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LEADERSHIP AND FAITH FORMATION IN YOUTH MINISTRY: EXPLAINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES AND FAITH FORMATION IN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

NEIL A. CHRISTIANS

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Leadership and Faith Formation in Youth Ministry:
Explaining the Relationship Between Leadership Experiences and Faith Formation in Middle School Students

by

Neil A. Christians

This research project explained how leadership experiences of middle school age students during their time in a youth ministry Confirmation program affected their faith formation. The lenses of *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging* were helpful in framing a missional view of faith formation. Results revealed these four aspects of leadership experiences to be important to the youth: leadership and helping others are connected, relationships are integral and vital within these experiences, there needs to be an element of fun by making the experience enjoyable and/or meaningful, and leadership experiences bring relevance to a student's faith both inside and outside of church.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you to all the students and families that I have had the opportunity to work with in Children, Youth, and Family Ministries over the years. You have taught me what it means to participate with God in ministry. It has been a joy to see God working in your lives.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
IBM SPSS	International Business Machines Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
IRB	Institutional Review Board of Luther Seminary
MTD	Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
TBH	To Be Honest
VBS	Vacation Bible School

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

Introduction

Confirmation was primarily the dissemination of information, primarily around the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, when I went through Confirmation as a middle school student. This is not sufficient in making disciples in our current culture. More and more individuals are leaving the church after Confirmation and high school. According to a 2007 study by LifeWay, more than two-thirds of young adults who attended a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.[1] Therefore, an effective Confirmation ministry needs to be more than just catechesis (religious instruction).

A current study with *The Confirmation Project* seeks to learn the extent to which Confirmation and equivalent practices in five Protestant denominations in North America are effective for strengthening discipleship in youth.[2] They have seen that many churches

[1] Scott McConnell, "Lifeway Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop out of Church," LifeWay Research, accessed August 25, 2017, https://lifewayresearch.com/2007/08/07/reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church.

[2] "About Us," The Confirmation Project, accessed August 25, 2017, http://www.theconfirmationproject.com. "The Confirmation Project seeks to learn the extent to which Confirmation and equivalent practices in five Protestant denominations in North America are effective for strengthening discipleship in youth. These denominations include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, and the United Methodist Church. It seeks to provide Christian leaders with examples of good practice and with strategies that are effective in helping young Christians grow as disciples of Jesus Christ."

have moved to experiment with different models of Confirmation to find more helpful way of growing disciples. Based on the findings of *The Confirmation Project*, I propose there are at least five elements to a helpful discipleship process. These are *relationship*, *community*, *service*, *leadership*, and *worship*. My research looked at experiences of middle school and high school underclassmen[3] for each of the five categories, as well as other experiences that may be outside of these parameters, and how all these experiences connect to their faith formation. To study this, I first conducted a quantitative survey. I followed this with qualitative interviews and focus groups to dig into leadership experiences and how they might influence faith formation in these students. Therefore, this was an explanatory sequential mixed methods case study. Research was with students and their parents at Christ Lutheran Church[4].

Research Question

The research question being explained is:

> How might personal leadership experiences of middle school age students impact their faith formation?

This research did not look at adults in leadership roles and their impact upon the faith formation of students. This research project looked at students' personal leadership experiences and how these experiences might impact their own faith formation. While not everyone needs to be in a leadership role in order to grow in faith, I suggest that everyone has the capacity to be a leader in some fashion. This research seeks to

[3] I use the term "middle school age" throughout this thesis because this research looked at both middle school student and high school underclassmen.

[4] Psyndonym are used in this thesis for all proper names of persons, congregations, and church organizations.

understand if and how these leadership experiences have a positive impact on a student's faith formation.

This begs the question of what is meant by leadership. What does it mean to be a leader; and, is there an opportunity for everyone to lead in some capacity? This research project investigated what leadership means and explored what is meant by "leadership experiences." There are different kinds of leadership experiences and different aspects within each kind of leadership experience. I explored these aspects in this research and investigated what is helpful in different leadership experiences that are vital to influencing faith formation in a positive way.

Variables

This study examined leadership experiences within a faith community. The dependent variable in this study was faith formation and the independent variable was leadership experiences. This research project looked at certain elements within leadership experiences that are vital for impacting faith formation. Many kinds of leadership experiences are available in a church. These include serving on a youth council or church council, leading a service project, or leading in worship. Various components within each of these leadership experiences might include knowledge of the area in which you are leading, trust of those you are leading, and a commitment or passion for what you are doing. This research project looked at what elements of these leadership experiences might impact faith formation in a positive way.

Intervening variables were gender, grade, family involvement, attendance in worship, attendance in Confirmation, and relationships. This research did collect some quantitative data regarding some of these intervening variables. However, this research

focused primarily on leadership experiences for the qualitative data in order to keep this research from becoming too broad.

Significance of This Study

I have always believed in helping students grow as leaders. Explaining how leadership experiences might impact their faith formation in a positive way helped me be intentional in this process. I have a few different roles within the church where this research has impacted what I do in regards to leadership experiences. First, I serve at Christ Lutheran Church in a suburban neighborhood of Minnesota as the middle school ministry director. A large portion of this position is a focus on Confirmation. Christ Lutheran Church has gone through staff and program changes over the past couple of years. One of these changes is with Confirmation ministry, which is why my case study focused on students and parents who have recently gone through this program. This research has helped me determine how to approach future program planning. It has also given other church staff direction to be intentional in providing leadership experiences for every student. It has helped the church staff identify which components of leadership experiences are important to include. For example, when planning a mission trip for middle school students, I am intentional in developing different leadership experiences for each individual student on that mission trip. This holds true for planning other ministry programs including the various aspects of the Confirmation ministry.

Second, I serve as the director of Camping Ministries. This ministry is an adult-mentored and youth-led summer day camp ministry. High school youth are entrusted with leading every aspect of a three-week summer day camp at their own church along with middle school leaders and adult mentors. Over the past twenty-six years, Camping

Ministries has seen amazing transformations in the youth ministry and individuals within the congregations that have participated in this program. Looking at what aspects of leadership experiences might impact an individual's faith formation has been very helpful. This research has provided guidance to Camping Ministries and to congregations that offer this ministry to their communities.

Historical Lens

I have considered a few historical lenses with this study. First is the overall cultural landscape. The faith formation of students in the United States is changing rapidly. It is very different from what it was ten years ago. An increasing number of people are saying that they do not believe in God or, at the very least, do not have any religious affiliation.[5] There are also an increasing number of students who regularly attend church in middle school and high school who will leave the church by age twenty-three.[6] As the culture changes, so must how the church interacts with the world around us.

Second is the landscape of Christ Lutheran Church. Christ Lutheran Church is a large congregation that celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2018. In this time, they have grown from 412 members to nearly 9,000 members. The church also has an active youth community with Confirmation classes averaging around 170 students per grade. The Christian cultural shifts within the United States are not felt as severely as they are within smaller mainline denominational congregations. It has been shown that one element of

[5] "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, accessed September 3, 2017, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape.

[6] McConnell, "Lifeway Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop out of Church."

effective faith formation is caring relationships that include a student's involvement in a religious community.[7] It is more socially acceptable to middle school students to be part of this religious community because there are a great number of students active in the program. There also seems to be a family value around Confirmation that is prevalent within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Families tend to ensure that their children attend and complete the Confirmation program even if they rarely attend worship services or other programs within the church. These factors give Christ Lutheran Church a community that may not be consistent with today's changing religious landscape.

The other aspect of the landscape of Christ Lutheran Church is recent changes in leadership. Christ Lutheran Church has called a new lead pastor as well as new leadership positions in a majority of the Children, Youth, and Family Staff. The other change is moving from a junior high model (grades seven through nine) to a middle school model (grades six through eight) in 2016. This has opened the door for leadership experiences for students at an earlier age at Christ Lutheran Church.

Theoretical Lenses

This study framed its research around two areas. The first is leadership. How this research defines and understands leadership is important. There are many different ways to be a leader and how one understands what it means to be a leader. This research also explored what leadership looks like for middle school age students. The second area is faith formation. Here I used the theoretical lens of *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging*.

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[7] John Roberto, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages & Generations* (Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith Associates, 2015), 34-38.

There is some debate as to the order of this three-fold process. For this research these three are seen neither as independent nor hierarchical. They are interdependent upon each other. Each area influences and is influenced by the other two. First I will briefly outline the theoretical lens of leadership. Then I will address *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging*.

Leadership

Defining leadership is important to frame how this might impact faith formation. John Kotter helped in defining what it means to be a leader by looking at what a leader does.[8] Kotter says leadership is very different from management responsibilities and personal styles of leadership. What leaders do and how they use power and influence are central issues for Kotter. What does this mean for individuals who are in a position without any power? How does one lead another individual who may be over them in a position of power? What does this mean for middle school students, many of whom deal with self-image, doubt, and identity issues? I addressed each of these questions in this research.

Peter Northouse brings to light the different styles and traits of a leader.[9] Northouse's concepts of different styles of leadership should not be confused with Kotter's personality styles. Different styles of leadership are important to consider. It is helpful to look at different styles of leadership even though middle school age students may not be able to identify a leadership style for themselves. Many, especially middle

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[8] John P. Kotter, *What Leaders Really Do* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2005), 51-74.

[9] Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007).

school students, have the image of a leader as one who stands up in front of a group and tells everyone what to do. Therefore, some who are shy and/or introverted may exclude themselves from being considered as a leader. This research explored how every individual might be able to be a leader in various roles despite their doubts and questions.

Margaret Wheatley, in her book *Leadership and The New Science*, gives voice to how leadership within the church must change. Wheatley shares insights on how leadership might form organically using ideas that draw on chaos theory and quantum physics. Her insights give ideas on how to improve leadership within organizations; she also shows how leadership impacts the individual. Individuals do not lead within a vacuum. They are part of a system, and that system influences all who are involved. Still, leadership experiences impact not only a system, but they also impact the individual leader.[10] This gives a framework to look at how leadership experiences might impact the faith formation in middle school age students.

Patrick Keifert gives voice to missional leadership in his book *We Are Here Now*.[11] His book specifically addresses how churches can move from the maintenance of Christendom to being missional churches in their present time and neighborhood. Missional leadership begins with the understanding that this is God's mission and not ours.[12] Leaders come together in community to discover what God is up to in their local community in order to participate in what God is doing. My research also took into

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[10] Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2006), 3-48.

[11] Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006).

[12] Keifert, 37.

account the "New Era of Mission" that the church faces and how the understanding of missional leadership fits into this overall lens of leadership for my research.

Finally, Josephine Van Linden and Carl Fertman shape what leadership looks like for middle school students.[13] Some adults have mentioned to me that students of this age are not ready for a leadership role since the adolescent brain is not fully developed. The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that controls such functions as problem solving, judgment, and impulse. All of these functions can be argued as necessary in order to be a leader. How can youth be set up to be effective leaders? Van Linden and Fertman show three stages of adolescent leadership development based on fifteen years of research. Their work gives insight on how adults can use tactics in developing leadership skills through various experiences.

Believing, Behaving, and Belonging

The area of faith formation uses the theoretical lenses of *Believing, Behaving*, and *Belonging*. There is a debate as to the order of this three-fold process. It used to be thought that one would come to believe certain concepts about God. Then they would behave accordingly. Finally, they would belong to the Christian community. Ironically, if you define "belong" as "membership," this is similar to how the Confirmation process is set up in many churches. You must go through the Confirmation process in order to learn about God (*Believing*). Then there are requirements such as worship notes and service hours that must be met (*Behaving*). This is followed by a Confirmation, or an Affirmation

[13] Josephine A. Van Linden and Carl I. Fertman, *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

of Baptism, service where you are accepted as a voting member of the congregation (*Belonging*).

There is the argument that this process could also begin with *Belonging*. In this argument, *Belonging* is equated with the acceptance of the individual within the community rather than with membership. Individuals are brought into the community, accepted, and loved for who they are (*Belonging*). From the love and acceptance of the faith community, the individual would then come to believe in God (*Believing*), which would be followed by their desire to change their behavior (*Behaving*). However, there is also some debate in the order of *Believing* and *Behaving*. Evidence exists that our behaviors and practices shape what we believe. Therefore, this research looked at all three (*Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging*) separately and as a unit.

Kenda Creasy Dean, Peter Block, and Amanda Drury bring different perspectives for each of these lenses. Dean believes the church needs to change its approach to ministry. There needs to be a *Believing* model of a "consequential faith" in order to be effective in our current post-Christendom culture.[14] Block argues there is need for community in a fractured society. The way community is formed can no longer be something that is assumed. It must be tended to and carefully constructed in order for individuals to find a place of *Belonging*.[15] Drury brings to the discussion the idea that our actions, specifically giving a testimony about one's own faith, is not something based on

[14] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73-77.

[15] Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 9-10.

the past but actually forms our present and future identity.[16] Therefore, our *Behaving* is formative in our *Believing*. I describe all of these factors and how they work together for faith formation of middle school age students with each of these voices.

Theological and Biblical Lenses

The theoretical lenses of *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging* give a framework for my theological and biblical lenses. This research connected each of these three theoretical lenses with theological lenses and biblical lenses. I will look at the theological lenses first and then at the biblical lenses.

Theological Lenses

Believing–Justification

I have heard students express many different understandings of who God is. Many still comment about believing in karma. Karma is the belief that if one lives a good life then good things will happen and if one makes bad choices then bad things will happen. Some believe that God cannot forgive them for bad choices they have made. Others hold the belief that "good people" will go to heaven as a reward for living a good life. They view Christianity primarily as individuals who live a moral life. Kenda Creasy Dean identifies this to be prevalent in students today. She calls this Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD).[17] Moralistic means people should be good, nice, and fair to each other. This moralistic view of Christianity leads to the argument that all religions are basically the same and good people go heaven when they die. Therapeutic is the belief that the

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[16] Amanda Drury, *Saying Is Believing: The Necessity of Testimony in Adolescent Spiritual Development* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 42-86.

[17] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.

central goal in life is to be happy and feel good about one's self. Deism is the belief that God does not particularly need to be involved in one's life unless needed to solve a problem. Dean provides a good lens along with Martin Luther[18] and his writing on justification and sanctification in addressing these beliefs. They show that our justification is because of Christ's actions and not because of our own actions. The belief of who God is in Christ Jesus gave a great lens through which to view the various beliefs that students shared in this research.

Behaving–Priesthood of All Believers and the Discipleship Process

Martin Luther's writings to dismiss the understanding that a Christian's life is divided into two classes, that of "spiritual" and "temporal," sparked the basis of the understanding of the *priesthood of all believers*.[19] Leadership in the church must be framed by the understanding that everyone has direct access to God and need not go through a priest, and that all baptized Christians are "priests" and "spiritual" in God's eyes. It is not based on someone's standing, role, or age. Everyone is seen as a "priest," everyone can be a leader within the church, and everyone has something to offer.

People of the Way by Dwight Zscheile, who writes from an Episcopal perspective, also gave an understanding of what it means to be the church today.[20] Another helpful voice is Rob Bell in his book *Velvet Elvis*. Bell gives insight into some original understandings of what it means to be a disciple, specifically, the calling of a rabbi to

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[18] Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).

[19] Martin Luther and Adolph Spaeth, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2016).

[20] Dwight J. Zscheile, *People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012).

individuals to become his disciples.[21] This lens was important for middle school age students who do not believe that they are qualified to be leaders within the church.

Belonging–Trinitarian Theology

Our identity and *Belonging* are rooted in who God is because humans are created in the image of God. One must reflect upon what they know of God in order to understand who God is. Today, this discussion is centered on the missional church conversation. The missional church conversation is wide and vast, but essentially, it is rooted in Trinitarian theology and how we understand God as a social Trinity and a sending Trinity.

The social Trinity is who God is within God's self. Jürgen Moltmann's work on the social Trinity shows the Triune God is found in the *perichoretic* relationship among the persons of God. While each person of God is distinct and an individual person, their personhood is found in the mutual indwelling with each other. The Father is the Father because of the Father's relationship to the Son and the Spirit. The Son is the Son because of the Son's relationship with the Father and the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit because of the Spirit's relationship with the Father and the Son. This is who God is. As Moltmann says, "The history of Jesus the Son cannot be grasped except as part of the history of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[22] All three are understood in relationship to each other.

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[21] Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 133-134.

[22] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 16.

This moves to a sending Trinity. All one truly knows of God is found in God's interaction with humans. God reveals God's self through God's actions. God does what God is. What we see of God is a sending God. God the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Spirit sends the church into the world for God's mission. God's mission has a church that is sent into the world.[23] The church finds its identity in who God is. Just as there is a mutual indwelling among Father, Son, and Spirit, so too there is a mutual indwelling among God, church, and world. The church understands that it is sent into the world not to treat others as objects to do things "for" or "at," but as subjects to do things "with." *Belonging* of humans, both in the church and in the world, is found in their relationship with God and with each other. This lens helps in framing leadership not as one sent to do a task but as a mutual or communal process where one participates with God in the world.

Biblical Lenses

Believing–Faith and the Works of the Law

Some might believe that Jesus died for their sins. However, at the same time, they may also hold the view that they still need to live a good life in order to receive God's forgiveness for their sins. Galatians 2:16 says, " . . . a person is not justified by the work of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."[24] The footnote in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says that the end of this passage can also be translated "the faith of

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[23] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 402.

[24] All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Wayne A. Meeks, and Jouette M. Bassler, Student ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2006).

Jesus Christ." This translation gives an even stronger case that our justification is based solely on the actions of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Galatians expressed his belief that one could not escape God's punishment from sin by purchasing it with money or good deeds.[25] It is a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our redeemer. This belief still holds true today. This research focused on chapters two and three of Galatians to frame what we believe about God for the lens on faith and the works of the law.

Behaving–Living Stones, Citizenship, and Co-Mentors

The scriptures talk about Christians forming a new kind of community in 1 Peter 2. Christians are described as living stones that are being built into a spiritual house. These Christians do not get to choose which living stones are built into this spiritual house. God calls them into this community. This is not about a sense of *Belonging*, who is part of the community and who is not. This is a sense of how one is *Behaving* within this community God is forming. Christians are to live with them whoever they are.

The lens of citizenship is seen in Ephesians 2:19 where it says that Christians are no longer strangers but citizens with the saints and members of God's household. Christians are formed into a community of God's people. They have a responsibility for each other within this community. Both images of living stones and citizenship gave an understanding of how this new community is to behave. How Christians live together as a

[25] Martin Luther and Theodore Grebner, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, New Abridged traslation ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Seminary, 2015).

community shapes their *Behaving*. They must behave with acceptance, accountability, responsibility, and mutual dependency within this household.

Another way Christians are to behave within this community is in "co-mentoring" relationships. This research talks about co-mentoring with several biblical lens passages. First is how Christians are examples to others as stated in 1 Timothy 4:1-16. Disciples intentionally pour themselves into others so that they may, in turn, have others pour into them. Paul's instructions to Timothy are not based on his age but are based on his actions and his example to others in the community. Second is how Christians follow Christ's example. Paul's writing in Romans 15:1-13 gives a lens on how Christians are to instruct others about Jesus. It is not their own examples that others are to follow, but only those that imitate Jesus and his teachings. Finally, there is no hierarchy in the co-mentor relationship. I used Ephesians 2:11-22 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 as a lens for the unity of Christians as well as the important role everyone has in the Body of Christ. Every Christian is a mentor to someone else, is being mentored by others, and all are equal partners within the Body of Christ.

Belonging–Great Commission and Greatest Commandment

Both the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment served as a lens for *Belonging*. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), Jesus commands his disciples to offer a place of *Belonging* within God's family. Included within God's family are "all nations." Everyone has a place within the Christian church. All are welcome. Combine this with the Greatest Commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) and we see how Christians are to welcome others–with love. These commands

were not given to the elite, but to all Christians. All are to lovingly accept others. Everyone is given a place to belong.

Methodology

This was an explanatory sequential mixed methods case study. This was done with the students at Christ Lutheran Church. I started with quantitative research questions surrounding five main elements of a discipleship process to determine how they were impacting the faith formation of middle school age students. These five elements were relationship, community, service, leadership, and worship. This survey was conducted over a three-month period. The Confirmation program studied starts in seventh grade and is completed in tenth grade. Since this Confirmation program has undergone changes in recent years, I surveyed students in eighth grade through eleventh grade to gain insights into the current program after changes were made. Students who had completed at least one year of the Confirmation program were invited to complete a written or online questionnaire. This is a census survey because all students who were involved in the Confirmation program at Christ Lutheran Church were invited to participate. The total number of potential students consisted of approximately 700 students. This invitation was done both through a letter and through email. Students agreed to participate in the survey once written informed consent was obtained from their parent or guardian.[26] This research project obtained insights not only from the students who participated in the Confirmation program, but also from their parents. Data gathered from the parents and their perspective on this process gave insights into some family values that impact the

[26] Throughout this research I shall use "parent" when refering to the student's parent(s) or guardian(s).

students' process in faith formation. I analyzed the data using SPSS software currently produced by IBM.[27]

This research then used interviews and focus groups to gain deeper insights on how leadership experiences might impact faith formation. Individuals were selected to participate in an interview or focus group based on their leadership experiences. I selected students who indicated that leadership was part of their Confirmation experience, those who indicated that leadership was not part of their Confirmation experience, those who had served as a Vacation Bible School (VBS) leader, those who had not served as a VBS leader, those who had leadership experiences outside of Christ Lutheran Church, and those who indicated they did not have leadership experiences outside of Christ Lutheran Church. I selected students from eighth, ninth, and tenth grade who had completed a questionnaire and whose parents had given permission for them to be audio recorded during these interviews or focus groups. I also selected students who were female and students who were male. Students were invited to sign up for a time to meet with me, making this a purposive sampling. Interviews and focus groups of two to four students took an hour to an hour-and-a-half. The interviews and focus groups were done at Christ Lutheran Church using a recording device to collect data. I had them professionally transcribed before coding the data using the method developed by Kathy Charmaz.[28] In this method, the researcher codes the transcriptions word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident to put together *in vivo* codes using the individual's own words. These *in vivo codes* are then grouped by common themes into focused codes and

[27] The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) currently produced by IBM. For more information: https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics

[28] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).

are then put into larger categories, which Charmaz calls axial codes. Finally, these were then put in theoretical codes to show the relationship between the axial codes.

Other Matters

Definition of Key Terms

Churchwide Assembly: The primary decision-making body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that meets every three years and consists of elected lay and ordained voting members.

Confirmation: A program of Christian instruction designed to apply Lutheran doctrinal teaching to everyday life.

Denomination: A recognized autonomous branch of the Christian church.

Discipleship: The process where one adheres to the school of teaching of an individual and assists in spreading the doctrines of that individual.

ELCA: A Christian denomination known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Faith Community: The people who belong to a particular church or particular religious group.

Faith Formation: The process in which faith in God is formed within an individual as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

High School: Students who are in school grades ninth through twelfth.

Mentor: An experienced and trusted advisor.

Middle School: Students who are in school grades sixth through eighth.

Missio Dei: The theological understanding of the Triune God sending the church to discern and to participate with what God is doing in the world.

Missional Leadership: The process where a community gathers together to discover what God is up to in their local community in order to participate in what God is doing.

Perichoresis: The theological concept of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a Trinitarian community of co–equal, interdependent persons finding unity in their dynamic interactions of self-giving love for each other.

Service Form: A form at Christ Lutheran Church that is filled out by students to help them reflect upon their service activity.

Spirituality: An inclusive term for any belief system that reflects upon and gives witness to an individual's understanding of the greater meaning and purpose of human life.

TED Talk: Videos of short powerful talks, usually under eighteen minutes, which are made with the intention of spreading ideas.

Vacation Bible School: A four-day program for preschool or elementary age students during the summer that utilizes various activities for Christian education.

Worship Note: A form at Christ Lutheran Church filled out by students to help them reflect upon their worship experience.

Ethical Concerns

This research conforms to the IRB ethical standards and requirements of Luther Seminary. Confidentiality of all individuals was maintained. Individuals were not referred to by name. I informed individuals that their responses were to remain confidential and a pseudonym would be used in referring directly to any comments that they might make. I worked with individuals who are under the age of eighteen and are

considered to be vulnerable by IRB standards. Therefore, I obtained written informed consent forms from their parent or guardian before getting the student's permission to participate in a survey, interview, or focus group (see appendix E). I did this before getting any survey data from any individuals or having them participate in an interview or focus group. Participation in any and all surveys, interviews, and focus groups was voluntary. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed. I used a confidentiality agreement with a transcriber (see appendix H). Parents who participated in my survey did so with implied consent (see appendix F). I do not have a deep commitment to specific elements of the Confirmation ministry program because I am fairly new to the congregation. Therefore, I was able to be more objective when hearing responses to participants of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. I strove to keep any personal responses neutral as to not influence future responses during this study. I conducted this research in a ministry context where I serve as a youth minister. I am aware that this brings power issues and biases to the process. I did not, to the best of my ability, let my biases or any power I may have influence participants in any adverse way. I kept all data on a password-protected external hard drive or in a locked file drawer that resided at my home, with me personally, or locked in my work office. These records will be kept until May 31, 2022, and then destroyed.

Summary

This thesis project studied how leadership experiences by middle school age students might impact their faith formation. Findings of this research are presented in chapters five and six. The theoretical lenses defined what leadership means and what it means to be a leader for a middle school age student. It also provided an understanding in

how *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging* are not sequential but mutually dependent upon each other. The theological and biblical lenses gave deeper insight on what *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging* mean and how they are crucial in understanding leadership and faith formation. These are presented in chapters two and three. We begin with the theoretical lenses in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL LENSES

I gave an overview of this research project in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I examine theoretical lenses to frame this research. The first area is leadership experiences where I use the theoretical lens of leadership. Foundational in understanding my research will be how I define what it means to be a leader as well as how I define leadership experiences. I also address the question of whether young people are even capable of being in leadership roles as well as what leadership experiences might look like for middle school age students. The second area is focused on faith formation. For this, I use the theoretical lenses of *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging*. Each of these three are looked at individually and as a unit. Here I engage with the authors Kendra Casey Dean, Peter Block, and Amanda Drury. Each author has insights to this three-fold process.

Leadership

I have heard the phrase used in regards to students and leadership, "Students are either leading or they are leaving." The message is clear. Students do not wish to be entertained by the church. They want to make a difference in the world around them. They wish to be full participants. While this may be true, the focus on this statement is one of church membership. It focuses on retaining the number of students participating in our church ministries. I focus on something deeper. I focus on faith formation. I am

concerned not only about keeping students in the church, but also in helping them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ as well as helping them discover how to live out a life of faith every day outside of the church walls.

What does it mean to be a leader? How are leaders and managers different? How does one become a leader? I will answer these questions in this section as well as explore if middle school age students are physically, emotionally, and spiritually prepared to be leaders. How does one define leadership? I know what leadership is, but I have struggled trying to define leadership. Peter Northouse in his book *Leadership: Theory and Practice* says,

> There are many ways to finish the sentence "leadership is . . ." in fact . . . there are almost as many different definitions of *leadership* as there are people who have tried to define it. It is much like the words *democracy, love*, and *peace*. Although each of us intuitively knows what he or she means by such words, the words can have different meanings for different people. As soon as we try to define leadership, we immediately discover that leadership has many different meanings.[1]

Defining leadership is no easy task. It seems each author has a different understanding of leadership. For this research, I define leadership as *a process whereby an individual influences one or more individuals towards a preferred and promised future*. I base this definition on the works of John Kotter, Peter Northouse, and Patrick Keifert. I will explain my definition of leadership section by section.

First, we must understand that leadership and management are different. John Kotter argues that management is about coping with complexity whereas leadership is about coping with change.[2] One is not better than the other. They are just different and

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[1] Northouse, *Leadership*, 2.

[2] Kotter, *What Leaders Really Do*, 52-53.

both are needed. Northouse says that leadership and management are not the same even though they have many things in common. Whereas leadership can be traced back to the time of Aristotle, management as a concept is something that came about in the 20th century in order to reduce the chaos in organizations and to make them run more effectively and efficiently.[3] Leadership and management are different practices.

Second, leadership is a process. This is from Northouse's definition of leadership. He defines leadership by saying, "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal."[4] This definition focuses on leadership being a process rather than a trait or characteristic. There are definitely different ways in which to lead. One can be a charismatic leader or a collaborative leader depending upon one's personality. Some leadership styles may be better in certain situations. For example, one might wish to have a charismatic leader in order to motivate people or to give a speech in front of a large group of people. One might wish to have a collaborative leader in order to work with a team of people in order to build community and teamwork. However, one style of leadership is not better than another. They are just different ways to lead in different situations. All of these different styles of leadership enter into a process. There are skills that can be learned to improve upon your abilities to be a better leader. However, leadership is a process because it is a transactional event that occurs between the leader and his or her followers. It is also a process because both the leader and those being led are affected.

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[3] Northouse, *Leadership*, 9.

[4] Northouse, 2-3.

Next, leadership is also about influencing one or more individuals. Leadership is not based upon a position or title. While someone may be in a leadership position, this does not necessarily make them a leader. Northouse calls these two different understandings of leaders *assigned leadership* and *emergent leadership*. "Leadership that is based on occupying a position in an organization is assigned leadership. Team leaders, plant managers, department heads, directors, and administrators are all examples of assigned leadership."[5] Emergent leadership is when an individual is perceived as the most influential member of a group or organization.[6] In a TED Talk in 2014, Simon Sinek said, "And I know many people who are at the bottom of organizations who have no authority and they are absolutely leaders." A leader is not someone who necessarily holds a position of leadership. On the television show M.A.S.H., popular in the 1970s and early 1980s, the character of Walter "Radar" O'Reilly was a clerk who did not hold a position of assigned leadership. Even though Colonel Henry Blake was the top-ranking officer and in the assigned position of leading the M.A.S.H unit, everyone really listened to Radar. Radar was the one many turned to if they needed to get something done. A leader is not based upon a position or title. Radar is a great example of an emergent leader. Radar influenced other and others influenced him in this process. A leader is one who influences others.

A leader can influence a group of individuals or they can influence just one other person. For example, in dancing, one can lead a group of individuals, such as in line dancing, or one can lead an individual partner. It is not the size of the group that is

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[5] Northouse, 5.

[6] Northouse, 5-6.

important. It is about influencing others. This is what a leader does. In the next section, I will address what it means to influence others and why the motivation of a leader is important. Before that I would like to finish unpacking my definition of leadership.

Finally, a leader moves towards a preferred and promised future. What is a preferred and promised future? Kotter tells us that leadership is the development of vision and strategies, alignment of relevant people behind those strategies, and empowerment of individuals to make this vision happen despite obstacles.[7] This is a fairly typical business model style of leadership and it contains elements for how this research defines leadership. Kotter believes that the leader decides upon the vision of a preferred and promised future. I agree more with Northouse. A leader does not create the vision of a preferred and promised future. A leader develops the vision as a photographer develops film. It is a process through which the vision is revealed. This process can be done any number of ways and a leader does not need to develop this vision alone.

It could be argued that a leader cannot develop, or discover, this vision alone. It must be done within community, like a sports team with a common vision to be the best in their league. The group agrees together that this is the vision they have for their team. The coach can decide what is the best strategy to accomplish this vision. They could build towards a great offense such as the 1990 Super Bowl champion San Francisco 49ers or towards a great defensive strategy such as the 2014 Super Bowl champion Seattle Seahawks. The vision can be developed by a group of individuals.

Rather than calling this a "vision" as Kotter does or a "common goal" as Northouse does, I prefer to use Patrick Keifert's words of a "preferred and promised

[7] Kotter, *What Leaders Really Do*, 54-62.

future." Keifert uses this phrase to shape the discernment process for a faith community. His process begins with asking the question, "What is God's preferred and promised future for our local church?" [8] This is the process for missional leaders. Missional leaders help a community discern what God's promised future is rather than holding up their own vision of the future. The leaders and the community prefer this future–God's preferred and promised future. It is a question of agency. It is neither the leader nor the community that it preparing this future. God goes ahead of them and calls them into this preferred and promised future. Missional leaders come together to discover what God is up to in their local community. Where is God active? Then they discern what that means for their own congregation and how they are going to participate with God in moving towards that preferred and promised future. It is a future that is promised by God and one that is preferred, not only by God, but also by the community of individuals. This holds true for my definition of leadership. Leadership is a process of discerning where God is active. Leadership is about influencing one or more individuals towards this preferred and promised future, which is agreed upon by the leader and those he or she is influencing. It is done within community looking to where God is calling them into the future. If it were not agreed upon, then this would be coercion and not leadership. The way in which a leader influences others matters. It also matters in *why* they are influencing others.

Leadership and Motivation

How does one influence another? I will unpack this shortly. First, I will look at motivation, both the motivation of a leader and the motivation of those being influenced. Influence is how you affect others. Motivation is why someone moves into action.

[8] Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 64.

Kotter says that leadership motivates people by satisfying basic human needs. These needs are achievement, a sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, a feeling of control over one's life, and the ability to live up to one's ideals.[9] Several of these are connected to the three basic needs of people that I learned from my pastoral care class. I was in a distributive learning program at Luther Seminary for a master's degree in Children, Youth, and Family Ministries. One of the required classes was a pastoral care class led by Rev. Dennis "Tiger" McLuen and Dr. Kevin Harrington, who were connected with Bethel Seminary. There was a partnership between the two seminaries in 2005 and I was more than happy to travel to San Diego, California for a weeklong intensive class during the month of February. In this class, we learned that people have three basic needs. First is the need to know that we are okay and not defective in some way. This connects to Kotter's needs for self-esteem and recognition. Second is the need to belong, which is also on Kotter's list. Last is to be valued. This connects to Kotter's need for achievement and self-esteem. These two lists match up fairly well. What Kotter adds to his list is that an individual needs to live up to his or her own ideals. This is an important piece to notice when talking about leadership. A leader's motivation when influencing others must be to help others live up to their ideals.

This connects with Simon Sinek's TED Talk "How Great Leaders Inspire Action." Sinek suggests that every company in the world knows what they do and some even know how they do it, but very few know why they do it. When he talks about "why," he is talking about the purpose, cause, or belief. It is about why the organization

[9] Kotter, *What Leaders Really Do*, 60.

exists.[10] He gives an example of the Wright brothers. Everyone knows about the Wright brothers, but very few know of Samuel Langley. Samuel Langley was given $50,000 by the war department to figure out a flying machine. He had a seat at Harvard, worked at the Smithsonian, and was extremely well connected. His motivation as he pursued results was to be rich and famous. The Wright brothers were motivated by the belief that they would change the world if they could figure out this flying machine. They were driven by a belief, a cause, and a purpose. Others followed the Wright brothers and were motivated because they also believed that this invention would change the world. They were driven by the "why." They were motivated to live up to their ideals.

The motivation of a leader is important. A leader is not only motivated by wanting to live up to their own ideals, they also want to help others live up to their ideals. Sinek says leaders "have chosen to look after the person to the left of them and they have chosen to look after the person to the right of them. This is what a leader is."[11] Is Kim Jong-un, the "supreme leader" of North Korea, a leader? In many ways, he can be considered a dictator. The difference comes from motivation and the use of power. Some use their power to influence others through coercion. Northouse explains, "Leadership and coercion are not the same. Coercion involves the use of threats and punishment to induce change in the followers for the sake of the leader. Coercion runs counter to leadership because it does not treat leadership as a process that includes followers."[12] I

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[10] Simon Sinek, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.

[11] Simon Sinek, "TED2014: Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe," accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_why_good_leaders_make_you_feel_safe/discussion#t-190755.

[12] Northouse, *Leadership*, 13.

have said that leadership is a process. For leadership to be a process, it must have willing participants. The motivation of the leader is important. Having the other's best interests must motivate a leader. If they put their self-interests first then they fall into using their power to coerce others. The individual is not leading but dictating what others must do. The motivation of a leader has the interests of others before their own self-interests. They must want to help others live up to the ideals that others have for their own lives.

Student Leadership

Can students lead? Are middle school age students physically, emotionally, and spiritually prepared to be leaders? Josephine Van Linden and Carl Fertman, in their book *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents*, provide some answers. While skills critical for effective leadership develop in adolescence and young adulthood, they begin before five years of age.[13] They conclude, "Research has found few differences between those adolescents identified as student leaders and those not identified as such . . . The researchers concluded that it is not possible to predict exceptional leadership performance in adolescents . . . This supports our assertion that all teenagers have the potential to lead."[14]

However, many students do not consider themselves to be leaders. This is because they view leadership as a trait or characteristic. I have outlined this earlier. Leadership is not a trait or characteristic, but a process. Within this process, there are different ways in which to lead. However, students view leadership as a set of traits or characteristics. Extroverted, popular, intelligent, hardworking, and self-confident are some characteristics

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[13] Van Linden and Fertman, *Youth Leadership*, 5.

[14] Van Linden and Fertman, 5-6.

associated with being a leader and "most students do not see themselves as part of such a group; therefore, most high school students do not think of themselves as having leadership potential."[15] This is not limited to high school students. There are many who think this way. Van Linden and Fertman call this view of leadership the "great person" theory of leadership. Leaders are born, not made. Adolescents discount themselves from being "chosen" because a limited number of people qualify for this view of leadership.[16] However, leadership has nothing to do with having "charisma" or other personality traits. It is not the province of a chosen few.[17] By defining leadership as a process, anyone can be a leader.

The one characteristic that I continually hear from students is that they do not think they can be a leader because they are not outgoing (extrovert from the list earlier). You do not need to be outgoing or stand in front of a group to be a leader. Great ideas inspire and influence a greater number of people than individuals who stand up in front of a group. Sharing of ideas is a powerful way to be a leader. Susan Cain, in her TED Talk "The Power of Introverts" explains,

> Interesting research by Adam Grant at the Wharton School has found introverted leaders often deliver better outcomes than extroverts do, because when they are managing proactive employees, they are much more likely to let those employees run with their ideas, where as an extrovert can, quite unwittingly, get so excited about things that they are putting their own stamp on things, and other people's ideas might not as easily then bubble up to the surface.[18]

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[15] Van Linden and Fertman, 20-21.

[16] Van Linden and Fertman, 22.

[17] Kotter, *What Leaders Really Do*, 51.

[18] Susan Cain, "The Power of Introverts," accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts/transcript.

One does not need to be up in front of a group in order to be a leader, nor is a leader based on a trait or characteristic such as being outgoing. One can be a leader by influencing others with ideas that they come up with when they are spending time alone. Anyone can come up with great ideas. This is not based on someone's age. Anyone can be a leader, including middle school age students.

Influencing Others

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences one or more individuals towards a preferred and promised future. How does one influence others? Van Linden and Fertman identify five dimensions for each stage of leadership development. These are leadership information, leadership attitude, communication, decision-making, and stress management.[19] The first two prepare the individual to enter into the process of being a leader. The second two deal with influencing others. The last moves into how one continues to develop as a leader.

The first two dimensions, leadership information and leadership attitude, prepare the individual to enter into the process of being a leader. These go hand in hand. One cannot influence others if they do not believe they can be a leader, as I have addressed earlier. Therefore, it is important to educate others on what leadership means. As one learns more about what leadership means and how there are different ways in which to lead, this will impact how they perceive themselves as a leader. Understanding leadership will impact an individual's attitude and belief that they can be a leader. Attitude goes beyond belief that one can be a leader. It involved one's dispositions, thoughts, and

[19] Van Linden and Fertman, *Youth Leadership*, 39-40.

feelings (both positive and negative) in identifying themselves as leaders.[20] You cannot make another be a leader. They must enter into the process willingly. Therefore, education on what it means to be a leader is key in creating a foundation to prepare an individual for leadership.

The next two dimensions, communication and decision-making, focus on how a leader influences others. The first is communication. "It is through communication that one person influences another. The process of communication can include both verbal and nonverbal messages."[21] Communication is how ideas flow from one individual to another or to a group. It is through sharing ideas that both the one who is communicating and the one who is receiving this communication are influenced. The second is decision-making. "Decision-making is what leadership is all about; it is making choices that influence others in an ethical and socially responsible way."[22] Within the decision-making process is the concept of the use of power. Van Linden and Fertman explain two different uses of power are connected with two kinds of leadership: transactional and transformational. Both are needed depending upon the situation. Transactional leadership focuses on the skills of leadership. This includes making decisions even if not everyone has been heard in order to move forward, get things done, and take charge (personal power). Transformational leadership takes all viewpoints and advice into account before making a decision, learns from experience, and shares leadership (group power).[23]

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[20] Van Linden and Fertman, 40.

[21] Van Linden and Fertman, 42.

[22] Van Linden and Fertman, 44.

[23] Van Linden and Fertman, 18-19.

Transactional and transformational leadership are how an individual uses power, both personal power and group power, in order to make a decision.

Kotter goes deeper into four different kinds of power one can use to influence others. These are: sense of obligation, belief in one's expertise, identification, and dependence. A sense of obligation is where the individual is influenced because they feel some sense of obligation towards the other. Friendship carries with it a sense of obligation "A friend in need." There is a sense that one is obligated to follow. One can influence another because, they feel that they "owe it to them." Belief in one's expertise is when someone has built up the reputation as an "expert" in certain matters. This is usually through visible achievements such as awards or degrees. One can influence another because they believe the leader is experienced and able to help them, they will follow. Identification is where others identify with the leader or ideas. It is based on how they perceive the leader and if they are viewed with respect. If they identify with the leader, they will follow. Finally, dependence is when one is viewed as being needed to give leadership. The individual or group cannot move forward without the leader.[24] Northouse adds to this list *reward power* and *coercive power*.[25] These are when a leader influences others through rewards or punishments. However, these two are primarily connected with positions of authority and cannot be applied to all leaders.

All of these uses of power are used in decision-making that influences others. However, these must be made in an "ethical and socially responsible way."[26] This

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[24] Kotter, *What Leaders Really Do*, 103-109.

[25] Northouse, *Leadership*, 8.

[26] Van Linden and Fertman, *Youth Leadership*, 44.

involves entering into a mutual relationship. One individual enters into the relationship as the leader. Another individual enters into the relationship as the follower. As mentioned in the first two dimensions of leadership, leadership information and leadership attitude, one must believe they can be a leader. They must willingly enter into this leadership position. In these second two dimensions of leadership, communication and decision-making, one must willingly enter into this relationship with a follower. There is a mutual relationship in this process. If one is exercising power over another without them willingly following, then the one exercising the power is a dictator and not a leader. They must move towards a future that is not only promised but is preferred by the leader and the one being influenced. The one being influenced must be willing to be influenced. They willingly become a follower or accept how they are being influenced towards a preferred and promised future.

Margaret Wheatley, in her book *Leadership and the New Science*, explores how leadership has been viewed in a hierarchical model with the leader at the top and the followers below. This brings to my imagination the head of a corporation sitting in the office at the top of a tall skyscraper. Wheatley explains this is based in Newtonian science whereby we understand something by taking it apart, dissecting, and then putting it back together. The assumption is that the more we know about the working pieces, the more we will learn about the whole.[27] For leadership this means trying to understand what makes up a leader. This moves us back to the understanding of a leader being shaped by one's characteristics, traits, position, or skills. However, I have already shown that leadership is about influence. This is where Wheatley is helpful. She talks about new

[27] Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 10.

sciences such as quantum physics. She says, "In the quantum world, relationship is the key determiner of everything."[28] It is within the relationship of the leader and those who follow where influence takes place. Both must agree to the relationship where the influence takes place. Both parties must prefer this promised future.

Van Linden's and Fertman's last dimension of leadership is stress management. This moves into the dimension for continuing to develop as a leader. As a leader moves through the process of influencing another, there is a degree of stress. Adolescents are often concerned about the responsibility of leadership and are afraid they will not make the right decisions.[29] How adolescents manage this stress impacts how they will develop as a leader as well as how they will influence others. Van Linden and Fertman say, "There is much anxiety involved in dealing with the consequences of the choices one makes as a leader. The ability of adolescents to regulate this stress influences their performance as leaders."[30] Through understanding what it means to be a leader and managing one's attitude and stress, an individual can influence others through communication and decision-making.

To sum up what it means to be a leader, leadership is a process. First one believes they can be a leader and they learn what it means to be a leader. A leader is not limited to a set of characteristics or traits. It is not based on someone's age nor is leadership based upon one's position within a group or organization. Anyone can be a leader, even middle school age students. Second, a leader uses power, both personal power and group power,

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[28] Wheatley, 11.

[29] Van Linden and Fertman, *Youth Leadership*, 21.

[30] Van Linden and Fertman, 46.

to communicate or make decisions to influence an individual or group of individuals. Both the leader and followers must agree to enter into this process towards a preferred and promised future. It is rooted in a mutual relationship. Finally, how one manages stress will impact how they continue to grow as a leader. This definition of leadership will be helpful in looking at how leadership experiences influence faith development. A student who says a prayer in their Confirmation small group is influencing those in their group. Someone is influenced if a friend decides to invite them to a church event. A student who is an usher in worship influences the congregation and their worship experience. There are many ways in which students can serve as leaders in our congregations.

Believing, Behaving, and Belonging

The second area focuses on faith formation using the three-fold process with the theoretical lenses of *Believing, Behaving*, and *Belonging*. There is a debate as to the order of these three. When I was growing up in the church in the mid-1980s one would need to come to believe certain things about God (*Believing*). One did not come to church or get involved in youth ministry programs unless you believed that God existed and you confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, or at the very least, your parents (because of their beliefs) made you go. In middle school, students would participate in the Confirmation program and learn more about the Christian faith. For me this included learning more about the Ten Commandment, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the sacraments in the Lutheran church. It also was about how we treat others and how one was to act or behave. A common saying sometimes contributed to St. Francis of Assisi

says, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary use words."[31] This may not be a direct quote from St. Francis, but people used this saying to illustrate that the Gospel is more than just our words. It is about our actions and how we live our lives (*Behaving*). Upon completion of this program, students would become members of the church (*Belonging*).

After I graduated from college, I took a position at a church in Houston, TX as a youth minister. That is where I learned that some church leaders were challenging the progression from *Believing* to *Behaving* to *Belonging*. This conversation is still going on today. Some, such as Diana Butler Bass, argued that the first step should be *Belonging*. In her book *Christianity after Religion* she says, "It is also the path found in the New Testament; the Way of Jesus that leads to God. Long ago, before the last half millennium, Christians understood that faith was a matter of community first, practices second, and belief as a result of the first two. Our immediate ancestors reversed the order. Now, it is up to us to restore the original order."[32] As a Christian community, we are called to welcome all people. We invite others to join us on a spiritual journey where we can learn, grow, and discover with one another. It must begin by accepting people and meeting them where they are in life. They must have a sense of *Belonging* so that they feel safe within a community. Only then will they open up, ask questions, and be willing to learn and grow. Only then will they come to a place in their life where they are willing to believe.

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[31] Glenn Stanton, "Factchecker: Misquoting Francis of Assisi," accessed September 7, 2018, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/factchecker-misquoting-francis-of-assisi.

[32] Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012), 203.

Some, such as Michael Lawrence, argue that it cannot start with *Belonging*. "Belonging before believing is a bad idea. A better idea is what Jesus described in John 13: a community that profoundly believes the gospel so that its life is marked by a love for one another. Such a community, he said, will provoke those on the outside not only to recognize they are outside, but to desire to come in."[33] Lawrence argues that if we start with *Belonging* it becomes confusing to Christians and non-Christians. A community is not documents or a building. A community is about its people. A Christian community is one that is defined by its people who participate in the new creation that Christ brings to our lives. If we define the church as a community of individuals that are one some kind of undefined spiritual journey, then the understanding of a Christian community becomes unclear. Some may just be beginning their spiritual journey while others started their journey long ago. The path and the destination remain undecided. Lawrence continues to argue his point by saying that Scriptures tell us, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge" (1 Peter 2:12). This is similar to 1 John 2:5-6 that says, "But whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked." For Lawrence, *Believing* must be where Christian community begins.[34] *Belonging* comes after this.

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[33] Michael Lawrence, "How 'Belonging before Believing' Redefines the Church," *The Underestimated Doctrine of Conversion*, no. 1 (March-April 2012): 47, http://www.9marks.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/9Marks_Journal_2012_Mar-Apr_Conversion.pdf.

[34] Lawrence, 46.

Whether you agree that *Belonging* comes first or last, there is still debate over the progression between *Believing* and *Behaving*. I can see truth in both viewpoints. An individual's belief about God naturally flows into behavior. We show love to our neighbor if we believe that God is love. As 1 John 4:7-8 tells us, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." We show love and compassion for our neighbor if we believe that God is a God of love and compassion. This compassion is seen at the end of the Good Samaritan parable. In Luke 10:36-37 after telling this parable, Jesus asks, "'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" Our behavior flows out of our beliefs.

I can also see it go the opposite way. Our behavior affects our beliefs. I love to play volleyball. My belief that we could win a game or come back from behind when our team is losing 10-0 was very low when I first started playing with this team. However, my belief in my team grew as we practiced together. Our behavior in practicing together affected my belief in my team's ability to win games.

There are differing opinions on what the order of *Believing, Behaving*, and *Belonging* should be. I will define each of these three areas more completely in the next section. It will become clear that there is no natural progression between them. Each is interdependent upon the other.

Believing

Believing is a tough category to nail down. The state of our Christian faith in the United States is disjointed. Kenda Casey Dean, in her book *Almost Christian*, outlines the

state of Christianity and what it means for the future of the church. Christianity has been reduced to what is called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

Guiding Beliefs of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.
4. Good people go to heaven when they die.[35]

This is not something just for youth. Dean goes on to explain that most teenagers in the United States mirror their parents' religious faith. "Parents matter most when it comes to the religious formation of their children. While grandparents, other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers are also influential, parents are by far the most important predictors of teenagers' religious lives."[36] However, as one of my close friends once told me, "Yes, they are the most influential but that does not mean in a good way." Parents feel inadequate about their own faith and so turn it over to the "experts" in the church to instruct their children.

This is not a surprise for anyone involved in youth ministry. We have known for years that youth ministry really involves ministry to the whole family. We need for students and parents to have what Dean calls a "Consequential Faith" which she unpacks in her guidelines for translating faith with young people. There are four guidelines.

1. The best translators are people, not programs.
2. The best translators are bilingual.
3. The best translators invoke imagination.

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[35] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.

[36] Dean, 18.

4. Translation can threaten the people in charge.[37]

The best translators are not programs. The best translators are people. Belief is more than the assimilation of knowledge. It requires a community. Dean writes,

> But faith is a way of life, not only a body of information to master, which means that youth groups and church education programs, important as they are for social networks, religious information, and opportunities for spiritual reflection, play second string when it comes to the transmission of faith. A missional imagination requires the indigenizing practice of translating doctrine and rituals into vibrant public witness. This takes models, not theories. Translation requires communities that embody the tradition in three-dimensional form, and adults who can connect these traditions to daily life on the wall.[38]

This community sees the act of faith formation as a labor of love and not as a program. They love God and want for others to know this love. It is a passion. As Dean says, "What awakens faith is desire, not information, and what awakens desire is a person—and specifically, a person who accepts us unconditionally, as God accepts us."[39] People within a community help others in their faith journey, not programs. Dean gives a great example to explain. Young people do not research a band and then decide based on their research that they really enjoy the band's music. They are first swept away by a song. Because they love this music, they start to research and learn about the band.[40] Faith formation works in the same way. It is a matter of desire, not accumulation of information.

The best translators are bilingual. Dean is talking about a community being able to do "church talk" and "cultural talk." They understand the language of faith as well as

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[37] Dean, 123.

[38] Dean, 117.

[39] Dean, 119.

[40] Dean, 122.

that of the culture they live in and they are able to connect the two together. It is not just a pastor giving a good sermon and showing how the gospel message can be lived out in one's daily life that week. It is about the entire community living this out. This is rooted in the incarnation. "God became what God loved, translating the divine self into human form, sending Jesus to become like us so we could become like him. Christian formation requires a similar but admittedly imperfect move, translating words of faith into lives of faith, as the church provides young people with the resources necessary for maintaining their alternative worldviews while they interact with a persuasive dominant culture."[41]

The best translators invoke imagination. They are able to use metaphors to connect the language of faith with the language of culture around them. Metaphors activate what is called "lateral thinking." They connect the two parts of the brain that are not normally strongly connected, thus connecting the language of the dominant culture and the language of the church.[42] Translation can threaten the people in charge. No longer is this a hierarchical model, but one where the community shares power. "To communicate to people that reading the Bible is something wonderful and liberating means we have to share power with them: the Word's power."[43]

This is what Dean means by a consequential faith. We need this kind of consequential faith, and it can only happen in community. Being within a community where we feel *Belonging* can shape our faith. *Belonging* shapes *Believing*. However, *Behaving* can also influence *Believing*. There are several different views of which

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[41] Dean, 112-113.

[42] Dean, 127.

[43] Dean, 129.

behaviors are essential for faith formation from Michael Foss' *Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship*[44] to John Roberto's *Reimaging Faith Formation for the 21st Century*.[45]

Believing cannot be separated from *Belonging* or *Behaving*. All three influence each other in this process of Christian spiritual faith formation. While Christianity has a set of beliefs that are confessed, the category of *Believing* is more than confessing these beliefs. *Believing* is about how these beliefs are formed within an individual and how an individual is transformed in the process of faith formation.

Behaving

As outlined above, behavior is something that affects our belief and there are different views on which behaviors are vital. Some of the core practices are worship, studying the Bible, serving, Christian relationships, and prayer. There is also strong evidence for testimony. Dean talks about the power of language and testimony, "To be able to actually say what God has done in Jesus Christ, for the world and for us—and to confess what this mean—is critical for Christian formation."[46] Amanda Drury, in her book *Saying is Believing*, gives us some great insights.

> On April 16, 2001, I told my husband-to-be, John, that I loved him. We were sitting on a couch in a small room in our church and I said those three words out loud for the first time. I had loved John for a long time before I articulated the sentiment. Prior to this declaration my actions showed evidence of this love. But saying the words out loud was a game-changer in our relationship. It was not enough that I *felt* love for John. It did not matter as much that I *acted* lovingly

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[44] Michael W. Foss, *Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

[45] Roberto, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*.

[46] Dean, 143.

> toward John. Once the words were actually said out loud the relationship moved forward. Saying the words out loud changed something about our relationship.[47]

The act of speaking about your faith is critical in forming your faith. It helps move us forward in our relationship with God. Talking about that experience, such as serving others, helps us make sense of what happened. Talking about it causes us to reflect on our experience and put our thoughts into a form that we can communicate to others. It makes it more tangible. It deepens our understanding of the experience.[48] Talking about our experience with God also shapes who we are as children of God. It is more than just describing one's life. It impacts one's life.[49]

I am a believer in journaling. I believe it is helpful to have students take time to individually reflect upon an experience and write down their thoughts. I have done this throughout my years as a youth minister. My instructions for students to take time to journal are met with groans and rolling of eyes. One year I was having lunch with a former student. "Remember when you made us do that journaling stuff?" he asked. "Well, I hated it at the time. Now I really appreciate that you made us do that. It made me think about what was happening." Journaling is helpful and testimony goes even deeper. It causes us not only to reflect upon what has happened but also to make sense of what happened and what it means for our lives because we have to explain it to someone else. Drury explains that this is critical to testimony. "A community is needed to receive a

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[47] Drury, *Saying is Believing*, 45.

[48] Drury, 49.

[49] Drury, 25.

testimony. There is not a testimony without someone there to receive the testimony."[50] To speak the words aloud is vital and it must be done within community.

There is interplay between testimony and community. "Those that hear the testimony *receive* it. They are pulled into the scene and are a part of the story. One person might be speaking, but the community as a whole receives and participates in this testimony."[51] If the community participates in the testimony, then they are also affected by it. Sharing about one's experience with God not only shapes a person's own faith but it also shapes the faith of those within the community. In her interviews with students, Drury finds that students see their own faith being shaped by listening to the testimonies of their peers. One of the students she interviewed said, "I may not have seen the Lord provide for me in the way God has provided for my friend, but when I hear this friend testify to God's provisions, I am given insight into the character of God refracted through my friend's experience. I can have vicarious faith that affects my understanding of my own relationship with God."[52]

This ties in with our definition of leadership. Leaders influence others towards a preferred and promised future as they tell their story. They are also calling the group forward towards a future that is promised by God when they are speaking of their past experience. They are calling the group forward to a future that is preferred by God, by the speaker, and those hearing the story. While practices such as worship, studying the Bible, service, and prayer are formative in our faith formation, speaking about these experiences

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[50] Drury, 67.

[51] Drury, 67.

[52] Drury, 51.

within a community has an even greater impact. *Behaving* is interdependent upon our *Believing* as well as our *Belonging* within a community.

Belonging

The sense of *Belonging* is something everyone struggles with and longs to have. As I mentioned earlier, my pastoral care class at Luther Seminary taught us that *Belonging* is one of the three things we all desire. The first is we all need to hear that we are okay. We need to hear that God did not make a mistake when creating us. The second is we need to know that we have value. We were created for a purpose and our lives matter. The third is we have a place of *Belonging*.

Having a place of *Belonging* is something with which everyone struggles. Society tells us we must surrender our identity and individuality in order to belong and feel accepted. Simply turn on the television or radio and you will hear this message loud and clear. We are told that our identity should be based on what we buy, how we dress, what we look like, where we live, which phone we have, and what car we drive. Society constructs an image to which we are to conform. The message is we will only be accepted, have a place of *Belonging*, and be happy if we conform. We are told that we must have a certain identity in order to belong, and this identity is to be like everyone else. We must conform to the image society has set for us. When I was in high school, girls wore jackets with shoulder pads, bright-colored clothes, and had big hair. Guys wore trench coats, rolled up the bottom of their jeans, and also had big hair or a ponytail. By the time I graduated from college, it changed to ripped jeans and a flannel shirt tied around the waist. Bleached hair was also popular. Today there are new trends that we are

told to conform to but the message remains the same. If we conform, then we will fit in. If we conform, then we will be accepted and find a place of *Belonging*.

This message is pronounced for middle school age students. This age is a time of self-discovery when students are exploring who they are as individuals rather than as extension of their parents. This is a time when students are striving to find out who they are and who they will be as adults. They are not only bombarded with messages from television and radio, but also through social media.

A few weeks ago, I was talking with a parent of a middle school student. Her daughter had a few friends over at their house on a Saturday, when one of the girls shared about a new app called TBH.[53] TBH stands for "To Be Honest." This social media app allows you to connect with friends and then anonymously rate your friends in different ways. A comment such as, "The person I most relate to" or "Most likely to conquer the world" is followed by a list of four friends who are also on the app. You choose which one of your friends the question applies to most. When one of your friends chooses you, as a response to a question, you are notified that a boy or girl chose you as the answer. The mother said it was like wildfire. All the girls in the house had to immediately download the app, add all of their friends, and start voting. This went on throughout the afternoon. The desire to be part of the crowd who had the app on their phone was overpowering. There was also the desire to hear through this app that they were accepted. Social media is a way for students to construct their own identities online.

[53] This app by Facebook was discontinued in July 2018.

In his book *Beyond the Screen,* Andrew Zirschky tells us that students construct their identities and strive to build a sense of community through social media.[54] "Teenage use of technology does not ultimately point to adolescent gadget hunger, but instead to a ravenous appetite for relationships."[55] While these girls are in the same room, they also have their extended online network community where they also seek acceptance. It shows their desire for community and *Belonging*.

It is not in conforming that we find *Belonging*. It happens when we find a group that values our uniqueness. Perhaps this was part of the appeal to the TBH app. These students heard how they were chosen for their unique qualities over their peers. *Belonging* does not come from our own actions but from the actions of the group of individuals around us. We would like to think that we could get others to accept us. That is why we have self-help books like *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.[56] The truth of the matter is that *Belonging* does not come from us. *Belonging* comes from the actions of the community around us. We may strive for acceptance by our actions, but ultimately it is based upon the actions of the community around us.

This kind of community does not just happen. There must be some intentionality in creating a community where an individual is welcomed with radical hospitality. This happens when a community has been developed and prepared to welcome that individual. Peter Block, in his book *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, gives some insights on what this community should look like and how it might be developed. Block argues that

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[54] Andrew Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen: Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation* (Nashville, TN: Youth Ministry Partners and Abingdon Press, 2015), 65-71.

[55] Zirschky, 5.

[56] Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1940).

community is not something that just happens. It is something that takes intentionality and care.[57]

One must first come to terms with the current community in order to build a new one. It begins with an honest self-examination. Unhealthy communities have certain qualities and mindsets. While Block is looking more at society as a whole, there are truths that can be applied to any community. There are three qualities and mindsets that one must address. The first is that the community has problems that need to be solved. Fix the problems and we will be a healthy community. The second is the future of the community is defined by self-interests, dependent on the accountability of leaders, and controlled by a small number of people. Third is the community is focused on eliminating the sources of our fears. By having more classes for awareness, stricter rules, and more protection we can battle these fears: unfortunately, we are simply focused on working harder at what is not working.[58] Let us unpack each of these.

First, if we fix our problems then we will be a healthy community. Block argues that our western mindset is focused on problem solving. We can prescribe a formula to build a better community if we can just understand the problem. He says, "We believe that defining, analyzing, and studying problems is the way to make a better world."[59] This is also brought up regarding building community in youth ministry. Some believe in what Andrew Zirschky calls the "basket myth." This is the belief that if we provide a basket for students to place their mobile devices in, then students will be more engaged

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[57] Block, *Community*, 9-10.

[58] Block, *Community*, 39.

[59] Block, 33.

and this will build community.[60] We will have a healthy community if we fix the problem of distracting mobile devices. However, it is not in addressing our problems that we will build a healthier community.

Community comes in seeing possibilities. We will always have problems; what we tend to do is continually try to address problems. We try to put out each little fire, but this only addresses the symptoms and not the source. We need to change our mindset from focusing on problems to seeing possibilities. What does it mean to see possibilities? Block argues that possibilities are not predictions or a goal. It is a choice to bring certain qualities into the life of the community.[61] It is a declaration of the future in which we choose to live.[62] It is claiming, "This is who we are." I have done this in several different contexts. I served for several years in a congregation in Texas that was one of the largest Lutheran churches in that area. A few parents came to me with a concern that our students were being exclusive. They complained about cliques within our youth ministry. I could have addressed the problem. I could have talked to the students about how they need to include others. I could have addressed the problem by splitting students up from their friends and putting them into different small groups.

I chose instead to speak to possibilities. I addressed the students and said, "We are a large group. That means we like to be loud and have fun. We play hard. However, because we are a large group, that means we have a larger capacity to look out for each other and to help each other. It means we have a larger capacity for bringing others into

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[60] Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*, 51-52.

[61] Block, *Community*, 42.

[62] Block, 48.

our group and including others in our group. It is okay to have a close group of friends. You are not all going to be best friends. You are going to get along better with some and not with others. We are a group that asks others to join. Because God accepts us and gave us this great group to be a part of, we also want to look out for others to make sure they feel accepted as part of the group. It is what we do as God's people. It is who we are."

Were we that accepting of new students? No. The parents were absolutely correct. However, in presenting a possible future to the students, they started to live into this possibility. There is power in words and we can speak people into being what we would like to see them become. It worked! I continued to speak these words and articulate what kind of group we were. Eventually the students began to use these same words. It became "cool" to talk to the new kid. It transformed this community of students. In order to grow a healthy community, we need to focus on possibilities, not problems. This ties in with our definition of leadership. Identifying a preferred and promised future for a community sets up the community for leaders to arise. Students are given the opportunity to influence each other to move towards this preferred and promised future.

The second mindset is the future of the community is defined by self-interests, is dependent on the accountability of leaders, and is controlled by a small number of people. I work with a company called Discipleship Living. This organization works with churches in crisis or that are struggling in some capacity. These churches are slowly losing members and are looking for ways to preserve their community. They are concerned with how to attract new members. They are specifically interested in how to attract young families. It is not uncommon today to see churches in this situation. They are worried about the future of their church community. Discipleship Living coaches

these churches in a process called “Listen.” It is a process where they listen to scripture, listen to their congregation, and listen to the neighborhood.

The first two stages of listening usually go pretty well. It is in listening to the neighborhood where these churches struggle. The intent of listening to the neighborhood is to discover what the needs are. What usually happens is the church discovers what the problems are in the neighborhood and then they come up with their own solutions. Let me give you an example. The church where I currently serve has a summer program where middle school students go into the neighborhood to serve others. Close to the church, there is a ministry to families in a mobile home community. The leaders of this ministry informed us that the problem for the families in the mobile home community is during the summer months, when the children do not have anywhere to go. They are isolated within the mobile home community when their parents are at their various jobs. At this point, many churches stop listening. They focus on the problem and start brainstorming on solutions. “We could have our middle school students go to the mobile home community and play games with them. Or what about doing a Vacation Bible School program for them?” The ideas continue. However, the listening has stopped. The church has assumed that it knows what is best for the mobile home community and the ministry to these families. What the church should be doing is asking, “What do you need?” The church needs to look beyond their self-interests and into the needs of their neighbors. In this example the church did ask, “What do you need?” The ministry to these families in the mobile home community said, “Well, these kids are cooped up here all summer long. They cannot get out of the mobile home community. What would be great is if your middle school students could bring them to one of the local parks off site

and just play games with them." The first situation, where the church started brainstorming solutions, may seem okay, but it is primarily looking out for their own self-interests and it brings us to a beneficiary mentality. Let us help you. Let us benefit you. You need us. To quote Block,

> To focus on the needs and deficiencies of the most vulnerable is not an act of hospitality. It substitutes labeling for welcoming. It is isolating in that they become a special category of people, defined by what they cannot do. This isolates the most vulnerable. Despite our care for them, we do not welcome them into our midst, we service them. They become objects.[63]

When we ask the question, "What do you need?" we enter into a relationship. We enter into a partnership. What can we do together? Throughout the summer, the middle school students did take the children in the mobile home community to local parks around town. They played, talked, and hung out together. They built relationships. To build healthy community is to look past self-interests and look to the needs of others. This also ties back into our understanding of leaders. Leaders do not look to their own self-interests, but are motivated to help others live up to their own ideals.

The mindset that the future of the community is dependent on the accountability of leaders is just as detrimental. It lets everyone else off the hook when we focus only on the accountability of leaders.[64] It also gives us a scapegoat when things do not work out. Healthy communities have accountability for everyone in the group. They care for each other and are accountable to each other.[65] The future of the community is the responsibility of everyone, not just the leaders, nor is it controlled by a small number of

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[63] Block, 58-59.

[64] Block, 41.

[65] Block, 30.

people. It is the responsibility of all. Block says this is an issue of "citizenship." Citizenship is not something we obtain; it is a state of being.

> A citizen is one who is willing to do the following:
> - Hold oneself accountable for the well-being of the larger collective of which we are a part.
> - Choose to own and exercise power rather than defer or delegate it to others.
> - Enter into a collective possibility that gives hospitable and restorative community its own sense of being.
> - Acknowledge that community grows out of the possibility of citizens. Community is built not by specialized expertise, or great leadership, or improved services; it is built by great citizens.
> - Attend to the gifts and capacities of all others, and act to bring the gifts of those on the margin into the center.[66]

The third mindset is the community is focused on eliminating the sources of our fears. This is evident with middle school students. Bring a small group of middle school boys together and it is only a matter of time before one will poke fun at another, usually for some way that they are different. This is not an unusual theme. This can be seen in movies such as the remake of *The Karate Kid*[67] where the boy Dre Parker needs to move with his mom from Detroit to China where being a cultural outsider is quickly exploited by his classmates. This can also be seen in the book *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio.[68] This is a story about a boy with medical issues that led him to have numerous surgeries resulting in physical distortions. August tries his best not to draw attention to himself on his first day of school. However, despite his efforts, a student named Julian immediately makes fun of him for his appearance. One might argue that this is why bullying is so prevalent today. We have a community that markets fears.

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[66] Block, 65.

[67] Plot summary of *The Karate Kid (2010)*, IMDB, accessed September 7, 2018, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1155076/.

[68] R. J. Palacio, *Wonder* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2012).

The thought is by having more classes for awareness, stricter rules, and more protection we can battle these fears. Take for example the issue of bullying. This is a growing fear for middle school students. I have seen this grow into a larger problem with the advancement of technology and social media. Bullying no longer takes place face-to-face. It happens online. This makes bullying easier to do. One does not see the hurt in the other person's face. We turn to awareness classes and have anti-bullying laws in our schools in order to address the issue of bullying. This top-down approach does not work. It is not in eliminating the source of our fears that will build a healthy community. It is by empowering its people that we will build a healthy community. Schools have found that by empowering individuals in the community to take responsibility to care for each other, this reduces bullying and results in a healthy community.[69]

Healthy communities do not just happen. They take work and intentionality. In building healthy communities, we create the environment for people to belong. A new person is not a "visitor," she is a part of your community just coming for the first time. Our behaviors shape our community. Our *Behaving* and our *Belonging* are interdependent. What we believe also shapes how we intentionally build our community. Our *Believing* and our *Belonging* are also interdependent.

Summary

The process of *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging* does not happen in a linear progression. They are all interdependent and mutually affect each other. So where do you start? This depends upon the individual. Some need acceptance. Some have questions.

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[69] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed January 12, 2019, https://www.stopbullying.gov/.

Some desire experiences. When looking through this lens, we can see faith formation for students is not isolated from a community nor is it separate from certain behaviors lived out in this community. This, along with how I am defining leadership, was helpful in looking at leadership experiences and how they may influence one's faith development. I will outline theological and biblical lenses for this research project in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL LENSES

I described my theoretical lenses for this research project in the previous chapter. The theoretical lenses*, Believing, Behaving*, and *Belonging*, have given me a framework for my theological and biblical lenses that I outline in this chapter. I have paired *Believing* with justification, *Behaving* with the priesthood of all believers and the discipleship process, and *Belonging* with a Trinitarian theology for my theological lenses. I used several passages for my biblical lenses. For *Believing* I used the lens of how we understand faith and the works of the law found in Galatians 2 and 3. For *Behaving* I used three aspects: Living Stones, Citizenship, and Co-Mentoring. Living Stones is found in 1 Peter 2:2-10 where I used Martin Luther's commentary on the Epistle of Peter.[1] Citizenship uses Ephesians 2:11-22. Co-mentoring utilizes aspects of how we follow Christ's example in Romans 15:1-13, how we are to be examples to others is found in 1 Timothy 4:1-16, and how these two come together in the image of the Body of Christ found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. I have paired *Belonging* with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 and the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:36-49.

[1] Martin Luther and J. G. Walch, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982).

Theological Lenses

Believing–Justification

The theological lens of justification is foundational for what we believe. Martin Luther said, "If the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost."[2] Justification is as much at the center of this discussion today as it was for the Reformation. At that time, justification was seen not as a gift of God but one that also came through human effort. Professor Herman Hanko says,

> Roman Catholic theology had no word of comfort for the saints. It had none because of its doctrine of justification. It taught a justification by works or a salvation which came to man by grace and human merit. As Schaff says, "In the Catholic system justification is a gradual process conditioned by faith and good works." Roman Catholicism confused justification with sanctification and spoke of justification as a process of becoming more and more righteous through one's faith and one's good works. This could not possibly bring peace of heart to the anxious child of God, for he knew, deep down within himself, that his own works could never accomplish anything. No wonder that Luther kept asking himself, when a monk, whether he was sufficiently hard on himself, whether God would notice his hunger and his cold, whether any good could come from beating himself. Always a hollow and empty void filled him.[3]

Martin Luther knew that he was a sinner. He knew that his own works could not accomplish anything in regards to his own justification. He felt lost. This was rooted in the thought that the term "righteousness of God" meant the anger God had against sin. God punished sin because God was righteous. It was not until Luther struggled with this that he came to the realization that justification was through faith alone. Luther writes,

> And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me

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[2] Martin Luther and John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther, Selections From His Writings*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 106.

[3] Herman Hanko, "Martin Luther and Justification by Faith," Protestant Reformed Churches in America, accessed December 8, 2017, http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/item/5020-martin-luther-and-justification-by-faith.

> truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine's The Spirit and the Letter, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when He justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught.[4]

Justification does not come through our actions. It is only through God's grace that God justifies us. Any righteousness we have is a passive righteousness on our part since we can do nothing to bring about our own justification. Luther writes, "Grace can only be freely granted. It is experienced only as a gift. This justification and righteousness, which cannot be attained and won by us, is the righteousness of faith. It is neither a justifying thinking nor justifying acting, neither contemplative nor active righteousness. It is a passive righteousness."[5] This was a turning point for Luther in his understanding of justification.

> And this is the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which He makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which He makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.[6]

It is the Trinitarian God who is the agent in our justification. We are justified by faith alone in God. Our faith in God is not something that we do. When I was a youth minister in Houston, Texas, I was faced with this concept all the time. This was a constant debate with friends, students, and other youth ministers. It was not uncommon to hear, "Last night we had this youth rally and we saved four students." My response

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[4] Hanko, "Martin Luther and Justification by Faith."

[5] Bayer, *Living by Faith*, 19.

[6] Hanko, "Martin Luther and Justification by Faith."

would always be, "Who saved?" It would open up a conversation about justification and salvation. Eventually they would agree that it is only by Christ's sacrifice that we are saved. This gift of salvation is a gift of God. We are justified not by our own works but by faith in God alone. This is where the conversation would hit a bump. They would argue that faith is our decision to follow Christ. Faith is our commitment. Faith is our half of the relationship. I would argue that faith is not something we do. Faith is also a gift of God. Martin Luther would agree. Faith is solely the work of God. Faith encounters us by coming to us.[7]

This understanding of God coming to us is foundational to what ELCA Lutherans believe. I had to develop a basic way of communicating this to students while in Houston, TX. I was tired of hearing students and parents articulate the Lutheran faith by saying what Lutherans are not. "We do not worship that way." "We do not believe that." "We do not interpret that Bible passage like that." These are the statements I would hear whenever I would ask, "What do Lutherans believe?" It was always stated as what Lutherans are not. Nobody could give an explanation of what Lutherans believed apart from putting down another denomination. I was surprised that I did the same thing. I decided to put together a simple understanding of what Christians believed and what the Lutheran lens was for these beliefs.

To combat the understanding that all religions are the same, I would ask students how religions spelled "salvation." I would explain that all but one of the major religions spell "salvation" with two letters, D-O. Salvation is something that you do, whether it is the Eight-Fold Path of Buddhism or the Five Pillars of Faith of Islam. Salvation is

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[7] Bayer, *Living by Faith*, 20.

something that you do. You must take an active part in your salvation. However, Christianity is different. Christianity spells salvation D-O-N-E. It is something that is done for us. God willingly leaves heaven to come down to us in the person of Jesus Christ. God willingly enters into our very broken and sinful world in order to be with us. As Luther says, "The glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouths, our heart, our bosoms."[8] We are not active participants in our salvation but passive recipients. The Lutheran lens in this is how we receive. It is by Grace Alone. It is by Faith Alone. It is by Word Alone. All three of these are ways in which we receive. We receive a gift that we are not worthy to receive. We receive only by the grace of God alone. We receive by faith alone; which is also given to us. "It (faith) is a gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We receive by hearing God's word (word alone). These are the ways that Lutherans understand how we receive from God.

Then someone would usually ask, "Then what do we do?" I would tell them that we live in response to what God has done for us. We do not do anything to earn our salvation. What we do is live a life that is worthy of the gift that we have received by loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and by loving our neighbor as ourselves. How do we love our neighbor? We do this by following God's example, by willingly entering into the brokenness of another in order to be with them in their suffering.

This is a different understanding than Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). The first tenant of MTD is God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught

[8] Bayer, 23-24.

in the Bible and by most world religions. While this may be true, Christianity is deeper than being nice to others. The Bible tells us to love our neighbors. Loving our neighbor goes deeper than being nice to them. The second tenant says the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. Luther would disagree. Luther says that the experience of faith is painful.[9] We take credit for works and wisdom and do not give credit to God without this painful process and the death of the old Adam. It is another form of self-actualization of the renaissance. To become more Christ-like is to be willing to enter into the suffering of another. Nor would Luther agree that God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem. God is always the activator. God always takes the initiative to be part of our lives. The final tenant of MTD is good people go to heaven when they die. This completely contradicts our lens of justification. We are justified and go to heaven, not by any action or decision on our part. We are justified solely by the work of God in Christ Jesus. We live our lives in response to what God has done for us.

We believe, as did Martin Luther, that we are sinners in need of a savior. We cannot save ourselves. It is not in our behaviors, or in trying harder, that will bring about our justification or salvation. In fact, it is in our repeated failures that we see that we cannot save ourselves. These behaviors shape our belief of justification. We believe that our justification and our salvation are gifts from God. While our behaviors do not give us faith, they can help in shaping our faith. Our behaviors can open us up to receive and experience the gifts God has in store for us. Our faith is not static but continually changing because of our experiences and behaviors. Faith formation is a process. What

[9] Bayer, 20.

we believe and how we behave are interconnected. *Behaving* and *Believing* are intertwined.

Behaving–Priesthood of All Believers and the Discipleship Process

Martin Luther writes about the *priesthood of all believers*. We are all priests in the eyes of God. I have outlined assigned leadership and emergent leadership in my theoretical lens on leadership. Assigned leadership is a position of leadership versus emergent leadership is when an individual is seen by others to have true influence. I illustrated this with the television show M.A.S.H. Colonel Henry Blake was an assigned leader with a position of leadership, whereas Corporal "Radar" O'Reilly had influence and was the emergent leader. Luther talks about priests in a similar way. A priest is not someone who occupies an office. "That outward institution of the priesthood has all ceased, wherefore another priesthood now begins, and another sacrifice is offered, even one that is entirely spiritual."[10] The old institution of priests has passed and we are all considered "priests." Luther continues, "Therefore, since he (Jesus) is a priest and we are his brethren, so all Christians have it in their power and charge, and obligation rests upon them, to preach and to come before God, and one to pray for another, and offer himself up to God. And in spite of the fact that one does not raise his voice to preach or to speak he is nevertheless a priest."[11] We are all priests.

What does this mean in regards to *Behaving*? What are the behaviors of a priest? As Christians, we are called to "sacrifice, pray, and preach and confess the grace of God

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[10] Luther and Walch, *Commentary on the Epistle of Peter and Jude*, 92.

[11] Luther and Walch, 93.

in Christ."[12] When Martin Luther talks here about sacrifice, these are not the sacrifices that we see in the Old Testament, but a sacrifice our old sinful selves. "There the true office of the priest is administered when we sacrifice to God the wicked rogue, the corrupt old stupid fellow, namely, the carnal man."[13] It is about us casting off our sinful lives and living in service to others.

Not only were sacrifice and prayer important behaviors for Luther, the preaching of the Gospel and confessing were also vital.[14] This connects with Drury and her work with the power of testimony. Not only is faith impacted by the one giving the testimony, but it also impacts those that receive this testimony.[15] These testimonies can also come through the scriptures.[16] Here we can see that Drury would add testimony and study of scripture to our list of behaviors. Zscheile would add "discernment" to this list. Zscheile writes, " . . . discernment must be a way of life for Christian disciples and Christian communities seeking to participate in God's reign."[17] We wonder what God is up to in our midst. Therefore, our list of behaviors has grown to sacrifice, pray, preach, confess, worship, study, and discern. All of these are not done in isolation. They are done in community. Our *Belonging* in a community and our *Behaving* are connected. This can also be seen within the discipleship process.

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[12] Luther and Walch, 95.

[13] Luther and Walch, 94.

[14] Luther and Walch, 95.

[15] Drury. 49-51.

[16] Drury. 53.

[17] Zscheile, *People of the Way*, 97.

In his book *Velvet Elvis*, Rob Bell describes the discipleship process in the Bible. Jewish students would begin memorizing the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and by the age of ten would know the whole thing by heart. From these students some of the best would move on to the next level. This is called the *Bet Talmud* or the "House of Learning." This lasted until the age of fourteen when they would finish memorizing the Hebrew Scriptures. Students at this level would also study the art of questions and the oral traditions surrounding the texts. Only what Bell calls "the best of the best" were still studying at the end of *Bet Talmud*. Most students would have stopped this process and entered into learning the family business. The "best of the best" would apply to a well-known rabbi to become one of his disciples.[18]

A disciple was much more than just a student. A disciple did not just want to know what the rabbi knew. He would want to become like the rabbi. This level of education was called *Bet Midrash* or the "House of Study." A Jewish student would present himself to the rabbi who would question him about the Torah, traditions, and the art of asking questions. If the rabbi believed that the student could do what he did and be like the rabbi, he would say, "Come follow me."[19] Being a disciple was not just knowledge but a way of life. It was about becoming like the rabbi.

The same is true for Christian disciples. It is not about learning but about becoming like Jesus. This is why I like Amanda Drury's definition of faith formation. She says, "I understand spiritual formation to be the process in which one is transformed into the like-mindedness with Jesus Christ while simultaneously resisting the pull to be

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[18] Bell, *Velvit Elvis*, 125-129.

[19] Bell, 129-134.

formed into the mold of the world (Romans 12:2)."[20] Discipleship is about being transformed. "The call to Christian discipleship is a call to conversion–deep change that encompasses our hearts, mind, and every aspect of our lives."[21] It is about how we behave and not just what we know or believe.

Christ Lutheran Church has what are called "Faith Practices." These are similar to the list of behaviors we have just listed previously. They are also similar with Michael Foss' Six Marks of a Disciple.[22] The faith practices at Christ Lutheran Church are: worship, pray, give, serve, invite, encourage, and study.[23] All of these are ways in which we strive to be more like Christ. These faith practices do not give us faith. God gives us faith. These faith practices are a response to what God has done in us. They are a way in which we live in response to God's action, and God will use them to continue to help us grow in faith. Our *Believing* is intertwined with our *Behaving*. For example, let us look at the faith practice of giving. We do not give in order to grow in faith. This would be an active participation in the sense that our participation in the faith practice of giving activates faith growth within us. Instead, we give to others as a response to what God has already given to us. We are so thankful for what God has given to us that we are compelled to give to others. We might also give in hopes that God will grow faith in us. This practice of giving opens us up to what God has to offer us. Giving makes us more

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[20] Drury, *Saying is Believing*, 23.

[21] Zscheile, *People of the Way*, 92.

[22] Foss, *Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship*. Foss' six marks of discipleship are: daily prayer, bible reading, weekly worship, Christian service, relationships that encourage spiritual growth, and giving in the spirit of generosity. You can see the similarities with Christ Lutheran Church's faith practices. However, Christ Lutheran Church adds"invite" to their list.

[23] These faith practices were developed by the ELCA and adopted by Christ Lutheran Church. For more information: https://www.elca.org/Resources/Ministry-Practices

thankful for what we have. We grow in faith that God will continue to give to us, and this compels us to give to others even more. The faith practice of giving (*Behaving*) is intertwined with our *Believing* as well as to our *Belonging* within a faith community.

Belonging–Trinitarian Theology

Humans are created in the image of God. This is where our identity and *Belonging* is. Our identity and *Belonging* are rooted in who God is. I will use Jürgen Moltmann's writings on a social Trinity and David Bosch for a sending Trinity understanding of who God is for a lens into Trinitarian theology.

The social Trinity is who God is within God's self. This is what is called the immanent Trinity. It is the very nature of God. To understand the nature of God one must look at the relationship between the three persons of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—rather than beginning with each individual person of the Trinity. It is in the nature of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity that each person of the Trinity finds their personhood. While each person of God is distinct and an individual person, their personhood is found in the mutual indwelling with each other. The Father is the Father because of the Father's relationship with the Son and the Spirit. The Son is the Son because of the Son's relationship with the Father and the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit because of the Spirit's relationship with the Father and the Son. [24] This is who God is. As Moltmann says, "The history of Jesus the Son cannot be grasped except as part of the history of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[25] All three are understood in relationship to each other. "They have the divine nature in common; but their particular

[24] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 165.

[25] Moltmann, 16.

individual nature is determined in their relationship to one another."[26] This is what is called *perichoresis*.

Perichoresis is the Greek word used to describe the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. God is love. This means God is self-giving. Each person of the Trinity gives of themselves to the others. They make space for the others and find their personhood in their relationship with each other. One image for this might be a divine dance.[27] This is not a dance such as a waltz where there are two partners, one leading the other, but it is a community dance. I learned several different kinds of community dances when I lived in Houston, TX. Dances like line dances, square dancing, or the Cotton Eyed Joe circle dance are done with groups of people. You have a partner for the beginning of the dance but your partner changes as the dance progressed. In community dances, each individual must make room for the other in order to come together. Partners continually change. Sometimes one leads while at another time one might need to follow. If we look not at the individual dancers in community dances but at the dance community as a whole, then we can see more of what is meant by *perichoresis*. Each dancer makes space for another in order to be part of the communal dance. Each dancer's individuality is defined by their interaction with the other dancers. The communal dance is experienced through the interaction of each dancer. That which defines them as individuals also defines them as part of the group. As Moltmann says, "In the *perichoresis*, the very thing

[26] Moltmann, 172.

[27] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 274.

that divides them becomes that which binds them together . . . The Persons themselves constitute both their differences and their unity."[28]

Each person of the Trinity finds personhood in mutual indwelling with the other. It is in relationship that they find personhood. Humans also find personhood in relationship with others. We were created in God's image and "A person is only God's image in fellowship with other people: 'in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27)."[29] We find our *Belonging* in our relationship with each other.

The mutual indwelling of the Trinity has no hierarchy. No person of the Trinity is above the other. The Father does not sit above the Son and Spirit nor does the Son or Spirit sit above each other or the Father. They are united as one God. Since they are united, it is impossible for one to sit above another. The same is true for humans. We find our personhood in our relationships with each other. Moreover, these relationships must be mutual and equal. There can be no hierarchy within these relationships.

It is also important to note that this community within the Triune God has not closed up upon itself in heaven. This is "rather a community whose own identity is found in freely sharing life and love with others."[30] Dwight Zscheile uses the ancient way of saying that God's communal life is *ecstatic*—outward reaching, generative, and creative (from the Greek word *ekstasis*, literally standing outside oneself).[31] The Triune God is open to each other person of the Trinity. The Triune God is then also open to humanity

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[28] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175.

[29] Moltmann, 155.

[30] Zscheile, *People of the Way*, 47.

[31] Zscheile, 47.

and all of creation because of the communal *ecstatic* life: and, as disciples, we should resemble that communal life. Moltmann explains this using the term "open" instead of "ecstatic."

> Moreover it is not a closed unity; it is an open union. That is why we can read in the High Priestly prayer (John 12:21): "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . .". The fellowship of the disciples with one another has to resemble the union of the Son with the Father. But not only does it have to resemble that trinitarian union; in addition it has to be a union within this union. It is a *fellowship with* God and, beyond that, a *fellowship in* God. But that presupposes that the triunity is open in such a way that the whole creation can be united with it and can be one within it.[32]

God's very nature overflows into what the Triune God does. This brings us to the sending Trinity. What we know of God's nature, who God is, is by what God does. It is through God's interaction with humanity that we see God's nature. The Triune God can only appear in history as God's self.[33] This is called the economic Trinity. God cannot separate God's actions from God's nature. They cannot contradict each other. Therefore, the economic Trinity must be the immanent Trinity. Moltmann says, "Statements about the immanent Trinity must not contradict statements about the economic Trinity."[34] He continues by saying, "This is why I have affirmed and taken up Rahner's thesis that 'the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa.'"[35] What we know about the nature of God is shown in how God interacts with humans. We see this in the mission of God (*missio Dei*). David Bosch, in his book *Transforming Mission*, explains:

> Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It is thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology.

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[32] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 95-96.

[33] Moltmann, 153.

[34] Moltmann, 154.

[35] Moltmann, 160.

> The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.[36]

It is in this sending that we see the nature of God. The church is sent into the world to proclaim the gospel. This is the mission of the church: to share God's message of love through word and action. Within this mission, there is a relationship between the church and God as well as between the church and the world. Similar to the social Trinity, there is another trinity of relationships between God, the church, and the world. It is within these relationships that identity is also formed. It is in these relationships that the church finds its identity. The church exists because of its mission. Bosch writes, "Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."[37] In the social Trinity God finds personhood within the relationships with each person of God. In the sending Trinity, humans find their personhood within the relationships with God and other humans as we are sent out into the world. The sending Trinity gives us not only identity but also a place of *Belonging*. We belong in the world rather than in a church building. We are sent into the world.

We are sent because we belong to God. We are God's children created in God's image. In our relationship with God, we find *Belonging*. We also find our *Belonging* within our relationship with each other because we are all God's children. Our sense of

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[36] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

[37] Bosch, 389-390.

Belonging is not found in our common interests. It is found in our common relationship with God. I form students into small groups for retreats, summer programs, and Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church. Middle school years are a very difficult time for individuals just starting to discover who they are in the world. I allow students to choose one friend whom they wish to be with in a small group. This gives them someone in their group with whom they are already friends. This helps them feel safe as they enter into this new group of people. However, I am also intentional to not place students with common interests into the same small group. For example, I do not place all hockey players into the same small group. Why? Because hockey is all these students will discuss. They allow their activity to shape their identity. However, our identity is not found in our activity but in our relationship with God and one another.

The common bond between the students is not their activities but their relationship as children of God. This is where we find *Belonging*. Some colleagues of mine would disagree with me. They would place all of the hockey players together in the same small group. What this creates are small individual groups of students with common interests. There is no sense of community between the small groups. These small groups have not found a place of *Belonging* within the larger faith community. They have simply moved their common interest group into the church building. There is only participation in activities the church might offer rather than in God's mission. There is not a larger sense of Christian community or *Belonging*.

"The word 'communion' (Greek *koinonia*) is one of the richest terms in the New Testament. It means sharing, participation, fellowship, belonging, togetherness, solidarity, unity, reciprocity, and mutuality. Communion is the reconciliation of

differences into a common life."[38] Our differences not only identify us as individuals but they also draw us together into a fuller picture of the body of Christ. Community is not about our common interests but our different interests that give us a greater insight into the Triune God. We gain greater insight into who God is by God's interaction with each of us. God interacts with each of us differently based on our gifts, talents, and experiences. We gain a greater insight into who God is as we come together to share these experiences with each other. This leads us to wonder what God is up to not only for ourselves but also for us as a community. What is this Triune God sending us to do? How is our *Belonging* and *Believing* interacting and influencing our *Behaving*? These are the questions we ask as we come together as children of God.

Our *Belonging* is rooted in who God is. We can see this through the lens of Trinitarian Theology. It is rooted in the relationships within the social Trinity. It is also rooted in the relationships between God, the world, and the church (the sending Trinity). Our *Belonging* is interdependent on our *Believing* of who God is. Our *Behaving* is interdependent with our *Belonging* as children of God sent to serve the world.

Biblical Lenses

Believing–Faith and Works of the Law

I define my biblical lens for *Believing* by focusing on Galatians 2:15-3:14 where Paul speaks about faith and works of the law. Our salvation is not based on works of the law but in faith in Jesus Christ. Paul tells us Christian righteousness is different from all other kinds of righteousness because Christian righteousness is a gift of God not based on

[38] Zscheile, *People of the Way*, 45.

any action that we take. Martin Luther calls this a "passive righteousness" because this righteousness is not based on our actions but on the actions of God.[39] This righteousness is not based in our own efforts but in the acts of Jesus Christ. I have written about this above in the lens of justification.

The law is still important. The law is used to curb our wickedness, serve as a mirror to see ourselves more clearly, and to guide us in how we live our lives. Luther tells us the first use of the law is to curb wickedness. It serves as a fence for good civic behavior as we live together. This includes admonitions like do not kill, do not commit adultery, and do not steal.[40] This second use of the law serves as a mirror of our humanity. It reveals the perfect reflection of what we were created to be and who we are in relationship to God. It shows us that we are human and are not able to save ourselves. We are not about to contribute anything to our righteousness. We are in need of a savior! Christ came to be this savior for us. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Our salvation, our righteousness, comes not from our works, but through the works of Jesus Christ. Righteousness comes from God. " . . . A person is not justified by the work of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16). The footnote in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says that the end of this passage can also be translated "the faith of Jesus Christ." The original Greek is πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. If we translate the Greek as "through faith in Jesus Christ," this is an objective genitive view while translating it as "through the faithfulness

[39] Luther and Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 100-101.

[40] Luther and Dillenberger, 139.

of Jesus Christ" is a subjective genitive view.[41] Therefore, Jesus Christ is either the object of faith (faith in) or the subject of faith (faith of). There are arguments on both sides on which is the proper translation of this phrase. However, for our purposes, either translation holds true. Whether we are justified by our faith in Jesus Christ or by the faith of Jesus Christ, we are justified not by something found within ourselves but within Jesus. Our justification is based upon the actions of Jesus Christ and what God has done for us. The third use of the law is to serve as a guide. It shows us not only what not to do, but it also shows us what the proper way to live together is in light of the risen Christ. Luther shows us this in the Small Catechism as he explains the Ten Commandments. Each commandment tells us not only what not to do but it also tells us what we should do.

Galatians 2 gives great insight on faith and the works of the law. The law helps us curb our wickedness, serves as a mirror, and guides us in how we are to live together. What we believe and how we behave are intertwined with each other. Our *Believing* and our *Behaving* are interdependent and influence each other.

Behaving–Living Stones, Citizenship, and Co-Mentoring

Luther writes in his commentary of 1 Peter, "Christians who hear the Gospel are they who are built and are the stones which are to be fitted into this corner-stone. We are to repose our confidence on him (Jesus) and let our hearts stand and rest upon him."[42] Christians are to rest upon Jesus and his actions upon the cross. "Like living stones, let

[41] Bill Roach, "Justification by Faith in Christ apart from Works of the Law Galatians 2:16," accessed November 16, 2018, https://williamroach.org/2015/05/13/justification-by-faith-in-christ-apart-from-works-of-the-law-galatians-216.

[42] Luther and Walch, C*ommentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 92.

yourselves be built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Christians are living stones not based on their own actions, but on God's actions in building them into this spiritual house. I have written about this in the previous section on justification. Peter moves from talking about Christians as individual living stones to living stones that are built into a spiritual house. They have a place of *Belonging* in this spiritual house because they are living stones. There is also an understanding that those who are built into this spiritual house are to be joined together into a community. How Christians live together as a community shapes their *Behaving*. There is no choice on which other living stones are in this spiritual house.

Paul uses this image of a building in Ephesians, with Jesus as the cornerstone. "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God" (Ephesians 2:20-21). Paul is talking to Jewish and Gentile Christians in this section (verses 11-22). There are some Jewish Christians who are saying that Gentiles must first be circumcised in order to be part of the Christian community. Paul speaks out about this behavior. They are no longer two different people, Jew and Gentile. They are one new people of God. "He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it" (Ephesians 2:15-16). Paul also uses the image of a building where all come together and rest upon Jesus the cornerstone as one community. Both Jews and Gentiles coming together through peace and reconciliation into one community.

There are "no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). Here is an understanding of acceptance, accountability, responsibility, and mutual dependency. *Behaving* is not something one does by one's self. *Behaving* happens in response to what God has done for us and it is done within community (*Belonging*).

These communal relationships are what I call "co-mentoring" relationships. "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 8:7). This not only speaks to the acceptance of one another but also to following Christ's example. We follow Christ's example from what we see through God's people and not only from what we hear through scripture. After talking about Abraham, Moses, and other Israelite heroes, Hebrews 12 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses . . . " It is through others of the faith that we also learn to imitate Christ. They are guides and mentors. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a mentor as "A trusted counselor or guide."[43] They guide us in how to follow Christ's example. We in turn are to also be an example for others. The Apostle Paul writes a letter to Timothy instructing him on how to lead others in the Christian faith. In 1 Timothy 4:12 he tells Timothy to "set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." We not only have mentors to be examples for us. We are also mentors to others.

Students have a hierarchical image when I talk to them about mentors. They seem to think that following the example of another places this individual above them. Returning to Merriam-Webster's definition of mentor, a mentor is a guide. Think about

[43] Miriam-Webster Incorporated, "Mentor," accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mentor.

an adult and a middle school age student coming together to talk about the Christian faith being lived out in our daily lives. The adult has knowledge about the Christian faith that can be used to guide the student. The adult can explain the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed. The adult is a mentor, a guide, in the knowledge of the Christian faith. Students also have knowledge that the adult does not yet possess. They know what life is like in a middle school. They know what it is like to live as a middle school student today. They know which apps are popular. They know what drugs or other risky behaviors are challenging to their peers. They know what gossip is kept from most adults. The middle school student is a mentor, a guide, in the knowledge of the daily life of a middle school age student. Both are mentors to each other. They both guide each other in knowledge. They are both influencing each other. They are both leaders. This is a co-mentoring relationship where, in coming together, they may be able to discern what God might be up to in the lives of middle school students. There is no hierarchy in this relationship. The relationship is more like that found in 1 Corinthians 12 that talks about us all being different parts of the body of Christ.

> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior

> member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:14-27).

There is no hierarchy in this relationship where we are mentoring and being mentored. We are all the body of Christ. We all have different knowledge to share. We all have different talents and experiences. We all have knowledge to guide others and we all seek another to guide us in being more Christ-like through the Holy Spirit. Our *Behaving* is intertwined with our *Believing* and all this takes place in community (*Belonging*).

Belonging–Great Commission and Greatest Commandment

Both the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment provide a lens for *Belonging*. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at the tomb after his resurrection in Matthew's gospel. Jesus instructs them to tell the disciples, his friends, to meet him in Galilee. The eleven disciples go to Galilee to a mountain where Jesus appears to them. Here they worshipped him even though some doubted. Jesus says in Matthew 28:18-20,

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

It should also be noticed that the word "go" is one to which they must commit their lives. This is not a part-time deal. They are to go to all nations. This was a lifetime commitment and it was something that they would do together. This is a new way of living. As a community, they are to go to the nations, baptize people, and teach them about Jesus Christ. The disciples were formed into a new community. Here they found a

place of *Belonging* and they were sent into the world to bring others into this community. They were sent to help others find this place of *Belonging*.

It is important to see in Matthew 28:18 that this invitation into this new community was to "all nations." No longer is this just for the Jewish people. This is a turning point where the walls are broken down and all nations are brought into this new covenant with God. The Jewish people were called to be separate from other nations. Now the apostles are sent to all nations. They are sent to all nations to baptize and teach . . . to disciple them. This is not a sending to proclaim judgment as the prophets of the Old Testament did. The apostles are sent to disciple them.[44] This is not based on their beliefs. Because when Jesus gives this commission in Matthew 28 to the apostles, even some of the apostles doubted. The invitation to be a disciple is not something someone can earn based on his or her actions or beliefs. The invitation is open to all based on Christ's action on the cross. This great commission to go to all nations must include all people. Jesus says, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 2:8). All nations include the Jewish people, but also those whom they disliked (Samaritans).[45] They were to consider those they disliked to also be part of this new community. They were to consider them their "neighbor." In Luke 10, a lawyer asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus' great commission to the disciples was to include all people, even those that the apostles considered their enemy or whom they disliked. This new community was to be

[44] Matthew Henry, "Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete)," accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete.

[45] Henry.

something different. It was different in how these people treated one another as neighbors. Their *Behaving* would be intertwined with their *Belonging*.

How were they to treat these neighbors? Here we see the Greatest Commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). This commandment was not for the elite. This was a command for all Christians. Christians are commanded to welcome all people with love and acceptance (*Behaving*) because all have a place of *Belonging*. While *Belonging* was not based on *Behaving* or *Believing*, these three were interconnected.

The Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment show us that God chooses everyone to be part of God's family. We find our place of *Belonging* because of God's choosing us to be God's people. As God's children, we find our place of *Belonging* with God and with God's people. This sense of *Belonging* is intertwined with how we are *Behaving* in treating others as God's people. It is also intertwined with our *Believing* that we are all part of God's family. This lens shows how *Behaving*, *Believing*, and *Belonging* are all interdependent and influence each other.

Summary

These theological and biblical lenses helped when looking at faith formation and leadership experiences. Our justification is not through our own actions, but through the actions of a Trinitarian God. However, our behaviors matter. *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging* are not linear or mutually exclusive. They are intertwined and interdependent. Each of the faith practices that I have mentioned can entail a leadership experience. Leadership is how we influence each other by rooting our identity in the relationship with God and one another. Leadership is experienced within the relationships we have in

community with one another. Using these lenses was helpful in looking at the data from this research. I will outline my methodology for this research project in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

I have outlined my theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses in the previous chapters. I will explain my methodology for my research project in this chapter. I designed this research project to examine how leadership experiences might impact faith formation for middle school age students in a suburban neighborhood of Minnesota at Christ Lutheran Church. The research question being explained was:

> How might personal leadership experiences of middle school age students impact their faith formation?

I am not talking about the impact of adults in leadership roles and their impact upon faith formation of students. This research project looked to explain how students' personal leadership experiences impact their own faith formation. I conducted surveys with parents and students to create a rich description in my research. This was followed by conducting interviews and focus groups to dig deeper into the question of leadership and faith formation. Therefore, I chose an *explanatory sequential mixed methods* design for this case study.

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods

Explanatory research strives to explain why events occur. This research strove to explain the impact of leadership experiences of middle school age students upon their faith formation. Sequential mixed methods research utilizes quantitative questionnaires followed by qualitative interviews. First, I collected quantitative data. This gave me some

insights into how the current Confirmation program is influencing the students' faith formation. Then I explored the quantitative results using qualitative data. The qualitative questions were adjusted to address specific questions that I, the researcher, wished to explain from the results of the quantitative questionnaire in order to gain deeper insights or to clarify questions. This research was sequential because the quantitative data influenced my qualitative interview protocol.[1]

I used interviews and focus groups to give me the ability to dig deeper, specifically into how leadership experiences influenced students' faith formation. The combining of quantitative and qualitative methods is called "mixed methods research."[2] This method was helpful in explaining the Confirmation ministry at Christ Lutheran Church. Doing research with students and their parents who are involved in this Confirmation program not only gave me insight into the current program in order to improve the program, but it has also helped me to be more intentional in how I guide students during this time of their faith formation.

Biblical and Theological Groundings

Matthew 28:18-20 says, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" What captures my imagination in this

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[1] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 224.

[2] Creswell, 215.

passage is the command to go and make disciples of all nations. Discipleship is an active process. It is not something that just happens. It is an active process between God and God's people. This discipleship process contains two things: baptism in the Triune God and, through instruction, to be obedient to everything Christ has commanded.

Baptism is in direct response to this verse. Baptism is understood as one of two sacraments in the ELCA. The other sacrament in the ELCA is Holy Communion. A sacrament is an outward sign that points to God's command and promise. It contains two things. First, it is the Word of God that makes the action or element a sacrament. Second, it contains an outward sign or a physical element. In baptism, this outward sign is water. It is the water and the Word that come together to make baptism a sacrament. This is not just a command but also a promise. Baptism is God's act claiming the individual as God's child who is forgiven of sin and given eternal life. The ELCA Service of Holy Baptism includes these words spoken when an individual is baptized, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."[3] As an individual is baptized, they are brought into God's family, forgiven of their sins, and granted eternal life. God is active in baptism. God is active in the discipleship process.

In response to what God is doing in baptism, parents or sponsors of the individual being baptized make promises to God. These are:

> . . . to live with them among God's faithful people, bring them to the word of God and the holy supper, teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, place in their hands the holy scriptures, and nurture them in faith and prayer, so that your children may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through

[3] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Pew ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 231.

> word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.[4]

The Confirmation program is seen as a time of instruction to fulfill many of these promises made at an individual's baptism and is connected to the second piece of the discipleship process, to instruct others to obey all that Christ has commanded. After the program, there is an Affirmation of Baptism service. During this service, the individual affirms that they will take upon themselves the responsibility to uphold the promises made to God:

> . . . to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.[5]

While Confirmation is not seen as a sacrament in the ELCA, it is rooted in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. It is foundational in the command to go and make disciples. This is a direct parallel to Matthew 28:18-20, which connects "go and make disciples" with baptism. Baptism and Confirmation are connected in the ELCA. The 1993 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA defined Confirmation as "a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission."[6] Confirmation is a discipleship process that is one of the primary times of faith formation.

The command to make disciples is clear. The question is, are we effectively and faithfully making disciples. Luke 18:8 poses a very powerful question, "However, when

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[4] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 228.

[5] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 236.

[6] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Churchwide Assembly Minutes for August 25 to September 1, 1993," accessed September 17, 2017, http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1993.pdf .

the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" This is a very important question for each Christian community to ask in our current culture. Are we being faithful in helping each other grow in faith? Which elements are helpful and which are not? An explanatory case study will show what practices during the Confirmation years are effective at Christ Lutheran Church. By digging into one specific aspect, that of leadership experiences, this research can show ways in which I can be more intentional and design a Confirmation program that is more helpful in the faith formation of middle school age students.

I wanted to conduct my research in a relational way because relationships are important. Social Trinitarian theology shows that each person of the Trinity finds their personhood in the mutual indwelling with each other. It is their relationship with each other that brings about who they are. Humans also find their personhood in relationship with God because humans are created in God's image. Humans also find their personhood in relationship with one another. We do not form our identity in a vacuum. It is formed within the relationships with others. These relationships can be messy and there is need for forgiveness and a "social harmony." Bishop Desmond Tutu explains:

> We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather, "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.". . . Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good . . . To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me. It gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.[7]

How we come together with others shapes our identity. We find that we are interconnected with each other. It is within this forming of community and finding a

[7] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 31.

place of belonging with each other that we find our personhood or identity. This is the way that we were made. We were created to be in relationship with each other. Bishop Desmond Tutu goes on to say,

> One such [universal] law is that we are bound together in what the Bible calls "the bundle of life." Our humanity is caught up in that of all others. We are humans because we belong. We are made for community, for togetherness, for family, to exist in a delicate network of interdependence. Truly "it is not good for man to be alone," [Genesis 2:18] for no one can be human alone. We are sisters and brothers of one another whether we like it or not and each one of us is a precious individual.[8]

Humans find their personhood in relationship to each other. Qualitative research was an important aspect of this process because I wanted to conduct my research in a relational way. As the researcher, I needed to engage with those in the interviews and focus groups in relational conversations to understand this qualitative research. It is important in this process to not only hear a response, but to also hear the stories as to why certain practices are important to an individual's faith formation. I needed to enter into a relational conversation in order to understand the individual's responses to the questions as well as to dig into deeper meanings that were being conveyed.

Research Design

Census Survey

I started the quantitative stage of my research by conducting a census survey through the administration of a questionnaire with seventh grade through eleventh grade students and their parents who were active in the Confirmation program at Christ Lutheran Church. This questionnaire focused on five main elements of a discipleship

[8] Tutu, 31.

process to determine how they might impact the faith formation of middle school age students. These five elements were relationship, community, service, leadership, and worship. The Confirmation program at Christ Lutheran Church starts in seventh grade and is completed in tenth grade. This program has undergone recent changes. Therefore, I only conducted a survey with students in eighth grade through eleventh grade to gain insights into the current program. I field-tested my questionnaire with students, parents, and other youth ministers who would not be part of my research. This allowed me to clarify specific questions to focus on the data that I wanted to collect. I also had these individuals read my informed consent forms to clear up any misunderstandings or confusing language. See figure 1 for an overview of the timeline of my research.

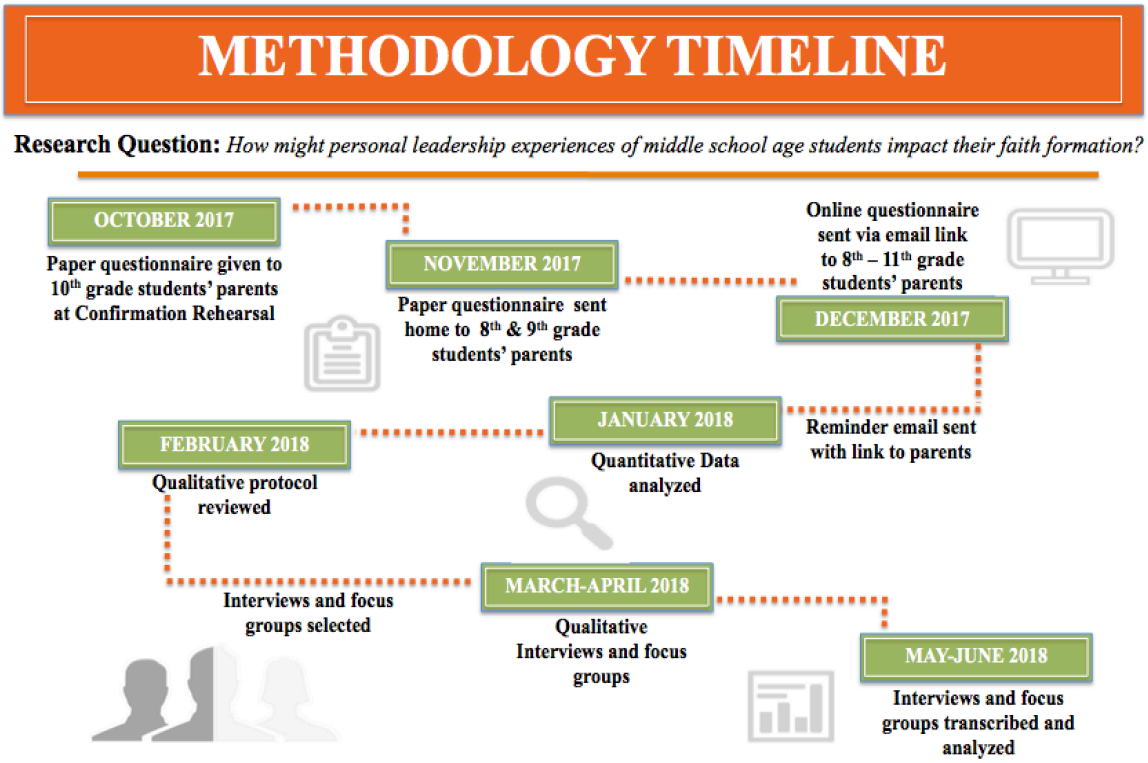

Figure 1. Methodology Timeline

The first questionnaire was administered with tenth grade students' parents at a Confirmation rehearsal at the end of October 2017. This event gave me direct interaction

with all of the active tenth grade students and their parents. After explaining the research project to the entire group, parents were dismissed into an adjoining room where I handed out my informed consent document to these parents (see appendix E) along with a student questionnaire (see appendix B). I also handed out a parent questionnaire (see appendix C) along with an implied consent form (see appendix F). Many parents and students filled out the questionnaire at this event while others took them home. They were given a three-month period to complete the questionnaires.

The same consent form, parent questionnaire, and student questionnaire were sent home in the month of November with eighth and ninth grade students who were present at Christ Lutheran Church's Confirmation program to give to their parents.[9] These we accompanied by a contact letter (see appendix G). During the first week of December, I emailed parents who had children active in the Confirmation program that were in eighth grade through eleventh grade. This email contained a letter thanking those who had participated in the survey as well as an invitation for anyone to complete the questionnaire online if they had not already done so. This online questionnaire was conducted through SurveyMonkey.[10] This was followed up the first week of January with a second email reminding parents to have themselves and their child fill out the questionnaire by the end of the month. Therefore, the questionnaire was sent out in the first month to eighth grade through tenth grade families in paper form. An email was sent in the second and third month to eighth grade through eleventh grade families. Parents

[9] Parents who had more than one student in eighth through tenth grade were invited to fill out a survey with each specific student in mind. If they did not wish to fill out multiple surveys, they were encouraged to fill out the survey for the eldest child in these grades.

[10] SurveyMonkey is an online software service company started in 1999. For more information: www.surveymonkey.com.

would comment to me that this regular request to complete the questionnaires was helpful to them, especially in the busy holiday season.

I did not receive responses from any eleventh grade families. I did not have a relationship with this class of students since I had only been on staff at Christ Lutheran Church for two years. It is not surprising to me that I did not receive any responses from these families. Therefore, I focused my analysis on the eighth grade through tenth grade families. I received fifty-five student questionnaires out of 538 students registered for Confirmation, which is 10.2% of this population. I received ninety-six parent questionnaires out of 937 parents for students registered for Confirmation representing 10.2% of this population. I analyzed the quantitative data I collected with the aid of SPSS software[11] after I completed administering this three-month survey. Participants in the questionnaire provided data using Likert scale questions about worship, service, community, relationships, leadership, and parental involvement. Descriptive data were only collected from the students. I analyzed data using independent t-tests, primarily comparing the views of students and their parents on how being a leader impacts faith formation in a positive way with the student's involvement in leadership experiences both inside and outside of Christ Lutheran Church. The descriptive and inferential statistics may be found in the methodology chapter.

Interview/Focus Group Protocol

Quantitative data was not enough for this study. Qualitative research also had to be utilized in order to explain how leadership experience might impact faith formation.

[11] The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) currently produced by IBM. For more information: https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics

Where quantitative data are good at studying the breadth of things, qualitative data explore the depths. I wanted to dig into this topic; therefore, utilizing a mixed methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative data was most helpful.

I invited middle school age students to participate in an interview or focus group in the qualitative phase. Many students responded to the questionnaire that they did not consider themselves in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church during their time in Confirmation. However, they also responded that being a leader was part of their Confirmation experience. I wanted to figure out what this might mean to these students. What did they see as the difference between considering themselves as a leader and being a leader? How might this affect their understanding of leadership and faith formation? Therefore, I revised some of the questions in my interview/focus group protocol (see appendix D). My research was sequential because I changed these questions based on what I discovered in my quantitative questionnaires. Then I field-tested my new interview/focus group protocol with students who were not part of my research.

The informed consent given out with the questionnaire gave permission not only to participate in my research but also to be audio recorded if they were invited to participate in one of my interviews or focus groups. Some individuals declined to be audio recorded, which gave me some insight into who would be willing to participate in an interview or focus group. The consent form also had a place to print the student's name so I could identify which students had informed consent to participate in interviews or focus groups.

I identified individuals based on their responses to leadership experiences in my quantitative questionnaire. These students fell into one of six categories: those who did

and those who did not serve as a Vacation Bible School leader, those who did and those who did not consider themselves as having served in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church during their time in Confirmation, and those who did and those who did not consider being a leader was part of their experience outside of Christ Lutheran Church during their time in Confirmation. I invited both male students and female students from eighth, ninth, and tenth grade to participate in an interview or focus group, making this a purposive sampling. Students were asked to sign up for a time they could meet with me. Some sessions only had one student sign up while others had two to four students sign up. Therefore, some sessions were interviews while others were focus groups.

I utilized Rubin's and Rubin's responsive interviewing approach. This is based on a conversational partnership between researcher and participant. The researcher does not simply ask questions that have been predetermined beforehand. They may adapt questions or ask probing questions based on the responses that she or he is hearing. They view those being interviewed not as subjects but as partners in the research.[12] This method gives the researcher a deeper understanding based upon participants' words and stories. This approach was vital for this research, which strove to understand middle school age students and the impact leadership experiences might have on their faith formation. This could not be understood from outside observation alone. Hearing the personal stories, thoughts, and questions from middle school age students gave me deeper insights and understandings for this research. I used the interview/focus group protocol as a guide for the conversations. However, based upon the responses and stories, each interview or focus group dug into different aspects of leadership experiences and how

[12] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 38.

they might impact an individual's faith formation.[13] Each interview or focus group lasted sixty to ninety minutes. These interviews took place in April and May of 2018 at Christ Lutheran Church and used audio recording devices to collect data. I also used a journal to record my own thoughts and non-verbal responses after each interview and focus group. I had each interview's and focus group's audio recording professionally transcribed. I used a confidentiality agreement with my transcriber (see appendix H). Then I coded the data using the method developed by Kathy Charmaz.[14]

I took the transcripts word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident to put together *in vivo* codes using the individual's own words. This process of word-by-word, then line-by-line, and then incident-by-incident, caused me to continue to interact with the data rather than drawing my own conclusions. This also helped to keep my own biases in check. These *in vivo* codes were grouped together by common themes into focused codes. Then I grouped the focused codes into larger categories, which Charmaz calls axial codes. This provided a good framework for my research. Then I examined and reflected on these axial codes and how they related to the theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses of my thesis. Finally, these axial codes were put into a diagram showing the relationship between these common themes. This is called theoretical coding.

Summary

This research project was an explanatory sequential mixed methods case study, bringing together quantitative surveys and open-ended structure of qualitative interviews and focus groups. This model fit well for my research since I was seeking to explain the

[13] Rubin and Rubin, 122-125.

[14] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 47-70.

relationship between leadership experiences and faith formation in middle school age students. The initial information through the surveys brought about questions to use in the interviews and focus groups in order to gain deeper understandings. I will now write about the results of this research project. First, I will look at the results from the quantitative questionnaires. Then, I will look at the qualitative results from the interviews and focus groups.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF THE STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand the relationship of personal leadership experiences and faith formation. My research question was:

> How might personal leadership experiences of middle school age students impact their faith formation?

Results were first gathered with a census survey of all students in eighth through eleventh grade and their parents.[1] A questionnaire was administered over a three-month period both electronically utilizing SurveyMonkey[2] and with paper copies. This instrument contained questions specific to each student's experiences during their time in a Confirmation program. I also conducted a census survey with the parents of these students in order to gain some greater insights into the students' overall leadership experience. I analyzed the descriptive statistics using SPSS software.[3] The descriptive statistics for the students included Ns and percentages of the respondents according to

[1] I did not receive any responses back from eleventh grade students or parents. Therefore, the results are focused on eighth through tenth grade.

[2] SurveyMonkey is an online software service company started in 1999. For more information: www.surveymonkey.com.

[3] The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) currently produced by IBM. For more information: https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics

age and gender.[4] I analyzed the inferential statistics with independent t-tests to determine if there were significant differences between the means of two groups.

I constructed a protocol for interviews and focus groups from the results of this questionnaire. An invitation was sent to the parents of students who had completed the questionnaire to participate in an interview or focus group. Students were selected to participate in an interview or focus group based upon their responses in the questionnaire. See the methodology chapter for specifics on how these students were selected.

After transcribing these interviews and focus groups, I used Kathy Charmaz's coding process to analyze the data.[5] I began with coding these transcripts word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident. From this I developed *in vivo* codes. This process of coding kept me interacting with the data rather than drawing conclusions based on my own assumptions and biases. I categorized these *in vivo* codes into focused codes. From this I developed axial codes by grouping the focused codes into categories in order to provide a framework for my research. Finally, I strove to explain how these axial codes related to and interacted with each other by developing theoretical codes. A deeper explanation for this process can be seen in the methodology chapter.

I begin this chapter with quantitative analysis of the data from the student and parent questionnaires. Then I will examine the qualitative data from both interviews and focus groups and how this gave deeper insights into this research.

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[4] Descriptive statistics for parents were not collected.

[5] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 109-161.

Results from Quantitative Data

The total number of students (N) who completed the questionnaire was fifty-five. The total number of parents (N) who completed the questionnaire was ninety-six. The demographics of the student participants can be seen in table 1.

Of those who completed the questionnaire, there were 32.7% eighth graders, 21.8% ninth graders, and 45.5% tenth graders. The number of respondents from the ninth grade students was lower than anticipated, but this still gives a good representation for each of these grades. I had a better response from tenth grade students because the questionnaire was administered at a Confirmation rehearsal. Of those in eighth grade who completed the questionnaire, 61.1% were female and 38.9% were male. Of those in ninth grade who completed the questionnaire, 66.7% were female and 33.3% were male. This gives a good representation of the students who participate in the Confirmation program. Tenth grade respondents had a higher number of male students (64.0%) than female students (36.0%). While the Confirmation program did have a slightly higher number of female students for this grade, this should not be a factor in the results of this research. Overall this is a good representation of the Confirmation student population at Christ Lutheran Church for eighth grade through tenth grade.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents by Grade

Gender	Female n	Female %	Male n	Male %	Total n	Total %
Eighth Grade	11	20.0	7	12.7	18	32.7
Ninth Grade	8	14.5	4	7.3	12	21.8
Tenth Grade	9	16.4	16	29.1	25	45.5
Total	28	50.9	27	49.1	55	100.0

Students were asked if being a leader had an impact on their faith in a positive way. I compared the means of these responses with other questions through an independent t-test. There was a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement that being a leader impacted one's faith in a positive way between those who were VBS leaders (M=3.73) and those who were not VBS leaders (M=3.16); $t_{(34)}$=2.81, p=0.008. These results can be seen in table 2.

Table 2. Students' Views on Being a Leader and Leadership Experiences at Church

Being a leader has impacted my faith in a positive way.

Leadership Role	n	Mean	t	df	p
Was a Vacation Bible School leader	**11**	**3.73**	**2.81**	**34**	**0.008**
Was not a Vacation Bible School leader	44	3.16			
Currently serves in a leadership role at church	**6**	**3.83**	**2.95**	**13**	**0.011**
Does not currently serve in a leadership role at church	49	3.20			
Considered themselves to be in a leadership role	12	3.67	1.72	53	0.091
Did not consider themselves to be in a leadership role	43	3.16			

Those who were VBS leaders had a higher mean than those who were not VBS leaders. This suggests that those who served as a leader for Vacation Bible School felt that serving as a leader had a positive impact on their faith formation. There was also a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement that being a leader impacted one's faith in a positive way between those who were currently serving in a leadership role at church (M=3.83) and those who were not currently serving in a

leadership role at church (M=3.20); $t_{(13)}$=2.95, p=0.011. Those who were currently serving in a leadership role at church had a higher mean than those who were not currently serving in a leadership role at church. These results suggest that those students who were currently serving in a leadership role at church also perceived that this experience impacted their faith in a positive way. However, there was not a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement that leadership experiences impacted their faith in a positive way for students who considered that they were in a leadership role during their time in Confirmation.

In the first two categories, serving as a VBS leader and currently serving as a leader, students were actively participating in some kind of leadership role. Students in the last category, considered themselves to be in a leadership role, did not actively participate in a leadership role. They only considered themselves to either be in a leadership role or not. Even though there was a higher mean for students who considered themselves to be in a leadership role at church than those who did not consider themselves to be in a leadership role, there was not a significant statistical difference. This may suggest that students who have a concrete leadership experience see these experiences as having a positive impact on their faith formation rather than the concept of being in a leadership role.

Another aspect that I wanted to examine was how the students' views of leadership and faith formation compared to their parents' views. Are the students reflecting their parents' views or are there differences in how they view these leadership experiences? Parents were asked if they felt their child's leadership experiences impacted

their child's faith in a positive way. I used an independent t-test to compare the means of their responses with other questions.

Table 3 shows there was a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for parents whose child was a VBS leader (M=3.12) and those who were not a VBS leader (M=2.56); $t_{(94)}$=2.50, p=0.014. There was also a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for parents whose child was currently serving in a leadership role (M=3.83) and those who were not currently serving in a leadership role (M=2.63); $t_{(9)}$=6.15, p<0.001. Parents whose child was a VBS leader had a higher mean than those who were not VBS leaders. In addition, those whose child was currently serving in a leadership role had a higher mean than those who were not serving in a leadership role. This suggests that parents viewed leadership experiences as having a positive impact on their child's faith. This parallels the students' views.

Table 3. Parents' Views on Being a Leader and Leadership Experiences at Church

Being a leader has impacted my child's faith in a positive way.

Leadership Role	n	Mean	t	df	p
Child was a Vacation Bible School leader	**25**	**3.12**	**2.50**	**94**	**0.014**
Child was not a Vacation Bible School leader	71	2.56			
Child currently serves in a leadership role at church	**6**	**3.83**	**6.15**	**9**	**0.000**
Child does not currently serve in a leadership role at church	90	2.63			
Considered their child to be a in a leadership role	**20**	**3.40**	**4.99**	**49**	**0.000**
Did not consider their child to be in a leadership role	76	2.53			

Students also viewed leadership experiences as having a positive impact on their faith. However, there was also a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for parents who considered their child to be in a leadership role during their time in Confirmation (M=3.40) and those who did not consider their child to be in a leadership role during their time in Confirmation (M=2.53); $t_{(49)}=4.99$, $p<0.001$. Those who considered their child to be in a leadership role at church had a higher mean than those who did not consider their child to be in a leadership role. This suggests parents hold the view that leadership experiences will have positive impact on their child's faith, whether or not they actually participate in the act of leadership. It is merely the concept of leadership, rather than any personal experience their child may have. As outlined previously, students appear to need more than the concept of leadership. Students needed to experience leadership firsthand in order to view these experiences as having a positive impact on their faith. However, parents only needed the concept of leadership for them to view leadership experiences as having a positive influence on their child's faith.

These independent t-tests suggest that there is a connection between leadership experiences and faith formation. For parents, this is an overall positive view for any leadership experience for their child. For students, it is not just the concept of leadership, but a concrete personal leadership experience. These concrete personal leadership experiences impact how they view leadership as impacting their faith in a positive way.

My research also explored the influence of leadership experiences at church and how they might be different from leadership experiences outside of church during a student's time within a Confirmation program. Might the perception that leadership experiences are impacting one's faith in a positive way be because these experiences

happen within the church, or does this view hold true for leadership experiences both at church and outside of church? I asked both students and parents if being a leader had an impact on the student's faith in a positive way and about their leadership experiences both outside of the church and as part of their Confirmation experience at church.

It may seem that the question about leadership at church during their Confirmation experience has already been addressed. In the questionnaire there were two separate questions. The first was, "Do you consider that you were in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church during your time in Confirmation?" The response was either "yes" or "no." The second question was, "Being a leader was a part of my Confirmation experience." The responses to this question were on a Likert scale, choosing between "not at all," "not very much," "somewhat," and "very much." Several students answered "no" to the question about considering themselves to be in a leadership role at church but responded "somewhat" or "very much" to the question that being a leader was part of their Confirmation experience. While these students did not consider themselves to have had a leadership role, they did consider that leadership experiences were part of their Confirmation experience at church. Their parents also had similar responses. Why would some students not consider themselves to be in a leadership role while, at the same time, consider leadership experiences at church to have a positive impact on their faith formation? It could be because students are differentiating between what Peter Northouse calls assigned leadership and emergent leadership.[6] They could be viewing leadership in an assigned role as different from being a leader and influencing others without a specific

[6] Northouse, *Leadership*, 5.

assigned leadership position. I will address this in my qualitative data results in the next section.

The question, “being a leader was part of my experience outside of Christ Lutheran Church” was also on a Likert scale choosing between “not at all,” “not very much,” “somewhat,” and “very much.” For the question regarding leadership at church and for the question regarding leadership outside of church, I divided the responses into two groups. Those who responded “not at all” and “not very much” I placed in a group that viewed being a leader as a “lower level of experience.” For those students who responded “somewhat” and “very much” I placed in a group that viewed being a leader as a “higher level of experience.” I compared the means of these two demographic groups of “lower level of experience” and “higher level of experience” for the question regarding leadership at church and for the question regarding leadership outside of church with the means of the response to the question “Being a leader impacted my faith in a positive way” through an independent t-test. The results can be seen in table 4.

There was a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for students who had a higher level of experience of being a leader at church as part of their Confirmation experience (M=3.67) and those who had a lower level of experience (M=2.80); $t_{(32)}$=-3.72, p=0.001. There was also a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for students who had a higher level of experience of being a leader outside of church as part of their Confirmation experience (M=3.47) and those who had a lower level of experience (M=2.40); $t_{(11)}$=-2.76, p=0.019. Those who had a higher level of experience of being a leader at church and outside of church had a higher mean than those who had a lower level of experience of being a leader at church or

outside of church. This suggests that students view leadership experiences, both those outside of church and at church, as impacting their faith in a positive way.

Table 4. Students' View of Being a Leader During Confirmation

Being a leader has impacted my faith in a positive way. Leadership Role	n	Mean	t	df	p
Had a higher level of experience of being a leader at church as part of their Confirmation experience	**30**	**3.67**	**-3.72**	**32**	**0.001**
Had a lower level of experience of being a leader at church as part of their Confirmation experience	25	2.80			
Had a higher level of experience of being a leader outside of church as part of their Confirmation experience	**45**	**3.47**	**-2.76**	**11**	**0.019**
Had a lower level of experience of being a leader outside of church as part of their Confirmation experience	10	2.40			

I looked at the responses from parents and compare them to their child's responses. The questions for leadership at church and outside of church were also on a Likert scale. I made two groups for both questions as I did for the students. The first group had a lower level of leadership experiences for the responses "not at all" and "not very much" and a higher level of leadership experiences for the responses "somewhat" and "very much." I compared the means of these two demographic groups for both questions with the means of the response to the question, "Being a leader impacted my child's faith in a positive way" through an independent t-test. See table 5 for these results.

There was a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for parents who viewed their child as having a higher level of experience of being a leader at church as part of their Confirmation experience (M=3.28) and those who had a lower

level of experience (M=2.18); $t_{(88)}$=-6.71, p<0.001. There was also a statistically significant difference in the mean level of agreement for parents who viewed their child has having a higher level of experience of being a leader outside of church as part of their Confirmation experience (M=3.41) and those who had a lower level of experience (M=2.50); $t_{(71)}$=-5.76, p<0.001. Parents who viewed their child as having a higher level of experience of being a leader at church and outside of church had a higher mean than those who viewed their child as having a lower level of experience both at church and outside of church. This suggests that parents view being a leader at church as well as outside of church as having a positive impact on their child's faith.

Table 5. Parents' Views of Being a Leader During Confirmation

Being a leader has impacted my child's faith in a positive way. Leadership Role	n	Mean	t	df	p
Had a higher level of experience of being a leader at church as part of their Confirmation experience	**46**	**3.28**	**-6.71**	**88**	**0.000**
Had a lower level of experience of being a leader at church as part of their Confirmation experience	50	2.18			
Had a higher level of experience of being a leader outside of church as part of their Confirmation experience	**22**	**3.41**	**-5.76**	**71**	**0.000**
Had a lower level of experience of being a leader outside of church as part of their Confirmation experience	74	2.50			

The parents' views parallel the students' views. The only leadership experience that seems to not impact a student's faith as much is one where the student only has the concept of being a leader. A student cannot only consider himself or herself to be a

leader; they must have a concrete leadership experience. This may or may not be in an official leadership role. As mentioned earlier, some students and their parents indicated that they were not in a leadership role at church during their time in Confirmation, but also indicated that being a leader at church was part of their Confirmation experience. This could be because they did not serve in an assigned leadership position but still viewed being a leader at church was as an emergent leader. In the qualitative interviews and focus groups I paid attention to which kind of leadership experiences students talked about and if these were emergent leadership and/or assigned leadership experiences. I also paid attention to where these leadership experiences took place, either at church or outside of church. I will examine the qualitative data in the next section.

Results from Qualitative Data

Further research was done after analyzing the quantitative data from the questionnaires. This was done through interviews and focus groups. I selected both male and female students who were in eighth, ninth, and tenth grade based on their responses in their questionnaire: those who indicated they did and those who indicated they did not serve as a Vacation Bible School leader, those who did and those who did not consider themselves as having served in a leadership role at church, and those who did and those who did not consider being a leader was part of their Confirmation experience.

Students signed up for a time to meet with me. Some sessions were interviews where only one student signed up for that time while other sessions were focus groups where two to four students signed up for a specific time. These interviews and focus groups provided deeper insights on how leadership experiences might impact the faith of middle school age students.

The total number of students (N) who participated in an interview or focus group was thirteen. The demographics of the student participants can be seen in table 6. Of those who participated in an interview or focus group, there were 38.5% eighth graders, 15.4 ninth graders, and 46.1 tenth graders. Of the eighth graders who participated in an interview or focus group, 80.0% were female and 20.0% were male. Ninth graders were all male and tenth graders were all female.

Table 6. Demographics of Interview/Focus Group Participants by Grade

Gender	Female n	Female %	Male n	Male %	Total n	Total %
Eighth Grade	4	30.0	1	7.7	5	38.5
Ninth Grade	0	0.0	2	15.4	2	15.4
Tenth Grade	6	46.1	0	0.0	6	46.1
Total	10	76.0	3	23.1	13	100.0

I analyzed the results using Kathy Charmaz's method of coding.[7] I looked at the transcripts word-by-word, line-by-line, and then incident-by-incident. After this I identified *in vivo* codes using participants' own words and phrases. Then I clustered similar *in vivo* codes into focused codes. The 282 *in vivo* codes are presented in appendix A along with their grouping into twelve focused codes. These focused codes can be seen in table 7.

The first two focused codes, *Seeing others need help* and *Helping others*, may seem the same. However, the students saw leaders first as individuals who see others in need of help. One student said, "He just needed help or guidance" and another said,

[7] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 109-161.

"Some of them needed help." This was about not only seeing the need but also the desire to help others. It was about the motivation of the leader. The students saw leaders as individuals who truly cared about those who they are influencing. One student said, "You're not there for you. You're there for them." A leader must have good intentions for those whom they are leading. They are not motivated by selfish means but truly wish to help others. Another student said, "You have to be a leader when someone else needs help." For the students, this is different from what a leader does. Students viewed leaders as those who help others, but they also viewed leaders as individuals whose motivation was to help others. It must be a desire as well as an action. Both go hand in hand, but they are two separate categories.

Table 7. Focused Codes

FC1	Seeing others need help
FC2	Helping others
FC3	Being a role model
FC4	Having parent and family influences
FC5	Experiencing leadership and serving others
FC6	Having God's help
FC7	Being in community
FC8	Inviting others
FC9	Having fun and being happy
FC10	Helping me grow
FC11	Making a difference
FC12	Having relevance to daily life

Students believed that a leader was to help others. When asked what a leader does, one student responded, "They focus on helping and teaching everybody else." When asked how one might be a leader without being in a formal leadership position, students replied with "by helping others" and "they're just there to help and serve." These

students intertwined service and leadership. A leader is one who wants to impact others for good. Part of being a leader is in helping others.

The students also talked about how their understanding of leadership was shaped. Many talked about family members, specifically their parents, as those who were influential in how they understood leadership. These family members did this primarily through their actions of being a role model. There was a lot of conversation around others being a role model for them as well as the expectation to be a good role model for others. Leadership was viewed not in just helping others, but in modeling good behavior for others.

It was also important to include the focused code *Having God's help* even though it had only nine *in vivo* codes. This focused code came also from my journal notes. I would journal about things I saw and impressions I had after each interview or focus group. I observed that there was an underlying tone that the students looked to others to help them in being leaders. This included an adult, peers, and God. God was either implied or talked about implicitly when the students talked about helping others and leading others. Therefore, it was important to include this category of *Having God's help* at this level of coding.

It should also be noted that students distinguished between *Making a difference* and *Having relevance to daily life*. The students talked about impacting others and feeling that they are making a difference. This is primarily in making a difference in the lives of others by helping them. However, students could have viewed helping others through church programs as being isolated to their church activities, similar to how dribbling a basketball is seen as specific to the game of basketball. Students could have viewed

making a difference as specific to their church-related activities. However, these students talked about how making a difference in the lives of others made their faith relevant to their lives at church and outside of church. For example, some students said leadership experiences made coming to church fun and more relevant to them. They talked about how teaching younger students made them want to learn more about the Bible. They also mentioned how much they looked forward to seeing the younger kids on a Sunday morning. Being in leadership made them want to be more involved at church and made church programs more meaningful. It also made it more relevant for their lives outside of church. Students talked about how leadership experiences helped them know their own strengths and weaknesses better, which is beneficial outside of church. They talked about how helping others at church helped them realize that they can help others outside of church on their own. One student commented that leadership experiences and helping others "makes it seem more real life than just going by the textbook." The focused codes of *Making a difference* and *Relevant to daily life* were distinct.

I then looked at the relationship between each focused code and grouped them into axial codes to reflect major themes discussed by the participants. Table 8 shows each of the focused codes and how they are grouped into axial codes.

Students expressed in many ways what it means to be a leader in the first axial code *Understanding leadership*. It starts with the desire of the individual to help others and to see there is a need that others have. Then a leader helps others through their actions with another individual or through their actions in modeling good behavior. This was first done for them, primarily by a family member, who set the expectation that they were to continue to help others in turn.

Table 8. Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes

AC1	Understanding leadership
	FC1 Seeing others need help
	FC2 Helping others
	FC3 Being a role model
	FC4 Having parent and family influences
AC2	Getting into leadership
	FC5 Experiencing leadership and serving
	FC6 Having God's help
	FC7 Being in community
AC 3	Experiencing leadership and serving others
	FC8 Inviting others
	FC9 Having fun and being happy
	FC10 Helping me grow
AC 4	Desiring leadership and serving others
	FC11 Making a difference
	FC12 Having relevance to daily life

The second axial code was *Getting into leadership*. Several students commented that becoming a leader was something expected of them. This could be from a parent, teacher, or extra-curricular activity leader such as a dance instructor or theater director. There was an expectation to become a leader. There was also the opportunity for individuals to become leaders. These could be official positions of leadership such as a section leader or general opportunities for leadership within a program. Most students did not step into these leadership experiences on their own initiative. They were invited into the experience, encouraged by another, or outright told that they were going to be a leader. However, they did not do this by themselves. They always had help either from an adult, peers or God. These leadership experiences were always done within community. Relationships were vital throughout this process!

The third axial code, *Experiencing leadership and serving others*, brought about two results. First were the expectations of the student as a leader. This was primarily

focused on influencing others by inviting them to join a group or activity. Students talked about how it was expected of them to invite others. Second was what the individual experienced as a leader and serving others. The students talked about how the experiences were fun and made them happy to make a difference in the lives of others. Students commented on how they enjoyed serving others and being a leader. They also talked about how it helped them grow. They grew in experiences. They grew in skills. They grew in personal knowledge. They grew in faith.

The last axial code was *Desiring leadership and serving others*. Being a leader and serving others was not just for themselves. It was to make a difference in the lives of others. The students experienced how they could make a difference in the life of someone else, which in turn also made these experiences relevant to their own lives outside of the church. One student commented, "That was so worth it, to see that growth or that change in those kids. You could easily just decide, 'Peace out, I'm going to leave. You can find another assistant to help out or even find another buddy.' You could leave if you wanted to, but people decide to stay for a reason." Because the students saw the impact they were making on others, they expressed a desire to continue in these activities. They desired to be in leadership and serve others.

Finally, I looked at the relationship of the axial codes and how they worked together. How do students understand the relationship between *Understanding leadership*, *Getting into leadership*, *Experiencing leadership and serving others*, and *Desiring leadership and serving others*? The relationships between these axial codes are

what Charmaz explains as theoretical codes.[8] Figure 2 shows these theoretical codes relating to the axial codes in this research.

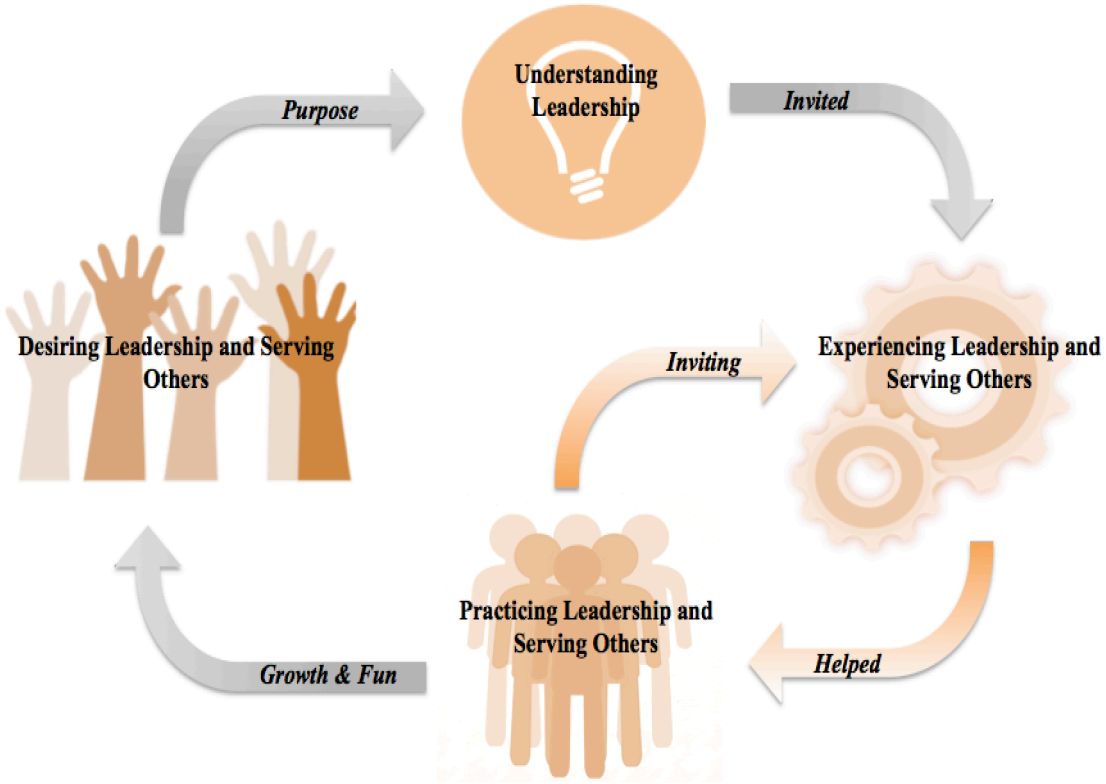

Figure 2. Theoretical Coding for Axial Codes

First, students are taught what it means to be a leader. They learn this from others who are leaders in their lives. This is done primarily though teaching and modeling leadership. The students come to understand that a leader is someone who helps others and has their best interests at heart. Then the students are expected and invited into a leadership experience. The gray arrow in the top right of figure 2 shows how students move from *Understanding leadership* to *Experiencing leadership and serving others*.

Note that the next two sections, *Experiencing leadership and serving others* and *Practicing leadership and serving others,* are connected. Notice this mini cycle within the

[8] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 63.

larger cycle in the bottom right of figure 2. Think of this mini cycle as one unit. *Experiencing leadership and serving others* focuses on a specific event or activity. For example, students would talk about a specific time they helped someone, did a service activity, or the first time they started out in a leadership role.

A part of *Experiencing leadership and serving others* is that the students do not go through this experience alone. God, a peer, or an adult helped the students in their leadership experience and in serving others. Notice the orange arrow in the bottom right of this mini cycle. It is important to note that this is a vital part of the process. Leadership and serving others always takes place within community. Relationships are foundational in these experiences. Serving and leading with others is a piece that was very important to the students. When asked if they would like to serve others by themselves or with a group of people, students commented that they would want to serve with their friends or family.

Practicing leadership and serving others is the repetition of a leadership experience or serving others. For example, this could be serving as a VBS leader for a week or helping others for a weeklong mission trip. An aspect within *Practicing leadership and serving others* was the process of inviting others. Just as these students were invited into these leadership experiences, they were to then invite others (see the orange arrow at the top of this mini cycle). This could be to invite others to join in an activity or to be invited to be a leader. The students expressed that one aspect of being a leader was to invite others into leadership experiences. A leader invites others to participate. This is expected of them as a leader.

This mini cycle of *Experiencing leadership and serving others* and *Practicing leadership and serving others* brought about personal growth and an aspect of fun. Notice

the gray arrow in the bottom left of figure 2. First, they encountered growth in skills, experience, and faith. They saw the benefit of being a leader and serving others and therefore desired to continue in these experiences. Second, it is important to note that there is also an element of fun involved in this process. Students continued to mention that these experiences were fun and they made them happy. There were two reasons for this. First, they expressed that the service or leadership experience had to contain an element of fun. They talked about how leaders would make a service experience fun in some way. They would in turn invite others into leadership and service experiences saying, "come on, it will be fun." Second, it was fun because of the impact they had on others. When asked why she is a leader, one student commented, "I've decided to do it because I've experienced how fun it is, and how much it connects me through God and through my faith, and through my friends and meeting new people." Another student commented that the experience, "really makes me happy that I changed someone." Knowing that they were helping others and making a difference made the experience fun for them and gave them a sense of happiness.

Returning to growth, one could infer that students also grew in their knowledge of what it means to be a leader. Therefore, an arrow could move from this mini cycle in the bottom right of figure 2, to the top section *Understanding leadership*. While this may be true, this research did not show this result. Students did not talk about how their experiences and practices of leadership and serving others helped them to understand more about what it means to be a leader. What students did talk about was how their experiences and practices of leadership and serving others helped them grow and how it was fun and made them happy. This led them to a desire to continue as a leader and

serving others. Therefore, I do not move back to a deeper understanding of leadership until after students feel a sense of purpose from the desire to continue being a leader and serving others.

From *Desiring leadership and serving others* came a sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of what it means to be a leader. Notice the gray arrow in the top left of figure 2. The desire to continue being a leader and serving others brought a purpose to their life both at church as well as outside of church. When asked about why she thought serving others at church was important one student commented, "Because it shows that you can do anything you want. Like if you wanted to go to a service project, you can. You don't just have to do it in church." This student talked about how service at church made church more relevant to her life outside of church. When talking about why she likes being involved in leadership another student commented, "Really, when you just get down to the core of it, it's a lot more meaningful." Wanting to continue in leadership and serving others brought about a sense of purpose for life at church and outside of church.

It is here that we move back into a deeper understanding of what it means to be a leader (see the top of figure 2). As one student said, "you just realize that you're making an impact, you're there to help them and you're not there to gain anything for yourself." It is this process of knowing that they are making a difference that moved them outside of themselves to look towards the needs of others. As stated earlier, this is one of the motivations of being a leader. The students come to understand that a leader is someone who helps others and has their best interests at heart. It is this experience of making a difference in the lives of others that brings about a deeper understanding of what it means

to put the needs of others before your own needs. As the students move around the cycle, they grow in their understanding of leadership in deeper and more meaningful ways.

Summary

The research question being explained was:

> How might personal leadership experiences of middle school age students impact their faith formation?

Looking at both the quantitative and qualitative data together has brought about some interesting insights. In this research, I paid attention to whether these leadership experiences needed to be assigned leadership roles or if they were only emergent leadership roles where students influenced others without a formal leadership position. The quantitative data analysis suggested that students viewed concrete leadership experiences such as being a VBS leader, or another assigned leadership position that they were currently serving in, as having a positive impact on their faith formation. Further analysis also showed students with a higher level of assigned or emergent leadership experiences as part of their confirmation experience viewed these experiences as having a positive impact on their faith formation.

The students shared leadership experiences both at church and outside of church as impacting their faith. Assigned leadership roles at church were positions such as being a VBS leader or a leader for church school. Assigned leadership roles outside of church included opportunities like student council, buddy programs at school for new students, and leadership in activities such as dance or other sports. Emergent leadership included influencing others by being a role model, seeing others need help, and inviting others to come to church or to be part of an activity. Students struggled to identify many assigned leadership roles at church. However, they had many more examples of how they can

influence others and serve others in emergent leadership roles. This was true for leadership roles outside of church as well. The qualitative data suggests that students viewed these positive impacts upon their faith formation as bringing relevance and purpose to their faith life both inside and outside of church. But which aspects of these leadership experiences brought about this purpose and relevance? This research strove to understand which aspects of leadership were important. The research suggests that there are at least three aspects.

First is how students view these leadership experiences. The qualitative data suggests one reason these experiences brought relevance and purpose to their faith life is their understanding of what leadership experiences are. These students view leadership experiences as connected with helping others. Whether they were in an assigned leadership role or as an emergent leader influencing another, they motivation was centered on helping others. This is what a leader does, they help others. Helping others is one quality in these leadership experiences, either at church or outside of church, that had a positive impact on their faith that is suggested in the quantitative data analysis.

Second is relationships are central to these experiences. Leadership experiences and serving others must take place within community. The analysis of the questionnaires has suggested that both students and parents viewed leadership experiences as having a positive impact on a student's faith. These leadership experiences did not happen unintentionally. Students rarely took the initiative to enter into a leadership experience. They were expected, invited, and encouraged by someone else to enter into a leadership experience. Analysis of the qualitative data has suggested that parents of these students had expectations of their child to become leaders in some capacity. One reason parents

might have this expectation is that they believe these experiences would have a positive impact on their child's faith. Further qualitative analysis showed that it was not only parents that helped these students in their leadership experiences. Students also talked about how God, peers, and other adults helped them. They also talked about how their parents and other adults also expected them to help others. All of this is rooted in relationships. Students had others who helped them in these leadership experiences and they helped others.

Finally, these experiences must have an aspect of fun. This could be because the service activity or being a leader is something that is either enjoyable or meaningful. Students found these activities to be fun not only because they were enjoyable but they were also fun because they were meaningful in how they made a difference in someone's life. This could be making a difference in their own life by growing in skills, knowledge of themselves, or in faith. This could also be in making a difference in the lives of others. These experiences connected the student more deeply into the life of the church and brought about relevance to their daily life outside of the church. Making a difference will bring about a sense of purpose for students where they will wish to continue to serve others and serve as a leader.

I will delve deeper into these findings about leadership experiences and how these interact with my theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses in the next chapter. I will also give suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

I outlined the results of my quantitative and qualitative research as well as my interpretations of the data in the previous chapter. This chapter will first provide a summary of my research results. I will then view these results through the theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses that I chose to frame this research that are found in chapters two and three. Finally, I will outline possible implications of my research followed by some questions for future research that have come from this study. I begin with a summary of my research results.

Summary of Research Results

This research was an *explanatory sequential mixed methods case study*. The research question being explained was:

> How might personal leadership experiences of middle school age students impact their faith formation?

In order to explain the relationship between leadership experiences and faith formation, I conducted quantitative surveys with students and their parents. This was followed by qualitative interviews and focus groups with students to gain deeper understandings. I have come to four conclusions about leadership experiences and how they may impact faith formation in a positive way for middle school age students. These

are found within the theoretical codes in figure 2, which explains the leadership experience process in this research.

The first stage is *Understanding leadership*. The research shows the first conclusion within this stage: that leadership and helping others are connected to each other and cannot be separated. Wanting to help others and having another's best interests at heart must motivate a leader.

A student is then invited into a leadership experience where they are *Experiencing leadership and serving others* and *Practicing leadership and serving others*. The research shows the next conclusion within this second stage: that relationships within leadership experiences are vital for students. Leadership and helping others is not just done to someone, but with others. There must be a relationship with those they are helping or influencing and there must be a relationship with those they are serving and with those they are leading.

Students experience growth and fun as they move into the third stage, which is *Desiring leadership and serving others*. The research shows the third and fourth conclusions on either side of this third stage. The third conclusion is leadership experiences and helping others needs to have an element of fun. Fun can come in two different ways. First, the leader makes this experience fun by making it into some kind of game. They make the experience enjoyable for those leading or serving others. Second, they make it fun by making the experience meaningful, showing the students how they are making a difference in the lives of others. Seeing how they are making a difference in the lives of others is what makes the experience fun. However, making an experience fun does not have to be only enjoyable or meaningful. It can contain both elements. Students

can have fun by having an enjoyable experience as well as having a meaningful experience by seeing how they are making a difference in the lives of others.

The last conclusion is leadership experiences bring relevance to students' faith both at church and outside of church. The research showed that these leadership experiences must be experienced firsthand. The students could not simply consider themselves to be leaders. It is not the concept of being a leader but rather a concrete firsthand experience. This firsthand experience makes faith relevant to their lives both at church and outside of church.

These four elements found within leadership experiences seem to be what impacts a student's faith in a positive way. I will look at these four conclusions through my theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses in the following sections. Since my research centers on leadership experiences and faith formation, I chose my lenses to correspond to these two areas. The first area is leadership experiences. For this I chose the lens of leadership. Leadership is not based on traits or characteristics. Leadership is based on the process of influencing others. The second area is faith formation. For this lens I chose the theoretical lens of *Believing*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging*. It was essential to understand that these three lenses are neither sequential nor hierarchical. They are interdependent. I also paired these three categories with my theological and biblical lenses. *Believing* was paired with the theological lens of justification and the biblical lens of faith and works of the law. *Behaving* was paired with the theological lenses of the priesthood of all believers and the discipleship process. It was paired with the biblical lenses of living stones, citizenship, and co-mentoring. *Belonging* was paired with the theological lens of

Trinitarian theology and the biblical lenses of the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment. See figure 3.

Figure 3. Theoretical, Theological, and Biblical Lenses

All of these lenses for the areas of leadership and faith formation were helpful as I looked at the results from this research. I will now look at each of these four conclusions through these lenses. I begin with the first conclusion that students understand leadership experiences and helping others are connected and cannot be separated.

Conclusion 1: Leadership Experiences and Helping Others Are Connected

My first conclusion is leadership experiences and helping others are connected. They cannot be separated. I define leadership as a process whereby an individual influences one or more individuals towards a preferred and promised future. This definition was used in both the quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews and focus groups. In the questionnaires, some students did not believe they were in a position of leadership, but also believed that being a leader was part of their Confirmation experience. They exhibited an understanding of the difference between assigned leadership and emergent leadership. While they may not have held an official position of leadership, they were still able to have a leadership experience where they influenced one

or more individuals. They also may not have viewed themselves as a leader because of what Van Linden and Fertman call the "great person" theory.[1] This is the theory that leaders are born and not made. While some individuals may not be natural born leaders, they can still influence or help someone. Because leadership is a process, this may be why some students did not believe they held a leadership role but still viewed being a leader was part of their Confirmation experience. This is why the interview/focus group protocol included the phrase "influencing others" rather than just asking students about being in leadership roles. Leadership is not about position but about process. Within this process, the motivation of a leader has the interests of others before their own self-interests. When one influences another, they must have the other's best interests at heart.

The lens of *Believing* is connected with the biblical lens of faith and works of the law. This gives more insight into the motivation of a leader. There are three uses for the law. The law helps us curb our wickedness, serves as a mirror of our humanity, and guides us in how we are to live together. First, the law helps us curb our wickedness and selfish desires. The law holds us accountable so we will not enter into leading and helping others for the wrong reasons. Second, the law is a mirror for our humanity. It helps us see clearly what our perfect motives should be in leadership and helping others. It helps us to not look to our own needs but to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others. Finally, the law guides us in how we are to live together and how we are to treat one another. We are to put the interests of others before our own. Our motivation cannot be one of selfishness. If we are motivated by our own selfish desires, influencing others moves into coercion, and our leadership moves into dictatorship. Wanting the best for

[1] Van Linden and Fertman, *Youth Leadership*, 22.

others must motivate a leader. Leadership and helping others are connected. They cannot be separated.

However, when thinking about the lens of *Behaving*, we see the attitude of helping others is still based in a beneficiary model for students. Students would mention helping "the less fortunate." They viewed those who they would help as somehow less than themselves. Having someone else's best interests at heart motivates a leader. A leader wants to help others. However, students still hold the view that they know best what another needs. Students do not enter into helping others by first listening. Students move in with the understanding that they know what is best for those they are helping. Students are still in the beneficiary model that Block writes about in his book.[2] The students are well intentioned and perhaps they will be able to move out of this beneficiary model as they mature.

Within the lens of *Behaving* is also the theological lens of the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood of all believers is not based on someone's standing, role, or age. Everyone is seen as a "priest," everyone can be a leader within the church, and everyone has something to offer. Anyone can be a leader and help others. Students are not excluded because of their age. When students are invited into leadership experiences it is because someone believes that God is already active within that student.

Missional leadership is based in the understanding that God is already active within the neighborhood. Missional leaders discern within a community to discover what God is up to in the neighborhood. Then the faith community joins in what God is already doing. The same could be said of students. Missional leaders believe that God is already

[2] Block, *Community*, 58-59.

active within individuals. Missional leaders discern what God is up to in the lives of students and then invite them into leadership experiences and serving others in order to help them grow in faith. It is not based on the age of the individual. God is active in the lives of students, calling them into leadership and serving others. They are called to be priests. They are called to be leaders and to serve others.

The research showed that students viewed leadership experiences and helping others as connected. They cannot be separated. A leader must be motivated by the desire to help someone move towards a preferred and promised future. However, students still need to grow in their understanding of what it means to help others by walking alongside them rather than having a beneficiary model in mind.

Conclusion 2: Relationships Are Vital

The second conclusion is relationships are vital within these leadership experiences. Once again, I define leadership as a process whereby an individual influences one or more individuals towards a preferred and promised future. Both the one who is influencing and the one who is being influenced must agree upon this preferred and promised future. There is no hierarchy within leadership with the leader at the top being in charge and everyone else somewhere below them. There must be a mutual relationship between the two. This research showed that relationships within leadership are vital. It is not a top-down model. This ties in with our definition of leadership. Wheatley, in her book *Leadership and the New Science*, writes about quantum physics and how in the quantum world "relationship is the key determiner of everything."[3] Leadership must be based upon a relationship.

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[3] Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 10.

When thinking of our lens of *Behaving*, Block writes that citizenship is not something we obtain but it is a state of being.[4] Citizenship in the United States is more than taking a vow to uphold the constitution or having the right to vote. This is too limiting a view of what citizenship is. Citizenship is a state of being. It is a choice to hold oneself accountable to the well-being of the larger community of which we are a part. This behavior is about how we are in relation to each other. For citizenship, relationships are vital. This could also be said for the church community. Membership, like citizenship, is more than having a vote and deciding how to spend the church budget. For membership, relationships are vital. Being part of God's family does not happen in isolation. Acts of service, prayer, preaching, confessing, and accepting others must take place in community.

These communal relationships are rooted in co-mentoring. There is no hierarchy within these relationships. Both individuals bring something to the relationship that benefits the other. When they are influencing and helping others, the student benefits by knowing they are making a difference in someone's life. In this research, the students could see God working through them to help others and influence others towards a preferred and promised future. They talked about how relationships were vital throughout their experiences. They also talked about how this understanding of knowing they made a difference in someone's life is what makes these experiences fun for them. It is all rooted in relationships.

[4] Block, *Community*, 65.

This also connects with the lens of *Belonging*. Dean writes about consequential faith and how it cannot happen outside of a community.[5] Students understand this. They hunger to have a place of *Belonging* as we all do. This was one of the three lessons my pastoral care class at Luther Seminary taught. We all long for a place of *Belonging*. This is essential in faith formation. Faith formation is more than the assimilation of knowledge. It requires a community.

This research showed relationships are a vital part of leadership experiences and serving others. They must take place within community. These relationships are mutual with no hierarchy involved. There is a mutual relationship between the leader and those they are influencing. Both are affected within the process.

Conclusion 3: Leadership Experiences Must Contain an Element of Fun

The third conclusion is leadership experiences must contain an element of fun. This element of fun is different from what is outlined in Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. One of the tenants of MTD is the central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about one's self.[6] Students did talk about the fact that helping others and making a difference in the lives of others made them happy and this is part of what made these experiences fun for them. However, they were not motivated by the desire to be happy. Wanting to make a difference in the lives of others was their motivation.

Within the lens of *Believing* is the theological lens of justification, which gives insight into how leadership experiences impact faith formation. As mentioned above, students are not motivated to help others or be a leader in order to grow in faith. They are

[5] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 73-77.

[6] Dean, 14.

motivated by the desire to make a difference in the lives of others. It is through these experiences that God works faith within them. In order to help others, one must put the needs of another before their own needs and they must be willing to enter into the suffering of another. This is what God did for us in Christ. God willingly enters into our broken world in order to be with us. This is the call to discipleship to be more like Christ. As Luther writes, we sacrifice to God our own sinful self in order to help another.[7] We put their needs before our own and follow Christ's example to enter into the suffering of another in order to make a difference in their lives. This is what motivates students.

Leadership experiences must have an element of fun. This element of fun can come from the experience being enjoyable and meaningful. This can be enjoyable because the leadership experience or serving others has been made into some kind of game. This can also be meaningful because students see how they are making a difference in the lives of others. This is what motivates these students in leadership experiences and serving others.

Conclusion 4: Leadership Experiences Bring Relevance to the Student's Life both Inside and Outside of the Church

The last conclusion is leadership experiences and serving others brings relevance to a student's life both inside and outside of the church. Within the lens of *Belonging* is the theological lens of Trinitarian theology. The social Trinity gives more insight into how these experiences bring relevance. Each person in the Trinity finds their personhood in their mutual indwelling with each other.[8] We also find our own personhood in our

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[7] Luther and Walch, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 94.

[8] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 16.

relationships with those around us because we are created in God's image. Leadership experiences and helping others is rooted in these relationships. Students see how they make a difference in the lives of others and, in turn, they see how these experiences help themselves. They find their personhood within the relationships with others as they lead and serve in community.

The sending Trinity gives insight to how this also brings about relevance to the lives of students. As the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit, the Spirit sends the church into the world.[9] The church is sent to share God's message of love through word and actions. Students see how leadership experiences and serving others is part of sharing God's message of love with the world. Leadership experiences and serving others, both inside and outside of the church, is an expression of their faith. It is about how they put their faith into action. It is how they share God's message of love with the world. Helping others through their words and actions is rooted in sharing God's love.

Furthermore, the Triune God is not closed but ecstatic.[10] God is outward reaching, open to others. Humans are created in God's image. We are created to be outward reaching and open to others. Students are deeply connected to this. Their passion to help others and make a difference in the lives of others is evident in this research. They desire to make a difference, which is part of what makes these experiences fun and meaningful for them. They have the passion to reach out beyond themselves towards another. This brings about relevance to their faith both inside and outside of the church.

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[9] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

[10] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 95-96.

Thoughts on Further Research

This research was limited to the students and parents at Christ Lutheran Church. While leadership experiences may have a positive impact on faith formation, it must be understood that each faith community is unique. God is up to something different in each community. It is up to each faith community to discern what God is up to in their midst and to determine if leadership experiences for students is part of what God is up to.

This research not only looked at students' views but also the views of their parents. Leadership experiences must be concrete for students. Leadership experiences for parents need only be in concept. Further research could be done on whether the parents' views are impacted by their own leadership experiences or some other factor. Further research could also be done on how parents' views on leadership have impacted their child's views. Further research should also be done in other faith communities to determine if the findings of this research hold true only for the faith community at Christ Lutheran Church or if these findings hold true for students elsewhere. Finally, research could be done with each of these four results in mind. Could leadership experiences influence faith in a positive way if it did not contain one of these elements? For example, would a student's faith be impacted in a positive way if they did not see how they were making a difference in the lives of someone else or if the experience did not contain an element of fun?

Summary

This research suggests that leadership experiences impact faith formation of middle school age students in a positive way. This has had implications for my ministry at Christ Lutheran Church. It has caused me to make sure that spaces are created in order

to give students the opportunity to lead and to help others. These leadership experiences must be connected with helping others. The two cannot be separated for students. As programs continue to develop and change, spaces must be created within them where students can experience leadership opportunities where they are helping others. The research has shown that these opportunities must also have an element of fun. This element of fun is not only in the enjoyment of the activity but also in knowing how they are making a difference in the lives of others. Students must be constantly shown how they are influencing others in a positive way and how they are making a difference. This must all be done within community. Relationships are vital in these leadership experiences.

This kind of community must be tended to and carefully constructed in order for individuals to find a place of belonging and for these leadership experiences to impact their faith formation. These spaces must also be created intentionally in order to be helpful. This type of community will have a positive impact on the faith formation of students and make their faith more relevant to their lives both at church as well as outside of church.

EPILOGUE

I entered the Doctor of Ministry program at Luther Seminary in 2015 wanting to continue to grow in my own faith as well as in ministry. I was doing congregational coaching at that time, which was based on research around the understanding of how congregations could grow to be more missional. It became evident to me that theological education and learning how to conduct a research project would help me in coaching others in these congregations. The study of the missional movement as well as the social Trinity greatly impacted how I entered into these conversations.

I felt the call to go back into congregational ministry full-time later that year. The opportunity came about to work with middle school students within a Confirmation program. I was challenged in my views of community and theology as I moved through the first couple of years of the Doctor of Ministry program. Studying the social Trinity impacted how I understood who God is. It also impacted how I communicated this to students and leaders.

I had no idea what kind of research project would be helpful for me to study as I entered into the second half of the program. I did not want to do something that I was not passionate about or do something that was not helpful to others. I struggled with doing research with the organization Discipleship Living and Camping Ministries or to do this within the congregation I was currently serving. I finally realized I wanted to study the impact of faith and leadership. It seemed obvious to me that the two were connected in some way. I had seen leadership experiences impact the faith of students I had worked

with. However, in talking with others, I found that very few congregations had leadership opportunities for their students. Some may have ways in which to help, but very few entrusted leadership roles to students. I also found very little research on the connection between leadership and faith formation. Therefore, I wanted to look at leadership experiences and how they connected with faith formation through the views of the parents and students that I was currently working with. I was curious as to which elements within leadership experiences may be influential in faith formation.

This research has impacted not only how I approach ministry but also my faith. As I conducted interviews and focus groups, I heard the stories of how leadership experiences and helping others have impacted the lives of the students with whom I have been in ministry. Hearing the stories of their experiences has touched my heart. I know that I may not be remembered by these students in the years to come nor will we possibly remain in touch. Hearing their stories deeply impacted my faith as I see how God has worked in their lives, and I am deeply grateful to have been a part of those experiences.

This research has also made me intentional. Not only has it impacted how I include leadership experiences within each aspect of ministry, but also in how I craft these experiences. Knowing that they must contain an element of fun, showing students how they are making a difference in the lives of others, and focusing on relationships are intentionally part of each experience. I am also starting to teach others how to include these elements within leadership experiences. For example, in a ministry called Summer Stretch, young adults lead a group of middle school students along with high school leaders to serve within the community. I am planning to teach these young adults how to include these elements within their small groups. I will teach them how to serve as co-

mentors with the high school leaders and how they both can include the elements in the experiences for the middle school students.

Finally, this program has also influenced how I perceive ministry. The study of leadership experiences and how they impact faith formation as well as the study of leadership and the new sciences showed me that expectations are a vital part of the process. Our expectations influence the results and order will come about from chaos. I no longer feel the need to control things as much or to plan for every eventuality that may occur within a program. My attitude that things will work out and that God is at work within the chaos will influence the outcome. I am able to take a step back and watch how God is working within the chaos rather than trying to solve a problem to bring order from the chaos.

I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn and grow with my cohort. I am hopeful that this research will impact others in how they incorporate leadership experiences into the ministries with students. I look forward to how this research will continue to impact my own ministry and faith as well as how it may impact others.

APPENDIX A

IN VIVO CODES WITHIN FOCUSED CODES FOR QUALITATIVE DATA

Focused Code 1: Seeing others need help
Some people would be really bad leaders because they don't care.
They would probably do it poorly or not really care.
You're helping them and you're not there to gain anything for yourself.
You're not there for you; you're there for them.
It's good to have something that's not about you.
It's not about you. It's about somebody else.
Sometimes you just have to do what's right.
He just needed help or guidance.
So I went out and helped them.
I feel like God, He wants you to help others a lot.
Worshipping Him by serving other people.
You kind of want them to have a better life.
This is what I'm meant to do… I want to help others.
I feel like everyone should always help people.
The reason of the Bible is to help others.
We're sent to serve the world
We're sent to do His work.
I know it's the right thing to do and God would be proud.
Some of them needed help.
Where someone's maybe not doing as good.
She (sister) has trouble shooting… so I go outside and try and shoot with her.
When the teachers aren't there or something and you know the dance, you can help people.
You have to be a leader when someone else needs help.
You can be the person that helps them.

Focused Code 2: Helping others
Being a leader and telling people even your story can just influence them to be a faithful follower
They focus on helping and teaching everybody else
If someone's leading people to be better.
I had leaders and they were always there for me.
You have to be a leader when someone else needs help.
Somebody who wants to help you or is clearly willing to help you.
Help them get through their bad experiences.

It teaches everyone it's good to help.
You help someone and they'll help someone else.
That they can do to help other people too.
By helping other people.
It's kind of like taking a leadership role to help others.
You're just there to help and serve others.
We'll help each other.
You're just there to help and serve.
You kind of help them.
Everyone has the capability to serve others and we should.
I feel like you can help someone.
They try to help people get through it.
Help other people out.
I tell them how the game works and help them contribute more to the group.
I think we're benefiting as people.
Their churches are better now.
We're making people feel good.
Helping your friends.
More willing to help.
There's someone else in the world who's willing to help you.
She kind of helps me.
You have to be a leader when someone else needs help.
We get to help people.
Helping somebody who doesn't even know that we're going to.
It's just helping people who need it.
Just help them.
You know it will help them possibly grow in their faith.
Like the ability to also help others.
To go help others.
Like I helped somebody.
Then go help them.
But to actually go help them.
Oh, I helped someone out.
I could be volunteering.
I helped someone.
Have them benefit from like the good stuff that we're doing for them.
Think of all the people you helped.
Everyone kind of helping each other.
It's like everyone can help each other.
They can help other people be better people too.
You should help people because it's the right thing to do.
They focus on helping and teaching everybody else.
It's a good way to teach people and help others.
I'm helping other people as well.
You help someone, they help someone, and somehow it'll come back to you.
And they'll be closer to God too.

Because you're helping them, and they kind of like help you too

Focused Code 3: Being a role model
If we didn't have these leaders at our church…we wouldn't want to be leaders.
All these kids look up to me.
They kind of look up to you.
You can set an example for other people.
We're being an influence on them.
They'll remember us in that way.
Kind of like a "monkey see; monkey do."
Just the way they act might lead you and guide you
It might influence you to learn more about Him (God).
They should act in a good way.
It's good to keep showing people.
They should act like people are following the way they do things.
They take after you.
You can set an example.
Someone they look up to.
Maybe they don't know they're teaching people, they're just doing it.
Setting a good example.
What I play is more like a role player.
If we teach others to do it, they'll do it for someone else too.
That's leading them by showing them a good example.
They're always trying to set a good example for us.
We're setting good examples too.
They can set good examples for other kids.
I think God and Jesus tried to set good examples.
He tried to set good examples.
I feel when other people kind of look up to me.
That role model piece is important.
Role models especially.
And show them, "Hey, this is what you can be like."
Have those kids have someone else to look up to.
I looked up to him so much.
She changed me to be a leader for other people to show that it's okay to be you–who you are.
To give us an opportunity to be leaders and to give those kids someone else to look up to.

Focused Code 4: Experiencing supportive parents and family
I feel that your sister has impacted you a lot.
Church and my family have influenced me to be who I am.
I've wanted my dad to be my CONFIRMATION leader.
My cousin
My grandma's really religious
My grandparents are religious but they're just fun happy people.
With my family I do a lot.

My parents are like they're big religious people.
My grandma…she's brought me to church.
My mom will tell me stories of how she went to church.
When we go to Feed My Starving Children, normally we go with my aunt and uncle.
Parents are another influence.
What our parents did for us.
They (parents) are always trying to set us a good example.
My grandparents teaching my parents, and my parents teaching me.
We use to always go to the Bible camp in Wisconsin with them (grandparents).

Focused Code 5: Experiencing leadership and serving others
My mom kind of forced me in the beginning.
I guess my mom kind of told me I should do it.
My mom because she always like wants me to volunteer.
My parents wanted me to help more…to volunteer more.
It's just so great to have someone and my aunt is always there to show me.
They (parents) taught us how to do it and now, we can help others too.
We do ushering just as a family.
They (parents) told us to.
Part of it was our parents.
He (dad) obviously just pushed me to do these things.
"If there's anyone who wants to assist, please let us know."
They allowed you to step up.
They expect you to have leadership qualities.
They're just expecting it.

Focused Code 6: Having God's help
There's a piece of Jesus in you… it will help you be a mini leader of God.
God is with me.
If I need Him, He'll be there.
I think He was there with me the whole time.
You're always connected to God.
God can kind of help you lead other people.
He's kind of with you, He'll help you.
So you kind of like say, "God can you help me with this, like help me figure out how to fix this?"
When I make a difference and help other people's lives, God is there with me.

Focused Code 7: Being in community
I think it's like being with people.
I think that having faith that other people have and are going to be there for you is super important.
That will encourage a whole community.
We have friends in our Confirmation group.
My friend … she influences me to do things I would never think about doing but they're all good things.

You make new friends.
Just knowing that we'll always be there for each other.
Good friends.
Most of them are my friends.
Yeah, working with friends.
You can get a group of friends together to do a project.
We weren't friends before Summer Stretch and then we became friends.
And then you guys become friends.
Family comes first.
They (friends) are very important.
I will have a group of friends I sign up with.
Like making friendships and bonding with some of them.
Like some of my friends.
Become friends with them.
I guess forced to become better friends.
It could help you make new friends.
By like making new friends.
I'm with my friends most of those times.
Just being with your friends.
I met a lot of new friends.
Getting closer to your friends.
Well, the friends I think.
Then this one boy became best friends with him.
We were all besties by the end of the week.
To make new friends and stuff.
We'll be like, "Hey guys, we're going to start to be friends now, because we're going to."
Enjoy ourselves and each other's company.
Feeling alone sucks.
Our church is about relationships.

Focused Code 8: Inviting others
I'll be like, "Oh, come and hang out with us" if someone's alone.
I asked her to hang out with our group.
You ask them to come to the group.
I like getting people involved.
You kind of want to get them involved.
Some of my friends don't normally volunteer and I convince them to.
I think you should introduce them to the opportunity.
She invited me to do the walk.
Have them come to church with you and be a part of the church.
Let's do this thing.
I asked my friend to come and do it with me.
I wanted her to come.
So I told my friends.
I wanted her to be here and to, like, have her help people with me.

Focused Code 9: Having fun and being happy
I think of him and how fun it is.
You can try and convince them it's fun.
It will be fun.
It's fun getting all your friends to do a project.
I figured out it was fun.
He was helping all the kids have fun and come together.
I had a lot of fun.
I have fun on Sunday nights
That's always fun to look forward to.
It was so fun.
It's just fun.
It's the joy of them be happy.
It gave me a good feeling.
And to be happy.
It just gave me a good feeling.
Which really makes me happy that I changed someone.
It'll be fun.
I've decided to do it because I've experienced how fun it is, and how much it connects me through God and through my faith, and through my friends and meeting new people.
It makes your life happier knowing that you're doing the right thing and making a difference.
That being a Christian was fun.

Focused Code 10: Helping me grow
That brought me closer to God
It kind of brings me closer to God
Being a leader… it's like putting God's work in your hands
It can help you grow.
Has helped me know that God is there in more ways than one.
When you just get down to the core of it, it's a lot more meaningful.
It they didn't show any signs of I'm changing, I would be like, "Why am I here?"
Helped me get closer to God.
You could grow closer to God.
It will make you a better person.
It will help you to be a better leader.
It kind of brought me closer to God.
The more you help them, the more you get better.
It makes us better people, because we are doing good things.
It's really helped me grow in faith.
Whenever I do service projects I feel like I'm closer to God.
If you're a leader, I guess that can bring you closer to God.
Doing that you could like become closer to God.
Impacting their faith is definitely impacting your faith.
I think helping other people become a leader helps like your faith grow more.
The more you help them, the more you get better.

It brought me closer to God.
Some of the leadership experience could be like at church, so like you could grow closer to God.
I think it definitely impacts your faith.
I feel like, this is going to sound bad, but I like church a lot more. I feel like a fire to learn more.
I think it makes you stronger in your faith.
It can help you grow.
That helps my faith grow.

Focused Code 11: Making a difference
The people you make connections with can go off and be leaders to other people…like a chain reaction.
You realize you're making an impact.
Others could see how God could impact them.
You feel like you're making an impact.
He is changing, and that's because of us…that's why I keep going back.
I could change part of their life, which can affect how they live forever.
What I just did could impact like many people and like change someone's life for the better.
Look at the impact you did.
I can make a difference.
Because you're impacting people.
You just realize that you're making an impact, you're there to help them, and you're not there to gain anything for yourself.
Because it makes you feel like you did something important.
Because we can see it's possible to make a difference.
To make more of an impact on people.
When I do, I feel like I did something good.
If I didn't feel like I was doing something important, I would keep doing it.
We kind of impacted their journey.
I think it's cool to be part of somebody's life experiences.
I know for my job for me personally, it really needs to impact a lot of people.
I definitely want to do a job that impacts other people.
I think it's impacting other people because you like don't feel like you wasted your day.
It's cool to know if you'll have an impact on them.
That's so worth it, to see that growth or that change in those kids.
They still remember me.

Focused Code 12: Having relevance to daily life
Just kind of makes it seem more real life than just going by the textbook.
We feel that we can talk about our lives.
You don't have to do it in a church.
How this topic has connected with our lives.
Will impact our lives as we grow older.
The more I get to know myself, that definitely helps outside of church.

Feel like you've done something with your faith that day.
That's really meaningful.
I can spread God's word.
Makes everything a lot more worth it.
It was so worth it.
Something could change your life or something.
This could be like really meaningful and life changing

APPENDIX B

STUDENT QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your current grade?
   - 8th
   - 9th
   - 10th
   - 11th

2. Did you participate in the following programs?

a. Leader in Vacation Bible School _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

b. Middle School Mission Trip _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

c. High School Mission Trip _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

d. Confirmation _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

In what grade did you start Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church? ____

In the following questions, reflect upon the years you participated in Confirmation.

3. Attending worship...

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Is important to me to attend on a regular basis.				
Was enhanced by reflecting and filling out a Worship Note.				
Has been vital to my faith formation.				

4. Serving others through programs such as mission trips, summer stretch, or other service projects…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Is important to me to do on a regular basis through a program at Christ Lutheran Church.				
Was enhanced by reflecting and filling out a Service Form.				
Has been vital to my faith.				

5. Being in a small group …

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Was missed when we didn't meet.				
Was important to me at other events like retreats, mission trip or summer stretch.				
Was important to me because of the friendships I made.				
Has impacted my faith in a positive way.				

6. My friends at Christ Lutheran Church…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Are mainly from my Confirmation small group.				
Grew deeper from the Confirmation retreats or make up Saturday retreat events.				
Grew deeper from summer programs like camp, mission trips, summer stretch, VBS, etc.				
Have impacted my faith in a positive way.				

7. Do you consider that you were in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church during your time in Confirmation? _____ Yes _____No

If yes, what were these leadership role(s): _____

_____

8. Do you currently serve in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church? __ Yes __No

If yes, in what leadership role do you serve? _____

9. Being a leader…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Can be experienced in a variety of different ways.				
Was a part of my Confirmation experience.				
Was a part of my experience outside of Christ Lutheran Church.				
Has impacted my faith in a positive way.				

10. My family is involved in my faith life…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
On campus at Christ Lutheran Church through ministries like church school, Confirmation, or worship.				
In a partner organization through Christ Lutheran Church such as Feed My Starving Children or on a mission trip.				
In another religious organization outside of Christ Lutheran Church such as another church.				
At home on a regular basis.				

11. On average, during your time in Confirmation how often did you attend worship services at Christ Lutheran Church as a family?

- Weekly
- Once a month
- Once a quarter
- Fewer than once a quarter
- I did not attend worship services

12. Tell me about the adults during your Confirmation experience.

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
My Confirmation leader was a positive influence in my faith formation.				
My parents were a positive influence in my faith formation.				
The pastors at Christ Lutheran Church were a positive influence in my faith formation.				
I had other adults outside of Christ Lutheran Church that had a positive influence in my faith formation.				

13. On average, during your time in Confirmation how often did you attend Confirmation classes?

- Weekly
- Once a month
- Once a quarter
- Fewer than once a quarter
- I did not attend classes

For the following questions, please answer about your own faith.

14. I believe…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Good people go to heaven.				
Everything happens for a reason.				
God punishes bad people and blesses good people.				
God loves me no matter what.				

15. On average, during your time in Confirmation how often did you pray outside of Confirmation?

- Daily
- At least once a week
- At least once a month
- Rarely
- Never

16. How important is your faith to your daily life today?

- Not at all
- Not very much
- Somewhat
- Very much

Thank you for completing this survey!

APPENDIX C

PARENT QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your child's current grade?
   - 8th
   - 9th
   - 10th
   - 11th

2. Did your child participate in the following programs at Christ Lutheran Church?

a. Leader in Vacation Bible School _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

b. Middle School Mission Trip _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

c. High School Mission Trip _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

d. Confirmation _____ Yes _____No
If yes, how many years? _____

In what grade did they start Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church?____

For this part of the survey, please reflect upon your child's past experience at Christ Lutheran Church during the years they participated in the Confirmation program.

3. Attending worship...

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Was important to me to have my child attend on a regular basis.				
Was enhanced by my child reflecting and filling out a Worship Note.				
Has been vital to my child's faith formation.				

4. Serving others through programs such as mission trips, summer stretch, or other service projects…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Was important for my child to do on a regular basis through a program at Christ Lutheran Church.				
Was enhanced by my child reflecting and filling out a Service Form.				
Has been vital to my child's faith formation.				

5. Being in a small group …

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Was important for my child during Confirmation. They missed it when they didn't meet.				
Was important for my child to be in for other events like retreats, mission trip or summer stretch.				
Was important for my child because of the friendships they made.				
Has impacted my child's faith in a positive way.				

6. My child's friends at Christ Lutheran Church…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Are mainly from their Confirmation small group.				
Grew deeper from the Confirmation retreats or make up Saturday retreat events.				
Grew deeper from summer programs like camp, mission trips, summer stretch, VBS, etc.				
Have impacted their faith in a positive way.				

7. Do you consider that your child was in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church during their time in Confirmation? _____ Yes _____No

If yes, what were these leadership role(s)_____

_____

8. Does your child currently serve in a leadership role at Christ Lutheran Church? _____ Yes _____No

If yes, in what leadership role(s) do they serve? _____

9. Being a leader…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Can be experienced in a variety of different ways.				
Was a part of my child's Confirmation experience.				
In another religious organization outside of Christ Lutheran Church has been part of my child's life.				
Has impacted my child's faith in a positive way.				

10. Our family was involved in my child's faith life…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
On campus at Christ Lutheran Church through ministries like church school, Confirmation, or worship.				
In a partner organization through Christ Church such as Feed My Starving Children or on a mission trip.				
In another religious organization outside of Christ Lutheran Church such as another church.				
At home on a regular basis.				

11. On average, during your child's time in Confirmation how often did you attend worship services at Christ Lutheran Church as a family?

- Weekly
- Once a month
- Once a quarter
- Fewer than once a quarter
- I did not attend worship services

12. Tell me about the adults involved with your child during their Confirmation experience.

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Their Confirmation leader was a positive influence in their faith formation.				
The pastors at Christ Lutheran Church were a positive influence in their faith formation.				
They had other adults outside of Christ Lutheran Church that had a positive influence in their faith formation.				

13. On average, during your child's time in Confirmation how often did they attend classes?

- Weekly
- Once a month
- Once a quarter
- Fewer than once a quarter
- They did not attend classes

For the following questions, please answer about your own faith.

14. I believe…

	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very Much
Good people go to heaven.				
Everything happens for a reason.				
God punishes bad people and blesses good people.				
God loves me no matter what.				

15. On average, how often do you pray?
    - Daily
    - At least once a week
    - At least once a month
    - Rarely
    - Never

16. How important is your faith to your daily life?
    - Not at all
    - Not very much
    - Somewhat
    - Very much

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey!

APPENDIX D

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a bit about your experience in Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church. What is your group like and what have you been involved with?

2. What are some ways that you have seen students serve as a leader at Christ Lutheran Church?

3. How might someone influence others without being in a formal position of leadership? These could be at church or outside of church.
    a. Was there ever a time when you felt you influenced others without being in an official leadership role? Again, this can be at church or outside of church.

4. How did you first become involved in these leadership experiences?

5. Do these experiences make the church more relevant to your life outside of church? How or how not?

6. Why do you do leadership experiences?

7. Have these experiences influenced your faith at all?

8. Are there specific things about these experiences that impacted you the most?

9. Were there other things that you feel impacted your faith such as a significant adult, bible study, or small group?

10. Can everyone be a leader?

11. If someone said they did not think they could be a leader, what would you tell them?

12. Should everyone be a leader?

13. Is being a leader connected to you growing in faith or are the two separate from each other?

14. Is there something that we have not talked about that would be helpful for me to know about your faith life, your experiences of being a leader, or your family's involvement in your faith life?

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Leadership and Faith Formation in Youth Ministry

You are invited to be in a research study of the impact of leadership experiences in faith formation. You were selected as a possible participant because you participated in Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: me, Neil A. Christians as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul Minnesota. My advisors are Dr. Dan Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to examine leadership experiences that students have had during Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church and how they might impact an individual's faith formation.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things. Participate in a questionnaire and a possible interview that will ask about your experiences during the time you participated in the Confirmation ministry at Christ Lutheran Church.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
The study has no risks. I am only asking for you to give your time.

The direct benefits of participation are: None

Indirect benefits to yourself/or the general public of participation are improved programs in the area of, and contributions to the knowledge about, youth ministry.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home; only my advisor, Dr. Dan Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed.

While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied.

Recordings of interviews will be used for educational purposes only. They will be kept in a password protected external hard drive which I will keep locked in my home. Only my advisors and myself will have access to these recordings. All raw data will be destroyed by May 31, 2022.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary, Christ Lutheran Church, or with me. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher(s) conducting this study is me, Neil A. Christians. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 1234 Street Name, City, State, xxxxx or by email at emailaddress@emailaddress.org.
Phone: xxx.xxx.xxxx
You may contact my advisors, Dr. Dan Anderson or Dr. Alvin Luedke at Luther Seminary, xxxx Street Name, City, State, xxxxx.
Dr. Dan Anderson email: daemailaddress@emailaddress.edu.
Dr. Alvin Luedke email: alemailaddress@emailaddress.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of parent or guardian _____ Date_____
Signature of minor subject's assent _____ Date_____
Signature of investigator _____ Date_____

I consent to be audio taped if I am chosen to participate in follow-up interviews:

Signature of parent or guardian _____ Date_____
Signature of minor subject's assent _____ Date_____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature of parent or guardian _____ Date_____
Signature of minor subject's assent _____ Date_____
Please Print student's Name: _____
Created 9/10/17

APPENDIX F

IMPLIED CONSENT FORM

September 30, 2017

Dear Parents,

You are invited to participate in a study to examine leadership experiences that students have had during Confirmation at Christ Lutheran Church and how they might impact an individual's faith formation. I hope to learn the impact of leadership experiences on faith formation for our middle school age youth. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your child participated in Christ Lutheran Church's Confirmation ministry.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to give me insight into various aspects of our Confirmation ministry. It will also help me indentify individuals to be interviewed for further research. It will take about 10 minutes to complete. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to improve our Confirmation ministry at Christ Lutheran Church. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Christ Lutheran Church, Luther Seminary, or me. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact me at 1234 Street Name, City, State, xxxxx or by email at emailaddress@emailaddress.org.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Neil A. Christians
Middle School Ministry Director
Christ Lutheran Church

APPENDIX G

CONTACT MESSAGE FOR SURVEY

Dear Parents,

I am contacting you to ask for you and your child to participate in a research project I am conducting as a requirement for me to receive a Doctor of Ministry degree in Congregational Mission and Leadership from Luther Seminary in City, State.

I am asking students that have participated in our Confirmation Ministry process at Christ Lutheran Church to share with us about their experiences.

Our hope is that their insights will help us to improve this ministry! If your child participates, they may be asked for a follow up face-to-face interview where we can gain some deeper insights. Your child's confidentiality will be protected throughout this process. I will use pseudonyms for those whom I interview.

Saying "no" to this survey will not affect your relationship with staff, the Christ Lutheran Church, or me. Saying "yes" will help us to improve this ministry for our church and community.

Please complete the following:

- **Sign the consent form for your child (back of the second sheet)**
- **Have your child fill out the consent forms & the Student Survey (White forms)**
- **Personally fill out the Parent Survey (Yellow forms)**

Please return the surveys to me by the end of the year.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Neil A. Christians

APPENDIX H

TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Research Study Title: *Leadership and Faith Formation in Youth Ministry*

1. I, *GoTranscription.com*, agree to maintain full confidentiality of all research data received from the researcher related to this research study.
2. I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.
3. I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.
4. I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.
5. I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
6. All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up records, will be returned to the researcher or permanently deleted. When I have received Confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be returned to the researcher or destroyed, pursuant to the instructions of the research team.
7. I understand that Luther Seminary has the right to take legal action against any breach of confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

Transcriber's name (printed)_____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

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