

BEULAH HEIGHTS UNIVERSITY

**BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE:
THE DECLINE IN CHURCH ATTENDANCE IN THE ADAMSVILLE COMMUNITY IN
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

A Dissertation Proposal Submitted to
The Faculty of the Division of Religious Studies
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

BY

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Introduction

The Church has historically been the central gathering place for the African-American community in the Adamsville area of Atlanta, Georgia. The Church buildings were the crucial spaces for community development and planning. This aligns with biblical teachings that shows how the early Christians gathered together for prayer, fellowship and teaching of the Apostles.¹ Similarly, the Church in the Adamsville community has been the heart of both secular and spiritual affairs. However, church attendance has declined in this area in recent years, which has placed the physical buildings in danger of closing.

The Church in the Adamsville community has been the place where ministry leaders teach disciples to "go and make disciples of all Nations and teach them all the things I have commanded you."² The early Christian church was not a central brick and mortar building as it is today but was held in individual homes as a way to avoid the Roman Empire officials. Since these times however, Christians have met in centralized places as a way to build a community of believers. This mode of worship is being challenged by the decline of church attendance in areas such as Adamsville because of technological advances like the Internet. Technology such as streaming services allows people to watch church services on their phones. Thus, this study will evaluate this threat to church attendance in physical buildings because of technological advances in the Adamsville community.

¹ Acts 2: 42

² Matt. 28: 18 - 20

The first chapter of this research study will provide the background and problem to be investigated. Additionally, the purpose of the study, the research questions and their significance will be addressed. Finally, the research design will be outlined, important terms will be defined, as well as any assumptions and limitations of the study will be presented.

Background of the Study

The Church has been the location where people in Adamsville and other communities learned about the sacraments of the church such as The Lord's Supper, Water and Spirit Baptism, Laying on of Hands, Marriage and et cetera. The decline of church attendance and possible closing the physical buildings threatens preservation of the sacraments for future generations. These rituals, symbols, and sacraments of the church are important because they provide a space for worshippers to honor the sacraments and worship together in a communal way. Future generations must be educated on the ways to preserve the sacred things of God despite technological change and advancement.

Pastor Freddie Baisden, the principle researcher of this project, is the pastor of Living Waters Baptist Church, which is located in the Adamsville community. Living Waters is a meeting place for the people of Adamsville. Located inside of the local community center (Waits Community Center), Living Waters has first-hand information about the goals of the Adamsville community. Living Waters leverages the access it has to this information to assist the community in meeting the needs of the Adamsville community and its citizens. Living Waters makes its space within the Waits Community Center available to the local community. Outreach is one of Living Waters central foci. The positive impact demonstrates that Living Waters and other

churches within the Adamsville community are working diligently to reach the millennials and others. Living Waters hopes to preserve the brick and mortar church and believes it serves as an important part in spreading the Gospel. Living Waters is also one of the places in the Adamsville Community where one can learn about and practice the sacraments.

This research explores the relevance of the brick and mortar church while attempting to uncover the reasons for declining church attendance. Because the principle researcher hopes to sustain the church's presence within the Adamsville community, this research will also look at possible solutions to the problems uncovered in the research.

Statement of the Problem

The problem facing the African-American church attendance in the Adamsville community is generational. The baby boomer generation, which includes people born after World War II until the middle 1960s, has sustained the Christian Faith in the Adamsville community through church membership and paying tithes and offerings. Alternately, the millennial generation, those people born between the early 1980s and 1996, represent the largest group among African-American people departing the churches in Adamsville. Therefore, this study will investigate ways to reverse the declining church attendance trend among the millennials in this area.

Moreover, the millennial generation has a strong connection to technology, including the use of social media and streaming services.³ However, these young people have not rejected religion so much as they have rejected the institutions of religion and politics. The baby boomers

³ "Religion in America: US Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, May 11, 2015, accessed February 02, 2019, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

must reach out to the millennials to make the church relevant again if the church in the Adamsville community is to survive. This study will investigate the disconnection between the millennials and the baby boomer generation as the source of the church decline in the community. This research will further explore ways both generations in the community can be reunited around the great commission Jesus gave to his disciples: "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."⁴ The principle researcher believes the baby boomers can reach the millennials but knows it will require strategic effort. Thus this research aims to involve models or engagement that work best to unite baby boomers and millennials to preserve the legacy and significance of the church.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate and reverse the trends causing the decline in the African-American churches in the Adamsville community in Atlanta, Georgia. The ministers, church leaders, and teachers in the community are challenged to find ways to make church relevant too today's millennial generation. While the baby boomer generation was able to preserve the sacraments of the church as passed on by their parental generation, the millennials continue to leave the church in large numbers. This trend in church attendance could lead to not only the disappearance of church buildings in the Adamsville community, but to an overall decrease in church affiliation in the greater Atlanta area.

Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the disconnection between the baby boomer and millennials generation concerning religion and religiosity. While the older generation is oriented toward traditional church attendance in physical buildings, the younger generation is oriented toward religiosity out in the field such as visiting nursing homes, prisons, and soup

⁴ Matt. 28: 19

kitchens. This study will attempt to reconcile the goals of the baby boomers and millennials to save the church buildings in the Adamsville community and thus preserving the sacraments of the Christian faith that are practiced within these buildings.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the underlying issues that have led millennials to leave the African-American Church located in the Adamsville community in Atlanta, Georgia?
2. How can the baby boomers and millennials unite to find a common goal to diminish the threats to the church buildings in Adamsville of Atlanta, Georgia?

Definitions of terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be used:

African American Church. A Black or predominately Black congregation consisting mainly of African-American Christians.⁵

African-American Millennials. A generation of individuals born between 1980 and 2000.⁶

Religion. "Consists of the encounter of human beings with the sacred or divine"⁷

Generational cohorts. The term is used to "categorize a group of people with similarities, an era in which individuals were born, and when they came of age"⁸

⁵ Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990

⁶ Howe & Strauss, 2000

⁷ Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990

⁸ US Chamber of Commerce Foundation. 2012, p. 2.

Spirituality. A worldview in which individuals hold a more comprehensive understanding of self and hold belief in a larger reality than what is experienced in the natural world"⁹

Assumptions of the Study

This study will be conducted with the assumption that every community has its own story. The narrative approach will be used to better understand the stories of the community and the churches in this study. Every person that is interviewed has a story to tell about the problems facing the church. The data collected using the qualitative method will be used to evaluate the problem of declining church attendance in the community without personal bias. Additionally, this study assumes the schedule of the participants will be different, the collected information from participants will be kept private, and all participants will be treated respectfully.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is limited by the size of the community and time restraints. According to Locke et. Al., "Limitations of the study expose the conditions that may weaken the study,"¹⁰ Two questions will guide the study. There are many more questions that could be addressed about the decline in church attendance of millennials in the African-American church throughout the United States. However, it is the researcher's goal that this study will lead to more in-depth investigations that expose problems facing the Christian faith in the Adamsville community. Additionally, the qualitative method is well-suited to address the churches and size of the community in this investigation. This method will allow the researcher to uncover crucial stories

⁹ Dancy, p. 416.

¹⁰ Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2000; Rossman & Rallis 2012.

and themes that could improve the faith community and preserve the church buildings in the Adamsville community.

Delimitations of the Study

The key aim of this study is to investigate the ways baby boomers and millennials can work together to revive church attendance in the Adamsville community in Atlanta, Georgia. The results of this study will address the two primary research questions. This study will also be delimited by the timeframe and size of the community under investigation. The location of the study is more suited for the qualitative method because the sample size will be small. The qualitative method studies trends and issues in an in-depth way without needing information that stems from knowing exact numbers and measurements. Data will be collected through group and individual interviews. There are other research methods, such as the quantitative method that deals with numbers and mathematical relationships but that method is outside the scope of this study.

Importance of the Study

This study will address the decline of African-American church attendance and the possible loss of the physical church buildings in the Adamsville community of Atlanta, Georgia. Moreover, this study aims to increase church participation by millennials in this same community. This study may reveal some actionable knowledge about the trends in church attendance by millennials in this community that can be applicable to ministers, teachers, and other community leaders. This study builds on previous research that shows a significant gap between the generations in the African-American church.

The goal of this study is to provide insight into ways to address the underlying causes of this gap.

According to Sharon Cobbins, the millennials represent the next paradigm of the African-American Church¹¹. In 2016, Cobbins did her research at Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, IL. The goal of the study was to provide insight into ways to discuss the underlying causes of the gap between millennials and older generations, particularly baby boomers. Cobbins' research helps reinforce the goals of this research project and indicates that millennials will play a critical role in the future of the African-American Church. Hence, Cobbins' discovery echoes the principle researcher's concern for the future of the church in the Adamsville community.

The baby boomer generation has overcome many obstacles such as segregation, lack of voter rights, and Jim Crow laws. Despite these many trials, this generation has preserved the sacraments, the symbols, and rituals of the church within the United States and the Adamsville community specifically. In contrast, the millennials are the largest, most educated and technologically literate generation but are failing to attend church at the same rate as the older generation. As a result, it is incumbent upon the baby boomer generation to engage the millennials to continue this preservation of the physical church as a sacred space of worship.

Literature Review

This section provides a summary of the significant concepts and theoretical models related to this study. First, a brief review of the conceptual theories that support this study will be presented. Then, an in-depth analysis of the Adamsville community will be outlined. Finally,

¹¹ Sharon Cobbins, *Millennials: The next Paradigm of the African American Church* (Bourbonnais, IL: Olivet Nazarene University, 2016), 95.

this review considers noteworthy attempts to synthesize the numerous studies conducted on this topic.

Previous studies have been conducted on the decrease in church attendance on a national level and in other communities similar to the Adamsville area of Atlanta, Georgia. These studies will be used as a foundation for the investigation into declining church attendance in the Adamsville community. Many studies have been conducted on the millennial generation and found that a significant percentage of millennials are leaving the African-American church.¹² Similarly, the millennials are leaving the church in Adamsville. Many of these millennials were reared in religious homes by the baby boomer generation, which includes those born after World War II. These generations differ in myriad ways. The baby boomer generation grew up without Internet or access to media such as podcasts, blogs, or streaming services. In contrast, the millennials were born into an information age with many technological advances that were not available to the previous generation.

The Adamsville Community

The Adamsville community is a predominantly African-American area of Atlanta, Georgia. The community has about 10% of married couples, with the other households being led by single parents.¹³ As with other communities, the baby boomers attend church, pay tithes, and participate in other church activities at a higher rate than the millennials. Because of decreased levels of church attendance, many millennials do not pay tithes, which helps to maintain the church buildings in the area. If this trend continues, the church structures could be in danger of decay or demolition if there is not enough money to cover building maintenance. Moreover, there is a high

¹² Waters & Bortree 2012.

¹³ Statistical Atlas

rate of unemployment in the community. This may be one possible reason the millennials are leaving the church. Increasing the job opportunities could reverse the trend of millennials leaving the church.

The African-American church has been a place of support for this community and without it, the future of this community is uncertain. Jesus told His disciple Peter. "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."¹⁴ This scripture in the Gospel tells us that God's church will not be overcome by evil. Additionally, Jesus promised Peter that the Christian Church would survive. He also told Peter what he bound on earth would be bound in heaven."¹⁵ Even though the future of brick and mortar churches in this community are uncertain, Christians believe the church will still survive based on these scriptures.

Seminal Works

Several seminal books will be used to address the research questions in this study. The first book, *Claiming Resurrection in a Dying Church: Freedom Beyond Survival* by Ann B. Olson, explores the declining church in the United States and proclaims that the church is on its death-bed¹⁶. Olsen asserts that traditional church attendance has steadily declined for some time now. She goes on to state that the status of the church can be seen in the way the church buildings are maintained. The decline of the church can be seen through needed maintenance on the buildings and smaller congregation numbers. Once this decline occurs, many congregants may

¹⁴ Matt. 16: 18

¹⁵ Matt. 16: 19

¹⁶ Ann B. Olson. *Claiming resurrection in a dying church: Freedom beyond survival*

feel helpless to improve conditions so they may give up in the same way as Jesus did on the cross: “When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”¹⁷

Moreover, the author shares an interpretation on the resurrection of Jesus after the above passage. When Jesus gave up his spirit, God stepped in and raised him up from the dead. Jesus then began to appear to his disciples but they did not recognize him. Based on Olson’s book, the future of the Christian church is uncertain. It is possible that the traditional church may need to change to survive in the new millennium. The book goes on to offer advice to ministers and church leaders on ways to handle the transitioning that could be helpful to churches in the Adamsville community.

Furthermore, Jeffrey D. Jones in his work, *Facing Decline, Finding Hope. New Possibilities For Faithful Churches*, addresses both the decline and history of the church.¹⁸ He asserts that the church faces change every 500 years and the contemporary church is in a period of deep change. The church is continuing to work in a traditional manner that may no longer work for modern Christians. He discusses events in the Bible like when the ancient Israelites were rescued from captivity; the Priestly group defeated the prophetic group of leaders. While Nehemiah and Ezra rebuilt the old traditions, God created something based on the prophet in second Isaiah. Jones proclaims that the current church finds itself in a similar situation. He goes on to state that church leaders must create new ways to do ministry. Based on this, the best course of action for the Christian Church, including the Adamsville community churches, may be to follow this ad-

¹⁷ John 19: 30

¹⁸ Jeffrey D. Jones. *Facing Decline, Finding Hope. New possibilities For Faithful Churches*

vice as inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Christian church should address the declining membership by embracing the Kingdom of God in a new way.

Similarly, in the book, *Introducing the Missional Church*, Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren offer support for the research questions that guide this study. The authors believe the Kingdom of God has all but disappeared from the current preaching and teaching in churches.¹⁹ They stated that the church is called by God to help redeem the world by being a missional church just as when Abraham left Ur and when Jesus looking sought a city led by God.²⁰ They go on to state that the church must be guided by the Holy Spirit and must discover what God would have the church do in the communities that they serve. The authors discuss the conversations over meals with people in their communities and discovered that God is working in the lives of people who do not attend church. Based on this, current churches must experiment to discover the best way to minister to the people in their communities.

The work by James Poling is also relevant to the aims of this research study. In the book, *Rethinking Faith: A Constructive Practical Theology*, Poling suggests the church may need to rethink its faith in order to remain relevant. To support his claim, Poling makes several points. First he discusses the practical nature of God, which is aimed at demonstrating how God sustains the Christian's life through everyday experiences. Second, he looks at the Christian's life and the Nature of God together. Third, he reflects on surviving violence and the nature of God. The book suggests that despite evil, God's power is available to the church. As such, congregations in

¹⁹ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren. Grand Rapid: Baker Books

²⁰ Hebrew 11: 9-10

Adamsville must rethink its faith by connecting with the creative energy that stems from an alignment with the nature of God.²¹

Other studies have been conducted on the decrease in church attendance on a national level and other communities similar to the Adamsville community. One such study comes from Almeda M. Wright. According to Wright, research shows a disconnection between the millennials and the baby boomers about their views on religion and spirituality.²² This disconnection is causing a decline in church attendance mainly by the millennials. Wright notes that this fragmentation is caused by the injustice African-American millennials see and experience in their lives in the communities in which they live. Wright's research connects well with the millennials in the Adamsville community, as they to face issues of injustice. Wright urges church leaders to engage millennials and to foster a reunion between the baby boomers and millennials. According to Wright, the church must reach out to millennials both in the church and within the community with ideas and programs in which millennials can participate. She encourages churches to reach beyond having potluck dinners and instead invites the church to consider innovative ways toward genuine connection.²³

Samuel Chand and Cecil Murphy add to the importance of focusing on millennials in church decline studies, but noting research which indicates the different life stress millennials have from baby boomers. For instance, millennials are more concerned with sexuality, peer pressure, and crime. Chand and Murphy note how millennials are more self-reliant and rely

²¹ James Newton Poling, *Rethinking Faith: A Constructive Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

²² Almeda M. Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²³ Almeda M. Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans*.

more on themselves to overcome disappointments in life.²⁴ Their research demonstrates the widening gulf between millennials and baby boomers, which research shows, has an impact on church attendance.

In his book, *Black Millennials and the Church*, Joshua Mitchell claims that, “Millennials have a different view of religion,”²⁵ Mitchell’s research indicates that while millennials still had belief in God that they did not participate in any organized religion. His research also showed that many African-American millennials cite conservative politics as the turn off for them. And while Mitchell’s research shows married millennials as more likely to take part in a religion, all millennials are prone to relying on digital media to engage in religious activity or spirituality.²⁶

Mitchell goes on to mention the church’s adaptation to new technological formats to reach the millennials. To move forward as a viable presence in local communities, the church must reconsider its relationship with digital technology. For Mitchell, their connection to technology sets millennials apart from the traditional church. Millennials do not depend upon personal relationships but do want to feel connected to a pastor and other members of a church. Thus, millennials are not as likely as baby boomers to attend traditional church gatherings. Therefore, the church must use a more missional approach and go to them. Technology is an ideal way to connect with millennials that still need connection but prefer more innovative ways

²⁴ Samuel R. Chand and Cecil Murphey, *Futuring: Leading Your Church into Tomorrow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

²⁵ Joshua Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church: Meet Me Where I Am* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2018).

²⁶ Joshua Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church: Meet Me Where I Am*

to foster it. Baby boomers must become better acquainted with technology to engage the millennials. For Mitchell, this includes social media like Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and others.²⁷

Lee Krichers challenges congregations not to become like the Israelites in the days of Joshua's leadership. Kricher notes how the children of Israel thrived and accomplished God's purposes for their generation. However after Joshua and his group died, the next generation did not know the Lord, which might indicate Joshua and others did not have an impact on the next generation.²⁸ To avoid this, Kricher recommends implementing a succession plan. To help future leaders of the church prepare for service and leadership, he advises the church to use mentoring as a way to equip future generations.²⁹ It is what helps distinguish an engaging church by focusing more on what Roxburgh and Boren refer to as missional activity.³⁰

F. Douglas Powe Jr.'s book, *New Wine, New Wineskins*³¹, notes that baby boomers are trying to put new wine into old wineskins. In other words, baby boomers are trying to get millennials to come back to the old ways of doing things in the church. He notes that if the baby boomers want to reach millennials, baby boomers must learn how to go out to meet them by adapting its practices. Powe refers to this as walking on the water as Jesus did when His disciples were in trouble in a storm out on the sea. Jesus was on land by the mountain praying. When Je-

²⁷ Joshua Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church: Meet Me Where I Am*

²⁸ Lee Kricher, *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

²⁹ Lee Kricher, *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church*

³⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott. Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2009).

³¹ F. Douglas. Powe, *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012).

Jesus saw the disciples out on the sea in trouble, Jesus walked on the water to help them. Powe asserts that the African-American church is going to have to change the way it does church. The baby boomer is going to have to walk on the water. And the millennials are going to have to step out of the boat to meet baby boomers at the point of their effort.

Summary

This section reviewed some critical works related to the current church and declining church attendance as well as the Adamsville community. The review found that the Christian church faces many difficulties in contemporary society, but there is hope because God will help the church overcome these difficulties. The current church congregations have a difficult time changing because they are tied to traditional church doctrine and ways of conducting services. However, the traditional church may not be enough to attract and keep the millennial and future generations. Moreover, the church has experienced many spiritual challenges in the past but the power of God intervened just as he did for Abraham and Sarah when they thought having a child was impossible and as he did when he rescued the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

The extant challenges facing the church include declining church attendance because of technological advancements and other worldly distractions. These challenges are not new to the church as God's people have faced and overcome many challenges in both biblical and contemporary times. Historically, great difficulties for God's people have revealed a new plan by God for the body of Christ. For instance, God prepared the prophet Joseph to handle a period of famine in the book of Genesis to save His people. In Genesis 45:5, Joseph said. "God sent me to

preserve life.”³² There are numerous instances of these salvation oracles from God to His people. The review of the literature has revealed that God is doing a new thing in the life of the Christian Church. The leaders must discern this new thing and create spiritual programs that will preserve the life of the church. This may also preserve the physical buildings in the Adamsville community.

In a dissertation by written by Joy K. Challenger by the title,³³ *Infused: Millennials and the Future of the Black*, she notes that the church is call to do more than evangelize. It is also call to aid disciples learn how to live the lives that Jesus call them to live. The living Water Baptist will Church will give aid in this area in the lives of the people in adamsville community.

The church is also call to work with the poor. Many people in the adamsville community in Atlanta, Georgia are poor and disable. There are trends in the United States to require poor, low income people and people with disability to work in order to meet the requirements to receive medicaid _ the federal health care program for low income and disabled people.

In an article in *The Christians Century* magazine by the title, *How not to help the working poor*. June 6, 2018,³⁴ It is brought out that many poor and low income disable people not only work but sometime work two jobs just to make ends meet. The low income and disable people in adamsville need transportation to get to their job.

³² Genesis 45:5

³³ Challenger, Joy K. *Infused: Millennial and the Future of the Black Church*

³⁴ *Christian Century, Thinking Critically , Living Faithfully*, June 6, 2018

The Living Water Baptist is helping in this area in adamsville with the low income and disable people in adamsville.

Finally the story of adamsville can be find on the walls of adamsville in the city of Atlanta, Georgia. An article appeared in the Sojourners magazine. Faith in Action for Social Justice March 2017,³⁵ The title of the article is; The writing is on the wall, by Marcia Good. In this article she notes that you can found the story of a community by reading the writing on the wall. As I walked through adamsville I was struck by the reading of the writing on one such wall. The writing said: Stop Gang banging, your mother is worried sick. As a pastor in the Adamsville I am also worried sick about the adamsville community in the city of Atlanta, Georgia and the people in it. The writing is on the wall of my heart.

³⁵ Sojourners Faith in Action for Social Justice March 2017, sojo.net

Methodology

The review of the literature revealed that God is doing a new thing in the life of the Church. It also exposed the key to decreasing the threat to the churches in the Adamsville community will be an agreement between the baby boomer and millennial generations in that community. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate ways to reverse the current trend of declining church attendance among millennials in this community. This methodology seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the underlying issues that have led millennials to leave the African-American Church located in the Adamsville community in Atlanta, Georgia?
2. How can the baby boomers and millennials unite to find a common goal to diminishing the threats to the church buildings in Adamsville of Atlanta, Georgia?

Research Design

This study will use the qualitative method to address the research questions. The qualitative method is the most appropriate method to uncover the stories of the people of the church but also mindset of the baby boomer and millennial generations. The study will investigate the trends in both generations in the Adamsville community. As the review of the literature revealed, God is doing a new thing in the Church and church leaders must work to discern what this means for the contemporary church. The baby boomer generation is tasked with engaging the millennial generation to help revitalize the churches in this community. This may reduce the threat to the church buildings in the area.

This investigation will use the qualitative method to engage the participants in their normal social setting. First, the researcher will go into the field and observe the Adamsville community. He will seek to uncover the habits of the people and any phenomena that may be revealed through this observation. The researcher will only engage willing participants during the study.³⁶ Next, the researcher will use interviews to further understand the individuals in the community by listening to their experiences.³⁷ The interviews will be conducted personally by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher will employ the schedule method, which is used to test a hypothesis.³⁸

The researcher will also use questionnaires composed of direct questions, indirect questions, open form questions, closed form questions, dichotomous questions and multiple choice questions. These surveys will be used to diagnose and solve social problems within the community. These surveys will be administered online once permission has been received from the church pastors in the community. The population that will be sampled will be the participant names that will be obtained from bulletin boards in the churches in the community. Questions on the questionnaire will consist of the following:

1. Within a month, how many times do you attend church?
2. How often do you participate in church programs outside the church?
3. Does faith, spirituality, or religion influence your decision making process?

³⁶ Gergen Realities and Relations : Social Soundings in social Constructions, 1994

³⁷ Chase, S. Narrative Inquiry; Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices. The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative research{3rd ed. Pp 651-680} Thousand, Oak: Sage, 2005.

³⁸ Elementary Social Statistics. Publisher: McGraw - Hill. NY, 1942.

3. Are you married? Do you and your spouse, pay tithes to a local church?
4. Do you believe that African-American millennials are less religious than their baby boomer parents?
5. What programs can the church add that would bring you back to the church?
6. Were you raised in a religious or faith based home?

The qualitative method is not the only method that could be used to investigate the declining attendance problem in the churches in the Adamsville community. The quantitative method, which uses statistical tests to analyze data, could have been used as well. However, as this study is limited by timeframe and sample size, the qualitative approach would be more appropriate for this study. Furthermore, other qualitative studies such as phenomenological research, narrative method, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study methods could have been utilized as well.³⁹ However, the interview and survey methods allow the researcher to adequately investigate the research questions that guide this study.

To address a second and crucial question for this study, *How can the baby boomers and millennials unite to find a common goal to diminishing the threats to the church buildings in the Adamsville community of Atlanta, Georgia*, the principle researcher will invite baby boomers from different churches within the Adamsville community to participate in several missional church activities to help bridge the gap between baby boomers and millennials. Over a span of three-weeks, the principle researcher will lead an engagement of missional activities to encourage millennials to reconsider returning to the brick and mortar church. Following is a list of mis-

³⁹ Dalute & Lightfoot, 2004.

sional activities to occur during a three-week time span. Each activity will happen within a one to three-hour time period. The missional activities selected may change after a review of the pre-survey data. However, the researcher chose activities that are informed by other data within the research study.

1. The first missional activity will be held in the Community Center gym. It will be a day of games and conversations. The baby boomers and millennials will enjoy together a day of play and recreation while having a chance to connect.
2. The second missional activity will use technology to promote a face to face gathering. Using the Zoom video conferencing technology, the principle researcher will invite baby boomers and millennials to join him for a community church service online. Zoom allows up to 100 participants in every meeting and if necessary the principle researcher will offer two services to accommodate willing participants. To those who may not have Internet access, the principle researcher will consider alternative options for helping willing participants find a way to connect to the service virtually.
3. The last missional activity for this research will include a blended worship service where both the baby boomers and millennials will lead and conduct worship together. While baby boomers may need to refer to more traditional liturgical styles, the principle researcher will incorporate more modern liturgical practices to help millennials connect to the local church worship experience.

At the conclusion of all the missional activities, participants will be asked to complete a post survey. Even if the participants do not take part in each of the three activities, they will be asked to complete the survey. Answers to the survey questions will help the principle researcher con-

sider ways to help the baby boomers within the Adamsville church community more effectively reach out to millennials. It will also offer millennials a space to consider what would help them feel more included within the local church community. Some of the questions that will be on the survey are:

- A. How many of the missional church activities did you attend?
- B. Which of the missional activities did you prefer the most?
- C. Which of the missional activities did you prefer the least?
- D. Are you from the millennial or baby boomer generation?
- E. Do you think churches in the Adamsville community should do more missional activities in the future?
- F. Would you attend church less or more if the missional activities became regular practice of one or more of the churches within the Adamsville community?

At the conclusion of the active research part of this study, the principle researcher will conduct a local meeting in the Adamsville community to discuss his findings. During the meeting, he will offer suggestions and recommendations stemming from his research.

Additionally, the researcher will include a consent form to all participants who participate in the study. This will tell them that they have the right to withdraw at any time, that their responses will be kept confidential, and show any risk associated with participation in the study. It will also include any expected benefits and the overall purpose of the study.⁴⁰ Finally, the researcher will be the person collecting all data in this study.

⁴⁰ Glesne and Peshkin, 1992.

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