Church’s pastor mentioned his practice to “seek some help with other pastors and other leaders” who could advise him when he encounters particular situations in his personal life.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹³⁹ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with First Church’s lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Second Church’s pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Third Church’s pastor, January 24, 2024.

Interviewees articulated their view of pastoral accountability. Three interviewees contributed four statements toward the theme. Two pastors and one lay leader offered definitions of pastoral accountability. First Church's lay leader, the sole lay leader to offer a succinct definition, defined pastoral accountability as "the ability to lead your ministry, the congregation to where they're going" though he did not define what he meant by ability to lead or destination for the congregation.¹⁴⁵ Second Church's pastor offered two comments defining pastoral accountability. Initially, while referring to Acts 20:28, he said pastoral accountability is keeping watch over yourself and one another.¹⁴⁶ He explained further that pastoral accountability is "a standard that someone is making sure you are living according to."¹⁴⁷ Third Church's pastor offered a similar concept as he defined pastoral accountability as having to answer to someone or some group that may have questions about his decisions or actions.¹⁴⁸

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of data analysis from three cases, or participating churches, about pastoral accountability. The cases for the study were self-governing Southern Baptist churches with a pastor and lay leader who had been in office for at least one year. Three churches participated in the study: African American, Anglo, and Hispanic. Each church provided data via semi-structured interviews, a document review, and, if possible, a site visit.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with First Church's lay leader, February 9, 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Second Church's pastor, November 29, 2023.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Third Church's pastor, January 24, 2024.

An analysis of collected data resulted in themes within each case and across all three cases. The data across cases included themes according to the position of the interviewee and themes across cases in general. The themes across cases include the following:

1. Accountability teams are present and active in churches.
2. Accountability measures in churches are pastor-led initiatives.
3. Relevant training for accountability teams is needed.
4. Congregational meetings are an integral component of the churches' accountability structure.
5. Performance reviews are rarely used in churches.
6. Guiding documents are not utilized to their fullest capacity to address pastoral accountability.
7. Members are hesitant to address their grievances with their pastor.
8. Pastors and members affirm the importance of accountability.
9. Denominational support for pastoral accountability is desired among churches.
10. The scope of accountability within and among churches is limited.
11. The definition of accountability within and among churches is unclear.
12. Peer-pastor relationships are desired and appreciated by pastors.

The next chapter will cover the discussion of the study, including a summary, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapter, the results and analysis of the findings were presented. This chapter presents a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practices, recommendations for further research, and conclusions. The recommendations for further study will include suggestions for churches and pastors and denominational entities and leaders.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine how selected Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability. Calls for greater accountability of Southern Baptist pastors have been voiced, accepted, and resisted by various factions; however, the extent of pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches has not been examined. As a result, little research focused on how Southern Baptist churches practiced pastoral accountability.

The conceptual framework for the study included four interrelated areas: congregational polity, religious liberty, nonprofit leadership, and professional standards. Baptists subscribe to congregational polity, which places the highest decision-making authority of a congregation in the hands of the entire congregation when it gathers to decide. Consequently, Southern Baptist churches do not have an individual or group of individuals within the congregation or outside of the congregation with the ecclesiastical authority to compel a church to make or refrain from deciding. The legal context of the United States limits the government's authority to direct or entangle itself with the internal affairs of a congregation. The First Amendment to the US

Constitution precludes the government from promoting or discouraging religious beliefs and activities. Thus, the government cannot recommend, appoint, discipline, or dismiss ministers in churches. The ecclesiastical authority alone has the authority to call or recall ministers.

Churches, according to several states, are nonprofit organizations established to meet the spiritual needs of their congregation and community members. Society expects nonprofit organizations to operate with integrity and transparency. Some people assess churches and pastors by the same standards as nonprofits and nonprofit leaders. A subset of Southern Baptist pastors experienced professional accountability through their theological field education, clinical training, and professional associations. As a result, these pastors are familiar with the concepts of pastoral or ministry supervision. These four factors impact the way Southern Baptist pastors perceive or experience pastoral accountability.

Three research questions guided the study: (1) How do the selected Southern Baptist churches understand pastoral accountability? (2) How do selected Southern Baptist churches communicate their expectations about pastoral accountability? and (3) How do Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability? The intent of the first question was to discover how the churches conceived pastoral accountability. The second question focused on how the churches informed the pastor of their expectations. The third question covered what practices or measures the churches established to monitor the pastor's performance.

A qualitative multiple case research method was employed to obtain answers to the research questions. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with the pastor and a lay leader with knowledge of the accountability processes of the church. The interview responses were transcribed and triangulated against relevant organizational documents

and observations from field visits, if possible. The research resulted in the discovery of twelve themes: accountability team, pastoral initiative, training, business meetings, performance reviews, guiding documents, member difficulty, significance, denominational influence, limited scope, peer relationship, and accountability concept. The next section discusses how the findings answer the research questions according to the relevant theme.

Discussion of Findings

The goal of the study was to discover how selected Southern Baptist churches held their pastors accountable for their ministry. This section discusses the implications of the findings for each of the three research questions.

RQ1: How do selected Southern Baptist churches understand pastoral accountability?

The findings indicate the churches have a conflicted concept of pastoral accountability, supporting the assertions of Michael Ford and Douglas Ihrke and Pilon and Brouard.¹ The pastors and lay leaders differed in their understanding of the subject. However, they were united in their assertion that their respective congregations lacked a fuller understanding of pastoral accountability. When asked about their concept of pastoral accountability, the pastors were able to give a general definition of their idea. The lay leaders could not give a general definition of their idea. Furthermore, the concepts of pastoral accountability lack specificity regarding to whom the pastor was accountable and how the pastor was held accountable. While the respondents discussed for what the pastor was accountable, the interviewees provided a limited

¹ Michael R Ford and Douglas M. Ihrke, "Perceptions are Reality: A Framework for Understanding Governance," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 41 (2019): 140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2018.1512337>; Pilon and Brouard, "Accountability Theory," 585.

answer, such as preaching or financial accountability. The church documents charged the pastor with more responsibility than preaching and finances. The interviewees did not refer to the churches' governing or operational documents or a job description for the pastor. The Scriptures were the only written document the interviewees referenced about the pastor's responsibilities. Moreover, while the interviewees discussed the pastor's accountability to God, the pastor's accountability to the church was absent from the discussion of lay leader comments. In fact, the interviewees did not specify how the pastor was accountable to the congregation. One lay leader discussed the pastor's accountability to the congregation through the personnel team. The other lay leaders discussed the pastor's accountability to the congregation but did not indicate how the congregation ensures the pastor is accountable. The findings indicated that churches need assistance in understanding the nature and characteristics of pastoral accountability. The lay leaders interviewed on the church's pastoral accountability team did not demonstrate a full understanding of how they were to monitor the pastor's performance, in partnership with the pastor and on behalf of the congregation.

In addition to the accountability team, the findings indicated the business meetings are an important aspect of church governance and, therefore, pastoral accountability, supporting Echols's assertion.² The interviewees indicated their respective churches have regular congregational business meetings, with two churches having quarterly meetings and one church having an annual meeting. The findings indicate the church expects the pastor to report to the

² Echols, "Business Meeting," 96–7.

members the activities of the congregation since the last meeting. The pastor also brings proposals to the members for congregational approval.

The churches' perception of accountability is laid out in several written documents. In line with the assertion of several scholars, the findings indicate that written guiding documents are significant to congregational life and pastoral accountability.³ The highest written authority for the churches is the Scriptures. The pastors and lay leaders appealed to the Scriptures when responding to interview questions. In addition, the pastors, lay leaders, and other accountability team leaders cited the Scriptures during site visits and field observations. The churches also had legal guiding documents, such as a constitution, bylaws, or personnel manual. The two churches with governing documents did not have a personnel manual, and the church with a personnel manual did not have a constitution or bylaws. However, the church with the personnel manual had to have articles of incorporation because articles of incorporation were required in the state in which the church is domiciled, and the church is incorporated as a nonprofit religious organization within its state. Despite the recognized value of written guiding documents, some documents were either missing or outdated.

The churches' concept of pastoral accountability is rooted in relationships at the corporate and individual levels. Corporately, the interviewees indicated openness to receiving information and feedback about best practices of pastoral accountability from churches of similar faith and practice. Several respondents indicated a willingness to receive training from a denominational

³ Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 51; Reddicliffe, "Accountability and Professional Supervision," 126; Thompson and Thompson, *Organizing for Accountability*, 18; Trueman, "Parachurch Groups," 28.

entity regarding the topic, which affirmed the historical role of denominational entities as strategic resources for local churches.⁴ Furthermore, the findings also appear to affirm the principles of cooperation and subsidiarity regarding denominational relationships between churches.⁵ While denominational bodies do not have *authority over* Baptist churches, subsidiarity in a Baptist context would recognize a denominational role in providing support to churches while recognizing the authority, familiarity, and competency of local churches to determine the best way to resolve an issue. Individually, the interviewees recognized the role of collegial relationships to helping set the context for pastoral accountability. The pastors indicated a desire to covenant with a group of pastors for the purposes of mutual accountability. In the absence of such a framework of accountability, two of the pastors communicated they sought out fellow pastors to advise them and speak prophetically into their lives. One pastor asserted that peer-pastors or fellow elders within one church is his ideal context for pastoral accountability to occur in its fullness. The findings seem to agree with prior research that asserts the positive impact of peer-pastor relationships on personal health, professional competence, and pastoral accountability.⁶

⁴ Harper, “Decently and in Order,” 396-401; Segler, *Practicing Christian Worship*, 144.

⁵ Segler, *Practicing Christian Worship*, 144; Ricks and Peters, *Strategy in His Image*, 22.

⁶ Douglas, “Pastoral Skills and Qualities,” 42; Merkle, “Hierarchy in the Church,” 39; Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes*, 181.

RQ2: How do selected Southern Baptist churches communicate their expectations about pastoral accountability?

Four themes were significant to this research question: business meetings, performance review, member difficulty, and guiding documents. The findings indicate churches communicate their expectations about pastoral accountability through business meetings, performance reviews, and guiding documents. However, the findings also indicate that two of the three participating churches do not use any type of formal performance review process for their pastors. Though business meetings are a method of monitoring the pastor's performance, one of the three participating churches holds a regular congregational meeting annually. The long interval between business meetings could indicate a significant gap in the pastoral accountability structure of the church.⁷

One reason churches may not be using their full resources for pastoral accountability may be due to the anxiety church members feel about confronting the pastor for perceived wrongs. The findings indicate that members are hesitant to approach the pastor to redress their grievances, even though the pastors expressed—and the lay leaders confirmed—a willingness to receive constructive feedback and invited the church to do so. In fact, one pastor indicated he conducts an annual anonymous survey for members to provide their feedback; however, the lay leader indicated the members of the church are cautious about questioning the pastor. Moreover, the same lay leader asserted that many members are unaware that the church can call the pastor to account. Consequently, the members will withhold financial contribution to signal their

⁷ Echols, "Business Meeting," 96–7.

dissatisfaction. If their financial protest does not work, the members will leave the congregation to join another congregation. The lack of confidence of the membership to address perceived wrongs of the pastor may indicate the need to educate the membership aware of the role of the pastor's accountability group.⁸

RQ3: How do Southern Baptist churches practice pastoral accountability?

The findings indicate that nine of the twelve themes were significant to this research question: accountability team, pastoral initiative, business meetings, performance reviews, guiding documents, denominational relationships, limited scope, collegial relationships, and training. Churches practiced a minimal level of pastoral accountability. In fact, they practiced more pastoral accountability than realized, yet some best practices of supervision and accountability were noticeably missing. Churches practiced pastoral accountability by several means, including an accountability team, business meetings, performance reviews, guiding documents, and peer relationships.

The selected churches had some form of pastoral accountability team in place formally or informally. For this question and theme, formally means by order of the churches' written documents. Informally it refers to customs or tradition but not practice by formal policy. The pastor and the accountability team meet regularly with two churches reporting quarterly meetings and one church reporting a monthly meeting. In addition, the accountability team leader at one of the churches communicates with the pastor on a weekly basis at a minimum. The accountability team sees itself as partners with the pastor rather than as the pastor's supervisor. The presence of

⁸ Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 220.

a pastoral accountability team indicates that the selected churches embrace rather than avoid accountability.⁹

The pastor is the primary motivator or mover for pastoral accountability to take place in the church. Whatever the accountability structure was prior to the pastor's initiative, the pastor intentionally moved to strengthen the process in the church through various means. One pastor conducted annual surveys to receive member feedback, and another pastor submitted himself to the annual performance review process that the rest of the staff experiences. In either case, the pastor sought out more accountability because of his own self-awareness and concern for the church's well-being. The findings indicate that pastors must take the initiative if they desire more accountability. The pastors' initiative to implement accountability mechanisms demonstrates that they have an obligation and a desire to be accountable for their ministry practice.¹⁰

Business meetings are an integral component to the pastoral accountability process. Members expect the pastor to report significant activities and ministries that occurred since the last meeting and future ministry plans. The meeting provides the most visible expression of pastoral accountability, especially since the church calls the pastor in a business meeting session. The regularity of the meeting schedule lends to the strength of the church's pastoral accountability process, as more meetings may indicate more opportunities for the congregation to call the pastor to account for his ministry to the entire congregation assembled.

The churches reported the significance of a performance review process; however, only one had a formal review process. Consequently, churches did not report a formal review process

⁹ Thompson and Thompson, *Organizing for Accountability*, 1, 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

was in use or necessary except one church though the pastors indicated a willingness to submit to a regular review process. The churches, according to interview responses, indicated a challenge in determining what were the proper components of a performance review process for the pastor.

As mentioned earlier, all three churches had some form of written documents to guide their operations. One church had a constitution and bylaws, another a constitution only, and another a personnel manual. In addition, the churches shared a common belief in the authority of the Scriptures as the highest and final rule of faith and practice for their churches. Despite the possession of written guiding documents, the two churches readily admitted neglecting to follow their documents at times or that the document was outdated. The churches have a need to update and follow their guiding documents to strengthen their pastoral accountability processes.

The churches are active in their denominational life. Each church cooperates with their local association, state convention, and the national convention. Despite participating in denominational activities, only one church reported inviting their local association or state convention to the church to train church leaders and members. The study did not reveal the reason behind the disparity of participating in denominational activities and receiving assistance from denominational organizations.

The churches indicated a limited scope of pastoral accountability. The interviewees indicated the pastor's accountability limited to Sunday morning worship and financial stewardship. Though the church would recall a pastor found to be in grievous sin or malpractice, the churches did not report much concern about the pastor's performance outside of ensuring the church was providing worship opportunities and meeting its financial obligations. Though the churches have some expectations about pastoral accountability in their governing documents, the

churches tended not to evaluate the pastor by those expectations regularly. Furthermore, two of the three churches did not report a formal job description for the pastor. The one church that had a formal job description for the pastor did not review the document with the pastor regularly to assess his performance in areas outside of Sunday morning worship tasks and financial stewardship. Prior research warns that accountability should be holistic rather than segmented.¹¹

Churches reported a lack of training on pastoral accountability with an equal desire for training in pastoral accountability. Most of the interviewees indicated a lack of awareness that pastoral accountability training exists. One lay leader interviewee asked the researcher for ideas and support in that area. Pastors indicated a desire for their accountability team to receive training in pastoral accountability as well. The lack of training for pastoral accountability teams may indicate that churches do not have the resources to offer training to the team members.¹²

Practical Implications

Pastors and Churches

The implications for pastors and churches include (1) strengthening relationships, (2) employing a full range of available accountability measures, and (3) addressing challenges to accountability. The first implication concerns the various relationships involved in the pastorate: pastoral relationships with the church and community, professional relationships with fellow pastors and ministers, and denominational relationships with other churches and denominational entities. Pastors and churches should work on strengthening their pastoral relationship through

¹¹ Thompson and Thompson, *Organizing for Accountability*, 2; Weissman, "Accountability and Pseudo-Accountability," 323.

¹² Beyerle, "Nonprofit Executive Directors," 7.

strong accountability frameworks. Among the several ways to strengthen the pastoral relationship is involving a church-designated pastoral accountability team. The church can empower an existing group to monitor the pastor, such as the personnel committee, or create a group for that purpose, such as a pastoral relations committee. In either case, the group should not see itself as the pastor's supervisor, as that role belongs exclusively to the entire gathered congregation. Rather, the group should see itself as the mutual partners with the church and pastor to facilitate a most effective ministry. One word of caution would be not to have the diaconate fulfill that role to avoid the return of the "board of deacons" concept that plagued many pastors and churches.

Pastors and churches should endeavor to strengthen the pastor's professional collegial relationships with fellow pastors, especially in the same denominational family and network. Interviewees discussed the value of peer-pastor relationships in securing and maintaining pastoral accountability. As such, pastors need a peer group to facilitate a healthy and effective pastorate. SBC churches operating with an elder led congregationalism have other pastors with equal pastoral authority within the same congregation. Most SBC churches are smaller churches with one elder-pastor. In those cases, the pastor does not have peers within the same congregation; however, he is likely to have peers in the same local association or in a nearby association. Pastors should seek those types of relationships, and churches should encourage the pastor to seek those types of relationships. The pastor and church could have an agreement that the pastor can have an outside peer-pastor advisor to inform the church anytime the peer-pastor feels the pastor is experiencing a difficulty or challenge that would impact his ministry negatively.

Pastors and churches should investigate the denominational relationships with other churches. As noted in the literature review, Baptist churches called upon the denomination, especially the local association sphere, for support in assessing the fitness of a candidate for the ministry. In an analogous manner, Baptist churches can participate in denominational activities to ensure they have support if any issue regarding pastoral accountability needs input from the denomination.

Elements of Accountability

Pastors and churches have several significant accountability measures readily at their disposal, such as abiding by updated guiding documents, involving an accountability team in pastoral accountability, and utilizing the congregational meeting. Churches, especially incorporated under the nonprofit laws of their respective states, have guiding documents—usually bylaws—governing their operations. In addition, some churches have personnel policies and procedures as well. Pastors and congregational leaders can ensure their churches follow the standing rules of the congregation. Pastors and lay leaders can lead the church to amend their documents to update, as necessary.

Churches should involve an accountability team to monitor the pastor's performance. The team does not need to be large, as three to nine people may suffice. The pastor and committee should meet regularly, monthly or quarterly. The chair of the team may meet with the pastor in between entire group meetings. The pastor can share highlights and challenges of his performance to the group for their encouragement, support, and advisement. The team can serve as a mediator for members and other staff members who have unresolved grievances with the pastor.

Pastors and congregational lay leaders should ensure the accountability team has the relevant training to provide pastoral accountability. The training should include the best practices for personnel management in general along with best practices for church personnel management. Churches, though they are nonprofit organizations, do not get a free pass on employment law. However, laws and best practices apply differently to churches. In addition, the pastorate is a unique field of work with certain requirements unlike other professions. Consequently, the church would do well to seek out the appropriate training for accountability team members, which should be a part of the team member's orientation prior to assuming the duties required of the accountability team.

Address Accountability Challenges

Two challenges regarding pastoral accountability affect how pastors and churches engage in accountability practices: the concept of accountability and pastoral initiative. The concept of pastoral accountability includes the definition of pastoral accountability as well. Pastors and churches should define accountability and articulate their concept of accountability in their context. Using Weissman's framework, the definition of accountability should detail that staff members, the pastor in this study, are responsible for their actions. The concept of pastoral accountability should include clarity about roles, measurements, and consequences in the accountability structure. The pastor should know he is accountable to the church through the accountability group for the performance of his duties as detailed in the job description and what the consequences are of not meeting his obligations. In addition, accountability should include aspects other than preaching or finances, as the pastoral role includes more than those components.

The second challenge for pastoral accountability is pastoral initiative, which seems oxymoronic. Churches should continue to ask the pastors input about pastoral accountability and involve him in the process. Pastors should continue to speak into the church's structure of pastoral accountability. However, churches should not rely on the pastor to take the lead in developing an accountability structure for himself. On the contrary, the church—through the accountability team—should take the initiative for pastoral accountability as Lord Jesus Christ entrusts the ministry to the church, according to Baptist ecclesiology.

Denominational Leaders and Entities

The study has implications for denominational leaders and entities as well. The implications include providing training, facilitating collegial relationships, and developing resources. Pastors and lay leaders expressed a need for relevant training about pastoral accountability for their churches. As a result, denominational leaders should provide training to pastors and accountability team members through various means. For pastor's denominational leaders and entities can provide training through its network of seminaries. In addition, pastors could receive training at conferences and meetings of the denomination, especially in the associational context. The denomination can provide accountability team training through the local association or state convention offerings.

Denominational leaders and entities could facilitate collegial relationships among pastors. While seminary training and denominational meetings facilitate some collegiality, denominational entities could focus on cultivating peer relationships in the associational context. Local associations are closest to the pastors, so the association provides the best environment for such relationships. Pastors' meetings during which attendees can discuss sermon preparation,

ministry highlights and challenges, and ideas can create a condition in which attending pastors develop deeper friendships that lead to mutual accountability. Denominational leaders and entities may consider developing a minister's council or network to serve as an advisory body to help the denomination engage, encourage, and advocate for pastors.

Third, denominational leaders and entities could develop resources for pastors and churches. Many state conventions already provide resources for church administration and other functions, including draft constitution and bylaws and sexual abuse prevention training. However, denominational entities should develop resources specifically related to pastoral accountability as well. For example, associational or convention bodies could provide examples of personnel policies for different-sized churches. Another resource could be a suggested or sample code of ethics or standards of conduct for pastors, which would help churches define pastoral accountability and articulate an expanded scope of pastoral accountability.

Limitations of the Study

Although the findings expand the knowledge of pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches, the study includes three main limitations. First, the sample size was limited. The nature of qualitative case study necessitates a smaller sample size for examination. The utilization of a multiple case study allowed the researcher to examine more than one case; however, the sample size remained too small for statistical generalization. Second, the primary instrument for data collection was the researcher, as is typical in qualitative studies. The researcher is vulnerable to biases, conscious and unconscious. Recognizing the danger of biases, the researcher attempted for the potential of biases through several actions, such as obtaining approval of research methods from the Institutional Review Board, receiving peer review of the

interview guide from an expert panel, using multiple data sources to collect data, and triangulating data by various means. Third, the researcher interviewed only the pastor and a lay leader of the church. Consequently, the perception of leaders, clergy and lay, was the only voices speaking to the topic of pastoral accountability.

Recommendations for Further Research

The goal of this study was to discover how selected Southern Baptist churches practiced pastoral accountability. Using a qualitative case study method, the practices of three Southern Baptist churches were examined via responses to semi-structured interview questions, document analysis, and field observations. The analysis resulted in twelve themes related to pastoral accountability. However, the study did not relate those themes to best practices in personnel management, particularly in a church context. Consequently, further research in this area should compare pastoral accountability practices to best practices in church personnel management practices.

The cases, three selected Southern Baptist churches, utilized diverse groups as the pastoral accountability team, namely the diaconate, personnel committee, and leadership team. Furthermore, the nature, involvement level, and scope of responsibility differed for each group. Further research might inquire whether certain factors contribute to a church's decision as to what group will be the pastoral accountability team and the involvement level and scope of responsibility of the team. The three participating churches were also different in ethnic composition: African American, Anglo, and Hispanic majorities. Further research may question whether the ethnic or cultural composition of the congregation impacts how the congregation practices pastoral accountability.

The churches involved in the study were different. Two churches were less than one hundred members or attendees on a Sunday morning. One church had more than four hundred attendees in the Sunday morning worship service. While the larger church did not have a constitution or bylaws, the church did have a personnel manual. Further research into the area might investigate how church size impacts how a congregation practices pastoral accountability, including whether larger churches have more formal processes than smaller-membership churches.

Participating churches were asked to permit their pastor and a lay leader familiar with the church's pastoral accountability structure to participate in a semi-structured interview. Thus, the interviews captured the perspectives of only two individuals. Further research into how members in a non-leadership capacity feel about the pastoral accountability framework of their church could yield a better understanding of the state of pastoral accountability in selected churches. Further research may employ the use of focus groups to gather data for the study.

Three cases comprised the sample size for the study. Following the heuristic method for multiple case studies, five cases are the maximum recommended limit for analysis. Further research could expand the sample size in several ways: have five cases from within one local association or state, or five cases from different states. Future researchers may convert the themes into a survey instrument to conduct a quantitative study of pastoral accountability of one hundred or more churches.

Further research might compare pastoral accountability in urban churches, suburban churches, and rural churches. As ethnicity may impact a church's practice, so might its

sociocultural location. Further research may inquire what practices are similar among churches regardless of population density and what aspects are different.

Researchers may investigate pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches using Harold Weissman's accountability process framework. The research can investigate to whom the pastor is accountable internally and externally, for what the pastor is accountable, and what enforcement mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability. Weissman's framework may provide clarity for an actual church accountability structure.

Chapter Summary

The findings of the study indicate the selected churches have a skeletal structure for pastoral accountability in place and active. Pastors, lay leaders, and churches have a working concept of pastoral accountability from which all parties operate. Moreover, pastors and churches have communicated their expectations to one another, typically informally. Furthermore, pastors and churches have implemented certain practices to ensure pastoral accountability.

While the churches have a framework for pastoral accountability, churches may bolster the framework to provide stronger accountability. Pastors, lay leaders, and churches have a limited perspective of pastoral accountability in which the concept revolves around preaching, teaching, and financial matters. Pastors and churches state their expectations through conversations rather than documenting the agreements in writing. Thus, mutual agreements in the pastoral relationship are set in the context of oral discussions rather than formally documented in writing. In addition, pastors and churches implement a few measures to maintain

pastoral accountability. Usually, the church has a few to which the pastor adds a few more steps.

However, the implementation of the steps relies on the pastor to initiate.

Appendix A

Associational Mission Strategist (ASM) Letter

Dear _____,

I am a PhD candidate in Christian Leadership at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I am researching pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches for my dissertation. I am conducting research using a case-study method. My supervisor for this study is Dr. Jake Roudkovski, Associate Dean for Professional Doctoral Programs (jaker@nobts.edu).

You are being asked to contribute to the accomplish this research because of your position as a local associational mission strategist (AMS)/director of missions (DOM) might help the researcher identify churches that might serve as cases for research. Specifically, you will be asked to provide a list of churches that meet the following criteria: (1) be in friendly cooperation with the SBC, according to Article III, Section 1 of the Constitution of the SBC, (2) be a self-supporting, self-sustaining, and self-propagating church, and (3) must have had their current pastor for at least a year. You will not need to select churches for the study but provide the names of churches that meet the criteria.

The researcher will keep your identity and the identity of the churches confidential. The only people who will have access to the list of churches will be the researcher and the dissertation committee. The list will be kept secure until three years following the publication of the dissertation, at which point the data will be destroyed.

The current study will contribute to research on pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches, a much needed but minimally researched subject. The study has the potential to identify gaps in theology, theory, and practice of pastoral accountability among Southern Baptists.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [phone number] or [email address].

Sincerely,

Larry S. Johnson, MDiv, ThM, BCC

Adapted from John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 4th ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 124.

Appendix B

Church Site Permission Letter

Dear Church,

The following information is provided for your church to decide whether it wishes to participate in the present study. The church is free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any consequence.

The purpose of this study is to discover the pastoral accountability practices of Southern Baptist churches. The procedure will be a multiple-case study design. At this stage in the research, pastoral accountability will generally be defined as being responsible to the church for the practice of ministry. The researcher is a doctoral student in the Doctor of Philosophy program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) under the supervision of Dr. Jake Roudkovski, Associate Dean of Professional Doctoral Programs.

Data collection will involve documents (constitution and bylaws, personnel policies and procedures, and job descriptions of the pastor and personnel committee or like body), an interview with the pastor and with a church officer separately and recorded by audio, and a church observation during a business meeting. The researcher will be the sole data collector for this research. Data will be stored on a removable storage device, coded with an alphanumeric pseudonym, and locked in a secure location to protect the interviewee's identity. Data will be destroyed three years after publication of the dissertation.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before or during participation. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is complete. However, the church's name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and its identity as a case will be known only to the researcher.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with the church's participation are the information about views and practices of pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches and the opportunity to improve pastoral accountability within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Please sign the church's consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signature of Pastor or Church Officer

Date

Larry S. Johnson, ThM, Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Adult Informed Consent Form

Dear Interviewee,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any consequence.

The purpose of this study is to discover the pastoral accountability practices of Southern Baptist churches. The procedure will be a multiple case study design. At this stage in the research, pastoral accountability will generally be defined as being responsible to the church for the practice of ministry. The researcher is a doctoral student in the Doctor of Philosophy program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) under the supervision of Dr. Jake Roudkovski, Associate Dean of Professional Doctoral Programs.

Data collection will involve documents (constitution and bylaws, personnel policies and procedures, and job descriptions of the pastor and personnel committee or like body), one interview with the pastor and with a church officer separately and recorded by audio, and a church observation during a business meeting. The researcher will be the sole data collector for this research. Data will be stored on a removable storage device, coded with an alphanumeric pseudonym, and locked in a secure location to protect the interviewee's identity. Data will be destroyed three years after publication of the dissertation.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before or during participation. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is complete. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a interviewee will be known only to the researcher.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about views and practices of pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches and the opportunity to improve pastoral accountability within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signature of Interviewee

Date

Larry S. Johnson, ThM, Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Expert Panel Invitation Letter

Dear _____,

I am a PhD candidate in Christian Leadership at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I am recruiting volunteers to comprise an expert panel for my dissertation on pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches. Dr. Jake Roudkovski, Associate Dean for Professional Doctoral Programs, is my supervisor for this study and can be reached at jaker@nobts.edu. Would you consider participating in this panel?

Your leadership, ministry, or qualitative research expertise makes you an ideal candidate for the expert panel. As a panel member, you will provide feedback on the interview guide and the researcher's interpretation of research findings. Reviewing the interview guide should take at most 30 minutes. The review will focus on whether the interview questions are clear, open-ended, and non-leading. Feedback on the researcher's interpretation should take an hour at most and focus on whether the researcher's interpretation is logically plausible, regardless of if the panel member would have made the same conclusion.

Your identity will remain confidential. The only individuals accessing your feedback will be the researcher and the dissertation committee. While the researcher may report certain demographic information about the panel members, he will not report any personally identifiable information in the dissertation.

The current study will contribute to research on pastoral accountability in Southern Baptist churches, a much needed but minimally researched subject. The study has the potential to identify gaps in theory and practice while strengthening ministerial responsibility among Southern Baptists.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. If you have any questions, please contact me at [phone number] or [email address].

Sincerely,

Larry S. Johnson, MDiv, ThM, BCC

Adapted from John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 4th ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 124.

Appendix E

Initial Interview Guide

1. How would you describe your role at the church?¹
2. How do you describe your church?²
3. How do you define pastoral accountability?
4. How does your church understand pastoral accountability?
5. How does your church communicate its expectations concerning pastoral accountability?
6. How does your church practice pastoral accountability?
7. What people are involved in pastoral accountability in your church?
8. How have you seen these people involved in pastoral accountability in your church?
9. What measures are in place to maintain pastoral accountability in your church?
10. How have you seen these measures employed at your church?
11. What other information concerning pastoral accountability would you like to share?

¹ Adapted from B. J. Cranford, “A Study of Baptist Pastors’ and Children’s Ministry Leaders’ Practices Relating to the Age of Accountability” (EdD diss., Dallas Baptist University, 2016), 142.

² Ibid.

Appendix F

Expert Panel's Interview Guide Review Responses

1. How would you describe your role at your church?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements

2

This question is clear

Maybe instead of asking "how" just say, "Describe your role in at the church." Also consider if their role at the church has shifted during their tenure.

Senior Pastor

Good question, allows the interviewee to provide information based upon perception of role and job description. Might want to ask for job descriptions too, if available

Perhaps, "How would you describe your role and responsibilities in your local church?"

2. How would you describe your church?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question may be too broad. Are you looking for health, size, demographics, culture, ministry focus, philosophical or theological leanings, etc? The answers to this question may be too varied to glean useful comparative data

1. This question should be asked first.

This question is rather broad--describe it how? Faith tradition? Size? Congregational make-up? All of the above?

In what ways should they view this description? Maybe provide some parameters. I think this can be done without leading. "How would you describe your church demographically (ethnically, politically, socially, economically, etc)?"

Large Country Church

Simple and clear

Are you looking for a description of demographics, ministry philosophy, or ecclesiology?

3. How do you define pastoral accountability?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements

What is your understanding of pastoral accountability? What place does pastoral accountability have in your ministry?

This question is clear

Solid question.

Pastoral accountability is the metric by which pastor's use individuals and processes to hold them accountable in their personal, spiritual, and ministerial life.

Quality question

Good question

4. How does your church define pastoral accountability?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements. Just a thought, does church lay leadership have a different idea of pastoral accountability than the congregation?

Describe your church's understanding of pastoral accountability

This question is clear, but 'understand' may be broad; perhaps use 'define' as in the previous question

This question assumes the church even knows what pastoral accountability is. Can you provide an opportunity for them to share how the church's understanding of pastoral accountability has grown?

The church as a whole would say the pastor is accountable to the deacons. Overall, the church does not have a proper sense of pastoral accountability.

Difficult question. Does the church's position align with pastor's description? Formal and informal forms of accountability.

Clear and concise question

5. How does your church communicate its expectations concerning pastoral accountability?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements

How does your church apply its understanding of pastoral accountability on the pastor's functioning?

This question is clear

Solid question.

The church has never clearly communicated this as it concerns senior pastor. They do communicate accountability of staff members to the pastor.

Assuming they have some, good question.

Clear and concise question

6. How does your church practice pastoral accountability?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements. I appreciate that you have a question on expectations and a separate question on accountability because those two do not necessarily align

How and in what ways do you experience the church's written expectations concerning your accountability?

This question is clear

Solid question. Is the manner they currently practice accountability different from the past and if so why? A question to consider: "Have you or your church had training on pastoral accountability?"

There is no set approach.

Quality question, how does it align with above question "How does your church understand pastoral accountability?" Are you looking for a correlation between knowledge, understanding, and practice.

Clear and concise question

7. What people are involved in pastoral accountability in your church?

Good question, clear and non-leading

This question fulfills the requirements. Maybe ask what the roles of the people involved are and if the roles are formal or informal.

Who is involved in assessing your compliance to your agreed upon accountability? How often? When?

This question is clear

Solid question.

Deacons

Both formal and informal, personal and corporate.

Who is involved in pastoral accountability in your church?

8. How have you seen these people involved in pastoral accountability in your church?

Another good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements

How are the folks who are responsible for assuring accountability chosen? How would you assess their qualifications to do so?

This question sounds a lot like the one about practicing pastoral accountability

Maybe rephrase, "What are the roles of the individual(s) who offer pastoral accountability?"

They just really ask for a report in a monthly meeting and ask questions

Quality question. Could be singular if pastor meets with outside mentor for accountability.

Observed rather than seen?

9. What measures are in place to maintain pastoral accountability in your church?

Also a clear and thoughtful question

This question fulfills the requirements. Maybe add a question of whether they believe that the measures are sufficient?

In addition to the organizational structures of the church what measures are in place

This question is clear, but 'measures' may need clarification

Solid question.

None

Follows with the project, quality question.

Describe the measures . . .

10. How have you seen these measures employed at your church?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements

How have you experienced these measures . . .

This question is clear, but also sounds close to the one about practicing pastoral accountability

A potential follow-up question to consider: “What methods are outdated and/or what methods do you think should be added in pastoral accountability?”

No measures really exist so they aren’t employed.

Follows with previous question.

Good question

11. What other information concerning pastoral accountability would you like to share?

Good question, clear and open-ended

This question fulfills the requirements

In what ways do you maintain personal accountability (prayer/meditation, study of scripture, therapy, self-care, spousal relations, attention to family)

This may be nit-picking, but you may want to indicate if you’re asking for a general opinion or info specific to the individual and/or his/her church setting.

Solid question.

I believe proper pastoral accountability is critical and fear that most churches, like [name of church], do this poorly or not at all.

Great to include this. How will information from this question be integrated into the rest of the project? I am thinking specifically if data from this question overlaps with data from other questions in the questionnaire.

Great

Appendix G

Final Interview Guide

1. Describe your role and responsibilities in your local church
2. How would you describe your church demographically?
3. Describe your church's organizational/governance structure (i.e., How are decisions made?)
4. What is your understanding of pastoral accountability?
5. Describe your church's understanding of pastoral accountability.
6. How does your church communicate its expectations concerning pastoral accountability?
7. How does your church practice pastoral accountability?
8. What training have you or your church had in pastoral accountability?
9. Who ensures pastoral accountability in your church, and how are they selected?
10. What are the qualifications and roles of the individual(s) who offer pastoral accountability?
11. Describe the measures in place to maintain pastoral accountability in your church. Are they sufficient? Why or why not?
12. How have you observed (or experienced) these measures employed at your church?
13. Which measures should be discarded, updated, or added? Why?
14. What else would you like to share about pastoral accountability in your church specifically or in churches generally?

Appendix H

First Church Field Notes

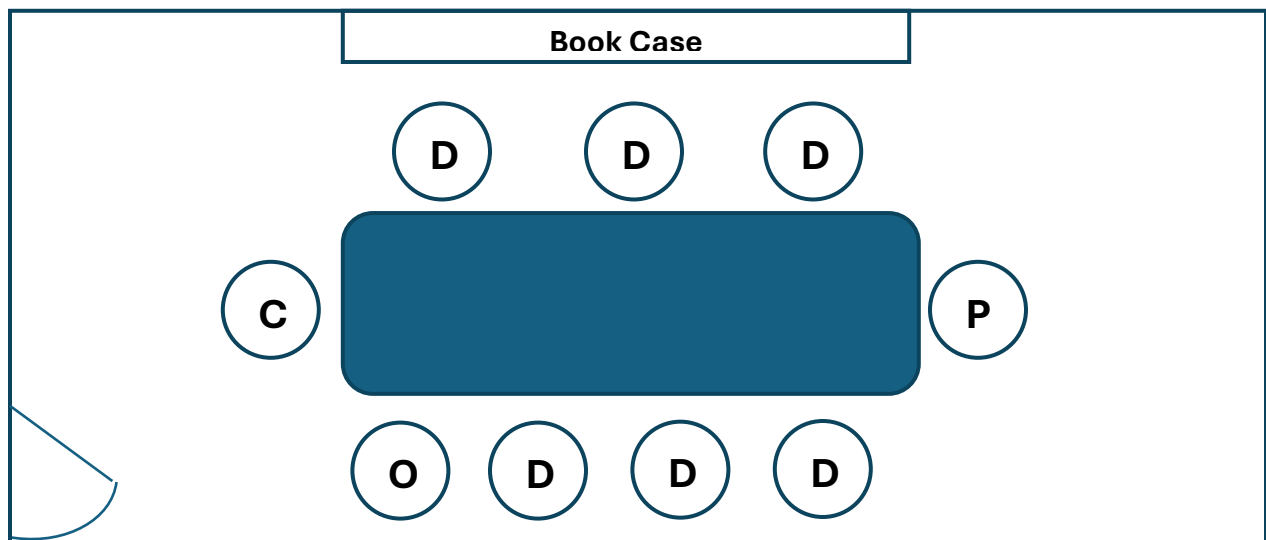
Researcher: Larry S. Johnson

Place: First Church

Purpose: To observe the interaction between group members and the pastor for evidence of pastoral accountability.

Date/Time: Saturday, November 18, 2024, 7:30–8:30 pm

Meeting Room Layout:



Legend: C = Candidate, D = Deacon, O = Observer, P = Pastor

I arrived at the meeting while the pastor was speaking with the deacons and deacon candidate about the role of the diaconate from Acts 6:1–4. The pastor acknowledged my presence and—instructing me to grab a chair from the sanctuary—invited me to enter the room where they were meeting. I followed the pastor’s instructions and sat down after I greeted the group. (*OC – I wondered whether I arrived late, as they already started their discussion. As I prepared to sit down, I discreetly looked at my watch to ensure I was on time for the meeting. I was punctual. I looked at the agenda to confirm how much of the meeting progressed before my arrival. They had barely started when I arrived, which was personally comforting.*)

Nine men were present in the meeting: the pastor, six deacons, the diaconal candidate, and me. The pastor sat at the head of the table, and the candidate sat opposite of the pastor at the foot of the table. The deacons sat on the sides of the table, three on each side. I sat to the candidate's right between the candidate and a deacon. The room was moderately lit with a bookshelf on the wall opposite my side of the table. The meeting room looked like it could be a Sunday School classroom. Everyone was in their 60s or 70s except the candidate and me. *(OC—The candidate was middle-aged like me. I wondered who nominated him for the diaconate: the pastor, current deacons, or church members. Did his nomination occur to bring younger men onto the deacon team?)*

The pastor continued his discussion regarding the role of deacons in the church. One deacon asked the pastor to introduce me to give the group an understanding of my purpose in the meeting *(OC—I thought the pastor would have briefed the group about my attendance already; however, I am glad the deacon asked about me. He raised a “point of order.”)* The pastor asked me to introduce myself, and I complied. I stated my name, purpose for attending, and gratitude for the permission to join the meeting *(OC—Though the deacon's inquiry concerning me seemed pleasant and not resistant, I wanted to convey that I understood my attendance was a privilege, not a right.)* I also stated that I am only an observer, not a interviewee. As an observer, I let the group know that I would be taking notes of my observations, but I would not be recording the actual words said in the meeting. *(OC—I wanted to communicate my respect for the sensitivity and privacy for all persons involved in this meeting. The group seemed to understand and appreciate my presence and purpose at the meeting. They welcomed me and continued their meeting.)*

The group had a robust discussion about the origin, qualifications, and responsibilities of deacons, with the pastor moderating the discussion. They began the questioning period by asking the candidate about his family and his family's involvement in the church. *(OC—The group knew the candidate well and supported his entrance into the diaconal office. The pastor and certain deacons referred to the candidate's family, which leads me to believe the candidate has been a member of the church for years.)* They continued questioning the candidate, moving to questions of faith. The candidate indicated he grew up in church but made a personal decision to follow Christ as an adult. The questioning continued regarding deacon leadership. One deacon offered advice about the value of the candidate's personal testimony in gospel conversations. The pastor discussed the deacons' role in rumors in the church, including advising the candidate to avoid giving answers off the top of your head but from Scripture instead. The deacons also encouraged the candidate to admit when he does not know an answer and set up a time to respond later. *(OC—This was a sticking point for the group. I wondered about the motivation behind such an emphasis.)* They offered advice concerning use of social media and its impact on his public testimony. *(OC—This is great advice.)* Certain deacons encouraged him to read and study Scripture. To that end, the pastor—pointing to the bookcase—told the candidate that he could come to the church building at any time to read any of the books in the bookcase. The pastor also

said, “An ordination is not proof of God’s work, but validation of God’s work in his life.” One deacon told the candidate that deacons are “leaders in the church, but not the leaders of the church.” Reading Edward Hiscox’s *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, the deacon said deacons act in conjunction with the pastor but not independently of the pastor. The pastor remarked about the strong personalities of the deacons, yet they provide support: “Together they can kick my butt, not together they stand with me.” The pastor also remarked that deacons should be familiar with the church’s bylaws. A deacon mentioned his need to review the current bylaws. *(OC—This comment was significant to me because the bylaws as the pastor gave to me were 30 years old.)* The pastor acknowledged the deacon’s comment and remarked that the church needs to update the current bylaws. They closed the meeting with prayer and preceded with his ordination the next day. *(OC—The pastor and deacons’ conversation, including tone, was encouraging and challenging. They had a spirit of collegiality and seemed to want the candidate to do well. Since the ordination service was scheduled for the next day, I assume the church, pastor, and deacons already supported the candidate’s entrance to the diaconal office. The purpose of this meeting was confirming a prior decision to ordain him as a deacon rather than discerning whether he should be a deacon.)*

Appendix I

Second Church Field Notes

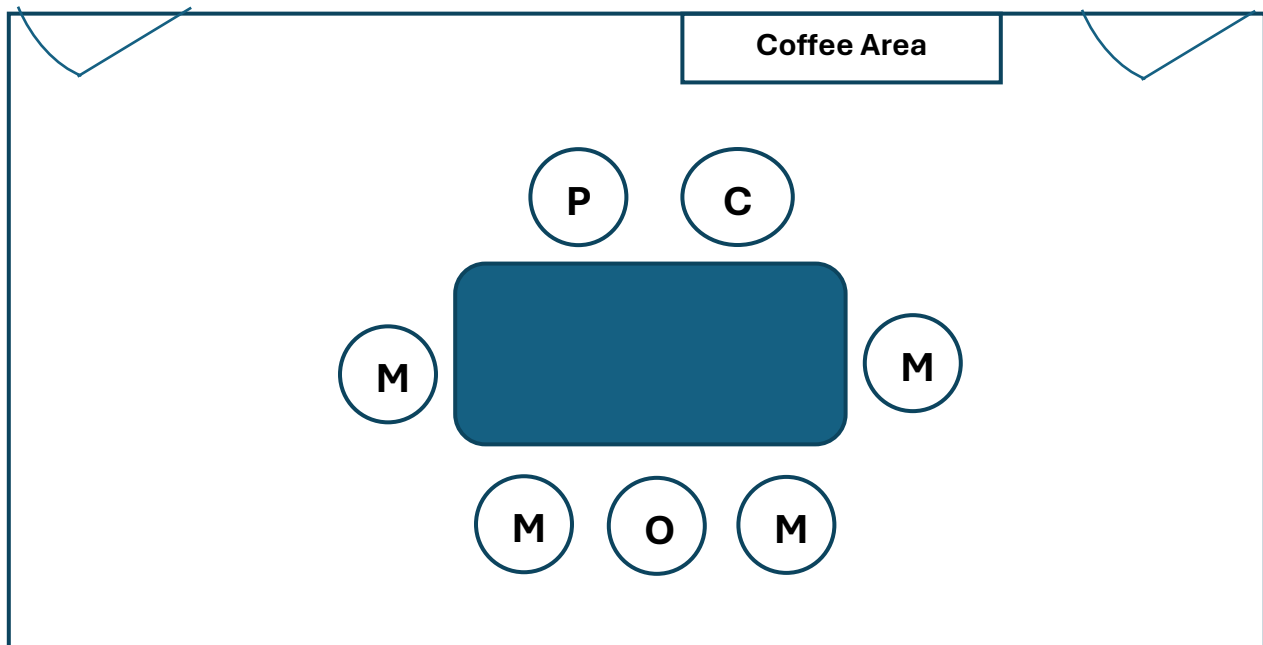
Researcher: Larry S. Johnson

Place: Second Church

Purpose: To observe the interaction between group members and the pastor for evidence of pastoral accountability.

Date/Time: Saturday, November 18, 2024, 7:30–8:30 pm

Meeting Room Layout:



Legend: C = Committee Chair, M = Committee Member, O = Observer, P = Pastor

I arrived at the church about 10 minutes prior to the scheduled meeting. The deacon ministry was closing its meeting in the fellowship hall. The personnel committee was scheduled to meet in a Sunday School classroom across the lobby from the fellowship hall toward the children's ministry area. The room was well lit, and it appeared prepared for the meeting. Two six-foot portable tables were side by side in the middle of the room with chairs positioned around them. Copies of the meeting agenda were on the table in front of every chair. When I entered the room, the pastor and personnel committee chairperson were present. We exchanged greetings, and the

pastor said I could sit at the table with the other committee members. We engaged in small talk until more committee members arrived.

Four committee members, two men and two women, arrived about five minutes before the planned start time. I exchanged greetings with the newly arriving committee members. The pastor shared the purpose of my attendance and asked me to give more information about my subject and process. *(OC—I appreciated the pastor initiating the conversation about my research to the committee. The “warm hand off” set a positive tone).* The chairperson ensured the committee had a quorum to conduct business. *(OC—Five committee members constituted a quorum.)* The chair formally opened the meeting with a prayer. *(OC—The chairperson’s prayer was heartfelt. He asked God to help the committee advocate for the pastor and staff. He also prayed for God’s providence and care for the pastor.)* The chair recognized the pastor, who led devotional exercises for the meeting about the believer’s hope for the resurrection based on John 11:17–27. *(OC—I was surprised that the pastor’s devotional for the meeting came from his regular Bible reading plan as opposed to something prepared specifically for the meeting. I did not think anything was wrong with the devotional topic. On the contrary, it encouraged me.)*

After the pastor concluded the devotional, the chair began moving through the agenda. The committee engaged in discussions on a wide range of personnel issues. One committee member referred to a previous business meeting when he asked about the impact on the personnel budget. The pastor acknowledged that the expenses exceeded revenue, but only by a couple thousand dollars. The pastor added that several staff members submitted retirement notices, which will impact insurance needs and expenditures. The chairperson then moved to discuss health insurance for staff members. After receiving the chairperson’s recognition, the pastor discussed the increase in health insurance premiums. He mentioned the factors that contributed to the higher premiums and the options available to the church to lower the premiums. The chair updated the committee that he authorized an increase in the deductibles; however, he communicated that the church would pay the difference between the original deductible and the increased deductible should a staff member file an insurance claim. A committee member asked whether the cost-share arrangement for the insurance benefit changed as well. The pastor indicated that the cost-share remained the same.

The committee engaged in significant discussion about personnel expenditures. One committee member asked questions regarding compensation arrangements and packages for staff members. The pastor answered the questions as the members asked them, including looking up answers on his computer at certain points. The chairperson mentioned staff changes that will occur due to new hires and retirements. The pastor informed the committee of his view of the staffing needs of the church. He noted his belief that the present and future needs of the church required

restructuring the staff. Committee members asked the pastor clarifying questions, such as the nature of restructuring and its impact to current staff members. The pastor answered the questions, providing clarity to the committee members. In the end, the committee members affirmed the pastor's vision for restructuring the staff.

With the discussion of staff changes and restructuring, the committee had a robust discussion on outsourcing certain staffing functions. The pastor communicated the reason considering outsourcing was the upcoming retirement of certain staff members. The pastor informed the committee that he researched vendors to provide the functions the church would need. He mentioned that he believed one vendor, who came highly recommended by other churches and faith-based organizations, would meet the church's needs. The pastor informed the committee that the proposed vendor would not complete all the tasks left opened by the soon-to-be retired staff member, so he is thinking about the best way to accomplish those tasks. The committee seemed satisfied with the pastor's explanation.

The pastor updated the committee on the sabbatical policy draft. He mentioned that he will meet with the sabbatical subcommittee, two members from the personnel committee, to complete the policy. The chair asked the committee whether the next committee date in January still worked for everyone. He stated that the committee meets quarterly, and January would be the next regularly scheduled meeting. He noted the current meeting was irregular because the committee needed to reschedule the meeting. The pastor then asked for the committee's approval to purchase retirement gifts for staff members that would be retiring soon. The committee approved the request.

As the committee was about to adjourn, a committee member asked the pastor who evaluates his performance. The pastor replied that no one officially evaluates his performance, but he would welcome regular performance evaluations. Committee members discussed who should evaluate the pastor's performance. One committee member resisted any notion that the pastor's direct reports should evaluate his performance. Another committee member agreed. A different committee member asked whether the chairpersons from the major church committees should perform the evaluation. A different committee member resisted that idea because the committee chairs rotate so often. The committee member who brought up the topic said he asked the question because he wanted to ensure the pastor is getting the support he needs. The committee member mentioned that fallen pastors do not fall in one day but because of patterns of behavior that have gone on for years unchecked. He wanted to ensure the pastor did not burn out, so he asked who is responsible for monitoring the pastor's health and work. The pastor expressed appreciation for the topic and invited more discussion to come to a resolution.

The committee chairperson closed the meeting with prayer, specifically praying for the pastor and staff's health and well-being. He reiterated his request that the committee advocate and support the pastor and staff. He also prayed for the committee members, those present and absent. The members talked for about another five minutes before bidding each other a good night.

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