

Calling All Volunteers...Maybe:  
The Consequences of Hurt Caused by Rejection within the

Evangelical Christian Church

by

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## ABSTRACT

It is common for Evangelical Christian churches to encourage young adult congregants to volunteer within their organization. However, when a volunteer applies for a position, and they do not receive it, they risk experiencing emotional hurt. There is a gap in the literature regarding responses of church attenders who have experienced rejection within the Evangelical church, specifically from a volunteer leadership position. In light of this, the present research conducted a qualitative study to identify how relationships between church staff and aspiring volunteers influence acquiring a leadership position and how young adults respond when they have been hurt by perceived rejection messages regarding volunteer leadership requests. This study gathered data through in-depth, one-on-one interviews of young adults, pastors, and church consultants. Pastors and church consultants provided context for young adults' responses to rejection from volunteering. Analysis of raw data followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive Thematic Analysis to identify patterns and themes seen throughout the data set. The depth of a relationship between a pastor and an aspiring volunteer is the primary evaluative process for pastors to acquire responsible leaders. However, aspiring volunteers who do not maintain a deep relationship with the pastor perceived behaviors demonstrating favoritism and were inclined to experience emotional hurt caused by feelings of exclusion and feelings of being morally or socially less than others. Young adult aspiring volunteers responded to perceived rejection through negative self-talk, avoidance, and continued participation in the ministry. Over time, young adults learned to understand and accept what had happened. Ultimately, the research found that the common leadership approach of developing leaders based on personal relationships between church staff and aspiring

volunteers increases young adult's hurt when they are not accepted into a leadership position.

*Keywords:* church, rejection, young adult, hurt

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A twenty-two percent decrease in church membership occurred between 1999 and 2020 in the United States, bringing church affiliation to less than half of the United States' population (Jones, 2021). However, sixty-five percent of Americans still self-identify as Christian and of those who report attending church, White, Evangelical Protestants make up approximately forty-six percent of congregations within nine major religious categories (Chaves & Eagle, 2015). Even though sixty-five percent of American's identify as Christians, only forty-seven percent report belonging to a church revealing a gap between church attendance and religious affiliation. Brenner (2011) explains that Americans tend to overreport their religious behaviors and care more about their identity of being a Christian than the behavior of attending church.

The common practice in America of reporting being a Christian without engaging in religious practices sets apart those who not only actively attend church but also seek to volunteer within the church. Most people who give up their time to volunteer want to contribute to a cause that they believe in; so, for those who identify as religious, they most likely will volunteer their time to a religious institution (Campbell & Yonish, 2003).

In this regard, within the church setting it is possible that a person may find themselves rejected from volunteering because it is determined that their behavior does not fit the church's beliefs and standards. For instance, a church or religious organization might perceive a volunteer unfit for a position because they fail in some way to demonstrate "fruit" that characterizes maturity and growth ("The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,"

Galatians 5:22-23, English Standard Version, 2001). It is evident that these types of judgments are subject to interpretation. Not being accepted into a volunteer leadership position when one believes they are actively exhibiting the duties of a “good Christian” is likely to cause emotional pain and negative thoughts of one’s personal morality.

There is extensive research on the rejection of LGBTQ+ and non-white people groups from the church (Bjork-James, 2018; Blum & Harvey, 2012; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1988; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018). These types of rejection provide a clear standard for what is believed to be acceptable and what is not within the walls of church (e.g., any sexual expression that is not heterosexual is unacceptable or a strong belief that segregation is acceptable). Interestingly, it appears that there is another group of people for whom rejection within the church often involves ambiguity or no clear criteria. This group of people consists of young adults who attend church services regularly and understand the socially and religiously acceptable behaviors and attitudes of the church yet are rejected from volunteering within the church.

There are many practical implications for church staff to better understand rejection within the church and acknowledge the benefits and detriments of relationships (or lack thereof) with aspiring volunteers in the church. Unfortunately, young adults who aspire to be volunteer leaders within the Evangelical church are a specific and overlooked group in academic studies, which necessitates investigation. It is important for research on various types of rejection to expand research into areas of socially meaningful contexts such as religious settings, like churches. For these reasons, the author has been

led to question what relational dynamics influence church volunteerism and the responses young adults have regarding perceived rejection experiences.

The present study seeks to discover common young adult responses toward rejection from volunteering within Evangelical Protestant Christian churches. After exploring the body of academic literature related to church relationships, organizational structure, and hurt caused by rejection, an overview of the methodology for the current study will be explained. The goal of this research is to identify the responses young adults have when they perceive they have been rejected from volunteer leadership within the Evangelical Protestant Christian church.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Church, the public facilitation of religion, is an outward expression of deeply held beliefs by a group of people (Schaff, 1867). The practice of attending a place of worship is habitual for some. To others, it is oriented around reverence and awe. Still for others it is an enjoyment to be experienced. Tozar (2006) posits that religion is the most defining factor about a person, “what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” (p. 4).

Saroglou (2011) describes all religions as having four major dimensions: believing, bonding, belonging, and behaving. Believing usually entails commitment to a supernatural or transcendental being which is the focus of the second dimension, bonding. Bonding with the powerful being is often accomplished through group ceremonies, such as Sunday church service or group prayer, that initiate belonging. Belonging encompasses the identity one connects with their religion and the fellowship or comradery found in participating in religious functions. Finally, behaving represents the choices people make based on their religious values and enhances altruistic tendencies and social order. Christianity aligns closely with these dimensions and if a single dimension breaks, such as belonging, other dimensions are quick to follow suit, such as behaving. For instance, when an individual loses a sense of belonging or identity within the church they attend, they lose motivation to adhere to social norms within the religion such as attending church, tithing, or even using in-group language. Deviating from these religious social norms affects altruistic behaviors outside of the church to treat others with the moral or spiritual guidelines of the religion. The dynamics of each

dimension enhance cohesiveness, positive social identity, and collective self-esteem (Saroglou, 2011).

Cohesion and the sense of identity associated with belonging to one's faith is reinforced through fellowship and service within a congregation (Brug, 1996). The church naturally encourages pro-social behavior within and outside of the church walls by bringing people together physically around a common set of beliefs (Durkheim, 1958). These beliefs drive relationships and behavior, such as volunteerism (Brug, 1996). Campbell and Yonish (2003) describe the links between church or religious involvement and voluntary association, civic engagement, motivation for participation, and enhanced civic skills. They believe that church involvement appears to be a meaningful steppingstone to civic participation.

Although religious affiliation and altruistic tendencies are correlated, Campbell and Yonish (2003) affirm that "*Americans volunteer for religious organizations more than any other type of group*" (original italics) (p. 90). The authors analyze five of the eight religious traditions categorized in the Gallup 1989-1995 surveys regarding volunteerism (which included a large total sample size:  $n = 9,626$ ). Gallup's research showed less than ten percent ( $n = 959$ ) of the participants who responded had no affiliation with religion while the other four categories of religion analyzed by Campbell and Yonish (Mainline Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, Black Protestants, and Roman Catholic) made up nearly 78% of the total respondents (as cited in Campbell & Yonish, 2003). And fifty-nine percent of Mainline Protestants and fifty-one percent of Evangelical Protestants report volunteering within the church or community on a weekly basis (as cited in Campbell & Yonish, 2003). The implications of this report show a large

proportion of people who volunteer regularly are associated with the Christian faith, more specifically the Protestant denomination, and more than half of Protestant participants reported volunteering on a weekly basis (Campbell & Yonish, 2003). Because of the large portion of Christian Protestant volunteers, it seems warranted to study this population within the church in more depth.

### **Relational Closeness and Leadership**

Although volunteering has a strong association with religious affiliation, relationships seem to be a driving force motivating volunteerism within the church. Brug (1996) emphasizes the importance of friendship aiding the innerworkings of an organization when he says, “fellowship refers to friendly relationships between people and activities in which they work together to advance common goals” (p. 3). Hellerman (2009) adds to this idea of fellowship by describing the commonly held belief that Christians within a church congregation are a family of believers.

Being a family constitutes a bond of influence upon each other. A common biological family unit includes a marital relationship, parent-child relationships, and sibling relationships (Parke, 2004). Likewise, the Christian Scripture refers to the church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:27; Isa. 62:5), God as a Father (Psm. 103:13; 1 Jhn 3:1; Mat. 6:9), and believers as siblings (Mat. 18:15; 1 Jhn 4:20). While relationships within the church are characterized by a theologically based spiritual bond of family, these family-like relationships also develop through a sense of belonging and engaging in familial practices (Sharma, 2012). Church as a family invites a collective group culture that strengthens relationships within the church (Hellerman, 2003). This family-based culture is structured around a common meaning and purpose for life which creates deep

bonds that transcend genealogical family relationships. This familial aspect of church is one of the most beautiful expressions of unity, yet it also increases the risk of emotional pain that may occur from hurtful situations.

In addition to the family ties church congregants share with each other, the hierarchical power dynamics between pastors and congregant members influences relationships. Pastors are public figures with a distinctly spiritual role, placing them in a position to be praised when the church appears healthy and flourishing, and judged more harshly when personal mistakes occur (Laaser & Gregoire, 2003). Most pastors are trained in aspects of spirituality and theology, but because churches are considered non-profit organizations, pastors end up taking on business roles as a leader within the institution with little preparation. Pastors are expected to maintain a flexible schedule to accommodate the spiritual needs of their congregants, being ready to pick up the phone at any time or meet during times of crisis (Davis, 2007). Pastors are held to high standards in church settings because congregants expect spiritual authority, leadership, and personal attention to their (the congregants') own needs.

Nevertheless, pastors also have the responsibility to seek help and “be mindful to develop people by giving others the vision, tools, and encouragement to serve both inside and outside the local church. For a pastor, this cannot be a haphazard exercise, but needs to be a deliberate one” (Whitson, 2014, p. 57). Developing people is a part of the role of a pastor and assists their ministry, thus requiring pastors to intentionally build relationships with people to determine their trustworthiness and capability to contribute within the church. As pastors juggle many responsibilities, they have a difficult task to befriend people and build relationships while maintaining a role of authority.

## **Young Adult Relationships**

Beyond simply building relationships with congregant members for the purpose of passing the torch, so to speak, pastors must be aware of *who* they are building relationships with, particularly as they connect with young adults. Pastors have an influential role in the social and spiritual development of youth, especially to encourage involvement in church activities (Michael, 2017). Interestingly, the involvement youth maintain in church impacts their continued involvement in church as an adult (O'Connor et al., 2002). In a longitudinal study, O'Connor et al. tracked down and interviewed 206 participants from the original 451 participants in Hoge and Petrillo's 1978 study regarding the participation and attitude of high school youth in church. O'Connor et al. found, after nearly twenty-two years, one of the most influential aspects that 16-year-old youth carried with them into adulthood was their involvement in church youth programs.

Young adults, typically categorized as 18 to 25 year olds, are in the formative years of adult life which means that the authoritative relationships in their life are incredibly influential (Arnett, 2015; Waldron et al., 2015). The stressors of school life, choosing a career, finding a job, managing finances, in addition to maintaining and developing relationships, intensifies the task of learning to become and behave like an adult (and all that encompasses being an adult) (Arnett, 2015). During this developmental time in a young adult's life, they seek mentorship, reassess commitments, develop new ideals, and "desire guides who will support their growth, challenge and critique where needed, and cast a vision for the future" (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, p. 5).

Young adults re-evaluate their moral commitments during this stage of life and are highly susceptible to memorable messages about morality (Waldron et al., 2015).



Memorable messages are phrases or communication snippets that are received in early years of life and remembered later in life (Knapp et al., 1981). This is especially important for pastors and developed church staff members. Because of their status with many young adults, their words and communicative actions are likely to become memorable and influential.

Additionally, young adults tend to have a view on life that looks out for opportunities, creative or innovative ideas, and future possibilities (Setran & Kiesling, 2013). Having energy and charisma that ignites a culture of excitement and passion may be what pastors and church leaders look for in volunteer leaders. Thus, building a relationship with young adults allows pastors to connect with potential volunteers while young adults are provided a unique relationship with a spiritual authority figure. As Michael (2017) explains, the best way to encourage people to participate in a church program is through conversation or relationship building initiated by leaders. The more a pastor or leader develops relationships with young people, the more likely that the student will be encouraged to participate in activities that allow for inclusion and community, thereby associating positive experiences with church and increasing the odds of long-term commitment to church.

### **Associated Friendship**

As a pastor befriends young adults, a truer judgment of character than a paper application is postulated. Therefore, pastors who personalize their ministry through the act of befriending church attenders may increase their assessment of potential volunteer leaders. For example, Adiprasetya (2018) makes the case for pastor's using a philiarchic leadership style meaning "leadership by friends" in order to transform the doularchy –

“leadership by service” – mindset common to pastor’s ministries. This idea that friendship enhances ministry highlights possible entanglement of interpersonal relationships with organizational ministerial procedures. Specifically, the tension between interpersonal and organizational communication is encountered when paid church leaders recruit church members to volunteer for positions of unpaid leadership. Michel (2017) writes:

Recruiting is a constant challenge for most ministry leaders. And the best recruiters are generally those who have lots of friends and acquaintances whom they can tap. People are naturally inclined to lend a hand to someone they know and trust. On a deeper level, knowing someone creates a spiritual intimacy and a relational dynamic that is empowering. (p. 30)

Michael (2017) describes the usefulness of leaders befriending potential volunteers because the leader has a deeper knowledge of the person volunteering, further demonstrating the blurred lines between personal and organizational decision-making. Because many desirable volunteer positions are those associated with an increase in leadership status or authority and require a level of social and spiritual maturity, staff members seek an intimate knowledge of the volunteer’s maturity level. As such, staff can judge more accurately if that person would be a good fit for a position when they befriend a potential volunteer. Hoge et al. (1998) also explain that “church staff, when phoning members in a search for voluntary help, are more likely to think of possible volunteers among the people they saw recently at the church” (p. 480), which aligns with the same study’s findings that most church volunteers are those who regularly attend church. The development of friendship between a leader and a potential volunteer increases

vulnerability with one another and dependence upon each other, thereby deepening the relationship from a state of friendship to kinship.

### **Organizational Procedures of Church**

Even though churches prioritize relational development, they are still considered non-profit organizations and act as such in many regards. Oosthuizen and Lategan (2015) provide detailed analysis and draw the following conclusion regarding the organizational care that should be allotted to church ministry, “the point driven home is that managing the church as an organization in line with sound management principles and practices cannot be ignored” (p. 553).

Sound management principles and practices can be overlooked and forgotten in any organization; therefore, churches must learn behaviors to help manage team members. Waldron and Kassing (2010) focus on managing risk such as compromising “identity, ethical principles, a valued relationship, [or] the organization’s success” (p. 2) in the workplace through communication strategies. These risks are not particular to for-profit businesses but are seen in Christian churches just as frequently.

One communication strategy that Waldron and Kassing (2010) discuss as an important function of risk management is the use of feedback. These authors consider that many dislike confronting another to share critical feedback and, instead, try to avoid conflict and hurt feelings. However, they also share that communicating feedback lessens misunderstanding and increases sensemaking. Communicating feedback is important within any organization including church organizations and useful for enhancing performance while maintaining appropriate relationships.

## **Volunteerism and the Church**

Because many churches run their weekly meetings and services with the help of volunteers, communicating clearly to mitigate the risks listed previously is important within religious settings. Volunteers are monetarily beneficial to churches as Hoge et al. (1998) details that volunteers were, on average, worth two-fifths the amount of monetary offerings and, for some denominations, volunteers substituted almost half of a church's monetary necessity. Since churches rely on the voluntary support of their congregants, extra care toward communication is imperative.

Church volunteers typically identify with the church's beliefs and ethical principles (Anderson 2017), and as discussed previously, they share deep familial-like relationships with congregant members and staff (Hellerman, 2009; Sharma, 2012). Hoge et al. (1998) describes a strong association between church attendance and church volunteerism, attributing the connection to a personal reward for volunteer participants and the added benefit of working with fellow believers.

Furthermore, volunteering within a church encompasses the act of offering one's time and energy, without compensation, to a religious institution with which one identifies. Volunteering thus entails a commitment to the role and purpose of the work (Wilson, 2012). One type of volunteering within the church consists of helping to execute programs such as Sunday School teaching, leading a Bible study, or maintaining the grounds of the campus that entails responsibility (Hoge et al., 1998). When volunteers are placed into authority or leadership roles within the church, a heightened sense of emotional and empathetic desires may cloud judgement and workflow (Wilson, 2012). In

other words, volunteers in roles of leadership, for better or worse, are usually passionate about the work they do.

## **Leadership**

While church volunteers are emotionally and spiritually invested in the work that they perform, leadership positions play a specific function in organizational structures while offering status to the individual placed in those roles. Leadership allows for group collectivism and effectiveness in organizations when performed well, however, poor leadership can have miserable effects for those that are underneath (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Leadership essentially deals with power as it relates to one's social identity (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2004) which is why influential leaders are most effective for "persuading people to set aside, for a time, their selfish pursuits and work in support of the communal interest" (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005 p. 172). This minimizes the individual status of the leader and enhances the group's skills and abilities. The pursuit of service for the greater group is seen in church volunteers, nevertheless, status inevitably associates itself with leadership. And volunteers who have a desire for status may find themselves aspiring for a position of leadership for the personal self rather than the collective bond of church attendees (Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2004).

Because those who desire volunteer leadership positions are typically regular church attenders who identify with the beliefs of the church (Hoge et al., 1998) and are most likely passionate about influencing others in their religious social sphere (Wilson, 2012; Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2004), there may be confounded feelings regarding one's identity when rejection or non-acceptance into a leadership position occurs. Questions regarding one's moral commitments and spirituality such as, "Am I

Christian enough?” or “What is wrong with me?” may develop from rejection in church settings. Furthermore, hurt feelings are likely to occur because of the deep connection to personal identity (Mansfield & Barna, 2012). Ultimately, identifying with the religious in-group, believing in the cause, and developing close relationships between church staff may likely influence an aspiring volunteer’s response to rejection.

### **Rejection**

Sadly, most social science research does not define social rejection concretely but assumes a general understanding of the phenomenon. Most research characterizes rejection in terms of the following categories: social rejection (between peers or romantic partners); and professional rejection (from a job). Both types of rejection encompass dismissal or non-acceptance by another person, group, or entity (Beeri & Lev-Wiesel, 2012; Jablin & Krone, 1984; Knowles & Gardner, 2008) that results in emotional reactions such as hurt feelings, jealousy, loneliness, shame, guilt, social anxiety, embarrassment, sadness, and anger (Leary, 2015). No matter the category, rejection experiences are painful.

### **Organizational Rejection Turned Personal**

In an increasingly networked society, gaining access to jobs requires a degree of networking through associations (Gee et al., 2017) which may develop preconceived assumptions between aspiring volunteers and pastors in church. Gee et al., (2017) describe that the deeper the relational connection is the more valuable the association is for acquiring a job. Therefore, it makes sense that bonded relationships between an aspiring volunteer and a pastor may lead the volunteer to assume that he or she is a shoo-

in for the position. The depth of relationship thereby increases pain when rejection occurs instead of acceptance.

Organizational decision-making may confound interpersonal relationships when those relationships reside within the organization. For instance, a church congregant member might label an experience of non-acceptance for a volunteer position as an act of rejection or even betrayal depending on the level of closeness between the leader and the volunteer. Fitness (2001) conceptualizes betrayal as the “rejection or discounting of one person by another” (p. 2). Thus, betrayal includes the sting of rejection, which leaves a person wondering what could have been, and demoralization due to perceived disloyalty in the personal relationship (Jones & Burdette, 1994). Importantly for the current investigation, the blurring of interpersonal relationships with organizational development likely increases volunteers’ potential to feel betrayed by pastors and church staff. Beyond the emotional pain that comes from rejection, confusion regarding personal morality may occur as discussed in the next section.

### **Rejection and Feeling Ignored**

Contrary to depth of a relationship causing emotional pain from rejection, ignoring another person may likewise cause hurt feelings to occur. Early theories of rejection focused on the need for affective relationships through positive affiliation (the converse to this is the fear of rejection or exclusion) (Rosenfeld, 1964; Mehrabian & Ksionzky, 1970), while more recent examinations of rejection distinguish between directly communicating rejection and passively ignoring a person, both of which produce feelings of hurt (Molden et al., 2009). Molden et al. explain that being rejected can cause a person to detach from a social situation and replay thoughts of what actions should have

been avoided, while being ignored results in personal thoughts of failure and dejection, causing a person to reengage in social activities to earn social acceptance.

Feelings that stem from ostracization, exclusion, or outright being ignored may cause a person to judge their own level of faith within the church. For example, a church attender who thinks that they are following the morally accepted rules within a church and finds themselves not accepted into a position of volunteer leadership, may question their identify as part of the in-group, thereby feeling excluded and rejected. Furthermore, any hurt felt by an aspiring volunteer may be confounded by questions of personal morality. Rejection *from* the church communicates an obvious difference of moral values (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998), whereas rejection *within* the church – when a person is rejected from a position to volunteer or association with a particular group within the church – is often accompanied by vague and ambiguous messages as to whether the person rejected has a moral fault or sin in their life. Being unaccepted to volunteer may leave a person feeling “different” socially within a church and can cause a person to question their ethical and moral standing. Non-acceptance or being ignored for a church attender raises questions about why they did not receive the position, whereas rejection communicated directly provides clarity in the mind of the aspiring volunteer to stop trying and step back from social activities (Molden et al., 2009).

### **Mitigating Hurt Feelings through Ambiguous Language**

Although unacceptance (without a reason) and rejection (having a clear reason) alike stir emotions, leaders who reject volunteers tend to share more ambiguous messages to mitigate negative behavior, hurt feelings, and conflict (Waldron & Kassing, 2010).



Folkes (1982) explains that hiding or altering the reason for rejection can be due to self-presentational concerns or trying to save face of the rejected. In other words, a rejector has more control over negative outcomes of the rejected based on reasonings provided for the rejection. For example, if a hiring staff tells an applicant that their character is not charismatic enough for the job, they are more likely to receive backlash from the applicant than if they were to say that they have chosen a different candidate with more experience. The rejector has more control to reduce negative outcome using impersonal and ambiguous language than they do using personal and direct language (Folkes, 1982). Moreover, when a staff member rejects a job applicant by providing a vague or generalized statement, it limits the potential for negative behavior or even feelings toward the hiring staff or organization (Jablin & Krone, 1984). This exemplifies the essence of self-presentational concerns. Sometimes this is used to save-face for the rejected especially in interpersonal settings to avoid hurting the feelings of the person rejected (Folkes, 1982).

Within the context of church volunteering, a person being rejected or not accepted may be told something general, such as, “we’ve decided to go with someone else” but underneath that message, the aspiring volunteer may assume that there were specific reasons why the staff decided to go with someone else (Jablin & Krone, 1984). Freedman et al. (2016) describe this kind of language as an ambiguous rejection message that leaves a person feeling unsettled or unresolved. On the other hand, direct communication regarding the reason for rejection may leave a person with a sort of catharsis, as well as present challenges if too much unwanted detail is shared about the reason for rejection (“You are not fun and I don’t want you a part of this team”). Directly communicating

rejection has the potential to leave a person deeply hurt. Inevitably, direct or indirect rejection messages are bound to cause an emotional reaction when rejection occurs within the church.

### ***Calling***

Similar to ambiguous messaging, some words and phrases used in the Christian faith, such as “calling,” may be used to communicate rejection and leave an aspiring volunteer confused and feeling hurt. “Christianese” language (words and phrases that are commonly known within the Christian faith but do not always translate effectually to outsiders of the faith; Lemaire, 2017), is often rooted in biblical principles, but overtime warps in meaning. Zeze (2019) lays out a thorough description of the biblical origin behind the word “calling,” connecting it to a sense of naming or commissioning. But the author goes on to explain how historic cultural influences began distorting the word, giving it an ultra-spiritual use. This author describes that during the Medieval and Middle Ages, the world was divided into two categories, secular and sacred, therefore, language befitting of the sacred category was reserved for high-ranking spiritual authorities such as clergymen. As time went on, the word transitioned to be used for vocational calling, meaning that everybody was capable of being “called” to God’s divine work (Zeze, 2019).

The word “called” and its conjugation is often used in ministry settings and may be heard from pastors or long-time church attenders. They may say phrases such as, “I didn’t feel called to serve,” or “I will wait for the Lord to call me into the place I am supposed to be,” or “I didn’t feel the Lord calling you into this position of leadership.” The use of calling in these contexts partially encompasses the biblical principle of being

commissioned by God, and they partially follow the cultural ideology of calling being reserved for those who are spiritually mature or worthy of spiritual authority. This language, when used as a reason for not accepting an aspiring volunteer into a leadership position, may lead an aspiring volunteer to question why God has not chosen them for a position of authority, thereby changing the perceptions of social rejection into moral rejection.

### **Emotional Response to Rejection**

As mentioned, rejection often leads to negative emotions (Leary, 2015), however, emotions generally provide guidance for decision making. When a person feels a strong sense of emotion after a rejection experience, the emotions likely direct an individual's behavioral response (Leary, 2015). Essentially, emotions may draw attention in a person's life to acceptance by an in-group or, as Twenge et al. (2002) explains, non-acceptance may lead to "maladaptive behaviors, such as self-defeating choices and reduced reasoning ability" (as cited in Twenge & Campbell, 2003, p. 263).

Emotional reactions are partially evolutionary tendencies to indicate threats and opportunities; for example, fear can signal danger which may lead a person to avoid a threat and be led to safety (Leary, 2015; LeDoux, 2012). A such, understanding common emotional reactions may help to understand a person's decision-making after a rejection experience. For example, when a person is angry, they may act brashly or quickly defend their own self and take control of the situation, yet a person who is embarrassed may retreat from the situation to save face and speak in lower tones (Barrett, 2005). Moreover, emotions overlap depending on the importance placed in certain areas of the relationship,

therefore, the emotion one feels from rejection may cause very different responses in different people experiencing a similar circumstance (Fitness, 2001).

Additionally, Tillmann-Healy (2003) explains that friendships aid in providing emotion and identity resources which creates the potential that a person's identity becomes de-valued if a friendship sours. The deeper a relationship is, the more potential there is for painful, emotional hurt to occur. Vangelisti et al. (2007) describe that heightened affectionate environments are more likely to cause emotional hurt. Therefore, when pastors and staff members develop personal relationships with aspiring volunteers and then do not accept them into a leadership position, there is likely to be a greater sense of hurt within the aspiring volunteer.

Furthermore, the depth of relationships is only a partial contributing factor to emotional hurt in circumstances of not accepting volunteers into a desired position. The other factor is the rejection itself. Leary et al. (1998) explain that perceived relational devaluation and rejection can cause hurt feelings. Rejection can also leave a person experiencing negative emotions connected to disappointment, dejection, and loneliness (Fitness, 2001; Jablin & Krone, 1984; Watson & Nesdale, 2012). However, hurt is the primary emotion experienced with rejection (Leary & Springer, 2001; Leary et al., 1998) and typically leaves a negative impact on relationships (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). Based on the literature regarding increased hurt caused by rejection from close relations, those who experience rejection within or from the church may encounter a deep emotional hurt.

## *Hurt*

Hurt has been a difficult emotion for researchers to conceptualize. The emotion is commonly experienced by people and understood through shared experience, however, the depth of the emotion is particularly challenging to define. Some scholars describe hurt as an emotional injury caused by another (Folks, 1982; L'Abate, 1977) and often researchers describe hurt as an emotion that is accompanied by other emotions such as sadness, anger, or fear (Feeney, 2005; L'Abate, 1977; Leary & Springer, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2000; Vangelisti et al., 2007). Hurt is a complex emotion and is impacted by the relational context in which it occurs (i.e., family, romantic, friend, etc.).

Although many situations of rejection may result in hurt feelings, Mansfield and Barna (2012) explain that church hurt occurring within one's place of worship is unique from other experiences. They say that "the traumatic element of the experience occurs when a place of trust and spiritual and social connection becomes a place of rejection, anguish, or disenchantment that could lead one to question and/or even reject one's church" (as cited in Anderson, 2017, p. 3). Mansfield and Barna believe that the core of church hurt comes from the corruption of a once sacred and secure environment. Depth of relational connection and the circumstances of rejection are a perfect combination for deep-seeded hurt. Again, many scholars have studied the phenomenon of church hurt in LGBTQ+ communities or non-white people groups, but the rapid decline of church attendance (Pew Research Center, 2019) suggests that there should be inquiry as to whether other groups are experiencing reasons to leave.

## **Rationale**

Significantly, Protestant Christians in the United States have a large presence and appear to make up most of the civil volunteers in the United States (Anderson, 2017; Campbell & Yonish, 2003). Because religious volunteers often share a personal and spiritual identity with the church, there is more at stake applying for volunteer positions within a church than applying for a job where a person is disconnected from the organization. Church volunteers typically attend the church, consider other members family, and are invested spiritually, which means that to understand the nature of rejection within churches one must consider the spiritual-family nature of those communities.

Overall, researchers depict the overwhelming impact of close relational ties in increasing emotional hurt from rejection experiences. This is relevant to the current study because churches develop relational connections that are bonded just as deeply, if not more intensely, than genealogical family ties. Additionally, pastors seem to have a responsibility to befriend congregant members not only for the purpose of taking care of them pastorally, but also for understanding them better so as to assess their ability to volunteer and serve in leadership capacities within the church. Moreover, regular church attenders are typically noticed by pastors and thereby have increased odds for being asked to participate in volunteer leadership positions. Unfortunately, when friendships are overridden by organizational criteria and an aspiring volunteer is rejected from a position within the church, deep rooted emotions are likely to occur. The most common emotion to be felt during times of rejection is hurt and, significantly, hurt influences the way that people make decisions and behave.

Furthermore, young adults are susceptible to great influence by the authority figures in their lives (Waldron et al., 2015), which is significant when one considers that church leaders have a responsibility to teach young adults and encourage them in their faith. Although this demographic of young adults has been largely studied, there is little to no literature regarding their experience being rejected within the church.

Studies regarding church hurt (Anderson, 2017), rejection from church (Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018), and organizational procedures of church (Oakley et al., 2018) have been conducted, yet have largely ignored the hurt experienced by young adult volunteers who experience rejection or non-acceptance within the Christian church. This current study uses an exploratory framework to examine volunteer leadership dynamics inside church walls, specifically focusing on the response of young adult volunteers to rejection.

### **Research Question**

The following research questions examine what relational dynamics within a church influence volunteerism as well as how young adults conceptualize and respond to hurt from the perceived rejection associated with attempts to volunteer within the Protestant Christian church.

#### **RQ1**

- a. How do aspiring volunteers (AV) perceive their relationship with church staff to have affected acquiring volunteer leadership positions?
- b. How do aspiring volunteers (AV) perceive the relationship between church staff and established volunteer leaders (EVL) to have affected acquiring volunteer leadership positions?

- c. How do aspiring volunteers (AV) perceive their relationship with established volunteer leaders (EVL) to have affected acquiring volunteer leadership positions?

RQ2

- a. What elements of rejection are related to the experience of hurt for aspiring volunteers within Protestant Christian churches?

RQ3

- a. How do young adults within Protestant Christian churches respond when they have been hurt by perceived rejection messages regarding their volunteer requests?



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

Due to the lack of previous research within the realm of young adults' responses to rejection within church, a phenomenological qualitative research method was used to discover the full profile and experiences of young adults. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants over a four-month period, then reflexive Thematic Analysis was utilized to analyze the data. Qualitative research methods allow for rich and deep knowledge of personal experience and insights lived out by the participant (Holloway & Todres, 2003). They also increase understanding of how participants make sense of their lived experiences.

#### **Research Approach**

##### **Triangulation**

The present investigation triangulated the perspectives of volunteerism within churches by interviewing three groups of participants: young adult volunteers, pastors, and church consultants. Triangulation studies are useful for gaining multiple perspectives of a single phenomenon and enhances credibility (Flick et al., 2012; Tracy, 2019). Triangulating the data collection allowed for enhanced validity of the phenomenon under study by providing various vantage points from which to view, in this case, aspiring volunteers rejected within the church (Abdalla et al., 2018). Fielding et al. (2012) describe three reasons for triangulating data collection: the first is for illustrative purposes to reflect the reality of participants experiences, the second is for convergent validation so that data from different points of view may point to similar themes thereby increasing the

strength of the data analysis, and the third reason is for analytical density to gain a deeper and wider understanding of the particular phenomenon being studied.

Young adults were the primary focus of the study and therefore took precedence in terms of number of interviews. Yet, because the experience of volunteering requires interaction between hopeful volunteers and decision makers (usually pastors in the case of church volunteering), the perspective of pastor's allowed for an organizational perspective of the process for acquiring volunteer leaders. Additionally, church consultants were interviewed to gain an outsider's perspective of rejection experiences within church walls. Genway (1992) defines a consultant as one who has the expertise of the job without being wrapped up in the innerworkings of the organization. The perspective a church consultant, separate from personal relationships within a church congregation, allows for an objective opinion to be shared. The pastors and church consultant interviews were used to provide context for the findings of the young adult interviews.

### **Procedure**

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all three groups of participants. Participants were contacted through snowball sampling via text, social media, or email. The interviews spanned in length from 25 minutes to 110 minutes. Before the interview, young adult participants were asked to take an online survey that required initial consent and provided the researcher with time to reflect on their preliminary explanation of their rejection experience (see appendix A). This allowed for greater depth of questions during the interview phase. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face, via Zoom, or by phone. With the permission of participants, audio

recordings were captured during each interview to allow for detailed analysis. After interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings for convenience of analyzing data. The average number of transcribed pages from all interviews was 16 pages.

The set of questions for the young adult interviews began with asking them to describe an experience that they had when they were not accepted into a volunteer position at a Christian church (see appendix B). Allowing participants to share their stories open-endedly provided an initial description of their experience and provided opportunities for the participant to guide the conversation toward areas most meaningful to their memory. Based on a study, by Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) designed to explore the reactions to hurtful messages, the young adult participants were asked to rate how hurtful the rejection experience felt. This was done in the initial online survey which allowed them to recall more details regarding the hurtful emotions during the interview. Pastors and church consultants were asked similar questions pertaining to their experience acquiring, working with, and not accepting young adult volunteers into leadership positions as well as experiences they have had or observed interacting with young adults that had been hurt from situations of volunteer rejection (see appendix C and D).

### **Demographics**

As table 1 displays, a total of 13 interview were conducted, 8 with young adults, 3 with pastors, and 2 with church consultants. Most literature would define young adults as late teenage years to mid-twenties (Arnett, 2015; Setran & Kiesling, 2013; Waldron et al., 2015), however, this study extends young adults to age 30, although all were in

**Table 1***Demographics of Young Adult Aspiring Volunteer Participants*

<b>Demographics of Young Adult Volunteer Participants</b>		<i>n</i> = 8
<b>Gender</b>	Male	3
	Female	5
<b>Age</b>	24	2
	25	3
	26	1
	27	1
	30	1
<b>Ethnicity (Participants were able to choose more than one)</b>	White/Caucasian	8
	Asian	3
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1
<b>Education</b>	Some College	2
	Bachelor's Degree	6
<b>Church Attendance Before the Rejection Experience</b>	3 or More Times a Week	3
	Twice a Week	3
	Once a Week	1
	A Few Times a Month	1
<b>Current Church Attendance</b>	Twice a Week	4
	Once a Week	1
	A Few Times a Month	2
	Only Holidays	1
<b>Length of Time Since Rejection Experience</b>	2 Years Ago	1
	5 Years Ago	3
	8 Years Ago	1
	10 Years Ago	1
	12 Years Ago	1
	15 Years Ago	1

traditional young adult categories when the perceived rejection took place. Three of the young adult participants explained having multiple rejection experiences within church settings so although there are 8 young adult participants, 11 rejection experiences were shared in the interviews and analyzed in the study. Two of the pastors were new in their ministry career, having only been in an official position of pastoring for less than five years, although both pastors had previous experience leading and participating in church ministry prior to pastoring. Additionally, both church consultants were former pastors and spent many years involved in church leadership. After working within church, they both decided to begin ministry outside of a specific congregation to help churches and pastors at large.

### **Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

The rich content gained from interviews was coded using reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is beneficial for summarizing qualitative data sets into pattern (themes) that provide shared meaning across experiences. The use of reflexive TA allows for insights to be generated through emergent interpretations and guided by theoretical concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Because reflexive TA does not utilize a singular theoretical framework, there is flexibility to discover a range of insights based on a multitude of theoretical frameworks. Reflexive TA is a method used to identify and report patterns or themes found in qualitative data. This present investigation followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, naming themes, and producing a report.

The author began coding the data by listening, transcribing, and reading through interview responses to identify how participants reflected on past experiences of hurt caused by rejection in church. During analysis, three strategies for developing themes were used: recurring thread of meaning within data, repetition of similar words or phrases, and the intensity or forcefulness of comments (Owen, 1984). Using these criteria, the author first analyzed the audio and transcribed data for primary understanding of participant's conceptualization of their rejection experience and the author began developing a code book. Then revision allowed for a concrete definition and name for each theme to be developed. Finally, all identifying information about participants was altered after the final report was written (Braithwaite et al., 2016).

### **Ethics**

Each participant was provided with a consent form to read before participating in the interview. Young adult participants were required to record their consent through an online survey while pastors and consultants were asked to provide verbal consent. Consent included voluntary participation in the research study which involved answering interview questions, allowing for audio recording of the interview to occur, and permission to publish any written and verbal words by the participant. Participants were fully aware of their right to skip any question or end the interview at any time.

Furthermore, confidentiality has been maintained for all participants. Names of volunteers, pastors, and consultants have been changed for privacy and any identifying information has been removed or altered to de-identify persons while keeping the integrity of the participants' experience. Throughout the analysis, pastors are identified in parenthesis as P1, P2, and P3 while church consultants are acknowledged as C1 and C2.

Of the three pastors and two consultants, only one was female, which aligns with literature that describes pastoring as a primarily male-dominated occupation (Bammert, 2010). Additionally, young adults were re-named and given gender neutral names for the purpose of anonymity. Desiring readers to gain a deeper understanding of the context for church ministry and volunteerism without biases regarding gender, pronouns have been removed or neutralized.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Before discovering themes surrounding young adults' experience related to rejection within churches, it was important to understand the context within which the rejection events took place. To provide context, the first part of this research study included interviewing pastors (inside perspective) and church consultants (outside perspective). Understanding the perspective of church staff provides context for what elements of rejection hurt aspiring volunteers in the church and how aspiring volunteers respond when they do not receive a position of leadership. Through the pastoral interviews two main contextual categories were communicated through the data: preparation for ministry and organizational procedures. Within the latter category three sub-themes were identified: acquiring volunteer leaders (relational connection), criteria for volunteering (looking like Christ), and conversations with volunteers (inviting conversations and tough conversations). Participants quotes are noted with P# (pastor identified by randomly assigned number) or C# consultant identified with randomly assigned number).

#### **Preparation for Ministry**

Pastors and church consultants provided personal examples of their experiences and observations of church volunteerism and the administrative procedures from their perspective. The pastors in this study had not completed seminary or formal classroom training for church work, and, regarding preparation for ministry, they explained that the best way to learn how to perform the duties of the job effectively was simply to do the job.



Churches are organizations that require structure; however, pastors are rarely trained in areas of managing people, yet they are expected to do so (Davis, 2007). Some pastors choose to go through seminary to learn about theological and biblical topics, but there seems to be more praise for jumping into the field and practicing ministry to learn relational management skills. As one of the pastors interviewed explained, “I really do think that having done this and having been in this job for as long as I have now, I’m convinced that the best way to learn this job is just to do it” (P3). All three of the pastors interviewed gave credit to internships aiding their pastoral experience. One pastor said, “It helped being an intern, that was a huge help. Some of the ministry classes [in my undergrad] required an internship and I was already in that, so that helped” (P2). While another mentioned:

I think it was really helpful for me to be a volunteer leader for many years because I had been a leader all throughout my undergrad schooling and then was basically an intern. I had been doing that for a couple of years and so I had a lot of experience, and I was really thankful for how I was developed along the way. (P1)

In addition, internships provided teaching regarding the practicalities of ministry that helped prepare pastors for ministry. One pastor said:

The internship that I was a part of... I just had an incredible experience with them [the church]. [The directors are] incredible, incredible leaders, incredible people. Just so good at what they do and really helped me both in the practical piece of ministry of like ‘this is how you do this’, but also the emotional and personal part of ministry too. I mean ministry is hard and it’s a toll and it takes a toll on you personally, trying to figure out how to navigate the hardships, and the emotions, and the challenges, and trials that comes with this job too. And there is a heart piece to that, that they invested into me well with that, I felt so prepared to do this job [of pastoring]. (P3)

Overall, pastors seem to think that internships guide them to understand the procedural and emotional dynamics of ministry before having the independent role of

pastor. Each of them gave credit to jumping into ministry and gaining experience as they went. One pastor mentioned, “I really do believe that a lot of [knowledge of ministry and managing people] just comes with experience,” (P3) and there will be errors along the way when experience acts as the classroom. Another pastor said laughingly, “I can tell you a whole lot of what *not* to do, that’s for sure” (P2).

The church consultants agreed with jumping into the ministry pool to learn. One consultant shared:

I think a lot of times seminaries end up about getting more theological and biblical knowledge and often pastor’s receiving training where they are actually developing relational and emotional maturity aren’t often a part of the deal. There are some things you just can’t be prepared for. So, I think you kind of just have to be ready for anything and everything and you usually see everything and anything. (C1)

The other consultant added when asked the question if they felt prepared for ministry starting out:

My initial thought was no. I don't think any of us are fully prepared. I think this is a process that we learn over time through successes and through failures. I've always asked the Lord to put me in places where I've really got to trust Him, where it doesn't come easy. I've often told people in my congregation if you're not making some mistakes, then you they're really not trying. (C2)

In the end, pastors are people trying to make a difference in the lives of their congregants and they inevitably make mistakes because there is very little managerial or relational training received outside of internships.

### **Organizational Procedures**

For any functioning church to run, organizational management must take place. Regarding the realm of religious volunteering, these procedures have not been clearly

outlined in academic literature. Therefore, in the interviews held with pastors and church consultants, questions were asked about the organizational side of church flow.

### **Acquiring Volunteers to Cultivate Culture: “Personal invitation” and “Open to all”**

Because most pastors are not savvy business individuals, they rely on personal connections to help them out, particularly in the realm of volunteering. Pastors have a responsibility to shepherd their flock and they desire to “cultivate a certain culture” (P3) that is set by the volunteers (P2), so they are careful to screen volunteer leaders in their programs. All of the pastors and church consultants interviewed described the act of seeking out young adults and asking them personally to join their team. One pastor said, “we really used to go after [young adults] and ask them if they would join teams... We would just ask them” (P2). Another pastor described the following about acquiring volunteer leaders:

It was really just identifying them as staff on our own and saying, “Hey we see this person has character that we trust, we see that they have social skills and are not awkward, and have some level of leadership ability – even if it’s not like they are the most dynamic, charismatic leader ever – and they are faithful, and consistent,” and we would just invite them. (P1)

Similarly, one pastor shared:

I’ve become very intentional about that [asking] and not that I am just going around asking everybody if they want to lead because I have to have some sort of relationship with them and know a little bit of their character and what they are about before I’m just going to drop them in and just let them lead with our students. (P3)

Another participant explained:

I think there is a value of talking about it [volunteering] and communicating in church service up front and anything that is published or on the web so it’s always being communicated in those kinds of things, but also just a personal invitation. (C1)

And the other church consultant replied to the question of how they have observed churches to acquire volunteer leaders, saying:

Well, that's actually changed very interestingly over the years. In the beginning we would just kind of befriend them, put the word out there that we needed volunteers and there wasn't much of a process other than getting to know that person. We didn't have background checks and fingerprinting and all this stuff that you do now. We just really trusted them, right or wrong, but we really trusted just the relationship that you built with them. (C2)

There is a common thread acknowledged by church pastors and consultants that personally inviting young adults to lead is a preferred method of obtaining volunteer leaders, partially because it allows staff members to formulate character judgements about the potential volunteer before deciding to invite them into leadership.

Another reason for the personal invitation process came from some of the participants observations, such as, "I think a lot of times people don't volunteer because they are never asked" (C1). Or:

Most people aren't going to come to you, even if they want to volunteer, most often they are going to wait to be asked to come and volunteer. I think they just want that validation and that affirmation of "oh I'm wanted". (P3)

Seemingly, there is a shared understanding by pastors and consultants that aspiring volunteers do not initiate asking for a position of leadership. Although reasons as to why this is the case might be assumed by pastors (and will be examined from the perspective of young adult aspiring volunteers later in the research process), church leadership recognizes the timidity of congregant members to take the first step and ask for a voluntary leadership position.

A few of the pastors and consultants acknowledged the challenge of people not requesting to volunteer, alongside of having a limited relational perspective to find

volunteers. Since pastors feel the need to ask people to volunteer, and they can only ask those they have a personal connection with, there is a chance people unknown or lesser known to pastors are overlooked for positions of leadership. Aware that this might be the case, some pastors mentioned that they changed their process for acquiring volunteers over the years. One pastor described:

We used to handpick, but in the last couple of years we have started an application process, we sort of opened up leadership to all students...so any student can join. We just do it year by year... If you signed up to be a leader it's a one year commitment. If you want to re-up, great! But you still have to go through the application process again. (P2)

Another pastor also found applications to be a beneficial resource for identifying young adults who would otherwise be overlooked. The pastor explained:

Eventually we got to a point where we were like, "You know, I bet there are other people that would probably want to be a part of [leadership] that we don't see ourselves because we do have a limited perspective and we are only interacting with a handful of students in our sphere, so how do we expand our viewpoint?" So, then we started doing an application process and saying, "Hey anyone can apply," that doesn't necessarily mean anything but that gives us an idea of who's actually interested that we might not have thought of. And that was definitely cool because it was like, "oh" random people came out of the woodwork that we had never really thought about. (P1)

Applications provided an outlet for aspiring volunteers to drop their name into the hat, so to speak, and widened the lens pastors had for finding leaders.

Additionally, applications provide the means to filter out unfit volunteers. It is the case in nearly every church that people will volunteer for the wrong reasons and lack qualifications. An application process helps weed out the volunteers that are not serious about the position. One pastor put it this way, "we make the process intentionally tough so that we never have that problem with leaders" (P2). And another participant said:

[Applications and background checks] are a two-edge sword, you want to be able to have people move into relationship with you over time, but you also need to do the work of ministry. And so, these background checks and applications probably help. But somehow, we've missed something in the relationships. (C2)

This church consultant acknowledged that applications could aid the efficiency of finding qualified volunteer leaders, but also had the potential to compromise the personal relationship a pastor has with an aspiring volunteer.

Some pastors go through an extensive process for volunteers to lead. The onboarding process of volunteer leaders in one ministry was explained in the following:

We interview the [aspiring volunteers], we have a sit-down interview, they have to write out an application, all of that stuff.... I think we make the process intentionally difficult, and it weeds out those who aren't going to be there. (P2)

One consultant also explained volunteers desiring to work with kids or youth ministry “would have to have a background check, they would have to do a training, they would have to go through screening as well just to ask questions, and sometimes that can be uncomfortable for people” (C1). While the other consultant explained:

In the past, on a couple of occasions, nothing ever came out because these couple of occasions decided not to continue to go through the application process, but in getting to know them [the volunteers], I began to sense that a couple of volunteers were there [for the wrong reasons]. I just kept sensing, “do you really have a genuine heart for this ministry? Or, is there something else going on?” Which quite frankly, I don't mind if you're a good person – and I don't know how to determine that – but I think the application process was really good because these two individuals just decided that was too much for them to go through the application process. So that's where that really helped in that situation. Or maybe even confirm my sense that something else was weird here. (C2)

The reason churches put extensive application processes in place is to discourage uncommitted volunteers and to protect the environment of ministry. The application,

interview, background check, and other onboarding steps ultimately help filter out volunteers who are not willing to see their way through the process.

### **Criteria for Volunteering: “Do you look like Christ?”**

Procedures such as applications, interviews, and background checks help pastors and church staff find volunteer leaders that meet their standards. Yet, this begs the question, what are common standards that pastors use to evaluate aspiring volunteers? All the pastors and church consultants emphatically shared that potential volunteer leaders must look like and be actively pursuing Jesus Christ. Each of them added that looking like Christ is not about perfection. One pastor shared, “obviously we are not looking for people to be perfect – we would never find anyone – but is there evidence that they have a personal relationship with Jesus, meaning they actually do spend time with him?” (P1). Echoing this saying that volunteer leaders must “reflect Christlikeness. That doesn’t mean they are perfect” (P2), and “it’s not like, ‘Oh you can’t come be a leader here if you’ve ever sinned or messed up in your life,’ that’s ridiculous and all of us are there.... But are you living a life that is genuinely pursuing Jesus?” (P3) were added in cohesion.

A church consultant chimed in saying that what they look for in a volunteer leader, “first off is a genuine heart to want to serve. We can work with a lot of other things, but we need that genuine heart” (C2). Apparently, consensus is shared that church volunteers are not perfect people, rather, they are people who know Christ’s example and follow a life that reflects Him.

Looking like Christ is a common theme shared by church pastors yet is incredibly vague and subjective to interpretation. Still, church staff shared categories or criteria for what Christlikeness can or might look like. Some pastors simply ask volunteers the

question “are they already leading?” (C1) or explained “obviously, if a student is going to be a leader, they are first and foremost leaders with their lives” (P2). Others described that they look for intentionality in the choices people make, particularly relationally, saying “[if] they are actually going to be pursuing the people that they are leading, they are going to be willing to invest in them” (P1). Expanding on the idea of leaders developing intentional relationships one pastor said:

It’s more about you [volunteer] just showing up and being present with our students.... They will remember you showing up to their baseball game or that you asked about their piano recital or all of these things that are really intentional relational things, things that they are going to remember and most of us are going to have the ability to do that if we care enough about it. (P3)

Intentionally investing into relationships is a key indicator for what a person who has leadership potential looks like from the perspective of pastors.

Furthermore, personality was a kind of criteria for church staff that indicated a person looks Christlike. Personality or character can be thought of in terms of agreeability and disagreeability. In other words, pastors seem to recognize when a person’s general demeanor is welcoming or off-putting and therefore may influence a pastor’s decision toward a leadership role. One consultant explained:

I think in leadership positions, are people responsive to that person? I mean, some people just have a temperament or personality that people just... they are not agreeable people, or they are just people that others don’t find it easy to get along with. So, agreeability, it’s kind of an intangible, but is that there? (C1)

And a pastor shared:

Are you, in the way you interact with people, are you kind? Are you loving? Are you generous? Do you show up for people? Do you have an interest in being involved with our church more than just what you can get out of it but more so what you can give? (P3)



While another pastor mentioned questions that tap into the criteria sought after in young adult volunteers:

Are you really passive aggressive and so everything that you say is actually a backhanded compliment? That's kind of a red flag. So, there is not necessarily a "They have to have this, this, and this in their character" but I think just in what we see, is the fruit of their life at least moving toward looking like Jesus? (P1)

Being an approachable person is a key personality trait that pastors and church staff look for in potential volunteers. Although personality traits like charisma or detail-orientation were desirable, they were not high concerns for pastors, however, the ability to get along with people is an important character trait for pastors who place young adults in a position of leadership.

Leaders must be taken seriously to carry any influence toward those they are leading, as one pastor said, to be a good leader a person must learn "to build a certain relationship and rapport with people in order for them to listen. And they shouldn't listen to you unless you have built that because you haven't earned it. That sort of thing is an earned thing" (P3). Respect can be earned in many ways. Another alluded that "having that relationship, being a person that they [students] can trust, for me and for the other leaders as well..." (P2) comes from leading by example and role modeling what it looks like to participate in church activities. The pastor went on to describe that when one of the leaders in their ministry made the decision to get involved with an event hosted by the ministry and began sharing excitedly with students, there was a great change in participation by the student congregants. The pastor described what the volunteer said:

"I want you [pastor] to know that I [volunteer] am going to [this event]" and we started pushing the other staff to go and pushing students hard to go and that's what I've been doing. But literally, the year that [this leader] made that decision,

we went from like 15 students to around 45 students and then every year it has grown. It was crazy! (P2)

Another way this is described is simply showing up and being dependable. Most of the pastors and consultants shared that part of what they look for in a potential volunteer is reliability to follow through with their commitments. One pastor explained:

I just look for basic things like responsibility. Are you able to show up to things that I ask you to, that are basic requirements?... Are you able to show up and do those basically and consistently and then are you also able to communicate with me well? That's like my number one value for my leaders and my volunteers, I tell them that all the time. Are you able to communicate with me? (P3)

Another pastor saw volunteer leaders taking on too many responsibilities and roles in different volunteer capacities and mentioned that a conversation was had with these young adult volunteers, "you are an amazing leader in both of these, but schedule wise it is going to kill you and burn you out, so you have to choose one or another" (P1). Pastors need people who are both "available and willing" (P2) to follow through on their commitments.

Finally, pastors and church consultants desired for emotionally and spiritually healthy people to participate on their volunteer leadership teams. One pastor explained "if you are asking people to lead other people you [the leader] have to be healthy and able to do that" (P1). Additionally, another pastor emphasized the importance of people over positions saying:

I care about them as leaders but I care about them first and foremost as people and so if we are in a situation where we are leading a life in a certain place that is just, not only not healthy for leadership in general, but just is not healthy, then we need to talk about that and leadership can't take precedent over that. We need to make sure that you personally and spiritually are okay before you are able to lead. (P3)

Pastors do not take leadership lightly. They have high standards and expectations for their volunteer leaders and yet they understand that the role responsibilities might not be attainable for all walks of life. Therefore, the ability to judge a person's character and responsibility level safeguards pastor's from having to conduct difficult conversations with volunteer leaders. One of the church consultants said:

Emotional health is, I think, important.... Because you can't learn that stuff from a resume. And I think spiritual health and maturity... Because if someone is going to be put into a leadership position or mentoring position, do they have something to share? Do they have some experience with their relationship with God? And then are they able to share it or transfer it to somebody else? So again, the only way you know that stuff is through conversation and getting to know someone, that kind of thing. (C1)

The other consultant reflected on experiences when volunteers were not emotionally healthy, saying:

Over that time, I can remember situations where this person was not going to get this position. There was no way, they were not emotionally healthy enough. And sometimes that's my opinion. But as a leader, sometimes you're going to have to just run with that. I can always control how I present that to someone. But then I can't control how they're going to react to that. (C2)

As pastors discover who a young adult individual is and where their gifts and talents fit into the church, there can be a need to guide the young adult. One pastor put it this way:

It's an interesting experience with young adults and when I say young adults I mean people generally between 18 and 25, that they are in an interesting life stage where they are learning to become an adult so there is...at times there are some gaps in responsibility, there are some...there is a lot of growth that needs to happen with a lot of those, they take up some of my time, and in a good way! I don't mean that in a negative way. But there is some like 'Come to Jesus' talks that we have to have about what's appropriate and what's not, how we communicate when we are not going to be there or what we are going to be able to commit too, that sort of a thing. I also enjoy energy that they bring, there is just some energy that young adult leaders bring to a ministry group. (P3)

Another pastor mentioned the hesitancy to utilize young adults to lead children or youth groups because of their lack of life experience. This pastor shared:

I have not felt like there are a lot of college students out there who are qualified for what I want a leader to be. No knock on college students, but I feel like they are just not far enough along in life to be the kind of role models I want to put in front of our younger students. (P2)

The understanding that young adults are in a particular phase of life where they need guidance and care to learn how to lead others well, causes hesitancy when acquiring young adult volunteer leaders.

### **Conversations**

Nevertheless, ministry is in the business of people, as one of the pastors shared, and inevitably that means conversations are going to be a frequent practice. Conversations in ministry take on many forms. Three specific sub-categories within conversations were shared by participants during analysis of pastor and church consultant data. These categories consist of the types, elements, and responses of and to conversations.

#### ***Types of Conversations***

The type of conversation a pastor has depends on the role of the communication partner. Mostly, church staff have two kinds of conversations related to volunteerism: positive invitational and seriously tough. Most *positive invitational* conversations involve asking a congregant member to participate in a volunteer leadership position. These conversations affirm a person's good character qualities and invite more responsibility or authority. One pastor explained, "if I identify somebody where I'm like, 'Oh man you might have the chops to do this.' I would come up to them and affirm them in something

that I see in them” (P3). Another pastor shared similarly, “we would just invite them and say, ‘hey this is what we see in you, we would love to develop that in you, would you want to be a part of leadership?’” (P1). A consultant repeated the notion of an invitation, explaining that the following would be said to a qualified volunteer, “I want to say, ‘Hey so and so is new and is getting involved, what if we invited them to help with whatever. So, I think personal initiation is a really big deal” (C1). The pastors and church consultants interviewed for this project clearly identify affirmation of character as a frequent occurrence with an invitation-type conversation.

The second type of conversation became evident when pastors and church consultants were asked about experiences sending rejection, non-acceptance, or correction message to hopeful or established volunteers. They responded that conversations of that nature were *seriously tough*. As they described their experiences a cautiousness came out in the word choice used to describe past situations. It appeared, during the interviews, that pastors did not want to focus solely on the negative correction, yet they wanted their point to be taken seriously. Therefore, the idea that tough conversations are also serious seemed to be common from the participants interviews. One pastor made these types of conversations a norm in the ministry saying to leaders:

We will have tough conversations, so expect it, expect that at some point we are going to have a sit down and say, “Hey this didn’t go well, you’re kind of dropping the ball here and you need to work on this,” or something like that. (P2)

Another pastor explained that, while conversations where a person does not get what they want or where they are asked to step down from an established position is always awkward:

I don't ever want to come at it like, "Hey we are telling you that you need to step out." My hope, my goal is that there is a mutual understanding of "Oh yeah maybe this isn't actually the best fit and this isn't the season for it right now." There is definitely the time for, "I'm sorry if you want to keep doing this but we do need to kind of ask you to step out." But again, trying to be really clear [saying] here are the reasons why. (P1)

Naturally tough conversations, or fierce conversations as Susan Scott (2004) would describe them, are uncomfortable and often avoided, however, most of the pastors and consultants explain that having an open-door policy helps lessen the negative impact of the message. The same pastor also explained that saying, "we would love for you to come back once this gets resolved and we want to walk with you in the process of that...Like we are not going to leave you out to dry" (P1) is an important part of having a tough conversation. Another pastor shared an explanation provided to young adults during a past experienced tough conversation, saying:

If anything changes and you want to come back on, we are open to that conversation and you know this is not a permanent shut the door forever, we can have that conversation. So, I think that was really good. That was really helpful, like it didn't make it feel permanent. (P2)

Likewise, a consultant explained that an option is left open for any volunteer leaders that might be asked to step away from the position for a time, saying:

So here are the things that I need from you and if you are really serious about this then these are the things that I need to see. You know and listing off whatever that might be. Which feels fair, it's not closing the door forever, but it is like hey if this is something that you really want to do, then here are the things that you need to work on. (C1)

In all three of these quotes, there is an expectation that change would occur if a volunteer desired to return to leadership. In some way, the door is open for the volunteer to make a choice to change their errors, yet in another way, the pastors will not allow entry without changed behavior which indicates a kind of closed door.

### *Elements of Conversations*

In addition to the types of conversations had by pastors of church ministries, elements of conversations were consistent across interviews. These elements consisted of affirmation of character qualities and redirection to other areas better fit for the volunteer. Most conversations, whether positive or serious include affirmation of the person, their character, qualities, gifts, and talents. One pastor shared that a gift they believed God personally gave to them was being:

Good at seeing qualities in other people that I think God loves and that I think God has put into them which makes it really... that's a really powerful thing for me to affirm people. So, being truthful while also be affirming. We are building up while we are also encouraging people to be better. (P3)

Another pastor shared that when turning someone away from a position they desire:

We try to make them feel very valued and loved and wanted and like "We absolutely love that you are a part of our community, this isn't you. Like, oh we don't want you around, but it is like Hey, what we are looking for is someone that like can carry people in prayer and relationships and I don't see that in you." (P1)

Pastors are careful to provide feedback about the qualities that are praiseworthy in a person even when the focus of the conversation is on not accepting the aspiring volunteer from a desired position.

Another way that pastors attempt to soften the negative impact of a tough conversation is through redirection. Redirection, based on participants' explanations, is the identifying of a person's talents and redirecting them away from the leadership position they are desiring and turning their attention toward a volunteer position that might better suit their abilities. One pastor explained that they might say to a volunteer:

“How about investing your life elsewhere” and I try to redirect in some way, like “Maybe this isn’t for you but here is what I do see in you that I really love and here is where I see you using that.” (P1)

Sometimes redirection simply offers ministry options that might be unfamiliar to a volunteer. Another pastor explains:

Maybe this [leadership] just isn’t a good fit, or that I see a different place for you in our church that you can serve. I see, here are some qualities that I see in you and I love those qualities about you and I think that they would be a really good fit [elsewhere in the church] ... I see this in you that God has put in you. (P3)

And a church consultant shared that in a recent experience a prayer prayed consisted of “Lord, what is the fit [for this volunteer]? Because they want to be involved, they want to do something, so what would that look like?” (C1). Adding to this the same pastor said:

My guess is that a lot of churches...if someone isn’t a fit, they just leave it at that and...it could be that for some reason it’s not a fit but then it’s just left at that and there is no sense of really shepherding that person, who they are and sticking with them, even if it’s not the right time or the right fit. I think that can be a factor that is in there and maybe another element is, coming back to the invitation thing, sometimes young adults just aren’t asked in the church. (C1)

Redirection seems to be used as another form of affirming the qualities a person holds and pointing out the best place for the volunteer to use their gifts. The focus is on the qualities a person can provide to the church rather than the interests of the person aspiring to volunteer because, as one pastor mentioned, “I think a lot of times people are like ‘oh my gosh, leadership! That is the... you have arrived, you are spiritually elite, that is the club’ [mentality]” (P1).



### *Young Adults' Responses to Conversations*

Pastors and consultants also recognized that the “ultimate spiritual club” mentality young adults often hold regarding church staff may influence AVs’ responses to pastors and church staff.

During tough conversations, young adults may perceive conversations positively with understanding or they might misunderstand the reason for rejection and feel very hurt. One pastor reiterated that the rejection was not a personal attack toward the volunteer, and it was not a request for them to leave the church. The pastor explained the aftermath of fierce conversations:

[It’s] just a lot of wondering like how is this going to go next because you don’t know how people are going to respond. You don’t know if they are thinking “You know what I took away from that conversation is, wow, my pastor hates me.” And, like “This is what I heard” even though that’s not actually what I said. You just don’t know and so I think there is a lot of like okay and we’ll see what happens next and just hope for the best. (P1)

Adding to the notion of how one receives a message or understands a conversion, another pastor emphasized, “they [the recipient of a tough conversation] need to be correctable, and they need to be correctable and not take it personally, not take it like I’m attacking them but that I’m dealing with the issue” (P2). This pastor explains that the volunteers who take tough conversations positively and with understanding are those who are most receptive to feedback or constructive criticism. A church consultant added to the idea of criticism saying:

I think what has been developed instead of being open to criticism – and criticism to me is not a negative word, it sure can be, but it's not a negative word – if the person really cares and loves and wants to help, I think we all need to be able to receive critique over the way we've done things or the way we do certain things or this or that. (C2)

Additionally, a pastor indicated that the response of volunteers can show a release or clarity and recognition of wrong in a volunteer, “I almost see – I don’t know if I want to call it relief, but – recognizing where priorities are and what needs to change” (P3).

On the opposite spectrum, those who do not understand the reason for rejection typically incur hurt feelings and lack maturity to recognize areas for growth in their own lives. One pastor explained an experience sitting down for a tough conversation with a couple of young adult leaders, saying:

Nobody got mad and was flipping tables. But I think both were a little irritated and I think that was just brought on by the fact that they were both really stressed with so many commitments and then here we are coming, holding their feet to the fire a little bit, and saying, you have to decide. They probably didn’t want to make the decision. (P2)

In another instance, a volunteer was asked to step down from a leadership position and later described feeling hurt. The pastor explained:

I had had a follow up conversation with the volunteer after that – who is back with us and things are good – but the volunteer had expressed to me, “when you had asked me to step away, I kind of had to work through some feelings of like this is a rejection of me,” which is wasn’t and I assured of that and we had a good conversation around that but “That’s kind of how it felt and I had to work through some of those things,” the volunteer said. (P3)

Although many pastors did not have tangible examples of rejecting experiences, they identified that the more understanding a person had regarding the reason for rejection, the better they took the news. Another pastor also described that tone in volunteers’ responses indicate that volunteers feel, “I applied to be a leader or something but I guess, I don’t know, I guess I wasn’t good enough” (P1). The personal feelings associated with non-acceptance has the tendency to create a misperception of reasonings for the circumstance. The same pastor went on to explain:

I think I see what they say versus what they actually feel doesn't always match up. Like they may come across more strongly to other people than they actually believe. "I don't actually think the pastor hates me but like out of my own whatever trying to make it seem like, I wasn't rejected, I just— this is a them issue." I think they [non-accepted volunteers] can come across more so that way than like if I were to actually say, "Hey do you actually think that?" They would actually be like, "No, no I know we had a good conversation and I know you love me." (P1)

When the rejection experience stings deeply, a volunteer may interpret tough conversation as a personal attack or rejection of their own character.

### **Discussion**

Ultimately, the information provided by the pastors and church consultants provide context for the organizational procedures and interpersonal relational entanglement of acquiring volunteer leaders and dealing with sending rejection-type messages. As noted, each of the pastors interviewed did not complete seminary although two of them were in the process of entering or completing seminary school. Nevertheless, personal lived experience was explained to be the most beneficial way of learning skills for managing people in ministry. However, one potential downfall of jumping into ministry with no previous skills is that the phrase one pastor shared, "I can tell you a whole lot of what not to do" (P2) becomes a common experience for those under ministry. Although many lessons learned can come through mistakes and failure, usually there are also hurt feelings and damaged relationships too.

Asking people to join leadership was a commonly practiced behavior for pastors and church consultants, which allowed for validation and affirmation in the potential volunteer, as one pastor explained (P3). However, the result of asking church congregants to be a part of leadership is that it becomes a normal behavior and people who aspire to

volunteer may be hesitant to inquire about a leading because they think that it is socially inappropriate to ask. The indication of this stems from the fact that church staff who opened volunteer leadership positions through an application process acquired many more prospective volunteer leaders than they would have received otherwise. The idea that people desire to volunteer and feel comfortable applying by application means that when an application process is not in place, oversight may occur to invite aspiring volunteers within the congregation.

Furthermore, the process of asking for leaders may develop a perception of selective partiality, exclusion, or even favoritism to group leadership. Pastors and church consultants discussed the importance of setting the culture in a ministry and, although there are specific reasons why relational connection may improve the quality of leaders chosen, it also has the potential for developing a space of loneliness for aspiring volunteers.

Due to the selective processing for acquiring volunteer leaders, the criteria behind becoming a leader can be difficult to understand from an outside or aspiring volunteer's perspective. For example, "looking like Christ through the fruit of one's life" was considered by pastors a significant indication of leadership qualifications, however, this is a rather vague statement, and criteria for being a leader does not appear to be made known officially for an aspiring volunteer. Such ambiguity may result in an aspiring volunteer, who thinks they look like Christ but is not asked to be a leader, to be left with feelings of personal rejection rather than non-acceptance for a position. Additionally, dependability, agreeableness, and emotional and spiritual maturity were other qualifications identified by pastors as important to leading within church ministry. A

young adult who perceives themselves to exhibit those specifications, yet does not receive a position in leadership, again may be left to question their level of devotion or health.

It is obvious through the interview responses that pastors and church staff care deeply about their volunteers and ministry, so it is unlikely that pastors or church consultants are aware of the perception of favoritism in the church and seems improbable that the church staff are intentionally developing a culture of exclusion. With that said, pastors reported that very few congregants initiated conversation regarding volunteering or hurt feelings. When interviewees mentioned that a congregant did approach them regarding a position of leadership, the pastors and church consultants indicated that they began developing a stronger relationship with that individual, and in some cases brought them onto leadership. Sadly, many of the interviewees shared that young adults typically do not inquire about volunteer leadership, which means that pastors are bound to a limited pool of potential volunteers that they know personally. As such, certain hopeful volunteers may never be invited into leadership.

In the end, it is clear that young adults are perceived by pastors and consultants to need to grow in maturity which may be gained through the lived experience of volunteerism, as one of the pastors indicated (P2). And, importantly, pastors and church consultants express young adults' ability to control their emotions when rejection occurs and learn to willingly take criticism.

## CHAPTER 5

### ASPIRING VOLUNTEERS' BIOGRAPHIES AND RESULTS

Having conducted a contextual analysis from the perspective of pastors and church consultants, an in-depth investigation of young adults' responses to perceived rejection experiences regarding church volunteering was conducted. The following provides a brief anonymized biography of each young adult aspiring volunteer participant. Due to the nature of snowball data collection and desiring focus on content of the results, all participants' names have been changed and made gender neutral, and gendered pronouns have been removed.

#### **Biographies of Young Adult Participants**

##### **Taylor**

Having grown up in a Christian church, Taylor appreciated the importance of church and the community it offers. During college, Taylor desired to participate as a volunteer leader for one of the church ministries. After applying for the position, Taylor never heard back from the pastor or director and found out through Instagram that one of the pastor's children had received the position. In later years, Taylor saw many friends be asked to join another leadership team and thought it would be nice to join as well since there were shared qualifications Taylor already possessed, however, Taylor was never asked to join. Inquiring with other volunteer leaders if they knew the reason why Taylor had not been asked to lead, frustration occurred from the ambiguous messages received and overlooked service to the ministry. This caused Taylor great hurt and led to them reconsidering attending the church.

## **Bailey**

Faithfully attending and participating in church functions, Bailey expressed interest in a leadership role with a church during college years. Many discussions with staff regarding Bailey's abilities and qualifications ultimately led to rejection of the position due to lack of qualification. Although sad for not receiving the position, Bailey understood the reasoning for the decision. However, Bailey did not feel like the church staff listened well to concerns or took the time to gracefully explain the reasoning for non-acceptance. Later, the church accepted a leader with fewer qualifications than Bailey had for the same position which caused great hurt because of the lack of consistency in the church's criteria for acquiring leaders and ultimately this led to Bailey's decision to leave the church.

## **Sam**

Although not actively involved in the church, Sam had participated in multiple events that a church ministry conducted, and desired to join their leadership team. Sam had experience with the team's specific focus for volunteer work and had many friends on the team. Sam believed it would be a great opportunity to give back, however, the application was denied through a generic email, and caused confused and hurt from the lack of personal communication. Additionally, the people who were chosen for the leadership team were a part of a core group of friends that appeared to have deep relationships with the church staff, and this influenced Sam's perception that favoritism toward other applicants was practiced. Sam occasionally returned to the church to show face and avoid being the focus for church gossip, however, in the end, Sam decided to leave the church altogether.

## **Kayden**

Passionate about church community, Kayden was actively involved in one of the church groups and attended multiple times a week. Kayden had many friends who were a part of leading others in the church, and the desire to be a part of the leadership group arose in Kayden. Inquiring about volunteering in leadership, Kayden was told by staff that consideration for the positions would be held soon, but Kayden never heard back from them. Recognizing the need to grow spiritual in some areas, Kayden took the time to initiate examining the self-life and making spiritual lifestyle changes. Over time, affirmation of character changes and growth was expressed to Kayden by other volunteer leaders in the ministry and gave the courage and confidence to inquire again about leadership. The church staff replied that to be a good leader Kayden needed to be a “servant leader” first and foremost. Kayden felt enormous hurt because, as acknowledged by others in the ministry, there was proof of being a servant leader, only the church staff did not recognize the growth achieved. Nevertheless, Kayden continued to participate in the ministry and overtime healed from the hurt of rejection although still believes that the process for acquiring volunteer leaders in that ministry should be changed.

## **Jordan**

Born and raised in a Christian church, Jordan actively attended church multiple times a week before the rejection experience. In high school, Jordan and a friend wanted to be a part of a leadership team, so they approached a staff member inquiring about an opportunity to join; the response was that they had already filled the positions. Although Jordan realizes, years after the experience, that this response was not an outright rejection, hurt was still felt by the experience at the time. After observing the process for



how church staff acquire volunteers, Jordan concluded that most of the best looking and engaging people were chosen and asked to be a part of the leadership team. Because of this, Jordan thought that others were more likeable, popular, and better people, which is why they received the leadership position and Jordan did not. Jordan eventually was invited to join the leadership team years later and this behavior from the church staff made Jordan realize that having a conversation and putting oneself on the staff member's radar can increase the odds for being asked into leadership.

### **Riley**

Actively attending church and participating in one of the church's ministries, Riley desired to be a group leader within the ministry. Knowing from other established volunteer leaders that pastor or church staff would personally ask congregant members in the ministry to lead, Riley had confidence that personal character traits showed the strong relationships with God and maturity necessary for leading out a group, however, Riley was never asked. After approaching a staff member expressing the desire to volunteer, the only thing that was shared was that the staff and others in the ministry already viewed Riley as a servant leader. Although Riley was not looking for titles or status, the refreshing support of community with other peer leaders was desired. Riley continued to attend the church and participate in the ministry; however, the rejection experience did influence the relationship Riley had with the church moving forward.

### **Logan**

Attending church multiple times per week, Logan was extremely active in church groups. Being involved as a volunteer on a leadership team, Logan was moving into a new ministry program within the church and desired to continue leading within the new

department. Logan thought that the position would carry over to the new program and did not realize that the new ministry required being asked into the volunteer leadership team. Logan assumed that with previous experience and being faithfully committed to the work of the church, acceptance would be simple. Unfortunately, Logan was not asked to join the leadership group, and this resulted in Logan being confused and questioning personal character and qualifications traits. Logan continued to attend the church and participate in the new ministry and moved on from the rejection experience.

### **Avery**

Although church contained many problems from Avery's perspective, importance for attending was still acknowledged. Avery was faithful to participate in church related activities and when leadership opportunities arose, Avery voiced the desire to participate in those roles. Avery had shown commitment to the church and thought there were areas leadership would provide opportunities for growth in the church. Never chosen for the leadership roles desired, Avery quickly shrugged it off. Avery had perceived that many of the people chosen for leadership were a part of a specific friend group that was hard to connect with but appeared very close with church staff. Avery thought that the staff members showed favoritism to this specific group of friends. Avery was disappointed with the churches procedural behaviors for acquiring volunteer leaders but experience little hurt. Avery stayed at the church until life circumstances quickly required Avery to move away.

## Results

### RQ1

Research question one asks three questions about the relationships between pastors, aspiring volunteers (AV), and established volunteer leaders (EVL): a) how do aspiring volunteers (AV) perceive their relationship with church staff to have affected acquiring volunteer leadership positions? b) how do aspiring volunteers (AV) perceive relationship between church staff and established volunteer leaders (EVL) to have affected acquiring volunteer leadership positions? c) How do aspiring volunteers (AV) perceive their relationship with established volunteer leaders (EVL) to have affected acquiring volunteer leadership positions?

As reviewed in the pre-analysis, pastors were most likely to personally invite young adult congregant members into a leadership team if they had a relationship with the AV. Pastors and church consultants explained that personal relationships increase the ability to judge a person's spiritual character and commitment to responsibilities, which were also described as two criteria for leading. Additionally, pastors and church consultants shared that volunteer leaders must have a Christlike character, showing that they are a servant leader before they can join as a leader with associated status. Most pastors and consultants emphasized the importance of affirming the attributes of good quality in a person's life, especially during tough conversations. Nevertheless, pastors and consultants reported that some young adults walk away from difficult conversation misunderstanding the importance of the discussion while most others take into consideration the words of the staff member and attempt to make changes in their personal lives.

With this brief overview of what pastors and church consultants reported, the following relational categories project young adults' perspective of how relationships influence acquiring volunteer leaders.

***RQ1a: Pastor-Aspiring Volunteer Relationships***

Although most pastors and church consultants underlined the importance of developing relationships with young adults who desire to volunteer, the experience of young adults did not appear to align with the pastors and consultants. Across the data, repeatedly, young adults described that they had a surface-level relationship by association with the pastor of the ministry, even though some had grown up in the church. One AV explained:

The pastor was there the entire formation of my young adult life. In all of my years, I did not have a true one on one conversation with the pastor until after I left the ministry. We had a short interaction but even then, that was in the middle of doing something else, working on something, not actually just sitting down and just talking. (Riley)

Another aspiring volunteer described having to go through an application and interview process, being asked questions that the pastors and directors already knew:

I grew up there. I had volunteered in every capacity, like underneath the people who were doing the interview for this. I knew them personally. It wasn't like they didn't know me. These are people that I've known for 10 years. (Taylor)

And another young adult mentioned:

Our relationships weren't bad with them [the pastor and director] but they also weren't super close where we did things all the time or we were in their group or something like that. (Avery)

And Kayden shared, "I wasn't very close with the leaders who had a lot of influence on whether or not you got hit." When asked if Bailey had relationships with the pastors and church staff before the rejection experience, Bailey answered: "Not really, I

don't think so. I think I just knew them as pastors. I never had a great relationship with them. We never really meshed well.”

Each of these responses indicate a connection with the pastor or director of the ministry who makes decisions regarding volunteer leadership. Only two young adults responded to the initial online survey that they had been attending the church three years or less before the rejection experience, which means that most of the volunteers had attended the church where they were rejected at least four years. Four of the volunteers reported having grown up and in at least one of the churches where they had experienced rejection (those who reported multiple instances of rejection may have experienced the rejection at different churches).

Sadly, many participants reported that they felt like the pastor did not like them or desire to get to know them:

I met with one of our elders, and I met with him a number of times, and one of my friends came and met with me and went out to breakfast with [the elder]. My friend said “I'd love to end up working for a church and try to get involved” and as soon as [the elder] heard that, [the elder] just started to talk to my friend about “Oh, you should get involved with this, you should do this, you should do that, and we have these options, this option we can get you here and plugged in there and plugged in.” So that was really hard because I was like “well I'm here too and I was the one who actually set up the meeting with you to try and find out if I could serve and just to get to know the church better and then my friend who came with me is the one now that you're talking to about everything, but I actually was the one who reached out.” (Avery)

Avery describes the focus of attention given by the elder to the friend simply because there was a desire for long-term church service even though Avery also had a desire to serve voluntarily within the church. Another instance, a participant said:

Other people recognized the work and the heart that I had for it [service] but not the people in charge. And it felt like it was from them [the staff members] not

paying attention and not trying to see and get to know me and so that prolonged the pain. Just compounded on itself over the years. (Riley)

This AV communicates that the hurt came from the church staff who did not spend enough time observing the character traits that made this volunteer so great.

Another instance, a participant explained church staff holding double standards is explained through the following:

One of the main leaders and I did not necessarily think very, similarly, we would buttheads a bit. Like, I didn't appreciate the tone taken with me oftentimes, and there was a thing where [the leader] would kind of expect a lot from you and tell you, you needed to be more mature, but then would also act like a child at times, and be really childish or immature themselves, but it kind of felt like a double standard. So that was hard. (Avery)

Sam added to this notion of double standards describing that EVLs were able to get away with behavior that Sam could not:

I probably would have looked like "oh she just doesn't want to work," but somebody else suggests it and it's like, "oh they just want to have fun or make it rewarding." So, I think it just depended on the person. (Sam)

Even when an AV did approach pastors the outcome was not beneficial. Bailey shared:

Some of the conversations we had about the [ministry], how [the pastor] responded to my desire to possibly lead in that ministry...none of those conversations went very well. They ended up, most of the time, being very emotionally driven conversations. I would get frustrated; they would get frustrated with me. So, it just ended up being very unfunctional and emotionally driven conversations. I never talked to [the pastors] after that and I haven't had a desire to. (Bailey)

Sadly, church staff were portrayed by AVs as childish and incapable of managing emotions. Bailey also shared the personal emotions associated with being pushed aside:

I don't exactly know one word for the emotion, but the feeling of putting in a lot of effort, as much effort as I possibly could into the ministry for a while and just being pushed aside. I was frustrated. I was frustrated with that. When those things

happen, a lot of times, my emotions just turn to shutting down and just being bitter. I'm just going to push that person away. I've had to work on that a lot. During that time, my emotions just became angry toward them, which wasn't good. (Bailey)

Logan reported "I never really talked to [the church staff] because they kind of intimidated me." Because pastors and church consultants indicate that befriending and getting to know a potential volunteer leader is important to discover their character qualities, when a pastor or church staff member does not take the time to acknowledge or turn their attention toward an AV, emotional pain may occur.

***RQ1b: Pastor-Established Volunteer Leader Relationships***

Although the lack of a relationship with pastors or church staff is a factor in the pain an AV experiences, much hurt comes from the AV's seeing pastors maintain a deeply bonded relationship with EVL. Most of the AVs described that the pastors or church staff would collaborate with EVL regarding who, in the ministry, could be asked to join the leadership team. One AV volunteer said that a friend who was on the leadership team told them after the rejection experience occurred that:

My friend is telling me how their meetings go for their leader meetings, and I guess they were just throwing out names that could potentially lead and then they are like, 'no'. It's all secondhand information though. (Taylor)

This process of throwing out names gave Taylor the hope that their own name would be tossed into the hat, thereby intensifying the hurt experienced when their name was not chosen. Kayden explained that:

That crew [of volunteer leaders] were the ones who had their [the pastor's] ears. While they took recommendations it was more based on that core group of people who they would then say, "okay, out of these, we like these presented, these are maybes," and then they could say, "yay" your name. (Kayden)

Additionally, participants described an inconsistency when requesting information about a potential volunteer. On AV described:

And then just the idea that the leaders were the spiritual authorities, but they were people that I mentored. Like I mentored [a leader] and I knew their theology before they led, but the leadership didn't ask me. But when I was suggested to be a leader, the leadership would be heavily involved. (Riley)

Riley expects church staff to be consistent in their standards. If a standard is to ask people who know the AV about their character and responsibility traits, then why did they not ask Riley about the leader who was mentored by Riley? This discrepancy created a level of mistrust and lack of respect from Riley to the pastor and church staff.

Increasing the depth of hurt for Riley was that church staff appeared to go the extra mile asking about Riley's character when considering leadership, which indicated to Riley that personality traits were questionable or that Riley lacked godly character in the eyes of church staff.

Additionally, one AV mentioned during the interview that pastors and church staff have a deeper bond with EVLs. This AV also shared:

They [the pastors and church staff] let them [EVLs] get away with certain things. I remember those feelings of, "Oh, that's great, they were able to do that, but I can't," type of thing. I know a lot of them [EVLs] still talk to those certain leaders. Like when we would go on mission trips, we weren't supposed to go out and do other things but they [EVLs] would convince them [pastors and church staff] to take us to fun places even though we were supposed to be there to do service not to get ice cream.

In the end, participants understood that the church staff members had the final say about who joined leadership. Jordan explained, "In the end, the director was in charge of who made the final decision." And Kayden mentioned that the pastor in the end "had



final yay or nay.” However, AV understood that final-say decision makers were heavily influenced by the recommendations provided by EVL.

***RQ1c: Aspiring Volunteer-Established Volunteer Leader Relationships***

As described, pastors desire a relationship with potential volunteer leaders to vet their character, and if they are unable to have a personal relationship, they will go to EVL to ask their opinion on potential leaders. It appears that pastors show a large respect toward the word of a volunteer leader and sadly do not show the same attention to AVs. With these relational dynamics, AVs found themselves in uncomfortable situations with other EVLs.

Many participants described being friends with the current volunteer leaders (although not always having deep friendships). Kayden said, “I was decently good friends with most of them [EVL]. I was seasoned friends with them, but I don’t ever think that I was viewed as someone of leadership quality or potential.” Kayden acknowledges that long-term friendships do not always correlate with deep friendship or even mean that someone will put in a good word. Sam also mentioned having friends on the leadership team “I had some friends in there and they really loved the program. I was familiar with a lot of people in that group, and I thought, alright finally I’m going to apply to get into it.” And Avery likewise explained “I mean I was never super close with any of the group. I mean we were friends for sure, but I didn't hang out with them all the time. We didn't do stuff all the time.”

Even though participants were friends with EVL, they did not always have the best interactions or closest connections with them, on AV said, “I was friends with them,

I went to school with them. There was a level of connection, but there was also that same stiff arm” (Taylor).

Kayden mentioned:

I mostly kept [one leader] at an arms distance. Just because there wasn't any real interest anyway of having any sort of friendship, it was just kind of like either I pick you and you're a favorite or your nothing, I guess, it's almost like they have to approach you to be friends. You can't try and put the bridge out yourself. (Kayden)

Another participant explained:

I knew [one leader] for four years and I still have pretty shallow conversations with them. Same with [another leader]. It was hard to build real relationships with the leaders if all I saw them was at church or in church settings where they were leaders. And that was kind of any time. (Riley)

Each of these participants indicate having a connection with the EVL without experiencing much depth of the relationship. Although one AV did describe having a deep relationship with one of the EVLs, they also described that the leader was “just trying to do what was being modeled,” and followed rules that caused the EVL to exclude the AV participant from certain activities, thereby causing the AV to feel hurt.

Ultimately, relationships do matter when it comes to acquiring a volunteer position within an Evangelical Christian church. From the young adult's perspective, it appears that pastors have a deep relationship with EVLs and those that they ask into leadership, while almost all of the AVs explained a lack of relationship with the pastor or church staff members, as well as some of the EVLs. Additionally, because of the pastor's depth of relationship with EVLs, pastors trust and ask for recommendations from the EVLs. When an AV explained their friendship with an EVL, there was a lack of connection in most cases. Overall, relationships matter and pastors as well as young

adults alike explain the importance and impact of deep relationships within church settings.

## **RQ2**

The second research question asks: what elements of rejection are related to the experience of hurt for aspiring volunteers within Protestant Christian churches? Analysis indicates that hurt is closely related to the depth of relationships between pastors and AVs. Before analyzing AV data for themes, it was important to determine if, indeed, AVs experienced hurt from rejection within the church. Figure 1 shows how young adult participants' ratings of how hurtful a rejection experience was on a 9-point Likert-type scale during the initial online survey. This scale was inspired by Vangelisti and Crumley's 1998 study regarding reactions to hurtful messages. Vangelisti and Crumley had asked participants to share their hurtful experiences of hurt and then rate on a 9-point Likert-type scale how hurtful the experience was and the impact it had on their relationships. Similarly, the current research study asked AV participants to rate how hurtful the experience was after describing their experience. As it appears, the lowest rating of hurt occurred at a four, while the highest pain rating was a max of nine, indicating that the experience was a great burden to the participant.

It is clear that young adults, in fact, experience hurt from rejection within the church. Thematic analysis produced three main themes across the data set related to why young adults feel hurt from non-acceptance into leadership positions within Evangelical churches. These themes consist of favoritism, ambiguity and inconsistency, and gaslighting and lack of personal responsibility.

**Figure 1**

*Graph of 9-point Likert-type scale measuring hurt in young adult participant.*

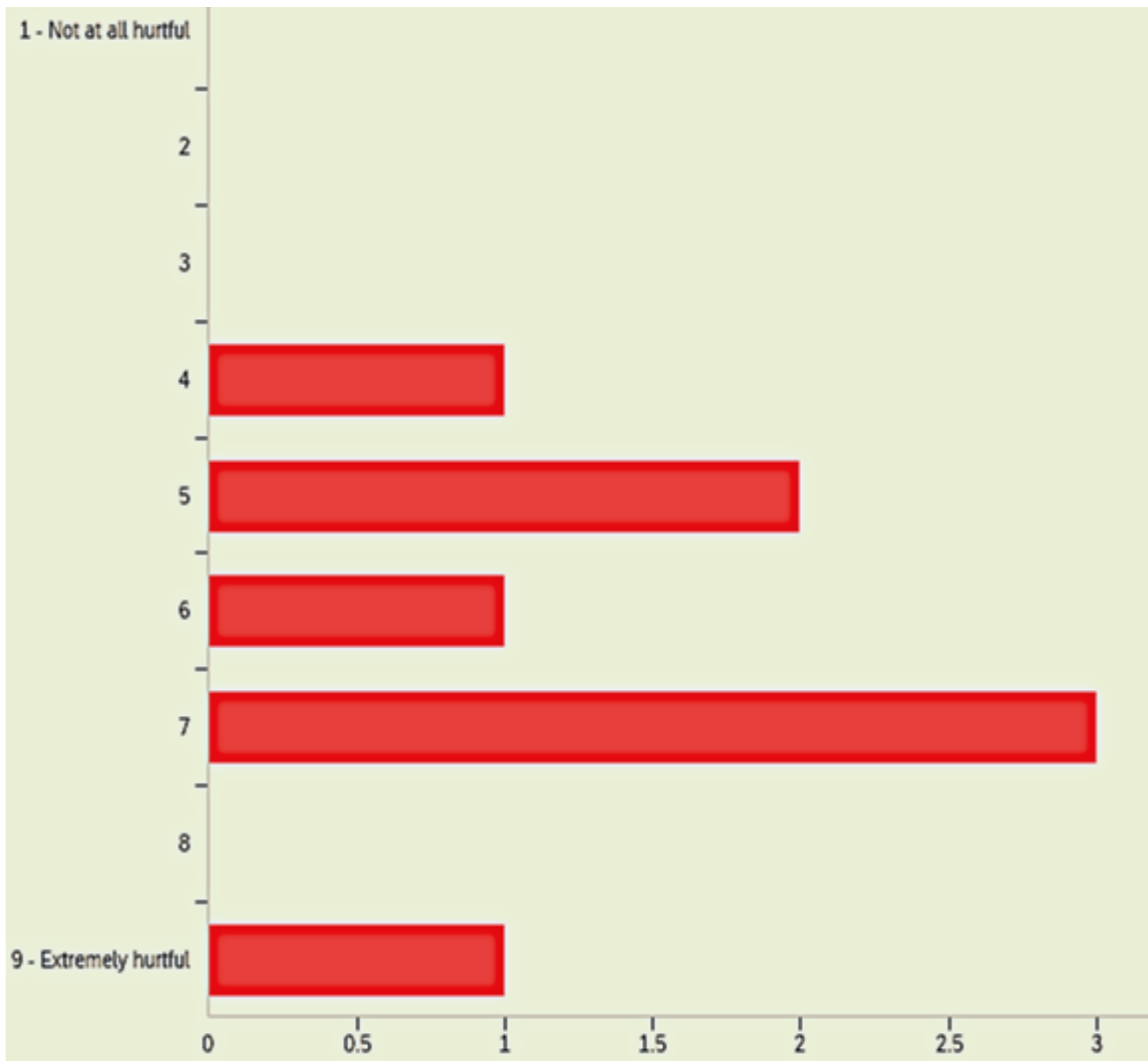


Figure 1 shows the rating of pain on the left-hand-side while the bottom scale represents the number of people.

***Favoritism***

Many participant responses that represented being hurt come from comments about being excluded, not fitting in, or being stiff armed. As mentioned, relationships

matter and pastors as well as AVs recognized the act of inviting or choosing a volunteer to become a leader. This process of hand-picking can aid pastors to familiarize themselves with character traits of AVs, however, it can also be very painful for the AV.

Most AVs indicated feelings of being less popular than other in the ministry group. Logan reported “They [the EVLs] just seem like the popular [people], even though I became friends with some of them.” Jordan described the desire to be like the popular people:

A good, popular, cool person in high school and so some of the people who were on that [leadership] team were the good looking ones, that loved Jesus, the ones who loved serving and were always in the spotlight, who were always called on because they were good Christians, and cute Christians, and well put together Christians and so I just felt like it was more of a popularity thing. (Jordan)

Sam also explained, “I feel like... you feel dejected a little bit because it almost feels like a popularity contest, it almost makes- you can’t take it personal but when you’re [young], you take everything personal.” It was a common thread across the data that popular people were seemingly chosen for leadership positions. However, nobody who was interviewed described being a part of the popular group, only that there was an identifiable popular group. Taylor mentioned:

It [the church group] was clicky, so there were like the clickable girls that were top tier popular and then there was everybody else... But there was also that same stiff arm, like “You can be here but we’re not really going to ask you to hang out, ask you to join things.” (Taylor)

As Taylor shows, VAs were friends at a base level with the popular crowd of leaders, but they never felt fully welcomed or accepted as part of the social group.

When asked if the staff members did anything to change the culture of the group, Taylor replied, “I don’t think they ever discouraged it. I don’t think they prompted it, but

there was definitely... you can see deeper relationships [between them and EVL] and then I was like, ‘Oh, what’s the issue with me?’”

Bailey described that church staff said outright, “we don't want you to apply, we are going to get somebody else no matter what.” Bailey went on to say, “I don't think, just with their [church staff] personalities, it was handled very gracefully. It was just hurtful.”

It was evident to Bailey that the church staff desired somebody else and Bailey was not what they were looking for. Additionally, another AV described the experience of not being accepted into a leadership role and observing the exclusivity of the leaders, saying:

It still felt like a lot of the people who are on there were sometimes those who are the popular Christian kids. Oftentimes, some of them were really deep thinkers but also kind of felt shallow. And some weren't willing to be friends with the people who are out smoking and drinking. They're like, “Oh no, they aren't” – not worthy of being friends with but – they're like, “I wouldn't be friends with someone who would do something like that” and I was. I was someone who is good friends with a lot of people who were non-believers and who were believers and all the above. (Avery)

Avery recognized an exclusivity to be a part of the leadership group. Additionally, Sam thought that rejection occurred because the popular people were chosen, and Sam did not associate with being popular. Sam shared:

I didn't get in, but I think a lot of it was favoritism because a lot of those kids were very familiar with the leader, and I was a newcomer. So even though I had [experience] with the same people there was just something missing, I guess that I didn't have.

Most of the AV participants observed that one must be deemed a “popular,” or “favorite” by church staff to join a leadership team and once a part of leadership, a person was a part of the in-group. Although not explicitly stated, each participant showed a

change in demeanor when they addressed the topic of favoritism. Most participants' voices became quieter almost out of a sense of embarrassment to talk about the subject and then grew into sarcasm when they detailed what was meant by popular. One participant physically shrank down into their seat, making themselves smaller which emphasized the point that they felt small from being excluded from the popular group of people. It appeared that the participants went from remembering an experience, to feeling the past experience of exclusion. Experiencing being an outcast is never easy, still recalling one's past days of being outside of the favorite group is likewise a challenging task.

Furthermore, perception of exclusivity and choosing the most popular or favorite people in a ministry to be leaders, was intensified when the chosen person for a job was kept secret. Young adults added that the process of finding out someone else had become a leader was kept secret and appeared to be purposefully hidden from other AVs. Kayden explained that after requesting to be on leadership:

Nothing was said after that either way, it was just kind of an understanding that if you didn't get talked to about it, that it wasn't you. And you would find out that this person got chosen or selected or like they really liked this person over here. And it was like, it happens, but we don't talk about it type of thing. That was a lot of the way that, at least early on, it had operated of keeping everything a secret until you absolutely needed to know.

Taylor described similarly, "And then they [the pastor or director] would secretly ask so and so to lead, or friends to lead, and it's like this secretive, close door, back room, conversation thing that has to happen." Taylor went on to describe:

It was a very vague process to me, or like secretive to me, of like "well we just elect these leaders and we come ask you and it's like this great honor of like well look at how wonderful you've been doing in the church, we'd love to have you join us as a leader" and it was this "ahhhh" moment and they made it seem like

that because that was their process, it was very closed door so I didn't know a lot of the details until I was there for a while.

AV participants described that the process of leadership selection appeared to be made into a grand action that purposefully communicated the chosen leader to be special and set a part as higher ranking than everybody else in the congregation. One participant even described, after expressing thoughtful interest in the position, that they felt like pastors compared them to past volunteers:

I thought that I was doing, you know, an at least an okay job. And I told them [church staff] that I wanted to apply [for a leadership position]. I told them, I know the ministry, I know I all these people. Would it be something that I could grow into? Can I be taught? I thought that ministry was something that I would want to do, I didn't know for sure though. So, I communicated that with them. [Eventually] I would start having conversations with them [church staff] saying "this is something I want to do." But I think they based me off of their past leaders. (Bailey)

Appearing to carefully formulate descriptions so as not to defame another, Bailey did not share much about the pastor's perceived intentions of comparison. Nevertheless, Bailey communicated that pastors appeared to overlook Bailey's good qualities and request to learn in a leadership position.

AVs communicated that leadership was a selective process and appeared to be a great honor bestowed upon a person. Aspiring volunteers felt different or unworthy of leading others in ministry due to being unaccepted into the group. The pain induced from viewing ministry as a popularity contest influenced AVs responses to the perceived rejection, as will be described in the following research questions' analysis.

### ***Ambiguity and Inconsistency***

Participants indicated that aspiring to participate in leadership and yet, perceiving that being able to join a leadership team is primarily based on popularity is rather



demoralizing, especially when reasons for not being chosen are unclear. Logan shared “The feeling of being rejected is never fun and not knowing the reason either. It made me respect the [church staff member] less.” One young adult AV highlighted ambiguity in the process as they explained “I was doing all, what I thought were the right things, pursuing whatever I thought they wanted” (Taylor). Another aspiring volunteer described “I didn’t come from a drinking and partying background. I wasn’t dating around and sleeping with people. So, I would think about it, and I was like, ‘maybe they don’t like me’” (Riley).

Another AV shared that the people who were chosen for leadership indicated a kind of hypocrisy:

I kind of have this personality now where it is what it is, not everything is going to go toward you. But at the same time, some of the people I knew in there weren’t the most upstanding citizens. It’s either the popularity club or almost hypocritical sometimes. I’ve noticed that sometimes the worst people I’ve known go to church on Sunday’s. So, it almost feels like, hypocritical. There were certainly double standards. (Sam)

These aspiring volunteers watched what other leaders were doing and how they were living their lives and they tried to copy their behavior. However, young adults reported being confused when hearing non-concrete messaging from church staff such as “God hasn’t highlighted you” (Kayden) or “We’re going to seek the Lord in it too, there was a lot of we’re just seeking the Lord, we sought the Lord and it’s just not what He wants” (Taylor). These young adults explained their felt confusion and frustrated over the ambiguous and vague language used to describe why they were not chosen for leadership.

Kayden shared with a puzzled look, “so even if it’s clearly and brazenly in front of you that someone would be a good addition to the team, for whatever gifts and skills that

they bring, if the Lord hasn't highlighted you, then you weren't it?" And Taylor questioned what a call from God sounded like:

This is the first time I've ever talked to God actually. I did not have an understanding of what seeking the Lord meant at first because when I first started going there, I had no back-and-forth relationship with God, you could call it. There was no concept of like 'oh you can actually talk to God and feel good about an answer.' I still sometimes don't fully understand when people will say, 'well the Lord said no to me' and I'm like, 'did you audibly hear the word no? What does that look like for you?' Like the whole talking to God concept is still very abstract. But I do understand praying about something and having a peace about something and not having a sense of peace about something. I understand that concept within my relationship with God and I think that is very real of like, the Lord will give you peace about things and not give you peace about things. He will open doors and close doors. But when they were like, "we're going to pray about it and ask God and it will be yes or no," I'm like, "okay, what? You're going to...what?" (Taylor)

Words and phrasing such as "calling," "highlighting," or "seeking the Lord" were questionable to AVs because they did not have a concrete understanding of what those words meant. So, in aspiring to participate in leadership, AVs attempted to do their best to live a life that would please God and, therefore, be "highlighted" or "called" into a leadership position.

Not only did the ambiguous phrasing cause confusion and hurt in AVs but simply not being placed into a leadership position when the pastors and church staff were communicating that spots needed to be filled caused AVs to perceive an inconsistency:

I think that was the biggest feelings, like "you're not allowing me to be a part of something good because obviously you need people like that and not everybody is like that." When you don't accept one person, who is really willing to put in that work then you're kind of missing out on that opportunity. (Sam)

When AVs were confident enough to approach a pastor or staff member and they received a vague response, subject to interpretation, they were hurt by the ambiguity of messaging and the inconsistency of church staff regarding clear criteria.

### *Gaslighting and Lack of Personal Responsibility*

Beyond trying to figure out what pastors and church staff desire in a volunteer, how to become that, and feeling like they have failed, a third way AVs reported feeling hurt was when responses from pastors and church staff pointed at character errors without making the AV feel like they (the church staff) really care about them (an AV) as a person. Kayden pointed out:

Some of my concerns [regarding the rejection] remain unknown. It was almost like, “well you’re... you just have too much pride, you’re just being insubordinate and challenging.” And it was all very gaslighty and kind of like “it’s all in your head” type of situation, which was not fun.

Kayden recognized that there were areas for spiritual growth in life, but the way that the pastor described the faults seen in Kayden caused Kayden to feel degraded and shocked.

Other AVs described that the responses from pastors regarding their volunteer requests were returned with excuses, such as:

I was told that I was a leader in the group, that people looked up to me, but I had to do all the work without the benefits of the support, without the fun retreats, without the actual recognition and like “Thanks for being a leader and serving.” So, I had brought it up to the pastor and their response was that I was an unofficial leader. (Riley)

Another AV described that the pastors would share openly, “If you want to be a leader in this then be a leader in other things, serve in other areas” (Taylor) but this AV already was leading in other church ministries. Another AV explained during church events “I got repeatedly reprimanded for reaching out to certain [EVLs] even though they were the ones available. So weird. And not to say anything bad of them, but that was just

an odd practice” (Kayden). These AV explained that pastors and church staff would place the issue of non-acceptance onto the AV for perceived illegitimate reasons.

After Kayden experienced the first conversation with the pastor who described Kayden as insubordinate and challenging, Kayden had the courage to approach the leader for a second time to share about the hurt that was felt over the years. Kayden shared the experience:

It still felt a little gaslighty because they were like, “maybe you're just not satisfied in Jesus enough and I just want to make sure that you are” kind of a thing which is good to have that concern, but it's kind of beating the dead horse if you will. Like, what are you trying to say here?

Not only did Kayden bravely request to volunteer a first time, but when approached with areas of growth in life, Kayden stayed at the church, worked through personal areas, matured in relationship with God, and had the self-assurance to approach the pastor again a second time. Sadly, the pastor's response was similar the second time around.

Unfortunately, young adult AVs not only reported perceived gas lighting, but also that of pastor's lack of personal responsibility to shepherd their flock and lead by example themselves. Young adult participants reported behaviors of pastors and church staff participating in gossip and using participants for service without checking in on their personal wellbeing.

Kayden reported:

Rumors were spread about you really easily. So, if I said, “I'm not sure I agree with that,” then automatically it would spread throughout the leadership that “this person doesn't believe this.” And you could tell, as it rippled out, what kinds of conversations they would have with you?... Conversations were privileged to the general group, but as soon as you tack on the title “leader” lips just go ‘a smacking, unless you were a part of the core – what they called the core group at

the time, which was like weekly attendance, those who were very invested in church and in all the events – you would be not the wiser. Fun, isn't it? But if you were one of those super core people, then you have a sort of extra status.  
(Kayden)

As young adults were being told to lead by example through service, Kayden witnessed EVLs and pastors alike participating in behavior that directly went against core principles of the Christian faith. This lack of personal responsibility for leaders to practice what they preach enhanced the hurt felt by Kayden.

Sam added to the lack of personal responsibility in pastors and church staff saying, “I feel like churches can be centers for gossip so if you don’t show up it can be like, ‘what happened?’” Sam explains in the interview that the rejection to lead came through a generic email that lacked any sense of personal connection. Sam shared:

It’s almost your typical acceptance or denial letter when you apply for college or something like, “you haven’t been admitted” it didn’t really explain why. That’s why I was kind of left reading from it. It was just like, something you could set up as a template and just fire off type of a thing. It wasn’t personable or anything.  
(Sam)

Another AV shared:

Before [the pastor] told me the “honorary leadership thing,” I had already been put in those [service] situations without being named [a leader]. So, I was like, “well, if I’m already in these situations, this is hard, and I want the support and the things that come with it, not just the bad and the hard things. I was asked to [help a congregant member] who had, I think, a fairly severe mental illness. And it was really, really hard, and they [the pastor] knew it was going to be hard, which is why they asked me because they thought I was going to be a good fit. Being treated... When they pick and choose to treat me like a leader... (Riley)

Riley expressed a sort of sadness recalling the memory of working hard to serve the church and the people within the church, yet being overlooked when it came to Riley’s own personal need for support. Overlooking AVs despite the great effort they put

forth to serve the church, enhances the pain of rejection from obtaining the status of leader and the associated community support.

### **RQ3**

The previous analysis shows evidence that young adults have the potential to be hurt deeply by rejection experiences within the Evangelical church, especially when muddled by relationships with staff and EVLs. Research question three asks: How do young adults within Protestant Christian churches respond when they have been hurt by perceived rejection messages regarding their volunteer request? Analysis produced two supra-categories: immediate responses and changed response. Immediate responses included three themes: negative self-talk, avoidance, and continued participation in ministry activities. Changed response was constituted of two themes: conversational push back and acceptance through understanding.

#### ***Immediate Responses***

**Negative Self-Talk.** Sadly, many of the young adult participants indicated an emotional pain that caused them to question their own abilities and self-esteem. Taylor mentioned multiple times that the rejection experience “re-validated some of those feelings of like, ‘Well you never really fit in here, you never really were *in* here,’” Or, “Why am I not good enough? ... I’m just not good enough to do whatever position it is that I desired,” and again, “It’s all terrible and all hurtful.” Jordan re-iterated this idea of non-acceptance validating pre-existing negative thoughts:

I’m the really bubbly, annoying, obnoxious, person who doesn’t have maturity, the person that does not belong to a group.... I was shoved to the side, “No we can’t care about Jordan being in this group, it’s just not something important to think about these things” and so therefore it was just like I was hurt because it

made it true in my head, like the thoughts that I had, you just made true and so that was hurtful because I did struggle with that [negative thoughts]. (Jordan)

Sam also shared:

Sometimes you aren't a right fit but to them it's like...wow, I'm trying to do all of these great things and they don't want you. And it's like, "why? What did I do that was so bad, I guess?" But that's not always the case either.

These examples demonstrate that rejection from leading enhanced the idea already in participants minds' that they were not good enough to be a part of the leadership group. The rejection affirmed to them that they were different from those who lead, that they did not fit such an elite group membership.

For a handful of AV participants, the hurt caused by the rejection increased the negative self-talk in their own mind and prolonged the feelings of hurt. For others, the hurt was less personal or severe. Sam explained, "it never feels good to be rejected necessarily. It's more, 'I'm trying to do good works, but you don't want that extra help.'" Avery shared that an indifference to the experience of rejection was felt and added that, "It was definitely something that impacted me, but it wasn't traumatizing or anything." Nevertheless, hurt was present at some level in every young adult who was interviewed. Bailey also shared, "I felt like I was just unqualified for the job, but I was like, I will just try to do the best I can with this and maybe, maybe we'll see," indicating a sense of questioning toward personal abilities yet not letting the thoughts affect pursuit of the goal to lead.

As discovered through the data, AVs tend to avoid conflict with church staff and pastors, nevertheless, they do not seem to avoid conflicting thoughts within their mind. Self-deprecation refers to the process of belittling oneself, self-criticizing with rigor, and

de-valuing one's self worth. Throughout the data, AVs reported responding to rejection or non-acceptance through self-deprecating thoughts. Taylor expressed during the interview, "I don't want all of my negative thoughts about myself to be validated. So, I was like, 'I'm not spiritual enough or I'm not whatever enough to be in this position.'

Taylor later shared:

From my understanding you needed to be involved, you needed to be serving somewhere else in the church, you needed to have a level of meekness, you needed to, I don't know, it was like, you needed to do enough where it was like, "okay you're solid, we notice you but don't be cocky, don't have...but also be interesting." You know, fit the mold. But I wasn't the mold.

Ultimately, Taylor exemplifies the negative self-talk going on in one's mind and the stages of battling it against the decisions of church leaders. Riley shared a similar experience when considering the reason for not being chosen for leadership. Riley explained:

Maybe they don't like me. I think was like what it got down to. Maybe they just don't like me. And that sucks that that was- instead of my spiritual knowledge or character, just the fact that they don't know me, or they don't like me was why I was not chosen.

The negative self-talk that young adults experience in times of rejection only encourages feelings of negativity. "I was disappointed, I was bummed," one volunteer said (Taylor). The same participant later described, "I felt blindsided that they would just hire somebody and just move on without ever calling me. It was really rude" (Taylor).

Many volunteers expressed negative self-talk in relation to strong emotional responses. One volunteer described experiencing an emotional response:

[I felt] probably anger and disappointment. Anger is one of the easiest emotions for me to feel, so it was probably mostly anger, and then quickly followed by disappointment and then probably anger again. (Riley)



Other participants described frustration, sadness, and bitterness. Whatever the emotions experienced, young adults often battle with their emotional responses to challenging situations.

**Avoidance.** Negative self-talk usually led an AV to avoid addressing the rejection situation with an authority figure in the church to help resolve their negative feelings. Most participants were raised in church and were a part, to various degrees, of social circle within the church. This made it difficult for participants to quit church or quit participating in church-related activities. As such, avoidance was identified as a theme regarding AV behavior, or lack thereof, toward the problem of being rejected rather than the ministry itself. Primarily, this theme indicated that participants were unwilling to have tough conversations with pastors and staff members.

Taylor explained that after having been neglected by the church leaders regarding an answer of acceptance or rejection for a leadership position, a conversation was had with family members and the following was spoken of:

I'm just going to let it go, you know, it wasn't meant to be, it's okay, it wasn't malicious, I didn't have this beef that we needed to iron out, it was just not for me, my family member was probably like, "for the better"... So, I didn't reach out. (Taylor)

Part of Taylor's response of not pursuing any conversation or dialogue to understand more clearly the reason for non-acceptance seemed to come from past experiences of having no follow up from the pastor. However, there also seemed to be a lack of desire, or a disconnect from the desire to receive feedback. This example shows active avoidance.

Avery conveyed a similar behavior and attitude sharing, “They [the pastor and church staff] didn't try and address that [favoritism] so because we saw other areas that was in there, we knew that that happened throughout most everything else too.” When asked if Avery inquired further regarding the non-acceptance, the response was, “Not that I remember.” However, Avery went on to say, “I don't think it was ever explained like, ‘Yeah, but we also want to give some [others] an opportunity to lead to.’ and so, I don't think there was any of that communication.” Interestingly, it appears that Avery desired an explanation or reasoning for the decision that was made, however was not willing to pursue or initiate the conversation, again, showing lack of action or behavior.

Another example of the avoiding pursuing further conversation was illustrated when Jordan explained, “I just thought, ‘Nothing is going to happen,’ and I just moved on.... I think it just was what it was, and I moved on from there.” Interesting that Jordan also described the experience of hurt as over a five on the Likert-type scale. Jordan did not desire to pursue a conversation to learn more about the reason for non-acceptance of a leadership position.

Riley likewise shared that pursuit of a conversation with the church staff was not had until Riley was no longer a part of the ministry group. Riley shared:

I think through the whole thing [rejection experience], I didn't want to ruin my chances of being an official leader, because I was like, “Maybe next semester, maybe next year.” So, until I got out of the ministry, I didn't have a conversation with the pastor about the actual rejection part.

Although Riley's psychological strategy for being asked to lead was highly involved, Riley did not initiate a one-on-one, sit-down conversation during the years

Riley participated in the ministry. Bailey further reflected upon the lack of conversations had with church staff before leaving the church. Bailey shared:

I got really bitter and that is one of the things that I really regret, was how I left the church, I left really bitter. I left without having a lot of conversations with people about why I was leaving and that's one thing, for sure, I regret. (Bailey)

Sadly, others described a sense of fear or uselessness in approaching church staff members to discuss the difficulties in ministries. Taylor shared:

Honestly, I probably could have walked up to [the pastor] and asked for it [leadership]. But low key I was scared of the pastor. So, I was like, "I don't want all of my negative thoughts about myself to be validated." (Taylor)

When followed up with the question of "Why?" Taylor said:

The pastor is just really intense and kind of off putting sometimes. Like one of those people that you don't really know where you stand when you enter a conversation with them. I feel like I'm rather stable, like I give off a similar – unless I'm having a really bad day – I'm pretty stable when I'm going to enter a conversation with you. You're going to get a smile and it's going to be pleasant. Half the time I didn't feel like the pastor was listening to me as I talked. (Taylor)

Unfortunately, this unwelcoming and unsupportive pastor made Taylor feel an incredible amount of intimidation and discomfort which affected the relationship Taylor had with church. Taylor describes interacting with the pastor saying:

It was just super off putting as a 19-year-old who is insecure about myself and they [the pastor] is like a full grown adult. So, there wasn't a level of trust there to go and be like, "I don't understand this about the church" and feel safe having the conversation and walking away from it like, without it feeling attacking. Also, 19, not brave at all. I've grown a lot. I can ask hard questions like that and have hard conversations, but back then, total avoidance, I could not have a hard conversation. Eventually watching my friends go into conversations like that and coming back fully defeated, I was like, "okay I never need to have a conversation with you." (Taylor)

And Taylor is not the only one who experienced this type of interaction with church staff members. Riley shared that the relationship shared with the ministry director

was “just a one-sided relationship and then [I was] just being completely overlooked.” Later Riley described that “Sometimes we were friends but sometimes it was weird. And it was all very surface level and cold, not cold, but kind of cold, even though the pastor knew me the entire formation of my young adult life.” Riley opened up further saying, “I think that through the rejection and the lack of conversations, it became pretty clear that they [the director of the ministry] didn’t know me and didn’t have intentions of getting to know me.”

Similarly, Bailey communicated that the few conversations with staff members resulted in shutting down which led to avoiding communication entirely. Bailey said, “I naturally get frustrated and in the moment, I will just shut down. I was just frustrated and kind of snappy. I was closed off and just not communicating.”

From the AV participant perspective, developing a relationship with staff members was a clear way to acquire a leadership position, however, for all of the AV young adult participants, they struggled to build any kind of meaningful relationship with staff members and furthermore lost a lot of respect for them. Avery, expressing indifference rather than hurt, shared a lack of willingness to approach the pastor because of the response assumed to be received.

It's kind of like, in some regards we all knew, and it was pretty common to talk about. [The pastor] always had favorites and if you weren't one of the favorites, you wouldn't get chosen for leadership things. But I think I was just... I knew enough people and was connected enough in our ministry, and I didn't really have to ask questions, I knew the answers already.

Ultimately, even those who express slight hurt from the circumstance, show avoidance toward conversing with church ministry staff.

**Continued Participation in Ministry Activities.** It might be thought that an AV would feel uncomfortable attending church ministries and remaining in the same environment as the church staff that sent the perceived rejection message. However, contrary to this notion, many of the AV reported continued participation in church ministry activities despite feeling hurt by non-acceptance into a leadership position and feeling uncomfortable engaging in conversation with church staff.

One AV shared:

I know myself, I don't remember exactly, but I know myself well enough that, probably the next couple of events that happened I wished that I could have been a part of [leadership], also while I might have wished that I could have been a part of it, those aren't the feelings that I remember today. So, looking back, it didn't play enough of a part on me where it's like, "Oh I hated that year, I wanted to be a part of every single thing that they did, why didn't I get to be a part of it?" I'm sure, I probably wished it a couple of different times, but I think overall...I'm a social butterfly so I will continue to be at the social events either way. (Jordan)

The social benefits of being involved in the ministry and keeping up with community outweighed the negative feelings from rejection that would have kept this AV away from the ministry entirely.

One AV described the need to participate in activities to show proof of commitment to the church ministry:

At least for a little bit there was over-compensation. Like I need to show them that I'm everywhere, that I'm showing up to things and that I am faithful to this church, that I am dedicated, that I am good at serving, that I am a good Christian because I show up and I do these things. At the time I wasn't running myself ragged – I wouldn't say I was running myself ragged for these things – but definitely trying to increase my motivation to show up for things, even though I didn't feel like they wanted me to be a part of it. (Riley)

Riley felt the need to become more involved within the church after the rejection experience so as to prove the worth and responsibility. Participating in activities became

one way that Riley responded to the rejection, although the response of becoming more involved may have also increased the amount of hurt felt due to the church staff overlooking the hard work Riley performed.

Another AV described the satisfaction with any service position which is why the hurt was less painful and engaged participation continued:

I'm not someone who needs to be another limelight or anything. I like having opportunities to show what I'm capable of so if a leadership position that's volunteer based and I'm not like getting paid for anything...it's like I'm fine with just helping. (Avery)

Some AV participants did not outright say that they continued to participate in the ministry but explained the phasing out process that indicated they were in the ministry for a period before leaving. Taylor explained:

I feel like the Lord has put this desire on my heart and so I'm questioning what they are saying about faith and their relationship with God and then looking at their processes for missions and [other ministry opportunities] and stuff like that and just being like, "this doesn't seem like God's heart for things. This doesn't seem like a process that is going to be good or beneficial." So, it eventually led to this emotional separation and then like friendships fizzled out that I thought were solid. And then I stopped going there. And the world shut down for covid. So nice easy separation. (Taylor)

Before Taylor left the church there was a period of time where pursuit to become a leader kept Taylor involved in the ministry. Taylor and others had experiences of non-acceptance that they perceived as rejection which meant that some AV continued to participate in church activities until they aged out or life circumstances moved them away from being eligible to participate in the ministry.

Although five of the eight participants reported leaving the church where they experienced rejection, none of the AVs said that they moved away from the church specifically because of the rejection. Rather, the experience of rejection only added to a

list of reasons why the church was not beneficial for their spiritual needs. Most of those who did end up leaving the church where they encountered perceived rejection did so after continuing to be involved in the ministry. Over time the AVs recognized that they would not be asked into leadership and moved on from desiring to lead in the ministry group.

### ***Changed Response***

All of the young adult participants in this study reported that the rejection experienced occurred two or more years in the past. Because of the amount of time that has passed for participants to reflect on their experience, during the interview questions were asked if their perspective has changed since the rejection experience occurred. Within the data two themes were communicated by aspiring volunteer participants regarding how their responses changed: conversational push back and acceptance through understanding.

**Conversational Push Back.** In a few instances, AVs described that they had returned to the pastor they interacted with during the perceived rejection experience and reported initiating a conversation expressing the hurt that was felt. In one instance the conversation was beneficial to the AV. Kayden described that after hearing excuses from the pastor for many years, a conversation was initiated by Kayden to address the underlying issue that the pastor was not shepherding to produce the desired results in Kayden:

The excuse that was made for a long time was, “well, you just haven't developed enough.” I finally got really tired of it and shot back “well, where was the time that you took to help me develop?” And, and they were like, “well, we suggested that you like lead in [this capacity].” And I was like, “no, no. Where was the time that *you* invested to develop me?” And we had a conversation about that. I've

actually had a couple of conversations with [the pastor] and they were like, “I am so sorry.” In our most recent conversation [the pastor] really wanted to hear my whole experience basically since I started attending. It was like a realization that I had been treated poorly. (Kayden)

Kayden went on to describe to the pastor how it had felt through the experience of perceived rejection, saying:

I said, it's like being invited, but not included. To where it's like, say a good friend of yours, or a good friend of someone that you're talking to, comes up to them and is like, “dude, we're going to have this great party,” you know this person too, you are generally friendly with them, maybe you are even somewhat of good friends, but then they are like, “dude, there's this really good party you [the friend] have to come, you have to be there” and then they turn to you say, “oh yeah, you can come too.” It's like that pity invite. Or like, “I guess it's not going to be really bad if we have one more person, but I'm not really interested in him. Like I don't have to have you, you can just be there.” (Kayden)

Kayden explained that this picture of being invited but not included was received very well by the pastor and repentance on the side of the pastor occurred. Kayden went on to explain that the relationship with the pastor is developing through frequent conversations. As cathartic as this story is, it took many years before the relationship between Kayden and the pastor began to develop and several missed opportunities passed during the years Kayden was actively involved in the ministry.

The second instance did not result in as happy of an ending. Riley explained an experience of sharing the experience of perceived rejection with the pastor at the church and nothing coming from the conversation:

I don't really think that it was much of a conversation other than me voicing my hurt and then praying for peace and seeing what the Bible had to say about it. I don't know, it didn't feel like a productive conversation like I was always still feeling hurt by it.

Bailey added that “none of those conversations went, went very well. They ended up, most the time, they ended up just being very emotionally driven conversations.”



Sadly, in Riley and Bailey's experiences, bringing attention to the hurt that was caused by the pastor during years in the ministry, resulted in no changed outcome. Although Riley did not provide any more details, the demeanor when sharing about the past memory, showed sorrow and pain. It appeared that Riley still felt some of the hurt from this experience, however, Riley had amazing courage to voice her pain and confront the pastor.

**Understanding and Acceptance.** Another area of response that AVs changed with time was accepting that the circumstance happened for a reason and produced growth in their own character. Taylor acknowledged this by saying, "I know I had a lot of issues going on. [It was a] good choice. Even though I wanted it and it would have validated me as a person. Good choice on their end." Another AV described letting go and moving on knowing that personal character was not the reason for non-acceptance.

Riley shared:

I think what I think about the situation now- it's like I can't change it, I can't go back in time, so I don't want to bother myself with it. Because if any character development was going to happen from that, it would have happened. I've had to grow from it because it's in the past, like I've physically grown, mentally grown, spiritually grown since then. But I can't pinpoint anything specifically that came out of that situation that impacted my spiritual walk or my mental health or whatever. It's more of a "okay well, the past is the past and I can't change it, and it is what it is." (Riley)

Riley showed an understanding that the decisions that were made were made and cannot be undone. Riley learned to accept what was and moved forward. Jordan also portrayed a changed perspective when asking the personal questions that follow:

What would I do? What would be the decision I mean, would me saying, "we're full this year" make some student feel like you are not popular? And that's not what I'm trying to say, but that's what me as a student felt like. And it's hard because you don't mean those things, but people feel different ways about things

and sometimes you can't control it because sometimes that was the right answer. That is still what made me feel less popular, less accepted, less cool, less popular, less any of those things, and so what's hard is that you have generations of students that continue to come in and what do these generations of students feel? Are there people who feel, who felt like I felt when I was in [the ministry]? I'm sure there are? But also, what can you do differently? How can you do that? And if I were in that position, I don't know if I would do it differently, I don't know what my answer would be because that would probably be the honest thing, even though it made me feel then like I'm not popular. And I don't always think that there is one right way to do things. So, I feel like looking back on it, I have more adult wisdom to be able to say I can understand some of it. (Jordan)

This AV really asked whether or not, placed in the same position, they would make the same decision and use the same language to convey the message of non-acceptance. Through the rejection experience and thinking back to memories, Jordan has a grasp on the reason for non-acceptance that felt like rejection. Jordan added:

I realized that there is no perfect church and in that all of these decisions, this event, other things that might have happened, anything- there is no perfect church so anything that would have happened, if they had accepted me, that doesn't make it perfect, what makes it perfect is that I'm serving at my church, that I'm serving God and not the people, not even that I'm liked but that I'm cared for and have a group of friends and that I belong at the church. So, did it affect me to the point of wanting to leave, no. (Jordan)

Not only did Jordan come to terms with the rejection experience, but they also came to a deeper revelation about the reason for church and ministry in general. Bailey also shared a joy for the experience, saying "I am happy that now seeing where my life is at. I'm happy that I didn't get the position because of what the Lord has done with my life. I think it's just sad with how it went." Bailey added later,

I think the best thing that has come out of it is just being able to realize and look at the growth that has come out of realizing where I went wrong and what I wish that I could have done differently.

Ultimately, AVs communicated that their perspective changed with time and some began healing from the hurt encountered by the rejection experience.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

Analysis of data in the current project demonstrates many dynamics that influence church relationships and hurt caused by perceived rejection in young adults. Overall, young adults are impressionable and messages communicated, intentionally or unintentionally, about rejection from leadership caused emotional pain that spiraled into behaviors of negative self-talk, avoidance, and in most cases, contributed to young adults' reasons for leaving the church.

Young adults can be an energizing force to incorporate within church ministry. Young adults have a creative perspective toward life and seek opportunities (Setran & Kiesling, 2013) which aligns with what one pastor said, "I enjoy the energy that they bring, there is just some energy that young adult leaders bring to a ministry group" (P3). Young adults are a beneficial part of the Christian church yet are still in developmentally growing stages of life that require guidance and direction (Arnett, 2015; Setran & Kiesling, 2013; Waldron et al. 2015). Leadership is one example of young adults desiring to be a part of something large that may require some additional help from those with more life experience. The young adults in this study demonstrated appropriate strategies as they attempted to achieve their goal of joining volunteer leadership teams. Within volunteering, young adults communicated watching established volunteer leaders' (EVL) behaviors and listening to the words of pastors and church staff to enable their own character to match the criteria they thought church staff were looking for in leaders. As one aspiring volunteer (AV) mentioned "I was doing all, what I thought were the right things, pursuing whatever I thought they wanted" (Taylor). The young adults served in

other ministries, they attended church regularly, and they even were friendly with the EVLs who made recommendations for leaders to church staff. However, with all of these attempts to do things the right way, AVs did not receive leadership positions.

As aspiring young adult volunteers pursued living a life worthy of leadership, messages they received from church staff regarding the criteria to be asked into leadership was often ambiguous. AVs reported hearing Christianese messages (words and phrases known only to insiders of the Christian faith) (Lemaire, 2017) such as “God hasn't highlighted you,” (Kayden) or “we sought the Lord and it's just not what He wants” (Taylor). These messages, although sometimes based in Biblical principles were misconstrued and misaligned with the original intent of the Biblical message (Zeze, 2019). It is not the place of this research to make judgments about the benefit or detriment of using Christianese language in church settings, however, the young adult data indicates that this language can cause confusion in understanding reasons for non-acceptance into volunteer leadership positions. One of the young adult participants, Taylor, explained this confusion best, saying “I still sometimes don't fully understand when people will say, ‘well the Lord said no to me’ and I'm like, ‘did you audibly hear the word no? What does that look like for you?’”

Young adults who were not chosen for leadership positions perceived double standards by pastors and church staff within these ambiguous and ultra-spiritual messages. The questionable decisions made by church staff regarding volunteer leadership led AVs to question the consistency and integrity of pastors and church staff. One AV summed up the disappointment toward church staff when they said, “when you

don't accept one person, who is really willing to put in that work, then you're kind of missing out on that opportunity" (Sam).

Part of the danger that comes from using ultra-spiritual words that are easily misinterpreted is that young adults may begin questioning their own morality. A message directed to an AV from a church staff that says, "we sought the Lord and He has not highlighted you to be a part of the leadership," may communicate more than social rejection from a position of status and authority that provides a meaningful way to serve, rather, it has the potential to communicate moral messages about being worthy or acceptable in Gods' eyes. This message of lacking before God cuts deeper than messages about not fitting in with people.

The contextual data from pastors and church consultants clearly indicates that pastors carry a heavy burden on their shoulders and oftentimes are learning about ministry practices as they take on the role of pastor without any formal training. Pastors and church consultants emphasized unanimously that there is no training that can entirely prepare new pastors for what to experience in ministry. One consultant shared the sentiment that "there are some things you just can't be prepared for. So, I think you just have to be ready for anything and everything and you usually see everything and anything" (C1). Although pastors are somewhat self-taught in regard to working with people, there is an awareness pastors and church staff must have regarding their language and communicative messaging. Still, pastors appear to understand that their roles place them in a position to be judged critically for their moral character based on the appearance of a healthy or floundering church (Laaser & Gregoire, 2003).

Pastors also reported desiring to “cultivate a certain culture” (P3) set by the volunteers (P2) (another ambiguous message regarding church environment). When asked about criteria used to determine if an AV was eligible for leadership (or if an AV was fit to cultivate the kind of culture desired for the ministry), pastors primarily reported that they seek for young adult congregant members who are “Christlike” and produce good “fruit” in their life. One pastor posed the question to help identify potential volunteer leaders, “is the fruit of their life at least moving toward looking like Jesus?” This metaphorical language of producing fruit in one’s life may be influenced from Christian scripture. As discussed in the introduction to this research study, “fruit” may relate to Galatians 5:22-23 that discusses the fruit of the spirit.

However, pastors appeared to list Christlikeness and a fruitful life alongside other standards for leading. For example, already being involved in service positions within the church (“are they already leading?” C1), showing up to events, (“it’s more about you [volunteer] just showing up and being present” P3), agreeability (“are people responsive to that person? I mean, some people [...] are not agreeable people. [...] So, agreeability, it’s kind of an intangible, but is that there?” C1), availability (“just being available and willing [...] a willingness to serve” P2), and maintaining a healthy lifestyle (“if you are asking people to lead other people you [the leader] have to be healthy and able to do that” P1). These categories were reported by pastors and church consultants as criteria for obtaining volunteer leaders in the church. The term “fruit,” as reported in pastor and church consultant interviews, falls under the same ambiguous category as other Christianese words and phrases (Lemaire, 2017) such as looking like Christ, being

“called” into ministry, or seeing the Lord “highlight” a person for a leadership position; there is no clear meaning behind the word.

The difficulty of pastors grouping these various criteria together emphasizes the literature describing the entanglement of organizational procedures and interpersonal relationships (Michael, 2017). Pastors need volunteer leadership positions to be filled for practical reasons of the ministry running efficiently, however, they also indicated that they must know a congregant member personally to determine if their character qualities align with their criteria standards, as exemplified through one pastor's words, “I have to have some sort of relationship with them and know a little bit of their character and what they are about before I’m just going to drop them in and just let them lead” (P3). Through this process of acquiring volunteer leaders, pastors typically hand-pick leaders which affirms a person and usually makes them feel good about themselves. However, one possible downfall behind this relational interplay with organizational procedures is that congregant members who desire to be in a volunteer leadership position and are never asked (perhaps because a pastor does not know them well) may feel rejected or inadequate for church ministry.

One pastor recognized that AVs may consider leadership to be an elite club that traps AVs into a mindset that leadership is the place where a person arrives at their spiritual best. The pastor said, “I think a lot of times people are like ‘oh my gosh, leadership! That is the... you have arrived, you are spiritually elite, that is the club’ [mentality]” (P1). In some regard, the pastor was correct that AVs view leadership as an elite group but the reason for arriving to one’s spiritual best did not align with young adults’ reports. AV participants shared that the club mentality came from perceptions of

pastors and church staff choosing popular people who they favored to join leadership, sharing that “it almost feels like a popularity contest” (Sam).

Interestingly, both pastors and AVs reported the same process for acquiring volunteer leaders: pastors or church staff build relationships with AVs to determine their godly character and then invite those most qualified or liked into positions of leadership. Yet, the purpose for developing relationships was perceived differently. Pastors thought that relationships allowed them to get to know a person’s character to determine their responsibility and emotional health, “the only way you know that stuff is through conversation and getting to know someone, that kind of thing” (C1), whereas AVs saw this behavior as a sign of choosing the most popular people to be on leadership, “I didn’t get in, but I think a lot of it was favoritism because a lot of those kids were very familiar with the leader” (Sam). It appears that church staff, unintentionally, create an environment where AVs view leadership as an elite club.

From the young adult perspective, it doesn’t appear that they want to be a part of a club, but rather that they feel their skills and character qualities would be beneficial to the church ministry. Sadly, most AVs reported that the club mentality was affirmed as reality due to the responses received from staff, “I would start having conversations with them [church staff] saying ‘this is something I want to do.’ But I think they based me off of their past leaders” (Bailey).

This process of choosing or picking leaders appears to create an atmosphere of exclusivity or favoritism, thereby leaving other church goers excluded, lonely, and cast aside. Although pastors or church staff did not report intentionally excluding members of a ministry (especially if they were not favored or popular) the initial data by pastors and



church consultants seems to show otherwise. Some pastors explained that they have a limited perspective of AVs and therefore they knew that choosing people based on who they had established relationships with meant that some AVs would be overlooked. One of the pastors explained a thought they shared with the ministry leaders, saying, “I bet there are other people that would probably want to be a part of [leadership] that we don’t see ourselves because we do have a limited perspective,” (P1). Pastors do not have an unlimited capacity for developing relationships simply due to practical interferences such as lack of time. Intentionally building relationships to bring in volunteer leaders excludes AVs who are not popular or well known to pastors and church staff.

Nevertheless, this behavior of picking and choosing qualified volunteers, may not ever be communicated as outright rejection toward AVs. Rather, it passively ignored or overlooked people, causing the AVs to feel deep hurt (Beeri & Lev-Wiesel, 2012; Jablin & Krone, 1984; Knowles & Gardner, 2008; Molden et al., 2009). Unacceptance felt like rejection to most of the AVs interviewed and was the root of enormous hurt for some.

The context regarding relational entanglement with organizational procedures helps to understand how young adults respond to hurt caused by rejection within church. Most of the young adults in this study blamed themselves and felt a personal fault or error in their own life that made them less qualified than others (“why am I not good enough?” Taylor; “I’m the really bubbly, annoying, obnoxious, person who doesn’t have maturity, the person that does not belong to a group,” Jordan). The special selection process by pastors, as perceived by AVs, unintentionally affirmed the negative thoughts built up in the minds of young adult AVs. In essence, as more and more people were chosen for leadership, the hopeful volunteer heard the negative voice in their head affirm all the

negative qualities and flaws about themselves. Again, this is almost certainly unintentional on the pastor or church staff's part, nevertheless, the response of the non-accepted volunteer is extremely negative and self-defeating.

As mentioned, volunteers enhance the negative talk within their minds and begin to believe the lies they tell themselves. This practice is not just kept internally, seeing as AVs can make rather snap judgments and assumptions about church leadership's intentions. Still, negative emotions are yet another way young adult volunteers respond to rejection. Negative emotions span from the primary emotion, hurt, to secondary emotions of disappointment and frustration. The perception that not being accepted into a leadership position was rejection of their moral character or personal self, young adults reported feeling negative emotions that fed their destructive self-esteem.

Despite experiencing negative emotions, in some cases extreme negative emotions as indicated by sevens and one nine on the level of hurt shown in Figure 1, the perspective of many AVs changed with time. Participants reported having more appreciation for the outcome of their experience and understanding toward the intricacies of church ministry ("I have more adult wisdom to be able to say I can understand some of it" Jordan). Time also taught AVs how to acknowledge faults that occurred and that nobody is perfect. Additionally, time allowed AVs to recognize that errors in judgment made by pastors or church staff toward them as a younger person did not mean that the pastors and church staff had malicious intent to hurt them.

A means of aiding changing responses over time in young adult AVs was through the messages that pastors sent about correction. Gaslighting was described by AVs as a category of hurtful elements of rejection. AVs mentioned that the pastors told them: "If

you want to be a leader in this then be a leader in other things, serve in other areas” (Taylor), or “you’re too prideful” (Kayden). Things like this were commonly described by pastors regarding the criteria they *look for* (positive qualities volunteers maintain) and *look out for* (red flags that indicate a volunteer is not suitable for a leadership position). Most AVs reported serving in other areas of the church, being involved in ministry activities, and living a life that they were worthy of leading. So, when the tough correction messages were interpreted by AVs, they saw inconsistency in pastors (“you’re not allowing me to be a part of something good because obviously you need people like that” Sam). Most pastors answered that an AV does not need to already be serving in ministry at the church to be eligible for ministry (although pastors did indicate that it was a helpful sign that a person is involved and committed to the church). Yet, AVs frequently heard from pastors and church staff members that they must be servant leaders, or that they were already unofficial leaders. These mixed messages confused and hurt young adults because they thought they were already showing characteristics of servitude.

### **Limitations**

The depth of personal information gained from the interviews within this study provided a greater understanding of how young adults interpret and make meaning from their experiences regarding hurt caused by rejection within the Evangelical Christian church. However, the small sample sizes for each group interviewed (young adults, pastors, and church consultants) hindered the ability to understand if this phenomenon is a common occurrence. Furthermore, the small sample size and snowball method of recruiting participants allowed for a marginal representation of Evangelical churches.

These limitations of the research study did not negate the personal experiences of each participant; however, they do limit the understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Although AVs had the ability to discuss hurtful matters with pastors and church staff, they rarely chose to do so. In many cases, young adults choose to actively avoid conflict negotiation tactics with church authority. In few cases, an AV who has stepped out of their comfort zone to discuss conflict with a pastor or director of a ministry, was shot down or ignored, enabling the avoidant tendencies even more. Although young adults desire positions of leadership, they do not easily approach staff members to discuss obtaining a position. Because of the avoidant behaviors of young adults, certain AVs may never be invited into leadership.

In the end, these underlying communicative messages between pastors and AVs create an uncomfortable environment for most AVs. The church should be a place for young adults to gain comfort and support, however, when the stressors come from church, a young adult is likely to seek comfort elsewhere. As described in the literature on hurt, emotions are often guides for decision making (Leary, 2015). Since young adults are still developing emotionally, they have a difficult time being able to control their behaviors spurred on by negative emotions. The combination of lack of development socially and emotionally, alongside the difficulty to control and manage one's emotions, predisposes young adults to give into negative feelings that run through their minds, whether that be sulking in sadness, disrespectfully talking back in frustration, seeking revenge in anger, or completely giving up and walking away in despair. The church should be a place for young adults to feel secure and pastors should be the first people

who congregant members feel comfortable to approach. Sadly, in most cases young adults reported that the pastors and church staff intimidated or scared them and made them feel uncomfortable to approach.

It seems important to make clear that pastors and church staff are not the villains. Although there are choices made that send messages of exclusion to young adults, church pastors and staff are not intentionally creating environments of hurt and disappointment. Nevertheless, it is important for church staff to understand the impact of relationships within the church, particularly how overlooking relationships might lead a young adult to experience deeper pain than an outright rejection for a leadership position. In the end, young adults do experience hurt from rejection to volunteering within the church and their responses indicate a great need for further research and insights.

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APPENDIX A

YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPANT ONLINE SURVEY

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) Please describe a time when you were not accepted for a volunteer position (i.e. small group leader, Sunday school teacher, church camp leader, worship team member, etc.) within a church and how you responded to the situation. You may keep these responses rather brief as you will have the opportunity to elaborate on them in the interview. Please refrain from using personal names or other identifying elements.
  - a. Please describe the situation where you were not accepted for a volunteer position within your church.
  - b. Who did you interact with (title or position – please change names)?
    - i. Did you have a connection or previous relationship with this individual(s)? If so, please describe.
  - c. What was the position you were volunteering for?
  - d. Were you required to formally apply for this position? If not, what was the process whereby someone would acquire the position?
  - e. How was it communicated to you (if at all) that you were not accepted for the position?
  - f. What emotions did you experience after you found out that you were rejected for the position?
  - g. What did you do or say after finding out you were rejected for the position?
  - h. At the time, why did you think you were not chosen for the position?

- i. Today, have your thoughts changed as to why you think you were not chosen for the position?
- j. Please add additional information that you would like to share or think would aid in understanding the context of the situation you are describing.

3) Please indicate how hurtful the rejection experience was.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Not at all hurtful

Extremely hurtful

4) Please indicate how much of an effect the rejection experience had on your relationship with the church you were attending.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

No effect at all

Extremely large effect

- 5) What was your initial reaction/response to the rejection?
- 6) How has your reaction/response to the rejection changed over time?
- 7) When did this experience occur? Please indicate whether the experience was an extended period of time or simply one conversation or encounter.
- 8) Describe your *experience* at the church after the rejection occurred.
- 9) Describe your *involvement* with the church after the rejection occurred.
- 10) Did you remain at the same church after this rejection experience? If so, for how long and why? If not, did you move to another church or stop attending church? Please explain.
- 11) Did you apply to volunteer within the same church again? If so, explain your experience the second time.

12) What kind of relationship do you currently have with the church where you were not accepted to volunteer?

13) How long had you attended the church (from which you were not able to volunteer) before your rejection experience?

14) How often did you attend church before the rejection experience (this does not have to be the same church where the hurtful experience occurred)? If you worked at a church, please do not include times when you were getting paid.

- a. 3 or more times a week
- b. Twice a week
- c. Once a week
- d. A few times a month
- e. Once a month
- f. A few times a year more than just holidays
- g. Only on holidays
- h. Never

15) How often do you currently attend church (this does not have to be the same church where the hurtful experience occurred). If you work at a church, please do not include times when you are getting paid.

- a. 3 or more times a week
- b. Twice a week
- c. Once a week
- d. A few times a month
- e. Once a month



- f. A few times a year more than just holidays
- g. Only on holidays
- h. Never
- i. Other

16) What denomination is the church you experienced rejection to volunteer?

17) If attending a new church, what denomination is your current church?

18) How old are you?

19) What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Other preferred designation \_\_\_\_\_

20) What is your race or ethnicity? (Please choose all that apply)

- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
- b. Asian
- c. Black or African American
- d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- e. White / Caucasian
- f. Hispanic / Latino
- g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

21) What is your highest level of education?

- a. Some high school
- b. High school
- c. Some college

- d. Bachelor's Degree
- e. Master's Degree
- f. Doctoral Degree
- g. Trade School
- h. Other \_\_\_\_\_

22) Please write down the best email to contact you so that I may set up an interview with you.

APPENDIX B

GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

This interview is based on the online survey with the intent of asking for expansion and clarification of certain participant answers.

- 1) Please describe a time when you were not accepted for a volunteer position (i.e. small group leader, Sunday school teacher, church camp leader, worship team member, etc.) within a church and how you responded to the situation.
  - a. Who did you interact with (title or positions – feel free to change names)?
    - i. Did you have a connection or previous relationship with this individual(s)? If so, please describe.
  - b. What was the position you were volunteering for?
  - c. Were you required to formally apply for this position? If not, what was the process whereby someone would acquire the position?
  - d. How was it communicated to you (if at all) that you were not accepted for the position?
  - e. What emotions did you experience after you found out that you were rejected for the position?
  - f. What did you do or say after finding out you were rejected for the position?
  - g. At the time, why did you think you were not chosen for the position?
  - h. Today, have your thoughts changed as to why you think you were not chosen for the position?
  - i. \*Probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 2) Did you feel hurt by the experience? If so, what were some of the reasons you felt hurt?

- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 3) Do you think that the experience impacted your relationship with the church you were attending? If so why?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 4) What has your reaction/response been to the rejection over time? How has your reaction/response to the rejection changed over time?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 5) When did this experience occur? Please indicate if the experience was an extended period of time or simply one conversation or encounter.
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 6) Describe your *experience* at the church after the occurrence from which you were not accepted into a volunteer position.
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 7) Describe your *involvement* with the church after the occurrence from which you were not accepted into a volunteer position.
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 8) Did you remain at the same church after this rejection experience? If so, for how long and why? If not, did you move to another church or stop attending church? Please explain.

- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 9) Did you apply to volunteer within the same church again? If so, explain your experience the second time.
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 10) What kind of relationship do you currently have with the church where you were not accepted to volunteer at?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 11) How long had you attended the church (from which you had not been accepted into a volunteer position) before your rejection experience?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 12) How long had you attended church in general before your rejection experience?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 13) How often did you attend church as an unpaid attender before the rejection experience?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 14) How often do you currently attend church as an unpaid attender?
- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 15) Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of not being accepted into the volunteer leadership position?

APPENDIX C

GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS

- 1) Can you describe a little bit about yourself, how you became a pastor, and your ministry experience working with young adult volunteers?
- 2) Please describe the process you take for accepting young adults into volunteer leadership positions (i.e. small group leader, church camp leader, worship team member, etc.) within the church.
  - a. What is your process for obtaining young adult volunteer leaders?
  - b. How might a student become a volunteer leader?
  - c. Are there structured criteria for choosing volunteer leaders? If so, what are these and how were they made?
  - d. What does a typical interaction look like with a potential volunteer?
  - e. Do you experience a different type of interaction between young adults aspiring to volunteer for non-leadership positions than you do with aspiring volunteers of leadership positions? If so, can you explain the differences?
  - f. How do you communicate to a young adult when they are not accepted for a position?
  - g. Can you give an example of what you might say to someone who is not qualified for a position based on the criteria you mentioned earlier?
  - h. How do you feel after letting a aspiring volunteer know that they did not receive the position?
  - i. How do young adults typically respond to being told that they were not accepted for the position?
  - j. Are there common behaviors or phrases said by young adults after finding out that they did not receive the position? If so, what are they?



k. Do you perceive young adults to understand why they were not chosen for a position? Why or why not?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

3) Have you ever interacted with a young adult that felt hurt by their experience not getting a leadership position? If so, can you describe the circumstances and how you handled it?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

4) Do you think that your relationship with aspiring volunteers is affected by telling them that they were not accepted into a volunteer position? If so, why?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

5) Can you think of a particular circumstance when you had to reject a young adult from a position? If so, can you explain the interaction with and reaction from the aspiring volunteer?

a. When did this experience occur? Please indicate if the experience was an extended period of time or simply one conversation or encounter.

b. What was your perspective of the volunteer's emotional response to the situation?

c. What was the volunteer's behavioral response to the situation?

d. What was your perspective of the volunteer's *involvement* with the church after the occurrence from which they were not accepted into a volunteer position?

- e. Did the volunteer remain at the church after this rejection experience? If so (and if you can remember) for how long? If not, did you have an opportunity to speak with them about the situation? Please explain.
  - f. \* probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 6) Do you see young adults who have not been accepted into one volunteer position often apply to volunteer within the same church again?
- 7) How long have you been a pastor?
- 8) Did you go to seminary?
- a. At seminary, did you receive any formal training or take any classes on how to interact with and manage people?
  - b. If not, how do you think you were prepared to interact and manage people in ministry?
  - c. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 9) Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience working with young adults who do not get accepted into volunteer leadership positions in the church?

## APPENDIX D

### GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH CONSULATANTS

- 1) Can you describe a little bit about yourself, how you became a church consultant, and your ministry experience working with young adult volunteers?
- 2) Please describe your observations of the procedure's churches take for accepting young adults into volunteer positions (i.e. small group leader, church camp leader, worship team member, etc.).
  - a. In your observation, how might a young adult become a volunteer leader?
  - b. Are there common criteria for choosing volunteer leaders? If so, in your observation, what are these and how were they made?
  - c. What does a typical interaction look like between a pastor or staff member and a potential volunteer?
  - d. Are you aware of any differences in the interaction between pastor's or staff members and young adults aspiring to volunteer for non-leadership positions than you do with aspiring volunteers of leadership positions? If so, can you explain the differences?
  - e. How do pastor's and staff members communicate to a potential volunteer when they are not accepted for a position?
  - f. Can you remember a time when a pastor or staff member explained to you the experience they had rejecting a young adult from a volunteer position? If so, please explain how the pastor or staff member handled the situation.
  - g. What is your perception of how pastors or staff members feel after letting a young adult know that they did not receive the position?
  - h. What emotion have you observed in pastors or staff members after they reject a potential volunteer from a position of leadership?

- i. How do young adults typically respond to being told that they were not accepted for the position?
- j. Are there common behaviors or phrases said by young adult after finding out that they did not receive the position? If so, what are they?
- k. Do you perceive young adult to understand why they were not chosen for a position? Why or why not?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

- 3) Have you ever seen a pastor or staff member interact with a young adult that felt hurt by their experience not getting a leadership position? If so, can you describe the circumstance and how the pastor or staff member handled it?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

- 4) Do you think that your relationship with aspiring volunteers is affected when a pastor or staff member must tell the young adult that they were not accepted into a volunteer position? If so, why?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

- 5) Are you aware of any circumstances when a young adult was rejected from a volunteer leadership position? If so, can you explain the interaction between the staff member and the young adult?

- a. What was the reaction from the young adult who was rejected from the volunteer position?
- b. When did this experience occur? Please indicate if the experience was an extended period of time or simply one conversation or encounter.

- c. What was your perspective of the volunteer's emotional response to the situation?
  - d. What was the volunteer's behavioral response to the situation?
  - e. What was your perspective of the volunteer's *involvement* with the church after the occurrence from which they were not accepted into a volunteer position?
  - f. Did the volunteer remain at the church after this rejection experience? If so (and if you can remember) for how long? If not, did any of the church staff have an opportunity to speak with them about the situation? Please explain.
    - \* probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 6) Are you aware if young adults who have not been accepted into one volunteer position often apply to volunteer within the same church again?
- a. \* probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.
- 7) How long have you been involved in church consulting?
- 8) Have you ever held a position as a staff member of a church (lead pastor, worship pastor, elder, etc.)?
- 9) Did you go to seminary?
- a. At seminary, did you receive any formal training or take any classes on how to interact with and manage people?

- b. If not, how do you think you were prepared to interact and manage people in ministry?

\*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

- 10) In your experience consulting churches, do you see pastors trained to adequately manage volunteers? Please explain.

- a. \*probe for further explanation and clarity when appropriate and necessary.

- 11) Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience working with young adults who do not get accepted into volunteer leadership positions in the church?