Memorandum

To: Monica Barron, Executive Assistant, Human Resources  
CC: Dean Gary Hodge, Social and Behavioral Sciences  
From: Pamela Gaiter, Professor of Sociology  
Date: 11/7/2013  
Re: Sabbatical Project

Based on the sabbatical leave stipulation, I have attached the following:

1. Sabbatical Summary;
2. Sabbatical Research Paper, “A Qualitative Study Examining the Role of the African-American Church During Economic Challenges;”
3. Reference Page;
4. Consent Forms to Participate;
5. Personal Interview Questions with Church Leaders;
6. Congregational Questionnaire; and
7. Recruitment Letters to Church Leaders

I am very appreciative to Collin College, President Israel, The Board of Trustees, and Dean Gary Hodge for granting me the opportunity and time to complete this sabbatical project. I believe it has enhanced my skills professionally and given me personal gains from learning more about the community and society we serve.
Historically, the African-American church has been one of the most visible, viable institutions in fulfilling various roles in the African-American community. The purpose of this study is to provide empirical data reflecting the ways in which the African-American churches responded to the needs of the community after the economic recession of 2008. This study focuses on economic challenges of high unemployment rates, decline in homeownership, and high rates of poverty in the African-American community during and after 2008. Social challenges, such as lower rates of educational attainment, racial disparity of incarceration, and race relations continue to be major sources of contention in these communities. Therefore, these problems are also examined in the study. Research questions that guide this study are (1) how the African-American churches responded to the higher rates of unemployment, foreclosures or evictions in their communities, (2) what outreach services are available to the communities and how are they funded, (3) do the churches serve as agents of political or social change for those who have experienced injustice in their communities, (4) are the churches or their leaders involved in the local and/ or national political issues, if so, to what degree, and (5) are more services available based on the size of the church’s congregation, particularly if it is defined as a megachurch? Data was collected during face-to-face interviews with 12 different pastors of 12 different African-American churches and a survey was distributed to each church to obtain demographic information. The research found these African-American churches extend their services beyond the church’s walls into the community through various outreach services and programs funded by the church’s budget as
well as governmental grants. These churches (collectively or individually) are also actively involved with local, state and national politics addressing social injustices presented in their communities. Though the larger churches have more resources to expand their services, all participating churches are actively involved in addressing the needs of their communities, spiritually, socially and politically. The specific results of this research are provided in the attached paper with plans for publication in peer-reviewed journals as well as various professional conferences, such as sociology, African-American studies, and campus-wide events, including African-American History Month.

Professionally, this research adds valuable information to lectures, discussions and forums held in the classroom, community and college-wide professional development workshops about the significant role of African-American churches in political and social issues as well as the cultural influences of religion. Relationships I established with church leaders during this project provide opportunities for collaborative projects, such as service-learning opportunities for Collin students to serve as mentors or tutors. Also, these leaders appear willing to serve as primary sources for students’ projects related to historical documentation of social or political events discussed in social sciences courses, such as minority studies, sociology, history or political science. I also gained more knowledge about resources available for students (returning or traditional students) who may need services provided by these churches. While there are many social problems publicized about the African-American community, there is less information given about how this population is addressing these issues. Hopefully, this study will give a more positive aspect of the African-American population and their contribution to their communities and society. As an African-American who is active in her community and church, this sabbatical research gave me a sense of pride in the community in which I serve, worship and live.
A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH DURING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

SABBATICAL PROJECT

PAMELA K. GAITER
COLLIN COLLEGE
SPRING 2013

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Examining the Role of the African-American Church During Economic Challenges

After the economic recession of 2008, the African-American population, as well as other groups, faced a variety of economic and social challenges. As the nation’s poverty rate rose to 15.1% in 2010, Blacks had the highest rate at 27.4% followed by people of Hispanic origin at 26.5% (Censky 2011). According to a Pew Research analysis, the median wealth of White households was 20 times that of Black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, based on data from 2009 (Kochlar, Fry and Taylor 2011). Reportedly, “these lopsided wealth ratios are...roughly twice the size of the ratios that had prevailed between these three groups for the two decades prior to the Great Recession that ended in 2009” (Kochlar et al., 2011:1). The decline in the housing market was reported as the major cause of this reduction of wealth for minorities because home equity accounts for most of their wealth. The high unemployment rate also contributed to the reduction of wealth. Jobless rates for all major racial and ethnic groups increased during and after the recession but the rates for Blacks increased 16.7% while Whites experienced 8% increase (Rosales and Case 2011). Economic conditions relate to educational achievement as well as crime rates. Black students experience lower rates of educational attainment and achievement than White students (Austin 2011). Another social problem impacting the African-American community is mass incarceration of Blacks which limits one’s ability to obtain employment, housing, educational opportunities or a chance to participate in the political process in their communities (Alexander 2010). In addition, race relations became a major topic of discussion in the African-American community during and after the election of the country’s first American-American president, Barack Obama, and after the shooting death of a 17 year-old African-American, Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in February 2012. Many of these community-wide discussions were facilitated by church leaders in the African-American community.

HISTORICAL ROLE OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

Historically, the African-American church served as the anchor and refuge for the African-American community, especially during turbulent, challenging and changing times (Chaves and Higgins 1992). It was the only institution solely controlled by black people and it existed to benefit the community in which it was located (Speakes-Lewis et al., 2011). The Black church continues to fulfill an array of purposes in the African-American community including spiritual, civic and political resource (Fitzgerald and Spohn, 2005; Harris, 2001; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990/2003). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990/2003) examined the dialectic tensions between priestly and prophetic functions in the Black church. Priestly functions involve activities concerned with maintaining the spiritual life of members while prophetic functions refer to involvement in political concerns. Lincoln and Mamiya contend all black churches are involved in both functions (1990/2003:12).

Research Questions

The premise for this research is that the African-American church continues to sustain its position as the most vital institution serving the needs of the African-American community, regardless of current economic and social challenges. The manifest purpose for this study is to provide empirical data
reflecting the ways in which African-American churches have responded to the economic, social and political needs of the African-American population since the economic recession of 2008. The focus of the research centers on the following questions:

- How have African-American churches responded to the higher rates of unemployment, foreclosures or evictions in their communities?
- What outreach services are available to the communities and how are they funded?
- Do churches serve as agents of political or social change for those who have experienced injustice in their communities?
- Are churches or their leaders involved in local and or national political issues; if so, to what degree? How do church leaders perceive their political involvement impacting churches ability to fulfill the social needs of their communities?
- Are outreach services impacted by the size of the church’s congregation (especially if it is a mega church as defined by the church or others) or are these services motivated by the church’s mission or vision statement?

**Sample**

The researcher obtained a list of potential participants from the pastor of her church which is a predominately African-American congregation in the North Texas area. From this list, additional names were obtained through referrals from other church pastors. Thirty-five recruitment letters were mailed to churches of Black congregations in the North Texas area. Mark Chaves and Lynn M. Higgins define a “Black congregation as 80% or more Black membership” (1992:429). This definition of a “Black church” is used in this study. The term “Black” and “African-American” are interchanged throughout this report based on how it was used in the previous research or by those interviewed.

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants from twelve different churches. Twelve male senior pastors were interviewed; two pastors included their wives in the interviews; both pastors referred to their wives as executive pastors. One pastor was interviewed with another female church leader (leader of Women’s Ministry). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After completing consent forms, participants were provided with information regarding the confidentially of the interviews. Throughout this report, churches are referred to as randomly assigned letters, such as Church A, Church B, etc., in order to protect the anonymity of the church and the interviewee.

Demographic information about each church was collected through a survey distributed to each church pastor. The survey was completed by the pastor, church clergy or assigned designee (administrator or leader). Participating churches are located in urban or suburban neighborhoods in Dallas and Collin Counties. The oldest church was founded in 1884 and the most recently founded church in 2007. Religious affiliation of the churches includes eight Baptist congregations and four non-denominational congregations. Average family income varies from $25,000 to $99,000. Information regarding the demographics for the churches can be found in Table 1 at the end of this section.
Six of the participating churches have two worship services each Sunday, with an approximate total of 100-500 attendees at each service. The other six churches have attendees of 500 or more, including two churches with over 4000 members. Based on Hartford Institute of Religious Research (2006), three of the twelve churches are megachurches. Hartford Research defines a megachurch as a church having a large Protestant congregation with the following characteristics: 1) 2000 or more persons in attendance at weekly worship, 2) a charismatic, authoritative senior pastor, 3) an active seven-day-a-week congregational community, 4) a multitude of social and outreach ministries, and 5) a complex organizational structure. However, none of the three churches with these characteristics describe their church as a mega church. Instead, they gave various definitions or no definition of a mega church. Two pastors of the larger congregations suggest the term ‘megachurch’ held has a negative connotation because all churches should “be about the Lord’s work,” regardless of membership numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Snapshot of Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Sample Size:</strong> 12 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender of Participants: 12 Male Pastors; 3 Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oldest Church: Founded in 1884; Newest 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denomination: 8 Baptist; 4 Non-Denominational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range of Income: $25,000 to $99,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size of Congregation: 6 Churches: 100- 500 congregants;</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Churches: More than 500 congregants (2 of the 6 over 4000)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya states “...the most severe forms of racial discrimination against Black people have been economic in character,” (1990:238). Lincoln’s and Mamiya’s research concluded that the Black church has played a role in assisting Blacks in the community when other resources and agencies were not available for them. Moreover, Fredrick Harris (2001:140) describes the Black church “as an institution reflecting the interests of an economically marginal population...and have been committed to providing social services to the poor.” Harris contends this commitment varies based on the financial constraints of a congregation as well as the church’s doctrinal perspective, where personal salvation supersedes the social service needs of the community.

In this study, regardless of the church size or budget, each participating church pastor describes the mission or statement inclusive of spiritual needs as well as tangible, physical needs of the community.

*Pastor of Church D* states, “One of the ways we seek to reach to people as far as making Christ known is building relationships with people. Meeting the ‘felt needs,’ needs that people have that are a reality to them.”

*Pastor of Church G* comments, “I think if you are true to the gospel and the message that Jesus preached, ‘the coming of the kingdom,’ then I think we have no choice. And that’s the history, tradition and the legacy of the church where we have a responsibility to outreach.”
Clearly, these pastors realize that it has been difficult for the church to address all the demands due to the economic downfall. However, they all agree they must feed the body as well as the soul; thus outreach involves faith with food.

Pastor of Church I states, ‘I don’t believe their needs are beyond spiritual...If I can get you healthy spiritually, I can get you naturally healthy.’

All participants listed better economic conditions and more employment opportunities the most urgent need in the African-American community. It was stated several times, that people need “gainful employment.” Since 2008, all participating churches have seen increase in one or more of the following among their congregants: unemployment, layoffs due to downsizing, members forced to relocate or forced out of their home due to an inability to pay. Unemployment and downsizing are the top issues that have impacted church members the most. Congregants’ reduced salary or no salary has impacted their ability to remain in their home therefore these churches have had to address both issues, either through financial support, moral support, or both.

Though there has been an increase in unemployment within the African-American churches interviewed, nine churches have seen an increase in the congregational giving. The increase in giving despite turbulent times is spiritually driven, according to pastors interviewed. This is reflective of a “truly faith-based organization,” quotes one pastor. Another pastor describes his congregation as “fighters...who don’t give up. We actually tell them to go spiritual and God will give you a plan of action.” Two participating churches experienced a decrease in their congregational giving either due to loss of jobs among the congregants or due to additional expenditure costs. Only one church’s giving has remained the same since 2008.

**Employment Assistance**

Most of the twelve churches have increased their ministry efforts to assist with employment services through job postings, networking opportunities, or job fairs. Pastor of Church B describes a new program created by their Human Resources ministry. This program enhances a potential candidate’s ability to obtain a job through various seminars, such as resume writing, how to dress for success, mock interviews and job skills assessments. When an unemployed congregant completes the program and obtains a job, the church acknowledges them with “a celebration recognition service” presented during worship as a means to encourage others who may be seeking employment.

Another pastor comments on the need to address cultural differences, such as language and nonverbal communication skills, especially to the younger generation since this may impact their ability to be accepted in the corporate environment. This pastor reports this training is necessary based on what sociologist, W.E.B DuBois described as ‘duality’ of being Black in the business world. Instructing young adults on how to present themselves in the corporate world is part of the church’s career ministry.
Housing Assistance

To assist with the problems of housing, all twelve participating churches have some type of benevolence funding which not only assist with rent or mortgage payments but provide support with payment of a major utility bill, excluding a telephone bill. All churches require those they assist to participate in money management classes or financial counseling to help the family with better budgeting skills. Funds for these services are provided by the church’s budgets and any special offerings given by the congregants.

Additional programs for housing are supported through collaboration with other churches, non-profit organizations or grants (city or federal grants). Church B collaborates with another area church (non-minority, more affluent church) to build new homes in the church’s community then sells the house at a lower cost to minority families in the community. However, this particular pastor is concerned about the selection criteria established by the non-minority church because the program only assist single parents who are seeking housing, it does not assist other single individuals without children who also need housing. Pastor of Church B is concerned that this policy supports individuals who have children out of wedlock while it penalizes the single individual who does not have a child but may be struggling financially. This type of support conflicts with the church’s belief regarding individuals having children out of wedlock.

Another church (Church L) participates in a non-profit program funded by a city and county grant aimed at reducing homelessness in the area. This program provides housing opportunities and assistance to low to moderate income families with children, single adults with no children, displaced teens and senior adults. This grant also provides funds for after-school programs, summer arts and athletic programs in the city and surrounding communities. Church E owns a senior retirement village which houses elderly in the community and provides opportunities for employment to congregants. This program is supported by the church’s budget as well as a grant. Lastly, Church D provides transitional housing for men who have been released from prison and seeking to reestablish back into the community. All of the programs listed in this paragraph are provided to congregants as well as community members. Table 2 provides an overview of these programs established in response to the unemployment and housing crisis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. RESPONSE TO UNEMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING CRISIS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Programs to assist with unemployment:</strong> Job fairs, electronic announcements regarding job postings (sent to congregation and other churches); job resource bank; network opportunities within church and with other churches and organizations; creation of new Career ministry developed to enhance job interview skills or build technology skills; career counseling; moral support; spiritual guidance and encouragement; and, financial assistance with major bills during transition time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programs to assist with housing:</strong> Financial assistance with housing and utility bills (except telephone or cell bills); budget management programs; seminars on investing and savings as well as how to avoid ‘pay-day’, quick loans with high interest rates; presentations from loan institutions on how to obtain a housing loan; housing for seniors, housing for men released from prison, displaced teens, single adults and families.</td>
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</table>
SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The increase in unemployment and lack of affordable housing are not problems unique to the African-American community, however, eleven pastors comment that these problems are exacerbated by institutional discrimination experienced by this population.

Pastor of Church D states, “When the white community say that they are doing bad, what they mean is that they don’t wanna touch their savings. Black community say they doing bad means they don’t have no savings (in many cases).”

Other pastors suggest that racism is still prevalent as evident by discriminatory practices such as redlining by lending institutions, harsher penalties for African-Americans in the criminal justice system and problems within the educational system. This contributes to the economic distress experienced by African-Americans thus limits their ability to obtain and retain “gainful” employment. A common concern mentioned by several participating pastors is the difficulties experienced by many of their congregants who have been incarcerated but are currently trying to obtain legitimate employment and affordable housing. Pastor of Church F describes it as “…the new Jim Crow.” He refers to Michele Alexander’s research (2010) on the mass incarceration of people of color and its impact on the African-American community’s high rate of unemployment and other social issues. As one pastor states, “…they have acknowledged their mistakes, served their time, and obtained marketable skills”; yet, they continue to experience rejection from society due to the stigma of being a previous offender. Literature supports there are severe economic implications of mass incarceration of Blacks which has contributed to inequality between Black and White Americans (Burkhardt 2009). According to Devah Pager’s research (2003:960), “Blacks are less than half as likely to receive consideration by employers, relative to their White counterparts, and Black non offenders fall behind even Whites with prior felony convictions.” To assist with this employment challenge for Black offenders, a few participating churches provide the following services for ex-offenders: mentorship; counseling services, transitional housing, and assistance with employment (including employment opportunities at the church or serving as a job reference for these individuals).

Youth and the Church’s Response

Another issue of concern in the African-American community relates to “saving our youth.” Limited educational opportunities, juvenile criminal involvement and lack of motivation in school by the youth and teens in these communities were repeatedly mentioned by participants in this study.

Pastor of Church K states, “A huge problem (in our community) is with the children and youth in terms of just gainful employment skills, education, life skills and a ton of dysfunction (in the home).”

This pastor participates in ‘ride along’ with local police authorities in an effort to reduce criminal activities in the community and foster a sense of unity in the community. He describes the youth in his community as having a chaotic home environment with no leader in the home. Lack of family leadership and healthy family dynamics were issues of concern expressed by another pastor. Pastor of Church L
believes that increased parental involvement with children, especially from a stay-at-home parent during the early years of a child’s life, will reduce teen pregnancy, gang activities, and improve a student behavior in school.

“...Allowing us to empower and edify them as parents is the most critical need in the community,” states Pastor of Church L.

Church L sponsors programs that enhance family dynamic skills for various family structures, including two-parent households, single parents, divorced families, singles, and grandchildren who may be rearing grandchildren. Several other churches also provide youth and family seminars for their congregants. These seminars are available to anyone in the community, according to all church leaders interviewed.

Many of the participating pastors are particularly concerned about the difficulties experienced by the youth in schools. Cultural differences and institutional discrimination in the school system contribute to low achievement scores and lack of confidence among African-American students, according to three pastors. They state that school teachers and administrators treat African-American youth differently than other races, such as harsher penalties for disruptive behavior, lower expectations, and provide lack of encouragement to these students which discourage the student’s learning and limits parental involvement or support. Also, African-American parents, especially low-income parents who are not educated, often times are not aware of various resources available to assist their child or supportive resources are limited based on the location of the school. Limited resources were more reflective of a socioeconomic disadvantage than a racial disadvantage, according to several participants interviewed. For example, Pastor of Church B states that one of their after school programs in the community is currently unavailable to many of the youth in the community due to its cost. Initially, it was a free service provided by the local school district located in a central place accessible to the community. However, in the past couple of years, the city has collaborated with the school district and started charging fees for the after-school services. These fees have hindered youths from participating in the after-school program that was intended for them. Thus, the safe haven where children could get a snack, assistance with homework and other after-school activities are no longer accessible to many in this community. As a result, Church B plans to build a community center next to the church where youth in the community can receive after-school services and other programs. He states, “...this is not a black thing. This is a low socioeconomic thing.”

To assist with educational challenges facing youth, eleven participating churches offer various educational programs throughout the year. Many of these programs were established before the 2008 recession but have increased in its participation from church members. Four churches work with local schools and have ‘adopted’ these schools; meaning church members and church leaders, including a few pastors interviewed, regularly visit the schools to provide tutorials, serve as mentors, and maintain communication with school officials about the ongoing academic and basic needs of students in their community. Pastor of Church D and his wife accepted an award from the President of the United States in 2004 for their youth initiatives and the church’s impact on local students’ academic performance in school. The couple was invited and attended a Presidential recognition at the White House in honor of their community involvement. Their school is still involved with this local school.
In addition to tutorial and mentoring services, eleven churches provide one or more of the following services: summer youth camps, financial aid for high school students to attend college or a technical school, career counseling; and, testing and preparation workshops for college-bound students. Also, these churches have created personal development programs such as ‘Boys to Men’, ‘True Love Waits,’ and ‘Titus 2 Women’ to build youth’s self-esteem and prepare them to become responsible young adults. Most of these programs are supported by churches’ budgets and maintained by church volunteers. However, two of these churches receive funds from city or federal grants to support some of their summer youth programs.

A list of outreach services provided by participating churches is listed in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTREACH SERVICES PROVIDED</th>
<th>N= 12 churches</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment and career services</td>
<td>12 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benevolence funds</td>
<td>12 Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing assistance/programs</td>
<td>12 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td>12 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistance to Senior Citizens</td>
<td>12 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational programs</td>
<td>11 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grief ministry</td>
<td>10 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food distribution</td>
<td>10 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health-related programs</td>
<td>10 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clothing resources or referrals</td>
<td>10 Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Seminars &amp; Counseling</td>
<td>9 Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and alcohol abuse programs or referrals for services</td>
<td>8 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic development programs</td>
<td>8 Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen pregnancy and prenatal care ministry</td>
<td>5 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prison and ex-offender programs</td>
<td>3 Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen pregnancy and prenatal care programs</td>
<td>3 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td>1 Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex trafficking ministry</td>
<td>1 Church</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

In addition to serving as a central resource for outreach social services, churches in African-American communities have a history of serving as an active leader in the political process impacting their communities locally and nationally (Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh, 2001; Carter, 1999; Harris 2001; and, McClerking and McDaniel, 2005). Findings from this research indicate this role is still central in the community, especially serving as an agent addressing social inequalities. Seven church pastors and leaders state the church’s political involvement has a major impact on the church’s ability to fulfill the social needs of the community and views this responsibility as spiritually based. As one pastor states, “We have a responsibility to deal with social inequality especially when civil law is not in line with the
divine laws.” Yet, other pastors state that political involvement does not impact their abilities rather it is the church’s spiritual relationship that impacts what the church provides for others.

Pastor of Church J states, “…I think we don’t need any political affiliation to do what the Lord has called us to do…I believe there is a social component to this calling which requires us to do as he said… feed those who are hungry, clothe those who are naked, visit those who are sick, visit those who are incarcerated. And I think that goes along with his commission and has nothing to do with political affiliation.”

Eleven pastors interviewed describe their role in the political process as one who brings awareness to the community, not necessarily serving as a ‘political advocate.’ Pastor of Church L states, “I wouldn’t say political advocate but the African-American church is politically involved.” Another pastor contends the church is obligated to make sure, “…its equality for all people.” The ways in which these pastors fulfill this role is by making congregants aware of issues that may impact them (on a micro or macro level), sponsoring voters’ registration drives, community forums, political debates, and providing information about issues or candidates. All churches assist with transportation to the polls, especially for the elderly or any others needing transportation. Church E has a Civic Affairs Ministry that deals exclusively with political issues and concerns in the community. After this ministry becomes aware of a social or political issue impacting the community, they inform the church pastor who sends an electronic announcement (‘Eblast’) to congregants and other pastors in surrounding communities in order that they may collaborate on how to address these issues. All participating pastors report they do not endorse specific candidates nor tell congregants how to vote; rather, they consistently encourage congregants to vote in all elections. Several pastors report they will share their personal opinions about certain candidates or issues, if asked, but not while in the pulpit or on the church property. All participating churches provide political information to their congregants about local and national elections. Table 4 (at the end of this section) provides an overview of the responses given by church leader regarding political activism.

The following comments were made by different pastors regarding their encouragement for the congregation to stay involved in local and national elections:

“…I just don’t tell them who to vote for…at least not in the pulpit.”
“…a voteless people are a hopeless people.”
“…since the election of our first African-American president, the church has become more involved in public politics, right or wrong.”

One particular participant firmly states he avoids any discussion of candidates or any political propaganda. Even though this pastor is actively engaged in the community, working with local and state politicians as well as school board members, he perceives his pastoral role is simply to encourage his congregants to vote.

He states, “politics has gotten so muddy and as a spiritual leader and a Christian leader, a lot of what’s promoted I simply can’t endorse. Pastors have gotten so involved in politics, they’ve gotten lost in the mission of the church.”
Another pastor had no intentions of becoming a political advocate for the community but after racial slurs and messages were written on church property, he states he assumed this role and quickly became an active advocate in the community in order to improve unity in the church’s ethnically-diverse community. He believes such leadership has contributed to a better community environment because the church has worked hard to make the church more open and available to all members in the community. This church as well as several other churches serves as places for local town-hall meetings, voting locations, or community forums.

Four churches have members in their congregation who are elected local or national political officers or political leaders. There are nine churches that support various civic advocate groups, corporately or individually. These groups are listed in the Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you view the African-American church as a political advocate?</td>
<td>Yes: 7 Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No: 2 Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other responses: 3 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you view this church’s political involvement impacting the church’s</td>
<td>Yes: 5 Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>ability to fulfill the social needs of the community?</td>
<td>No: 3 Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other responses: No response; “we can do better,” “to a small degree”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you talk with congregation about political matters?</td>
<td>Yes: 10 Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No: 1 Church</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other response: “Individually, not over pulpit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your church provide political information to your congregation?</td>
<td>Yes: 12 Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 0 Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your church provide physical space for political gatherings?</td>
<td>Yes: 5 Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No: 3 Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other Responses include:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>“We would, if asked”; “we have in the past”, “we are planning to in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>future”, “only for town-hall meeting, not political gatherings.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil and advocate groups churches have been or is currently involved</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; United</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with (collectively or individually).</td>
<td>Negro College Fund;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Urban League</td>
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MEGACHURCHES

Literature suggests that large Black contemporary churches are not as concerned with social problems in the community as they are with materialistic, prosperity-based gospel which focuses primarily on increasing the individual prosperity while making little impact on the quality of life on the individuals that live in close proximity (Swain 2008). However, the three largest churches studied in this research appear to offer services focusing on serving the needs of the entire community, not just the clergy or church congregants. Each of these three pastors perceives the church as a central force in the community and should be responsive to any “social ills” or injustice facing those in their community.

As one pastor stated, “... I truly believe that the African-American pastor has to be ...a pastor for all people. ...anything that happens in the community, they gonna know that I’m gonna be there for them. And, I really try to.”

Commitment to the community is demonstrated by the various outreach services provided to the community. In addition to providing worship services and biblical training, these churches engage the community with the following direct services: homeless prevention, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family counseling, assistance with essential bills, food and clothing distribution, educational programs and services for preschoolers continuing through college and career, employment assistance, various youth activities, community health fair, domestic violence assistance, assistance for senior citizens, and AIDS awareness. All of these services were established with the focus of providing service to the community while addressing the spiritual needs of the individual.

“It is important for us to serve as a beacon of light because of the darkness that exist in society; and for us to not get caught up in those things that cause us not to shine...be careful, not focus only on social justice but (our) primary responsibility is to let people know about the Lord and his goodness and what he is able to do in their life,” stated by Pastor of Church E.

Each pastor of these three megachurches expresses a passion for meeting the complete needs of the community, including spiritual and physical needs. Their perspective of the role of the church and the church pastor expands beyond the walls of the church building into the homes of the community, locally and globally. These pastors describe the African-American church as, “the nucleus,” “the hub”, or “the mouthpiece” of the community, therefore they must address all aspects of the communities’ needs.

Summary and Recommendations

This study adds to the rich literature of information regarding the historical and contemporary role of the central mainstay in the African-American community, the African-American church (Barnes 2004; Harris 2001; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Moore 2003; and Speakes et al., 2011). The purpose of the research is to examine the response of the church to the economic and social conditions impacting African-American communities, specifically after the 2008 recession. Also, this research explored whether or not the Black church remains a catalyst for political and social change in their communities, as it has served historically (Chaves and Higgins 1992; Patillo-McCoy 1998; and Swain 2008).
Despite the economic challenges of high unemployment and other social and economic challenges during and after the recession, information collected in this study suggests African-American churches continue to remain the central warehouse for direct services; spiritually, politically and socially in their communities. Participating churches provide needed services and resources to its congregants and the community during the economic recovery and presently, either directly or indirect. Instead of reducing services, most churches expanded the types of and intensity of services provided to congregants and others in the community. These churches focused more on assisting with employment skills and opportunities while providing temporary financial assistance for basic needs during these transitional times of unemployment. They also created more homeownership programs through collaboration with other institutions such as other churches or local and federal governmental grants. Even though this population experienced a greater percentage of unemployment and loss of wealth, congregants’ giving and outreach services to the community remained steady or increased, in most cases. Such action appears indicative of this group’s faith that their physical and spiritual needs will be met through their primary backbone in the community, the church.

It is clear that churches with more funding and resources, such as the three larger churches, are able to provide more extensive services for community members. However, direct services mentioned in this study; benevolence, employment and career services, housing assistance, money management and educational assistance for students were consistently listed as services provided to the community regardless of church size or funds. Providing these services supports the churches’ mission or vision statements.

Regarding political activism, this study supports literature describing the Black church as a multi-dimensional religious institution that encourages and facilitates social and political activism in their community (Moore 2003, Swain 2008). Even though there has not been a collective movement similar to the Civil Rights Movement, churches studied in this research are involved in some type of political and or social activism, collectively or individually. When social injustices and or political concerns arise in their communities such as institutional discrimination in the schools, criminal justice system, banks and other institutions, all the pastors interviewed believed they had a responsibility to respond.

Collectively, these churches have a wealth of resources and can be a powerful tool in their communities and in various institutions, such as local school boards, community forums, and law enforcement neighborhood programs. Therefore, it is recommended that they build more of a collaboration together to reduce duplication of services and expand what they current provide to the community. Also, establishing more partnerships with schools and law enforcement will foster a better sense of community and open dialogue about perceptions of distrust and acts of discrimination in the African-American community. This can be accomplished through activities such as ‘adopt a school,’ ministerial alliances, community block parties or unity feasts; events currently sponsored by several churches involved in this study. As more churches seek to obtain city and federal grants to assist with outreach services, it is suggested that more church leaders become informed in the municipal and state developmental boards creating policies intended to fulfill a need in the community. This may also help promote more community-based economic developments which seek to improve and empower African-Americans’ economic conditions. Finally, political discussions and activities will remain an active part of
the church, regardless of diverse political ideology or federal guidelines. Therefore, it is recommended that politicians consistently dialogue with church leaders and community activists about issues impacting the African-American community before, during and after election in order to demonstrate commitment to the voices of this population, not just the votes.

Limitations of this study

The following limitations are presented because they may have impacted the outcome of this study and may suggest further research on this topic.

- The main variable impacting the selection of churches was based on churches’ racial and ethnic composition. However, there was a variation in churches’ demographics (size, location, and socio economic status) which impacted the amount of outreach services available to community members. Comparing African-American congregations with similar demographics may have provided a better analysis.
- Although 35 church pastors were contacted only 12 churches are represented in this sample. Therefore, a larger sample size may provide a more comprehensive examination of this topic.
- Including more larger (megachurches) in the sample would have provided a better comparison on their impact in the community versus comparing these churches with smaller congregations.
- Recommendations from these findings are strictly based on information collected during this study, therefore are not generalized to all African-American churches.
Dear Pastor/Church Leader,

I am a Professor of Sociology at Collin College in Plano conducting research regarding the involvement of the African-American church in their community and society. The purpose of this study is to identify the social needs currently facing the African-American population and examine how the African-American church responds to these needs. The research goal for this study is to provide a cultural understanding of the significance of the African-American church, not only as a spiritual institution but also serving as a social resource during times of economic and social challenges. With your help, the goal of this project will be achieved.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary with a low level of commitment. This project requires some of your time and information about your church and the community in which you serve. If you agree to participate, please contact me to explain this project and to obtain a consent form as well as a questionnaire. The questionnaire will provide me with general information about your congregation and should take approximately twenty minutes to complete. Once the questionnaire is complete, return it to me.

When you contact me regarding your participation, I will also schedule a time for me to have a personal interview to discuss your church’s social and political activities. The interview should last approximately one hour. If you are unavailable to meet with me, you may arrange for another church leader who is knowledgeable about the church demographics and its services to meet with me. I will need the name, title and contact information of the person you arrange for the meeting.

Please note that the consent form includes consent for an audio recording of our interview. The recording is for transcribing purposes only and the audio records will be erased after I have transcribed my notes on a password-protected computer file. However, if you are uncomfortable with the audio recording, I will take written notes during our interview. These notes will be shredded after I have transcribed them on a computer file. The names of the church and the church leader will not be included in the research findings.

I am excited about this study and look forward to hearing from you. Interviews are planned to take place in February, therefore confirmation by February 1st is greatly appreciated. If you need additional information prior to committing to this research project, feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Pamela Gaiter
Professor of Sociology
Collin College
2800 E. Spring Creek Parkway
Plano, Texas  75074
972-548-6705
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research Project: “Let the Church Say ‘Amen’: Social Activism in the African-American Church.”

Investigator: Pamela Gaiter, Investigator M.S. Professor of Sociology

Contact Information
pgaiter@collin.edu

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the social needs currently facing the African-American population and examine how the African-American church responds to these needs. The research goal for this study is provide a cultural understanding of the significance of the African-American church, not only as a spiritual institution but also serving as a social resource during times of economic and social challenges. Information gained will be used to promote community partnerships between the church, the college and other public institutions.

Description of Project: The investigator will send recruitment letters to churches in the North Texas area with predominately African-American congregants. The recruitment letter explains the purpose and goal for this project and asks the church pastor/leader to contact the investigator if he/she is interested in participating. After the church pastor/leader contacts the investigator and agrees to participate, the consent forms and congregational survey will be explained and provided to the subject. The survey includes questions such as size of church membership, social, racial and ethnic composition of church congregants, location of church, and worship services provided by the church. The duration of the survey is approximately twenty minutes. The participant is not obligated to respond to any question he/she feels uncomfortable answering.

After the congregational survey is completed and returned, the investigator will administer a face-to-face interview with the church pastor/leader to discuss the social needs of the church’s congregants and the community served by the church. Participants will also discuss the church’s involvement with local and national political activities. The investigator will schedule the face-to-face interview with the pastor/leader during the participant’s initial contact. The interview is scheduled for sixty minutes. At any time during the project, participants can choose to terminate their involvement in this research. If a participant withdraws, the investigator will destroy all information collected from the participant.
All of the data collected during the project will be securely protected and no identifiable characteristics will be used, except by the investigator to schedule interviews. Churches and church pastors/leaders will be assigned a generic label such as church a/leader a, church b/leader b, etc. to establish anonymity.

The investigator plans to audio record the personal interview for transcribing purposes only. The investigator will erase audio recordings after transferring them in narrative format to a password-protected computer file. Each interview will receive a generic label to avoid disclosing personal identifying information. A participant may agree to participate in the interview but refuse the audio recording. If this occurs, the investigator will collect qualitative data by writing notes. These notes will be locked in a secured file until they have been transcribed on a password-protected computer file. Once the written notes have been transcribed on the computer, the notes will be shredded.

Please check the box and sign below if you agree or disagree for the audio recording of your interview.

☐ Yes, I give permission to have my interview recorded for transcription purposes.

☐ No, I do not give permission to have my interview recorded for transcription purposes.

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________________________

Number of Participants: The number of research participants who will be involved in the research study will not exceed fifty.

Possible Risks: There are minimum risks associated with this project. Data collected from the interviews and surveys present no more than minimal risk to the participants. Possible minimal risks may include reluctance from participants to answer questions regarding church finances or government funding. Also, participants may be concerned about the confidentiality discussing the specific needs of their congregants and the church. However, participants will be informed on how the information obtained will be safely secured and labeled to remain confidential and anonymous. Also, participants can refuse to answer any question in which they view as inappropriate or confidential.

In addition, participants may become bored or exhaustive during the personal interview. If at any time the participant appears bored, physically exhausted, or agitated, the investigator will inform participants of their choices and rights: to omit any question, to take a brief intermission, to cease the interview or to withdraw from the research project. If the participant decides to withdraw, all information will be destroyed.

If the participant is reluctant to participate in audio recording of interviews, the investigator will take written notes.
Additionally, participants can request to be informed about new research that provides additional information about risks that may influence their decision to continue participation in this research once the information becomes available.

**Possible Benefits to the Participant:**
Churches and the community at large will benefit from this research as the data collected can provide a better cultural understanding of the church as it serves as a major social resource for the community during economic and social crisis. Information gained from this research can also be used to promote more community partnerships between the church and other institutions such as community colleges.

**Alternatives to Participation:** Individuals may choose not to participate or can withdraw from the project at any time.

**Reimbursement of Expenses [or Payments to Participate]:** There are no costs to you for your participation in the study except your time. There is no monetary compensation to you for participation.

**Voluntary Participation:** All individuals have the right to agree or refuse to participate in this study. Individuals who consent to participate also have the right to change their minds anytime during the study. Participants may tell the investigator that they no longer wish to participate. Refusal to participate will not affect participants’ legal rights.

**Records of Participation in this Research:**
The principal investigator is responsible for taking all necessary steps to maintain confidentiality of data. This includes maintaining congregational surveys in a locked file cabinet in the investigator’s office one year. After one year, surveys will be shredded. Written notes collected during interviews will be shredded after the investigator has transcribed them on a password-protected computer file. Audio recordings of interviews will also be transcribed on a password-protected computer file; afterwards the recordings will be erased from the recording instrument. All of the information participants provide to investigator as part of this research will be protected and held in confidence within the limits of the law and institutional regulation. The data will be secured at the Spring Creek Campus Room I-207 of Collin College to only be accessible to the principal investigator.

**Publications Associated with this Research:** The results of this research may appear in publications, particularly teaching and educational research journals, sociology journals, and/or presented at regional or national academic conferences/meetings. Individual participants and church names will not be identified.
**Contact People:**  
Participants who want more information about the results of this research may contact the investigator listed at the top of page 1 of this document. Participants who want more information about their rights as a participant or who want to report a research related injury may contact:

Dr. Chris Doumen  
Collin College Institutional Review Board Chair  
Phone: 972-881-5989  
E-mail: cdoumen@collin.edu

**Signatures**

A participant’s signature indicates that they have read or listened to the information provided above and received answers to their questions. The signature also indicates the participant has freely decided to participate in this research and they have not given up any of their legal rights.

______________________________  
Participant’s Name (printed)

______________________________  
Participant’s Signature  
______________________________  
Date

______________________________  
Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent

______________________________  
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent  
______________________________  
Date
Congregational Information Survey

1. **Church Contact & Location Information:**

   Church Address: ____________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

   Church Telephone Number: ____________________________________________

   Church Email Address: ______________________________________________

   County of Church location: ____________________________________________

   a. What year was your congregation officially founded? ________________

   b. In what year did your congregation begin worshipping at its current location?

   ____________________________________________________________________

   c. **If applicable,** list the three previous locations of your worship sites and the dates of each location. Begin with the location prior to current location.

      i. Location #1 _______________________________________________________
         __________________________________________________________________
         Dates of Location#1: _________________________________________________

      ii. Location #2 _____________________________________________________
          __________________________________________________________________
          Dates of Location #2: _______________________________________________

      iii. Location #3: ____________________________________________________
          __________________________________________________________________
          Dates of Location #3: _______________________________________________
2. **Congregation Size and Attendance Membership:**
   a. Circle the number that reflects your congregation official membership?
      - Fewer than 100
      - 501 – 1000
      - 1501 – 2000
      - 2501 – 3000
      - If more than 3500, give specific number ______________________
   
   b. How do you define “membership” in your church? Circle all that apply.
      i. Congregant completes official membership paperwork & procedures
      ii. Baptized members
      iii. Active participants
      iv. Active adults
      v. Other ways (specify) ________________________________

   c. Not including Sunday school, how many adult worship services does your church have on Sunday?
      a. 1
      b. 2
      c. 3
      d. 4

   d. Approximate the total number of persons, both adults and children, who regularly participate in any of your Sunday worship services, whether or not they are official members of your congregation?
      - Fewer than 100
      - 501 – 1000
      - 1501 – 2000
      - 2501 – 3000
      - If more than 3500, give estimate number ____________________
e. Other than Sunday services, does your church offer any of the following services weekly? Circle all that apply.
   i. Bible Study
   ii. Prayer Meeting
   iii. Youth activities (name them) ____________________________
       ____________________________
   iv. Children activities (name them) ____________________________
       ____________________________
   v. Choir practices (adult, youth or children) ________________
   vi. List other weekly activities not mentioned above __________
       _______________________________________________________

3. **Congregation Demographics:**
   Answer the following questions based on the regular participants in your congregation.

   a. What percent of your active members are female?

      0 – 10  10 -20  20 -30  30-40
      40-50  50 -60  60-70  70-80
      80-90  90 – 100

   b. What percent of your active members are males?

      0 – 10  10 -20  20 -30  30-40
      40-50  50 -60  60-70  70-80
      80-90  90 – 100

   c. Approximately what percent of your active members are:
      Children under the age of 18 ________________%
      Young adults between the ages of 18-25 _______%
      Adults between the ages of 26-48 _______ %
      Adults between the ages of 49 -76 _______%
      Adults 77 and older______________________%

   d. Approximately what percent are married couples with children? _______%
      On average, how many children do they have at home? _____%

   e. Approximately what percent are married without children? ____________ %
f. Approximately what percent are single with no children in the household? _____%

g. Approximately what percent are in single parent families? _______%
   On average, how many children do they have in the home? ________%

h. Approximately what percent are widowed? ________%

i. Approximately what percent are living with a partner? _____%

j. Approximately what percent are divorced? _______%

k. Circle the largest racial and ethnic composition of your members.

   White (non-Hispanic)          White (Hispanic)
   Black or African American (non-Hispanic)  Black (Hispanic)
   American Indian or Alaskan Native (non-Hispanic)
   Asian (non-Hispanic)
   Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)
   Other (Identify) ________________________________

l. Circle the average household earnings of your members.

   Less than $10,000
   $10,000- $14,999
   $15,000- $24,999
   $25,000- $34,999
   $35,000 - $49,999
   $50,000 - $74,999
   $75,000 - $99,999
   $100,000 or more

m. Approximately, what is the educational distribution of your members?

   Less than high school _______%
   High school graduate ________%
   Some college ______________%
   College graduate ___________%
   Post-graduate _____________%
4. **Community Demographics:**
Circle the racial and ethnic groups that represent the *majority* population of the community in which your church is currently located. You may circle more than one.

- White (non-Hispanic)
- White (Hispanic)
- Black or African American (non-Hispanic)
- Black (Hispanic)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native (non-Hispanic)
- Asian (non-Hispanic)
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)
- Other (Identify) ________________________________

5. **Contact information for the church leader completing this survey**

- Name (Print): ________________________________
- Your position in the church: ________________________________
- Telephone number: ________________________________
- Email address (print clearly): ________________________________

*Thank you so much for your time and information. If you have any questions about this survey or need clarity regarding any of the questions, please contact Professor Pam Gaiter at pgaiter@collin.edu.*
Personal Interview Questions with Church Leaders

1. What is your official position with the church?

2. Does the church have a mission statement?

3. Does this statement include providing for the needs of the community beyond their spiritual needs? If so, how?

4. What does the church consider as ‘the community?’

5. What do you see as the major needs of the community in which your church serves?

6. Do you perceive that these needs have changed in the past five years? If so, how?

7. Do you perceive the needs of the African-American community as being any different than the needs of the white community? Explain your response.

8. Do you view the African-American church as a major source of outreach services to the African-American population? Explain your response.

9. Since 2008, have you seen an increase in any of the following among your congregants? Which do you perceive as having the most impact on your congregants?
   a. Unemployment
   b. Downsized
   c. Forced to relocate due to job loss
   d. Forced out of their home due to foreclosure, eviction or unable to pay
10. How has your church responded to the issues we just discussed?

11. How do you think the church should address the economic issues in the African-American community?

12. Does your church offer any of the following services? If so, explain how as well as the length of time the church has provided the service.
   a. Daycare
   b. Drug and alcohol abuse programs
   c. Assistance to senior citizens
   d. Housing assistance programs
   e. Food distribution
   f. Clothing banks
   g. Educational programs
   h. Health-related programs
   i. Youth programs
   j. Career services
   k. Economic development

13. Are any of the above mentioned services available to the community as well as church members? If so, which services?

14. Are there other services we have not discussed that your church offers to the community?
15. What are the top five services your church provides to the African-American community at this time? Rank them in order of their importance.

16. Does your church collaborate with other churches or organizations to offer any of the services we have discussed?
   a. If so, which services and what other church or organization aid with these services? And, how long have you received their help?

17. Has your church applied for and received any federally funded program monies to support any outreach services?
   a. If so, what programs and how long has your church received these funds?
   b. If no, why not?

18. Generally speaking, which of the following statements applies to your church’s budget?
   a. Currently achieving above projected goal
   b. Currently achieving projected goal
   c. Currently achieving below projected goal
   d. Currently struggling to maintain the basic needs of the church

19. Have there been any inconsistencies with the church budget and its projected goal, in the past five years? If so, explain.
20. Since 2008, has the congregational giving increased, decreased, or remained the same?
   a. If there has been a change, what do you perceive as the cause of such change?
   b. In your opinion, is such giving typical within your church during economic crisis?

21. Has the congregational giving affected the services offered to the congregants or the community? If so, explain how.

22. Does your church provide church funds to special organizations? If so, what organizations? How long has the church provided these funds?

23. Do you view the African-American church as a political advocate? Explain your response.

24. How does this congregation engage in political activities on a local level, collectively or individually?

25. How does this congregation engage in political activities on a national level, collectively or individually?
26. Do you talk with your congregation about political matters? If so, to what extent (particular candidates, political parties, political topics, etc)?

27. Are there any elected or appointed officials (on a local or national level) in your congregation? If so, about what percentage?

28. Are there political candidates (on a local or national level) who visit your church?
   a. If so, how often?
   b. Do you give the candidates certain guidelines or stipulations? For example, do you instruct the candidates to just encourage the congregation to go out and vote?

29. Does your church provide political information to your congregation? If so, how?

30. Does your church provide physical space for political gatherings?

31. Does your church work with civil rights groups such as NAACP, Urban League or other advocate groups? If so, describe the level of involvement with these groups.
32. Do you view this church’s political involvement impacting the church’s ability to fulfill the social needs of the community? Explain your response.

33. What do you define as a “mega” church?

34. Would you describe your church as a “mega” church? Explain, why or why not.

35. I appreciate your time and contribution. Do you have any other information you would like to share?
REFERENCES


Moore, Thom. 2003. “Promoting Change through the African American Church and Social Activism.”


