UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES OF EXECUTIVE CHURCH DENOMINATION LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The challenges faced by executive church leaders, and their denominations, requires knowledge which specifically supports their development as high level leaders. This study builds on “lessons of experience” research and explores the leadership development experiences of executive church denomination leaders. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the essence of the leadership development experiences of several bishops within a single African American denomination. Among this group of leaders, six major themes and their respective sub-themes emerged as important elements of their collective experience. These findings suggest that leadership development experiences for executive church leaders should include ministry venture creation, the use of relevant and real cases, and mentoring relationships.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The development of any organization’s executive leaders is a difficult task. Those responsible for developing leaders (i.e., organization leaders, practitioners, and scholars) must consider the job tasks, the leadership requirements necessary for executive level of leadership, and the learning capacity of those being developed. They should also be aware of the development options available. These factors should both encourage practitioners to use appropriate practices, and inspire scholars to create new knowledge related to aspects of leadership development. Unfortunately, this is not the case for non-profit organizations like church denominations. Leadership development research has for the most part been conducted with the context of corporate organizations, and while organizations like the U.S. Catholic church and the Church of the Nazarene are trying to leverage their partnerships with corporations, educational institutions, and consulting firms to develop their leaders, these efforts are primarily focused on pastors.

The executive leaders of church denominations such as bishops and superintendents also need to be developed. They handle the strategic responsibilities of these organizations, and lead while coping with unique circumstances. More research is needed to understand their developmental needs, and to support their developmental processes. This study was designed to address a gap in knowledge related to the leadership development of these executive leaders by identifying the experiences which have, in the opinion of current executive church leaders, contributed to their development. It involves a phenomenological approach which captures the essence of their experiences.
In the following section, I present a background which briefly describes the context in which these executive leaders work, and the organizational and individual leadership challenges they face. I also describe the ways in which non-profit organizations are attempting to respond to these challenges through leadership development. This section ends with an introduction of a domain of leadership development research which supports the focus of this study.

After the background, I further explain the problem, the purpose, and theoretical framework. I also describe the research design, significance of the study, limitations, and definition of terms. The chapter concludes with a summary, and a statement about the chapters which follow.

**Background**

Executive church leaders are similar to their counterparts in for-profit organizations, in that they also lead multiple entities within a single organization, work with and communicate with people at different hierarchical levels, and adjust organizational strategy to meet internal and external pressures. They hold titles commonly associated with this level of leadership, including chairman, executive secretary, president, and vice president. While holding executive office, these leaders influence the direction of multiple assemblies. They must also adjust their communication behaviors and styles to ensure delivery and receipt of organizational values and messages, and address increasingly complex internal and external issues. Additionally, effective denomination leaders are able to fulfill their spiritually based missions, and accomplish organizational goals through their members and ministry partners.

The senior executive leaders of church denominations face many organizational and individual leadership challenges. According to Leith Anderson who writes the foreword for
Borden’s (2003) book, *Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation at the Mission Field*, the United States has approximately 400,000 churches. Most of these churches belong to denominations, and collectively they are suffering through slow growth and appear directionless. Roozen and Nieman (2005) also acknowledge that the traditional protestant denominations struggle with increasingly complex problems, and that their numerical and cultural prominence has faded. Furthermore, as early as the mid 1990’s, Lyle Schaller, a church culture expert, predicted that 12 to 15 denominations would divide in the following decades (*Christianity Today*, 1994).

The specific organizational challenges come as a result of several changes. Denominations are coping with changing cultural context, and changing judicatory structures. Lummis (1998) discusses several ways in which denominations are being affected by these types of changes. She suggests that the church is being marginalized due to an increasingly secular and religiously plural society. In her estimation, it is being influenced by our consumer and marketing driven culture. She also suggests that judicatories are now being seen as administrative staff who manage pensions and respond to pastoral vacancies, and that the local congregations view the judicatory as a “supplier of services.” Traditional African American churches are also being affected by cultural changes. Sherkat and Ellison (1991) report that African American members are switching from denominations to non-denominational churches for reasons related to race and politics.

In addition to coping with the current state of denominational organizations and their various issues, the executive denomination leader must be prepared to deal with the individual challenges which present themselves at this level of leadership. Lee (1989) asserts that what makes leadership in the church difficult is the necessity of being attentive to the inner and outer
life of the church. The leader must know how to nurture the people and simultaneously achieve value based operational objectives. Also, because executive leadership in the church is qualitatively different from pastoral leadership (Sparkman, 2010), these leaders must be prepared to deal with the added complexity of leading several churches, and maintaining ministry and work relationships with people at different functional levels.

As the organizational and individual challenges of executive leadership within denominations are becoming clearer, certain denominations and their leaders are attempting to meet these challenges through leadership development. The most traditional approach to the development of executive ministerial leaders is through formal education. Seminaries and divinity schools offer courses in practical theology designed to instruct ministers on how to perform general pastoral duties. These schools also offer degrees such as a Masters of Divinity, and the Doctor of Ministry degree. Both degrees are considered professional degrees for those at any level of pastoral leadership. Denomination leaders are seeking the tools needed for leadership through participation in leadership associations and workshops offered by consulting groups. For example the U.S. Catholic Church through its association with the National Leadership Roundtable of Church Management (NLRCM) provides seminars focused on issues pertaining to human resource development, management, and finance. The Catholic Church’s executive leaders learn from the knowledge and experience of executives at McKinsey & Co, and J. P. Morgan (NLRCM website, 2010). New Church Specialties, a church consulting organization, has worked with over 20 different denominations and offer specific training for judicatory leaders (New Church Specialties website, 2010). These judicatory leaders receive knowledge and participate in training related to organization development, leadership, and strategy development.
While the development of consortiums, participation in workshops, and the acquisition of
degrees help prepare these leaders for executive level leadership, these efforts are basic at best.
Generally, these three forms of development are limited in terms of their accessibility, and don’t
provide the specific experiences necessary for the respective contexts. The professional seminary
and divinity school degrees like the Master of Divinity, and Doctor of Ministry, are typically
directed toward current and future local church pastors. Their curriculums are designed to
provide a broad base of knowledge, and not the specific information needed for executive
leadership. Judicatory workshops have limited impact in that they are normally offered to, and
through, members of a specific denomination. Furthermore, the NLRCM is a newly formed
association (2005) which meets infrequently on the east coast. Given the importance of
leadership at the top, and the relatively scarce options, it is obvious that more should be done.
Fortunately, the current state of leadership development research and practice makes one think
that these efforts can be strengthened.

Even though the development of senior executive leaders in church organizations is at the
beginning stages, the current direction of leadership development research, trends, and practice,
portends positive results for non-profit organizations like church denominations. Several studies
affirm the potential impact of leadership development on organization leaders (e.g., Avolio,
Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009; Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Holton, 2004;
Sogunro, 1997). These seminal works support the intuitive notion that leadership behaviors and
skills can be improved (Northouse, 2007). Additionally, the recent trend toward strategic
collaboration between non-profit and for-profit organizations like City Year and Timberland, and
Georgia-Pacific and The Nature Conservatory, offer developmental experiences and encourage
the recognition of values in organizational leadership (Austin, 2000). These trends along with the
appropriate use of other leadership development techniques such as multi-rater feedback and action learning, have positively influenced the direction of leadership development practice and research. However, developmental experiences or “lessons of experience” is a domain of leadership development research which is quickly becoming a central feature of leadership development programs (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; McCall, 2004, 2010; Yip & Wilson, 2010).

McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison’s 1988 book, *The Lessons of Experience: How Successful Executives Develop on the Job*, sparked a series of studies related to the developmental experiences of U.S. and international corporate executives (e.g., Conway, Van Velsor, & Criswell, 2006; Douglas, 2003; Yip & Wilson, 2008; Zhang, Chandresekar, & Wei, 2008). Through surveys and interviews, they found that stretch assignments and developmental relationships were more beneficial to executive development than formal training. Yip and Wilson (2010) in Van Velsor, McCauley, and Ruderman’s *Handbook of Leadership Development*, further summarized the findings of several research studies and identified challenging assignments, developmental relationships, adverse situations, personal experiences, and course work and training, as the most frequently cited and favored developmental experiences. It is this line of research which supports the inquiry of the developmental experience of the executive leaders of church denominations.

**Problem Statement**

More knowledge related to the leadership development experiences of executive church leaders is needed. The predominant context of leadership development research has centered on the executive leaders of corporate organizations. Although the findings and practices derived
from previous leadership development research has been helpful, they have had a minimal impact on senior denomination leaders. While organizations like the U.S. Catholic Church and other denominations are leveraging the knowledge gained from previous leadership development research and practice through workshops, formal education, collaboration, these efforts are limited in terms of their direct influence on executive church leaders. Executive level denomination leadership is qualitatively different from pastoral leadership: it involves more complex ministerial and managerial responsibilities (Sparkman, 2010). Factors such as the contemporary issues these leaders are facing including, the current trend towards the numerical and functional decline of church denominations, the unique set of values promoted by church organizations, and the external problems associated with the changing social and cultural environments surrounding the church, should also encourage the pursuit of knowledge which could be used to support their development.

Purpose of Study

This phenomenological study examines the leadership development experiences of senior executive leaders in a single religious denomination. It describes how the executive leaders of a predominantly African American denomination understand the essence of their developmental experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This study explores the developmental experiences of the executive leaders of, one church denomination, and builds on leadership development research focusing on developmental experiences. Both Day and Lord (1988) and Zaccaro (2001) clarify executive leadership and
suggest that executive leadership is qualitatively different from lower level leadership. McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) and Yip and Wilson (2010) affirm the usefulness of development through experience. Respectively, they conclude that tough assignments and influential relationships are imperative, and report several themes which are vital for development including, challenging assignments, developmental relationships, adverse situations, course work and training, and personal experience.

In this study, the jurisdictional bishops, who have responsibility for the strategic direction of several churches within their denomination, are considered executive leaders. They have been queried to understand the essence of their developmental experiences. The main research question which guided this study is:

What meaning do the executive denomination leaders ascribe to their leadership development experiences?

The subquestions are:

1. What statements describe these experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the contexts of and thoughts about their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experience?

In addition to the above questions, see Appendix A for the complete interview protocol.

Research Design

This qualitative study of the leadership development experiences of senior executive denomination leaders was conducted using a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research emphasizes an entity’s quality and the processes and meanings which are not measured by quantity, intensity, amount, or occurrence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The phenomenological
approach captures the meaning of the lived experiences of participants as they relate to a particular concept or phenomenon. It describes the common experiences shared by the participants as they interact with a phenomenon.

Using Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology, I collected data through in-depth interviews. The data was analyzed and reduced to key themes in order to develop textural and structural descriptions of the leadership development experiences of the senior executive leaders of church denominations. The combined description construes the essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2007).

**Significance of the Study**

A study of the leadership development experiences of senior executive church denomination leaders is important for three reasons. First, this study strengthens Human Resource Development’s (HRD) influence in non-profit organizations. Mclean and Mclean (2001) encourage a more substantial role for HRD, and project an intention to develop the expertise of individuals and organizations for the benefit of communities and all of humanity. This research opens an avenue of inquiry and explores a context rarely attended to by HRD: church denominations. The findings of this study provide useful information to the practitioners responsible for constructing leadership development programs involving developmental experiences. Secondly, these findings richly describe the essence of the lived experience of these senior executive leaders, and add heuristically to knowledge about the experiences needed for leaders of values driven organizations. Moreover, these findings add depth to and affirm the line of leadership development research focused on clarifying the nature of leadership development experiences. Thirdly, this study’s findings generally benefit both individual leaders and church
denominations. Individuals aspiring to reach the highest levels of church leadership now have an opportunity to understand and pursue similar leadership experiences. Church organizations now have the information useful for creating and tracking similar experiences. They can also direct their leaders to workshops, or seminars which offer opportunities akin to the experiences reported.

Limitations

Given the qualitative nature of this research, the generalizability is limited. This study was designed to provide an in-depth description of the leadership development experiences of senior executive church leaders who have responsibility for a multiple number of churches. Therefore, this study does not include lower-level leaders or senior executive leaders who don’t have jurisdictional responsibility. Two other possible limitations may influence the quality of this research. The first has to do with the level of access and candor on the part of the bishop or superintendent given the novelty of this research. The second has to do with the potential for bias in my interpretation of the research findings. My experience as a pastor could influence my perception and reporting of their experiences. In order to address both of these concerns, I have thoroughly explained their role as participants, the research procedures, and the potential benefits. I also “bracketed” and set aside my experience in order to gain a clearer perspective (Creswell, 2007).

Definition of Terms

Definitions of the major terms used this in this study include the following:

*Denomination*—A group of congregations united under a common and distinct faith, name, and organization (Borden, 2003).
Judicatory—A class, association, or district for relatively circumscribed clusters of congregations, and dioceses, conferences, or synods for larger regional groupings (Borden, 2003).

Essence—That which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is (Husserl, 1931, p. 43).

Executive leadership—That set of activities directed toward the development and management of the organization as a whole, including all of its subcomponents to reflect long range policies and purposes that have emerged from the senior leader’s interactions within the organization and his or her interpretation of the organization’s external environment (Zaccaro, 2001).

Experience—a) direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge; b) the fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation.

Leadership development—Almost every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages, and assists in one’s leadership potential (Brungardt, 1996, p. 83).

Lived experience—The term used in phenomenological studies to emphasize the importance of individual experiences of people as conscious human beings (Moustakas, 1994).

Management development—Managerial education and training that emphasizes the acquisition of specific types of knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to enhance task performance in management roles (Baldwin & Padgett, 1994).

Phenomenological study—A study which describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals. The researcher reduces the experiences to a central meaning or the “essence” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenology—A phenomenological approach where the researcher sets aside prejudgements regarding the phenomenon being investigated. The researcher relies on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to gain a view of the experience, and uses Moustakas’ (1994) systematic methods of analysis.

Summary and Organization of the Study

The executive leaders of church denominations are facing many internal and external challenges. These leaders can and should be developed to address these issues through
organization sponsored development, or through the individual pursuit of relevant experiences. Unfortunately, the above is not the case. Research which identifies and describes the developmental experiences of those who already hold senior executive level positions is needed. Building on the research which affirms developmental experiences as a crucial feature of leadership development programs, this research is explored the phenomenon of leadership development experiences in an alternate setting: church denominations. The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge related to developmental experiences. They are also beneficial for HRD practitioners and researchers, and individuals and church organizations concerned about executive level leadership.

The first chapter of this dissertation presents the introduction, background, problem statement, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research design, significance of the study, limitations, and definitions. The second chapter presents the review of related literature and research relevant to the problem being examined. Chapter 3 contains a description of the approach to inquiry, and the procedures involved in gathering and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 offers an overview of the organization and Individuals involved in the study. Chapter 5 thematically describes the essence their developmental experiences, and chapter 6 summarizes the study, discusses its implications, and suggests future research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Over the years, leadership development has become recognized as a field of research and practice central to the operation of most organizations. Day (2001) cites the increasing allocation of organizational resources toward development, and the volume of leadership development literature, as indicators of the escalating interest in the subject. The calls for specialized development for organizations other than for-profits (Bass, 2008), as well as the call for more integrated models of development, also signify its growing influence (Boyatzsis, 2008; Day & Harrison, 2007; Pearce, 2007). After being empirically proven useful (e.g., Avolio et al., 2009; Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Holton, 2004), leadership development has evolved from a training approach directed toward lower-level employees, to a developmental approach designed to create and enhance the skills of executive leaders (Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Fulmer, 1997).

The level of interest in leadership development, the calls for more useful research paradigms, and the evolving use of leadership development practices should indicate that a substantial impact has been with regard to leadership development in non-profit organizations like church denominations. Unfortunately, this is not the case. However, by building on research and practices proven to enhance the development of executive leaders, this can become a reality.

Through this review of the literature, I argue for research which captures the nature of the leadership development experiences of executive church leaders. The findings will guide those who hold these offices, and encourage them to look and participate in similar experiences. These findings will also assist researchers and designers as they frame development experiences, and make it more useful to a broader range of executives. In the following sections, I build a case for this study by providing an overview of leadership development, by describing the nature of
executive leadership and the specific leadership challenges faced by executive church leaders, and by evaluating the status of a body of leadership development research which positively supports this pursuit. At the end of this chapter, I summarize these sections and briefly present an argument for the research approach I pursued.

**Overview of Leadership Development**

This overview of the field of leadership development is composed of several sections. First three key areas of distinction are clarified. The purposes of leadership development, its approaches, practices, and assumptions are explained. This section concludes with a discussion of the major transitions which have taken place in the field.

**Areas of distinction.** There are at least three areas of distinction which help clarify the field of leadership development. One of those areas is reflected by the definitions of leadership development used in the field. The other two areas are represented by the difference between leadership development and leader development, and the difference between management development and leadership development.

**Definitions.** Brungardt’s (1996) review of research in leadership development and education has the most comprehensive discussion of the terms associated with leadership development. He defines *leadership development* as “almost every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages, and assists in one’s leadership potential” (p. 83). In reference to these “stages of development in the life cycle,” he includes formal and informal learning activities including education childhood development, adult life experiences, and formally structured programs designed to bolster leadership capabilities. He further clarifies that *leadership education* is a component of leadership development which
includes the educational environments and learning activities intended to strengthen and cultivate leadership abilities. Finally, *leadership training* is defined as, “learning activities for a specific leadership role or job” (p. 84).

McCaulley, Moxley, and Van Velsor’s (1998) original definition characterized leadership development as a process which expands the collective capacity of an organization’s members to effectively perform in leadership roles and processes. More recently, it has been defined as the “expansion of a collective’s capacity to produce direction, alignment, and commitment” (McCaulley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010, p. 20).

The distinct aspects of the definitions can be seen in the underlying intentions for leadership development. Brungardt’s definition can be interpreted as a range of formal-informal, or structured or unstructured experiences which purposely or by happenstance enhances an “individuals” leadership potential. In the second set of definitions, the expected outcome is the enhancement of the “collective’s” capacity.

**Leader development and leadership development.** The difference between leader development and leadership development is reflected by the types of capital produced, the leadership model considered in development, and the types of skills developed. Day (2001) asserts that *leader* development improves human capital and builds on leadership models and theory which stress individual power, knowledge, and trustworthiness. With leader development, the skills associated with self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation are enhanced. In contrast, *leadership* development increases social capital and is done with respect to an emphasis on the relational aspects of leadership (i.e., commitments, mutual respect, and trust). Improved social awareness and social skills are the intended outcomes. Basically, leader development
centers on the individual leader, and leadership development centers on the leadership capacity of the entire organization (Riggio, 2008).

**Management development and leadership development.** The terms *management* development and *leadership* development are sometime used interchangeably (Lynham, 2000). Given the nature of the leadership research done in middle decades of the 20th century, this should be expected. Many of the articles published during this time were contextualized at the managerial or administrative levels (e.g., Katz, 1955). Furthermore, confusion may also be due to the alternate understandings of management development. Bass (2008) states that management development programs normally refer to a combination of long-term off-the-job and on-the-job educational processes. These processes could apply to leadership development programs as well. Day (2001) acknowledges the overlapping features of both, but distinguishes management development in two ways. *Management* development includes managerial education and training, and typically involves the application of tested solutions to well-known situations. It facilitates the procurement of specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities, which will improve performance in managerial roles (Baldwin & Padgett, 1994). *Leadership* development, on the other hand, primarily focuses on enhancing capacity for the purpose of addressing unknown challenges (Day, 2001a).

These alternate definitions and conceptualizations of *leader* development, *leadership* development, and *management* development help to clarify and distinguish the field. The field can be further clarified through a discussion of its purposes, assumptions, approaches, and transitions.

**Purposes.** Leadership development is intended to and designed to address the leadership related operational issues which affect an organization. McCauley, Kanaga, and Lafferty (2010)
suggest that three purposes drive an organization’s development of its leaders (a) performance improvement, (b) succession management, and (c) organizational change. Through leadership development, individual skills are developed, corporate values and vision is transmitted, and dialogue and implementation of a collective vision is promoted (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). These overall purposes are intended to resolve individual performance issues such as slow transitions into new roles, poor interpersonal relationships, and a lack of specialized knowledge, as well as operational issues related to strategy development and executive succession.

Leadership development addresses these issues in several ways. Leaders can be transitioned into new jobs through a leadership assimilation process (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008), and they can be educated to develop an understanding of the leadership skills required at different organizational levels (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). Leaders can lead themselves and others through self-awareness, and by learning to develop effective work groups and communication skills (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010). Lastly, they may obtain specialized knowledge through organization sponsored programs and executive education designed with particular roles and responsibilities in mind (Bass, 2008).

From an organizational perspective, the enhancement of human capital and social capital will result in value creation and competitive advantage. Leaders who have had rich developmental experiences resolving novel problems and addressing issues associated with globalization and technology will be more effective strategists. Organizational transformation will occur when development involves multiple education sessions, training for current and future competencies, and the coordination of educational and change initiatives (Conger & Xin, 2000). Finally, organizations that fill their leadership pipelines through the creation of individual development plans and the recognition and placement of individuals into key positions will be
better equipped to deal with the predicted leadership shortage (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Tierney, 2006).

**Approaches, practices, and assumptions.** Given the goals of enhancing individual and organization performance, managing succession, and facilitating change, leadership development involves different approaches and relies on several assumptions. These approaches can be understood in terms of the models and practices used.

**Approaches.** Leadership development approaches can be generally categorized according to Bass’ (2008) description of off-the-job, and on-the-job training and development. As it intimates, off-the-job development does not involve the elements of an individual’s actual workplace. It focuses on didactic and experiential training delivered through lectures, readings, discussions, role play, games, and simulations. On-the-job development is designed to encourage leadership learning through the participants’ actual work environment. Learning occurs through the employees’ exposure to unique experiences, coaching, mentoring, and special assignments.

The approaches mentioned above are simplifications. Leadership development is also supported by more complex models which help to conceptualize and guide development procedures. Pearce (2007) provides a good summation of the models used and considered in the field. He expounds on the features of the transactional-transformational model, multi-level identity based approaches, and behavior/competency models. The features of these models as well as Day, Harrison, and Halpin’s integrative approach to leadership development are described below.

Following the trends of leadership theory research, development based on the transactional-transformational model of leadership continues to influence the direction leadership development practice (Day, 2001a). An approach based on this model, will focus on enhancing
an individual’s leadership skills. During the past two decades the general conception of leadership in organizations has centered on this two-factor approach which attends to task and relationship behaviors (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). The two-factor approach can be characterized as transactional, in that it represents beneficial exchanges between the leader and the other parties involved, and transformational in that the leader is able to appeal to the core values and purposes of the followers, and encourage movement based on shared ideals.

The multi-level and identity-based approach is a more recent construct. It suggests that the development process can be made more effective if it is done with respect to individual values, experiences, self-perceptions, and the leadership needs at both the lower and higher organizational levels (Day & Harrison, 2007; Pearce, 2007). Day and Harrison (2007) argue that leadership development done in this way builds human, as well as, social capital. From a theoretical point of view, this approach acknowledges the existence of leadership differences and needs across organizational levels. It also integrates aspects of both leader and leadership development.

Leadership development can also be conducted with respect to the behaviors and competencies needed for effective leadership. The acquisition and use of intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors and skills drive this model. Stress management, networking, creativity, emotional, and spiritual awareness are some of the leadership skills perceived to be important for leadership (Lovelace, Manz, & Alvez, 2007; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Mumford, Hunter, Eubanks, Bedell, & Murphy, 2007; Riggio & Lee, 2007, Quantro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007). In the 2007 fourth quarter edition of Human Resource Management Review, the aforementioned authors respectively discuss how leadership development programs focused on enhancing these skills can be conducted.
Day, Harrison, & Halpin (2009) offer what they describe as an integrative approach to leader development. They argue that the individual-leader development process can be accelerated by applying principles based on research and theory from developmental psychology, adult learning, lifespan development, Gestalt psychology, leadership, expertise and skill acquisition, training, and development “among others.” Their framework considers the domains of epistemic cognition, which involves the construction of complex perspectives about the nature of knowledge and knowing; moral development, based on Kohlberg’s moral stages; and identity formation. Respective of these domains, leader development would enhance critical thinking, interpersonal, and problem solving skills. It would also impact the individual’s self-efficacy, self-awareness, goal orientation, and self-regulatory strength.

**Practices.** Several well-known practices support the various leadership development approaches and models. These practices include action learning, job assignments, networking, mentoring, coaching, and 360-degree feedback. Taken together, the practices build intrapersonal and interpersonal competence. According to Giber, Carter, and Goldsmith (2000) action learning, 360-degree feedback, and mentoring are most successful. These three practices along with job assignments improve individual performance; expedite socialization, and increases productivity (Day, 2001a). Other techniques such as leader assimilation, succession planning, and experiential learning, have been discussed previously or will be discussed in relation to leadership development transitions and research.

**Assumptions.** The approaches and practices mentioned above rely on a few basic assumptions. A primary assumption is that leadership development can result in improved individual and organizational performance. More will be said regarding this assumption in the next section. However, empirical research has supported this claim (e.g., Avolio, Reichard,
Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009). The notions that people want to, and can be developed, are also foundational assumptions. Building on these assumptions (Riggio, 2008), surmises that in order for development to be successful, a learner’s desire, readiness, and capacity must be considered. In regard to his concept of “desired change,” Boyatzis (2008) suggests that habits, actions, and behaviors linked to leadership effectiveness can be sustained if the individual is intent on change. Additionally, an understanding of developmental readiness on the part of the individual and organization involved in leadership development can help reduce the time it takes to prepare leaders (Avolio & Hannah, 2008).

Similarly, McCauley, Van Velsor, and Ruderman (2010) make three assumptions that are “embedded” in their approach to developing leaders. Those assumptions are that: (a) multiple leader roles and processes exist and during the course of life, and most people have engaged in some form of leadership; (b) leader development is influenced by context—different settings may contain different leadership expectations and practices, as well as different measures of effectiveness, and therefore there is no one way to develop leaders; and (c) individuals are capable of expanding their leadership capacities, and that leadership development results in useful outcomes. These assumptions reflect the belief that leaders can improve their effectiveness as it relates to leadership roles and processes and that aspects of leadership behaviors and skills can be taught. The theoretical and practical transitions that have taken place in the field affirm and reflect these beliefs.

**Theoretical transitions.** In the 1970’s and 80’s there was considerable debate in the field of leadership around the question of “does leadership make a difference in organizations?” Several research studies claimed that leadership had a minimal effect (e.g., Lieberson & O’Connor, 1972; Pfeffer, 1977; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Day and Lord (1988), Finkelstein and
Hambrick (1996), and Smith, Carson, and Alexander (1984), were among the researchers who published significant studies which ultimately refuted the notion of a minimal effect and confirmed the importance of leadership in organizations. This debate and its resolution had a great impact on research in the field.

Researchers in leadership development began to focus their attention on studies which would affirm or disconfirm the potential impact of leadership development programs. Burke and Day’s (1986) meta-analytic review was one of the first to explore the effectiveness of management training and leadership development programs. Through their analysis of studies from 1951-1982, they discovered that certain managerial training methods could be considered moderately effective in improving learning and job performance. They also urged researchers to improve on the process of collecting data used to help evaluate organization directed interventions. Collins and Holton (2004) followed with their own meta-analysis of the effectiveness of managerial leadership development programs. Their analysis focused on research from 1982 to 2001. Although differences in methods and concepts prevented direct comparison to Burke and Day, the overall effectiveness of certain types of managerial leadership development programs was again affirmed. In this study, Collins and Holton (2004) also noted the emergent trend of transformational leadership, and the need for training objectives to be developed according to the obstacles and situations which impact the implementation of strategic organizational goals.

Sogunro (1997) used both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to assess increases or changes to the participants’ leadership knowledge skills and attitudes. This study was designed to discover what impact, if any, would be produced through a 19-year old leadership training program sponsored by REDA, a private continuing education agency. The
results of pre- and post-tests showed increases in the understanding and performance of leadership roles. Four significant implications related to the research were offered: (a) Organizations should understand that every employee is a potential leader whose leadership ability should be cultivated. (b) Retraining in certain leadership skills may increase managerial effectiveness. (c) Leadership training programs should be dynamic and encourage the development of new knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate for contemporary and novel challenges. (d) More research which links specific training efforts to specific changes in the participants’ leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes should be conducted.

One of the more recent studies of leadership impact is Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, and Chan’s (2009) meta-analysis of literature reporting the causal impact of what they describe as leadership interventions. Studies chosen included those in which the researcher manipulated some aspect of leadership for the purpose of examining its impact on specific intermediate process variables or outcomes. Among the questions they sought to answer were (a) Does the impact of experimental/quasi-experimental leadership interventions differ comparing training or developmental versus other types of leadership interventions? (b) Does the impact of experimental/quasi-experimental leadership interventions differ as a function of whether it was based on newer leadership theory versus traditional leadership theory? The researchers found that experimental/quasi-experimental leadership interventions did have a positive impact among an array of interventions, organization types, leadership levels, theories, levels of quality of research, and outcomes. They also noted that while leadership interventions do have a positive impact, the ranges of the effects were heterogeneous.

Finally, two other research studies conducted in unique contexts also supports the notion that leadership development is a worthwhile investment. Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco,
and Lau (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of the leadership development process of cadets in a military college. Tracking measures of individual differences presumed to be predictive of leader effectiveness and leader emergence over a four year span, the researchers concluded that physical fitness and prior influence were predictive of leader effectiveness. Physical fitness, prior influence experiences, cognitive ability and self-esteem were found relevant to predicting leader emergence. Boaden (2006) examined a leadership development program offered and financially supported by the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. The analysis focused on the program’s effects on the individuals involved, and on the organization. Although the path of their research was somewhat difficult to follow, they did report success in the program’s intention of impacting personal and organizational contribution.

Taken together, the findings of these leadership and leadership development studies represent empirical confirmation of what had been intuitively understood by most organization leaders and researchers. The positive findings reported suggest that leadership can be taught, or at least enhanced.

**Practical transitions.** Several practical responses to significant trends affecting an organization’s approach to leadership development also represent transitions in the field. Two significant trends are driving these transitional responses. The first significant trend is the need for more leaders in a shorter period of time. The second trend is the need for more sophisticated approaches to leadership development. These trends and the subsequent responses are discussed below.

*More leaders faster.* Leadership deficits are predicted for the coming years (Conger & Fulmer, 2004; Tierney, 2006). A decline in the workforce as a result of retiring baby-boomers, and economically induced restructuring is expected. Tierney’s (2006) report on the status of
leadership in non-profit organizations makes clear that this situation will take a substantial toll on non-profit organizations. It is estimated that in the next decade non-profits will need to attract and develop 640,000 new senior managers. At the same time as the number of baby-boomers are retiring, Barrett and Besson (2002) are reporting that the number of American workers aged 35-44 will decline by 18% during the next 10 years. These predictions have encouraged the use and need for effective leadership development/succession planning, despite the current declination of the economy.

The need for more leaders faster is also spurred on by the notion that a competitive advantage can be gained through development (Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1999; Torraco & Swanson, 1995). The cultivation of human capital, and the development, use, and protection of intellectual capital are key activities necessary for achieving and maintaining strategic competitiveness (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). In fact, enhancing human capital appears to be a more successful business strategy than others. A study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania, found that companies that make additional 10% investment in education experience an 8.5% increase in productivity. On the contrary, a 10% increase in capital expenditures only raises productivity by 3% (Bennis, 1997). A more developed work force can both drive strategy and facilitate the execution strategy (Torraco & Swanson, 1995). Leaders who are exposed to multinational and non-standard experiences will have a broader perspective as they consider the strategic positioning of their organizations. Similarly, leaders familiar with technology will be less afraid, and more inclined to feature it as a tool for strategy development and implementation.

In response to the need for more leaders faster, organizations are becoming more purposeful in financially and operationally supporting the leadership development process.
Increases in the amount of money spent on development is indicative its perceived organizational importance. Forty-five billion dollars were spent on training and education in 1997 (Fulmer, 1997). By 2007, six-hundred seventy billion had been spent worldwide on corporate training, with almost one billion dollars contributed to executive education (Salopek, 2008). Not only are major corporations like General Electric and AT & T making substantial investments, but non-profit organizations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation are also financially supporting programs developed in-house or through consulting firms and institutions (Wilson, 2002).

More organizations are also intentionally adjusting their organizational cultures and operational procedures to facilitate the development of their leaders. For example, employees are encouraged to participate in executive education programs and pursue advanced degrees or specialized certificate programs (Salopek, 2008). Ott and Motherwell (2007) also suggest that organizations pay closer attention to developing and refining a leadership infrastructure. The leadership infrastructure would integrate individual development reviews, curriculum architecture, and performance management systems for the purposes of reducing the need to identify outside candidates and improving human capital.

More sophisticated approaches. The need for more sophisticated approaches to leadership development is the second trend driving changes in the field. Changes in the nature of the participants, programs, purposes, best practices, and measures of success suggest a need for more evolved approaches. Fulmer (1997) seemed prescient when he described several paradigmatic shifts in the field. He noted seven major shifts: (a) passive listeners were becoming active learners, (b) program designs went from one-time events to career-long development processes, (c) the purpose of leadership development evolved from providing knowledge to
taking action to resolve real issues, (d) the identification and use “best practices” to the
anticipation of the future through scenarios, (e) individuals involved in executive leadership
development went from having limited and specialized roles to significant shapers of the field,
(f) evaluations of the programs which originally focused on style were now evaluated for
substance, and (g) development opportunities which were once for a select few, were now open.

The increasing complexity of executive level positions and the different types of
organizations with specialized duties also prompt the need for more sophisticated approaches.
Corporate executives are contending with increasing global competition from different
industries, as well as the pressures which come with fluctuating financial markets and
technological advances (Besson, 2004). Executive leaders in both for-profit and non-profit
organizations must learn how to strengthen and maintain relationships with internal and external
stakeholders. They need specialized knowledge and an awareness of specific behaviors in order
to make strategic decisions (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005). In particular, non-profit
leaders are forced to integrate value driven missions with resource acquisition and organization
strategy (Herman & Heimovics, 1994). They also have to cope with the impact of governmental
policy changes, and the workforce challenges which come from competition with the private
sector for executive level talent (Turner, 2007-2008).

Organizations have responded to the increasing need for more sophisticated approaches
by using technology to present development curriculum, by creating specialized curriculum, and
by leveraging partnerships with other organizations. The following paragraphs describe these
changes.

Technology is being used as a platform for delivering self-paced instruction (Bass, 2008).
The tools involved and their application facilitate delivery and management of leadership
development. E-Learning which involves the use of computers, the internet, and virtual classrooms is replacing videotapes and films as instructional tools. Organizations are also increasing their use of knowledge management systems which allow them to track an employee’s developmental progress.

Executive education, which broadly includes development delivered through universities and organizations, is being refashioned according to the demands of learners, and the strategic objectives of the respective organizations. Conger and Xin’s (2000) survey research identified several shifts in executive education: (a) a shift from functional knowledge to strategic leadership and change, (b) a shift toward more customized learning materials for individual companies and industries, (c) a shift in pedagogy toward action-learning and feedback, (d) a shift toward learning through executive cohorts, (e) a shift toward integration of learning experiences into organizational operations, and (f) a shift to executives as instructors. Bass (2008) also noted that more effort is being placed on specialized training designed to meet the leadership needs of scientists, nurses, teachers, military service workers, engineers, and entrepreneurs. Additionally, educational institutions with programs primarily directed toward non-profit executives are attempting to adjust to the specific changes related to non-profit organizations by utilizing features of adult development (Paton, Mordaunt, & Cornforth, 2007). They are blending traditional means of development (e.g., classroom delivered) with contemporary means (e.g., mentoring and e-learning).

Finally, collaboration between organizations of different types is yet another response to the need for more sophisticated approaches to development. Non-profit and for-profit organizations have combined their leadership development efforts to increase sensitivity to value related objectives in for profits, and efficiency measures in non-profits (Austin, 2000).
example, the U.S. Catholic church is offering and promoting leadership and management development through the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management (NLRCM). Furthermore, their efforts are strengthened by their alliances and partnerships with organizations like McKinsey & Co, 3M, and, J. P. Morgan (NLRCM website, 2010).

An overview of the field of leadership development was provided in the previous section. It described the areas of distinction, including the definitions and subtle differences. The purposes, approaches, practices, and assumptions, as well as the significant transitions which have taken place in the field were also discussed. The next section focuses more on a research domain which supports the various purposes of, and methods used in leadership development.

**Executive Leadership**

Executive leadership and the development of executive leaders are topics intricately linked to leadership development. Organizations expect their executive leaders to be high-level performers, who can respond to complex situations in appropriate ways (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005). Organizations also need to prepare for potential executive leadership shortages and the loss of work-related knowledge and experience (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). Leadership development helps by addressing these needs. The following section describes the nature of executive leadership, including its definitions and theoretical constructs, and the role distinctions and requirements of executive leadership.

**Executive leadership definitions and constructs.** Executive leadership can be understood through the terms used to define it, and its theoretical constructs. Strategic leadership and executive leadership are among the terms used to describe leadership at the top of an organization. Using the term “strategic leadership,” Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), declare
that it “focuses on the executives who have overall responsibility for an organization, their characteristics, what they do, how they do it, and particularly how they affect organizational outcomes” (p. 2). Similarly, Cyert and March (1963) as cited in Boal and Hooijberg (2000), state that strategic leadership centers on those who have overall responsibility for the organization, this includes the head of an organization and the top management team. Zaccaro (2001) adds that executive leadership is:

That set of activities directed toward the development and management of the organization as a whole, including all of its subcomponents to reflect long range policies and purposes that have emerged from the senior leader’s interactions within the organization and his or her interpretation of the organization’s external environment. (p. 13)

In Day and Lord’s (1988) article addressing executive leadership research and theory, they pointed out that up until that point research on executive level leadership had been minimal. Since that time, research related to aspects of executive leadership has increased. As with the definitions, the constructs involved in the research of executive leadership help to characterize its nature. Building on Katz and Kahn’s (1978) and Mintzberg’s (1973) acknowledgment of the qualitatively different nature of leadership roles, Day and Lord (1998) suggested executive leadership research should be conducted with regard to how executive level leaders influence organizational performance. Zaccaro (2001) pushed this framework further and clarified the kinds of questions which should be addressed. He proposed that:

1. Executive leadership should address individual characteristics related to successful leadership.
   - What individual characteristics distinguish executive leaders from lower level leaders?
   - What individual characteristics distinguish successful executive leaders from unsuccessful executive leaders?

2. Executive leadership should explain executive influence on organizational performance.
   - How do the requirements for executive leadership performance differ from those requirements at lower organizational levels?
At what organizational levels do performance requirements shift in quality?
How are leader effectiveness and influence defined and operationalized at different organizational levels?
What is the relationship between the accomplishment of executive leadership performance requirements and organizational effectiveness?

The most significant feature of Zaccaro’s work was his conceptualizations of executive leadership research models. Based on his review of executive leadership literature, he suggests that four types of models reflect the nature of executive leadership research: conceptual complexity, behavioral complexity, strategic decision making, and visionary or inspirational leadership models. Each of these categories is briefly explained below.

Conceptual complexity models are based on the premise that executive leaders need to have strong conceptual capacities in order to be effective in the generally complex environments in which they work. At the executive level, the leaders will encounter more ill-defined and novel problems, and in turn the leaders must exercise higher cognitive skills to meet these challenges (Davidson, Deuser, & Sternberg, 1994; Holyoak, 1984). The individual characteristics considered include conceptual capacity, flexible integrative complexity, interpersonal skills, knowledge, and temperament. The performance considerations include long term work and planning time frames, boundary spanning and environmental engagement, network development and consensus building, and development of a causal map or organizational frame of reference (Zaccaro, 2001).

The research categorized by the behavioral complexity model supports the idea that an executive leader needs to be able to act in accordance to the multiple roles and responsibilities related to the position (Zaccaro, 2001). These roles may demand alternate if not competing behaviors, and are a reflection of the social complexity of a particular organization. For example, an organization with multiple internal units and multiple constituents and stakeholders, presents
the executive leader with the responsibilities of planning, coordinating resources, supervising, developing personnel, and monitoring. Several key studies support the notion of behavioral complexity (e.g., Mintzberg [1973, 1975], managerial roles; Tsui [1984a, 1984b], multiple constituency framework; Hart & Quinn [1993] and Hooijberg & Quinn [1992], competing values framework). These studies in addition to Zaccaro et al. (1991), suggest that executive leaders need to be socially perceptive and behaviorally flexible, ready for roles and skills which may be actuated depending on the situation.

The third category of executive leadership research, strategic decision making, supports the idea that executive leaders must create an alignment between the environment and the organization itself (Bourgeois, 1985). Thompson (1967) described this match between organizational elements and environment facts as co-alignment. Strategic decision making research focuses on executive leadership processes, and how strategic decisions are made to achieve organizational and environmental alignment. This model encompasses strategy formulation and strategy implementation, and three generic executive leadership processes have been intimated in executive leadership literature: (a) environmental scanning and interpretation, (b) strategic planning and formation, (c) strategy implementation (Zaccaro, 2001).

The studies related to strategic decision making have focused on strategic management functions (e.g., Wortman, 1982; Pearce & Robinson, 1995), as well as environmentally (e.g., Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) or organizationally (e.g., Starbuck, 1983) determined strategy. They have also considered strategic choice (Child, 1972; Hambrick, 1989), which suggests that psychological and other individual characteristics influence executive leadership interpretation and decision making. Some of the variables considered include executive leader characteristics such as age, education, socioeconomic status, and financial position.
Studies represented by the visionary and inspirational model reflect the notion that executive leaders develop and communicate an organizational vision as a main function of their role (Zaccaro, 2001). The executive leader holds to the organization’s imagined future and drives and influences operational activities based on this imagined future. The leader fulfills the vision by enhancing the motivation of subordinates through the linkage of the employees’ self-concepts, and the organizational outcomes (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). She also uses symbols which create meaning and correlates with the vision, manages impressions with the interaction of building confidence and trust, and teaches and demonstrates behaviors which support the organizational direction (Bass, 1990; House, 1977). According to Zaccaro (2001), all models and theories of visionary and inspirational leadership reflect one or more of House’s (1977) theory of Charismatic leadership, Burns (1978) and Bass’ (1985, 1990) transformational leadership theory, and Conger and Kanungo’s theory of Charismatic leadership (1992).

The theoretical distinctions and requirements of executive leadership were briefly mentioned during the previous discussion of executive leadership research. However, the role distinctions and requirements must be further explicated in order to provide a complete description of the aspects of executive leadership that leadership development addresses.

**Executive leadership role distinctions and requirements.** As implied by the term, executive leadership is different from leadership exercised at the supervisory and entry levels. Executive leadership is distinguished by the inherent challenges, the types of decisions made, and the functions performed. Olmstead (2000) surmises that leadership complexity, and the associated challenges, increase as the leader ascends to higher levels within an organization. Katz and Kahn (1978) as cited by Zaccaro (2001) identified three patterns of organization leadership that illustrate how leadership roles become increasingly complex. At the lowest level,
administrators use existing organizational structures to maintain organizational performance. At the mid-level, leaders enhance and exercise “formal structural elements,” and at the highest level, executives develop original plans and policies, while considering their impact on the entire system. Executive leaders have more discretion to make decisions. These decisions can impact multiple subunits and have external consequences. This executive discretion is moderated by internal and external constraints (Olmstead, 2000). Executives must consider the effects of alliances, culture, and the financial position of the organization (Yukl, 2002). Finally, with regard to function, Barnard (1938) surmised that executives define organizational purpose, select those who can contribute to the achievement of the purpose, and create communication systems which promote organizational cooperation.

Overall, executive leaders need to have strong perceptual ability, as well as analytical and communication skills. Research findings and discussions related to executive and strategic leadership clarify specific individual attributes and skills. Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs and Fleishman (2000), propose that executive leaders need to be able to solve the complex social problems which emerge in organizations. They suggest that social judgment skills—including social perceptiveness and social performance skills, knowledge of the apparent tasks, the people involved, and the organization—will improve the effectiveness of the leader. An executive needs to be conscious of the symbolic importance of the position and be aware of how she is perceived (Finkelstein, 1996). This awareness assists her in communicating organizational values and meaning. Executive leaders should be able to analyze their respective organizational structures, financial status, and the effect that social and technological trends may have on their organization (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Effective strategic leaders have absorptive capacity: the ability to learn, recognize, assimilate, and apply new information. They have adaptive capacity:
the ability to change through cognitive and behavioral complexity. And finally, they have flexibility and managerial wisdom: the combination of discernment in applying social intelligence, and taking the right action at the right time (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000).

**The Practical Challenges of Executive Leadership**

The above discussion of the nature of executive leadership including its definitions, constructs, distinctions, and requirements, provide a general context. However, a more specific discussion of executive leadership in church denominations, and the challenges their leaders need to be prepared for, is also needed. The following section describes executive leadership and its challenges in terms of the similarities and differences in aspects of executive leadership between non-profit and for-profit organizations. It concludes with a brief discussion of the contemporary issues now facing executive church leaders.

The similarities between non-profit and for profit executive leaders are evident in the types of managerial responsibilities they have, and their leadership requirements. For example, executive denomination leaders maintain overall responsibility for the entirety of their denominations, or they perform as members of the top management team. During the course of developing, communicating, and implementing the overall strategy, they must consider the financial position of the organization, and its strengths and weaknesses. They must identify key internal and external stakeholders who can contribute to, communicate, and execute the features of their strategy. These executive leaders also manage multiple units, in the form of local churches, and interface with lower-level and upper-level managers, in the form of pastors and district chairpersons.
In terms of the requirements for executive leadership, there are several correlations. Sparkman (2010) affirmed the notion that the executive leadership of a bishop is qualitatively different form that of a pastor; as he noted differences in the potential impact of their leadership, and the nature of their calling with regard to executive level leadership. Executive church leaders exercise conceptual and behavioral complexity as they encounter novel problems, and act in accordance to the varied perceptions of their role. Additionally, the primary responsibility of their position is to provide visionary and inspirational leadership. Borden (2003) also states that “the leadership skills required to lead and direct larger congregations are vastly different from those required to lead smaller ones” (p. 58).

The differences in aspects of leadership can be understood in terms of the unique operational constraints which exist in non-profit organizations, and in terms of the kinds of competencies needed by their leaders. The most cited operational differences between non-profit and corporate organizations are related to (a) governance and the roles and relations of boards and executives, (b) the mix and sources of revenue, and (c) the degree to which voluntary non-profit organizations rely on volunteers for program delivery (Herman & Heimovics. 1989). Non-profit organizations are constructed to meet different operational objectives than their corporate counterparts. The success of non-profit organizations is derived through the achievement of social objectives as opposed to revenue generation (Moore, 2002). Jeavons (1992) notes that “private nonprofit organizations at least the public benefit type—usually have come into being and exist primarily to give expression to the social, philosophical, moral or religious values of their founders and supporters” (p. 404). Finally, in Rothschild and Milosky’s (2006) discussion of the centrality of values passions and ethics, they point out the unsettled positions corporate organizations take when it comes to value grounded issues such as corporate
social responsibility. They suggest that these organizations are willing to promote and support these initiatives as long as the profits continue. In contrast, non-profits view values and issues like social responsibility as their reason for existing.

The leadership competencies among non-profit executive leaders are also unique. Thach and Thompson (2007) conducted a study to ascertain whether differences existed between small to medium-sized for-profit, and public and non-profit organizations, in terms of the leadership behavior, styles, and competencies directed toward organizational goals. Among the differences between the groups, the competencies of conflict management and being inspirational were favored by the non-profit participants. Among leaders in Roman Catholic orders, Nygren, Ukeritis, McClelland, and Hickman (1994) identified two competencies they describe as unique to non-profits. The first competency related to the leader being grounded in spirituality and humanitarian values; which is to be expected given the context. The second competency relates to the use of leadership authority to build commitment and consensus, or the ability to encourage members to take ownership of the projects and policies sponsored by the religious order or other agencies. In consideration of Day and Lord’s (1988) and Zaccaro’s (2001) framework for executive leadership research, Sparkman (2010) examined the qualitative leadership distinctions and means for organization performance understood by the bishops of a church denomination. Although these bishops held executive level positions and had responsibilities similar to senior executives in corporate settings, they had unique views of the way administrative responsibilities should be handled, and how care should be applied to stakeholders (i.e., ministers reporting to them, lay leaders, and congregants).

The significant contemporary issues faced by the executive leaders in church denominations also illustrate the differences in the executive leadership challenges. Lummis
(1998) notes the changing operational structure of denominations as a result of perceptual differences about the role of the denomination by its members. She also suggests that denominations are being impacted by the perception of low credibility. An article in the publication Christian Century (2008) also identifies the strained relationships between traditional denominations and seminaries, and the changing religious background of those who are visiting and joining traditional churches.

Executive leadership in any type of organization will have similar features. These similarities suggest that leadership development research and practice can have a broader impact on more organizations. However, the nature of the differences in executive leadership in organizations should also inspire new development practices and research. Leadership development for executive denomination leaders should involve practices which allow for consideration of their unique needs and challenges, and should be grounded in research proven useful over time. The section which follows highlights a domain of leadership development research which meets these criteria. In it, I argue that despite its limitations, leadership development through experience positively supports and necessitates research focused on the experiences of executive denomination leaders.

**Leadership Development Through Experience**

Leadership development through experience is an often pursued, and highly valued line of research. It is favored for its practical outcomes, and its intuitive and universal appeal. McCall (2004) boldly states that “The primary source of learning to lead, to the extent that leadership can be learned, is experience” (p. 1). Although it is not without its limitations, and knowledge gaps,
it is a body of research which provides a foundation for inquiry into the developmental experiences of executive church denomination leaders.

As alluded to by McCall, leadership development through experience is thought to be the most effective way to build leadership capacity. Learning through experiences promotes outcomes related to mastery, versatility, and transfer (Yip & Wilson, 2010). A leader’s existing skills and abilities are enhanced, capacity is broadened through experience, and the organization is impacted when the leader applies and transmits learning the group and organization. As opposed to competency models which focus on a list of standardized leadership attributes, experience provides a better foundation (McCall, 2010) and integrates the unique styles and behaviors of actual leaders. Dean and Shanley (2006) also suggest that executives who learn important lessons through experience develop at a faster rate and reach higher levels of leadership than those with “lower agility.” As specific practices which support development through experience, developmental assignments give learners an opportunity to lead across cultural and functional boundaries (McCauley, Kanaga, & Lafferty, 2010), action learning exposes the individual to actual problems which have organization wide implications (Kuhn & Marsick, 2005; O’Neil & Marsick, 2007), and job-rotation allows the individual to experience the nuances of globalization and alternate work settings.

Several research studies have influenced the scope of development through experience research. John Dewey’s (1977) *Experience and education*, David Kolb’s (1984) *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*, and Lewin’s (1951) *Field theory in social science*, no doubt added features to this specific theoretical framework, but McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison’s (1988) book, *The lessons of experience: How successful executives develop on the job*, was foundational in terms of its influence on research related
executive developmental experiences. In their book, they discuss the findings derived from survey and interviews conducted with 191 executives from six large U.S. corporations. The participants were asked to identify three events in their careers which made a difference in the way that they currently manage. These “lessons” learned from experiences were clustered into themes and discussed with respect to the context of the events which generated them. They ultimately concluded that stretch assignments and developmental relationships were more important than the formal training they received.

Yip and Wilson (2010) comprehensively reviewed the findings of similar studies in the United States, and abroad. They identified 15 types of events and categorized lessons of experience into five clusters: challenging assignments, developmental relationships, adverse situations, course work and training, and personal experiences. Challenging assignments included difficult tasks, and organization directed assignments. Developmental relationships included helpful bosses and superiors, difficult people, and relationships not associated with work. Adverse situations were considered crises, career setbacks, and ethical challenges. Course work and training included self-initiated or organization-sponsored programs such as formal management development programs, executive education, workshops, and academic programs resulting in a degree or certificate, and personal experiences included life-impacting and emotion-rich events where values or approach to life and work were established. Out of all of these developmental experiences, challenging assignments were the most frequently reported development experience across several countries (i.e., U.S., India, China, and Singapore).

Yip and Wilson’s compilation of findings included several other studies with significant implications for leadership development through experience research. Among the studies they identified were, their own study (Yip & Wilson, 2008) of the lessons of experience for public
service leaders in Singapore; McCall and Hollenbeck’s (2002) research on executives in the Netherlands and Japan; and a study describing the events and lessons of African American managers in the United States (Douglas, 2003). These studies illustrate the range of contexts for which this line of research can address. They also reflect the current boundaries of knowledge gained by lessons of experience research.

Any argument for the further exploration and use of the lessons of experience research should also include a discussion of its limitations and gaps. Several scholars responded to McCall’s (2010) article in which he touts the usefulness of leadership learned through experience, and suggests ways to leverage those experiences in leadership development practice. Among their disputation, Day (2010) cites the challenges involved in learning from experience, and the under-appreciated role of focused practice in developing expertise. He describes the difficulties of conceptualizing and operationalizing work experience, the personal factors which influence an individual’s ability or willingness to learn from experience, and the challenges associated with building the necessary practice time on the job. Hezlett (2010) refutes McCall’s suggestion that research clarifying what makes experiences developmental is no longer needed. She offers several areas of research which she believes will increase understanding and improve practitioner effectiveness. She suggests that more needs to be learned about (a) how reflection and goal setting impacts a leader’s learning from experience, (b) how contextual or situational factors affect development through experience, and (c) the impact of individual learning differences, and a leader’s readiness to learn from experience. Finally, Wilson and Yip (2010) also disagree with McCall’s disinclination to conduct further research. They instead suggest that, in light of globalization, research on leadership experience should be conducted with regard to the transfer of leadership learning and the effect of the culture surrounding the organization.
I appreciate Day’s (2010) recognition of the challenges involved in applying experience to actual leadership development practice. In addition, Hezlett’s (2010) and Wilson and Yip’s (2010) arguments against McCall’s claim that “no more research is needed” are legitimate and thought-provoking points. However, Day’s argument suggests that once the difficulties related to learning from experience and the question of the role of deliberate practice are resolved, leadership development will be a simpler endeavor. I rather agree with McCall’s (2010) response to the arguments when he states “I do not believe that the science will ever result in a mechanistic formula for such development” (p. 67). Even with the discovery of new knowledge in the field, leadership development will never be an exact science, because leadership isn’t an exact science. Also, in considering the arguments against McCall’s claim (i.e., Hezlett, Wilson, & Yip, 2010) these arguments ultimately endorse the need for further research.

Until this proposal, this researcher knows of no other studies which explore executive leadership experiences in a church denomination in this manner. Studies of leadership in the church have mostly been focused on aspects of pastoral leadership. The leadership behaviors and skill requirements for those who lead individual churches have been well discussed (e.g., Malphurs, 1999, 2005; Tidwell, 1985; Weems, 1993). These authors are focused on emphasizing a pastor’s ability to articulate a shared vision, develop teams, be attentive to culture, and demonstrate integrity (Weems, 1993). Brown-Haywood (1998) did conduct a phenomenological study of the leadership development of African-American church leaders, but again it was centered on pastors. While helpful to senior pastors, this information is not specific enough to address the more complex situations faced by leaders who are responsible for directing the activities for a multiple number of churches.
Summary

An overview of the field of leadership development was provided in the previous chapter. The chapter also included a discussion of the nature of executive leadership, the practical challenges of executive leadership, and research related to leadership development through experience. These sections were presented to clarify the boundaries of leadership development research and practice, and to offer a context for a study focused on executive leadership development experiences in church denominations. The areas of distinction were highlighted in terms of the definitions and differences between leader development and leadership development, as well as management development and leadership development. The purposes, approaches, practices, and assumptions, along with the transitions which have occurred in the field were also discussed. Finally, the executive leadership definitions and constructs, roles and requirements, and the practical challenges related to executive leadership in non-profit/church organizations were considered.

Leadership development through experience was identified as a body of research which can support and generate new knowledge in an area often overlooked: executive leadership development in church denominations. Executive denomination leaders face challenges similar to their corporate counterparts in that they also are responsible for developing and communicating strategy, managing multiple units, and interfacing with internal and external stakeholders. However, their responsibilities are unique in terms of their primary operational objectives, biblically grounded values, and the nature of their relationships with subordinates, volunteers, and those outside the church. The previous efforts to identify lessons of experience have been fruitful. Practitioners and executive leaders now know that challenging assignments, developmental relationships, and other events can have a more impactful effect on learning to
lead than that of formal training alone. This knowledge is now influencing the way that
leadership development is conducted among corporate executives.

A study of the lessons of experience among executive denomination leaders can have a
similar impact. Given the unique aspects of executive church leadership, and the research
purposes, practices, and approaches currently involved in leadership development, this research
study should add to the general body of knowledge related to leadership development. It should
also motivate researchers to inquire about the nature of leadership development experiences in
non-profit organizations.
Chapter 3

Methods

Qualitative research is conducted on the basis of differing theoretical paradigms, approaches, methods, and data collection procedures, and is intended to answer questions about how a social experience is created and what it means (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The following sections clarify the theoretical paradigm, research approach, and data collection procedures which were utilized in this study. It also describes the research setting(s), the participants, and the biographical information of the researcher.

This study was designed to understand the leadership development experiences of senior executive church denomination leaders. Inquiry of “what” and “how” these experiences have contributed to their development as executive leaders, enabled the researcher to develop a description of the essence of their leadership development experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Research Design Overview

Capturing the essence of the leadership development experiences of the senior executive leaders selected for this study required that I proceed on the basis of certain philosophical assumptions, methods, and techniques. These assumptions and procedures are mentioned briefly now, and are further explicated in the following sections. The issues related to trustworthiness are discussed in the sections describing the research setting, background of the researcher, and validity issues.

I hold to a social constructivist view of the philosophical assumptions involved in creating knowledge, and I used a phenomenological approach to examine the participants’ understanding of their leadership development experiences, and analyze the data. Purposeful
selection was used to choose the research participants, and in-depth interviewing was used to collect the data.

**Philosophical Assumptions and Approach**

The creation of knowledge in this study proceeds on the basis of a social constructivist view of the philosophical assumptions related to ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, and methodology (Creswell, 2007). Social constructivism is a strand of constructivism focused on social process and interaction. Those subscribing to this paradigm seek to understand how the participants become aware of, produce, and reproduce social actions, and in what ways does the group share an understanding of a particular life situation (Schwandt, 2007). The final outcome is a constructed meaning of a situation developed through an understanding of social processes and contexts experienced by the participants.

Applying the social constructivist paradigm to this study meant that knowledge of the leadership development experiences of these executive leaders would be constructed through an understanding of the social processes and contexts involved. It also meant that the research approach used needed to involve methods that facilitated the capture and development of an understanding of the shared experiences of this phenomenon. The approach best suited for meeting these research objectives was phenomenology.

Creswell (2007) asserts that “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 58). Noting the philosophical position of Husserl (1975), Moustakas (1994) acknowledges the role of consciousness, intention, perception, and intersubjective truth in the creation of knowledge. “Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearance and arrives at essences through intuition and
reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). Phenomenology focuses on descriptions of experiences and not analysis or explanations (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological approach chosen for this study was transcendental phenomenology. As one of two phenomenological approaches, with hermeneutical phenomenology being the other, transcendental phenomenology focuses on a description of participants’ experiences rather than the interpretation of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). In Moustakas’ (1994) *Transcendental Phenomenology*, the researcher brackets, reduces the phenomenon, describes the structures of the phenomenon, and synthesizes the meanings and essences. These four major processes reflect Husserl’s (1965) approach to human science inquiry in which knowledge is derived through systematic and disciplined methods, and seeks the discovery of the essences of experience.

In the *Epoche* (bracketing) the researcher purposely sets aside her own preconceived notions and experiences in order to describe the participants’ view of the phenomenon. The researcher is continually in touch with her own thoughts about the person(s), issues, or situations being engaged. *The Phenomenological Reduction Process* allows the researcher to identify the qualities of an experience through constant review and reflection. This process results in a textual description of the experience. The *Imaginative Variation process* facilitates the development of the structural themes emerging from the textual descriptions. It involves the systematic consideration of possible structural meanings, and the recognition of the themes or contexts which induce the phenomenon. Time, space, causality, materiality, and relationships to self and to others, are thought of as universal structures which generate feelings and thoughts related to the phenomenon. As a final step in the *Imaginative Variation Process*, the researcher
identifies examples which illustrate the structural themes and support the development of a structural description of the phenomenon. Synthesis of the Meanings and Essences is the last of the four major processes. It involves the integration of the textural and structural descriptions into a combined statement describing the essence of the participants’ collective experience with the phenomenon.

Collectively, the four major processes provided a structure for inquiry of executive church denomination leaders’ leadership development experiences, and they were used to seek answers to the main research question:

What meaning do the executive denomination leaders ascribe to their leadership development experiences?

And the subquestions:

1. What statements describe these experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the contexts of and thoughts about their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experience?

**Research Setting and Participants**

Maxwell (2005) suggests that the most important consideration in answering qualitative research questions is the selection of times, individuals, and settings. Ruderstam and Newton (2007) advise that “a phenomenological study usually involves identifying and locating participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon being explored” (p. 106). In this case, I purposely selected several potential participants, and contacted them to determine their willingness to participate in this study (see Appendix A). In selecting these individuals, I intended to meet two goals. The first goal was to establish the representativeness of
the individuals and their settings, and the second goal was to examine a case central to the supporting theories: leadership development thorough experience and executive leadership (Maxwell, 2005).

According to Finkelstein (1996), inquiry of executive leadership involves an examination of those executives who are responsible for an entire organization. With the above in mind, I selected jurisdictional bishops within a single setting because they could offer information which could help me answer my research question and which could not be obtained from other sources (Maxwell, 2005). Generally, these leaders are responsible for leadership functions similar to the executive leaders of for-profit and non-profit organizations. They hold the title of bishop and have the additional responsibility of performing ministerial duties. Each of the leaders currently presides over several churches within their specific geographic region, and represents their respective diocese or region at their national conference. They are responsible for the implementation of denomination-wide strategic plans, and for the development of their own dioceses’ strategic plan. These leaders are also accountable for the ministerial, operational and financial progress of their diocese, and the selection and development of local church pastors.

Out of the 14 jurisdictional bishops contacted, eight of them verbally agreed to participate. After obtaining their written consent, I met and interviewed the senior executive church leaders in the locations where they act in an executive leadership capacity, and discussed their leadership development experiences. During this process, I visited several Midwestern research sites across the United States including Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Ohio and Wisconsin. I met with them in their respective offices, and toured their facilities. In addition to the on-site interviews, I observed and participated in two jurisdictional workers conferences where the participants led the jurisdictional proceedings.
Data Collection

In-depth interviews were the primary means for collecting data in this phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This form of data collection supports the researchers’ effort to explore the “lived experiences” of the participants (Van Manen, 1990). In this case, I developed a rich and substantive description of the collective experience of these unique leaders. In order to describe their collective experience, I proceeded by collected data using a modified version of Seidman’s (2006) in-depth interview method. The interviews were structured to first contextualize the respective experiences, second capture the details of the experience, and third encourage the participants to reflect on the meanings of their respective experiences. The interviews for each participant were 80-120 minutes apiece. An interview protocol with several open-ended questions was used (see Appendix B), with all responses recorded and transcribed. Questions asked to the participants generally lead to other issues and comments which I also pursued based on their relevance to this inquiry. Additionally, during and subsequent to the actual interview, supplemental notes and comments were made to help guide follow-up questions and record my initial thoughts related to their responses.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed with respect to Moustakas’ (1994) modification of Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973) and Keen’s (1975) methods of analyzing phenomenological data. As discussed, Moustakas’ transcendental phenomenology is generally advanced through four major processes, epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. More specifically, the respective steps within the four major processes involved horizontalization, delimiting invariant horizons or meaning units, clustering the invariant constituents into themes,
and the development of individual textural and structural descriptions and composite textural and structural descriptions. It concludes with the synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences. Recommended by both Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007), Figure 1 illustrates the entirety of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen analysis method used for this study.

**Method of Data Analysis**

1. First describe personal experiences related to the phenomenon being studied. (Epoche)
2. Develop a list of significant statements. These are the statements in the interviews which describe how the participants experience the topic. (Phenomenological Reduction)
3. Group the significant statements into larger units, i.e., meaning units or themes. (Phenomenological Reduction)
4. Write a description of what the individuals in the study experienced with the phenomenon. (Phenomenological Reduction)
5. Write a description of how the experience happened. (Imaginative Variation)
6. Write a composite description of the phenomenon integrating the” what” and “how” descriptions. (Synthesis)

Adapted from “Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Approaches,” (2007), by Creswell, p.159

*Figure 1. Modified data analysis, Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method.*

**Analysis According to the Major Processes**

In phenomenological research, the researcher conducts the study with the intention of describing commonalities of all participants as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Using the four major processes involved in transcendental phenomenology (i.e., Epoche/bracketing, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis of Meanings and Essence), six major themes and their major themes and subthemes emerged. My analysis of the data is illustrated below with respect to these four processes.

1. **Epoche** (set aside preconceived notions and experiences in order to completely describe the participants' view of the phenomenon)
My reflection on the phenomenon of leadership development through experience and development experiences of senior executive church leaders evokes recall of several past experiences and perceptions that I held and currently hold. My interactions with executive church leaders, thoughts related to their development and leadership approach, and my own experience of being developed as a leader, do affect how I view this research task, and these views could influence the analysis of the data. In order to meet the objectives of the first stage of the research process, that is “set aside my prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85), I have disclosed my background and research interest (see Biography of Researcher), and I noted my personal values, experiences and assumptions.

I believe that leaders at the executive level of church leadership should be trained and developed in order to effectively handle the diverse responsibilities of the position. These executive leaders act as both spiritual and administrative leaders. They are also perceived by their congregants to be both moral and spiritual standard setters. The correct impartation of spiritual knowledge, the multifaceted nature of the administrative duties, and the increased scrutiny of those at this level of leadership, suggest to me that the position is too important to employ a ‘sink or swim’ approach to development.

My observation and interactions with these leaders lead me to perceive most of them as leading from either a spiritual or functional strength. Some rely on their strength as expositors or preachers, their ability to discern spiritual issues, or their ability connect with people at a deep level. Other executive church leaders seem to exercise strong management, communication, or problem solving skills. In my opinion, the executive leader who leads with both spiritual and functional strengths is rare. However, the executive church leader who has had opportunity to
obtain formal education or training seems to be more comfortable dealing with social, spiritual, and organizational issues.

During this study, I continued to reflect on these values and assumptions and potential biases, and considered them as I performed my analysis. I also made an intentional effort to put aside my biases and concentrate on hearing and acknowledging the experiences and values of the participants.

2. **Phenomenological Reduction** (identify the qualities of an experience through constant review and reflection)

The phenomenological reduction process involved several phases, reflection, horizontalization, clustering horizons into themes, and the development of a textural description of the phenomenon. During the reflection process, I read the individual transcripts of each participant several times. During the horizontalizing phase, I identified all statements in the transcripts which reflected the participant’s leadership development experience. The types of statements identified are noted below.

- “So I observed his phenomenal leadership style and I observed his astute wisdom and his ability to articulate and speak in to situations.”

- “So, with that training, that influence, that African American college experience, those instructors down south, it gave you a whole different view of the world.”

- “I was Superintendent, what you may have called a District Chairman and I was also his State Secretary.”

- “I had a supervisor of women who didn’t want me.”

- “I said to myself, I can not, under my watch, allow the work of the Lord to diminish. And I began to start seeing moments that I began to understand why I’m here.”

- “When other Jurisdictions would lash out and say cruel things about our Jurisdiction, about me personally, about our congregation and the attitude of coldness, you, they could come to us and we would embrace them and treat them warm and kind.”

- “You’ve got to understand that it’s one day at a time.”
I noted all non-repetitive statements and grouped them into preliminary themes which reflected the perceived meaning of a statement made by the participant (see Figure 2). The list below is a sample of the themes; it is not exhaustive. For example, the following quotes supported the preliminary theme “change.” Some of the quotes supported the major theme “Transformation through Ministerial Challenges” and the sub-theme “Initiating change.” Table 1 illustrates the final themes, subthemes and the quotes associated with them.

**Preliminary Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative difficulties &amp; cultural realities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An appreciation for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciation for effective administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader intellectual exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental milestone (people believing in him)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery of leadership potential</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise of faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposure to facets of the denomination previously unseen</td>
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<tr>
<td>God's providence in development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized knowledge base</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal initiative to improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal view of bishop position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection—age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing one’s place in meeting a need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicarious experience of personal struggles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Sample of preliminary themes.*

- And the second thing was having the wisdom to know that you don’t come in to as a Bishop and change the whole house. You have to first level. You have to be on a good playing field. You have to level the field. You have to get buy-in.

- It’s got to be consistency. In other words, you can’t say today, it’s going to be water, and then you get a whim: “oh the Lord told me last night, it won’t be water, it’s going to be juice.” Then we go to juice: “oh, the Lord changed his mind. He said fruit.”
• Some things you have to let go and let God do it. It doesn’t happen overnight. These problems were not created overnight. You’re not going to solve them overnight.

• Well I think this jurisdiction was ripe for change. Because there was a level of, respectfully, there was a level of kind of lethargic might not be the right word, but there was a level where was not kind of progress that was providing inspiration and out meetings kind of experienced that by way of its attendance sometimes.

• And you continue to build on that. Every success you have, you need to be working toward using that for your next venture to help you get that through. Every time you have a success, it gives you a certain amount of pocket change.

In the fourth phase of the Phenomenological Reduction process, I used the clustered themes to develop textural descriptions of their experience. The textural description explains what the bishops experienced, for example,

The bishop’s leadership development experiences include the times where he was able to respectively observe and interact with his grandfather and mother, both of whom were deeply involved in the church. Referring to his grandfather, “he had to deal with socio-economic, racial, and theological, and cultural, and familial barriers . . . so I observed his astute wisdom and his ability to articulate and speak to situations.”

3. Imaginative Variation (develop structural themes from the textural descriptions)

The structural description presents the precipitating and supporting elements that account for the experience. It reflects how the experience emerged and exists. In accomplishing this task, I questioned the textural descriptions and imagined how the experience came to be given the factors of time, causality, materiality, space, and relationships (Moustakas, 1994), for example,

Observations provided a realistic view of the responsibilities and hardships he might have to endure. They forced him to consider how he would resolve similar situations.

4. Synthesis of Meanings and Essence

As the final major process involved in the Transcendental Phenomenological approach, the Synthesis of Meanings and Essence integrates the textural and structural descriptions, for example,
For the bishops, experiential relationships as a function of their observations of leaders close to them, the opportunities given and the knowledge imparted to them, is the establishment of personal standards associated with faith and values. It is contending with circumstances which don’t directly involve them, but create opportunities for lessons learned. Through their relationships they are made aware of the cultural nuances which exist within their tradition. They receive knowledge which can only be passed on by those who have experience working these settings. They are encouraged, and sometimes coerced into experiences which stretch them, and receiving information intended to prepare them for the demands of leadership.

**Biography of Researcher**

I am a 40 year old former pastor and current member of a traditional predominantly African American protestant denomination. I hold a Master of Divinity degree with a specialization in Urban Ministry and I am currently a doctoral student in the field of Human Resource Development. My interests in the subject of executive leadership development within the church stem from my experiences with the bishops from my denomination, and my views of the challenges, decisions, and the development processes involved in executive leadership of non-profit organizations.

My previous interactions with bishops, and the relationships built over time, facilitated access to the participants. Based on these relationships and those of a key informant, the researcher was able reach participants outside of his own denomination, and a strong rapport with the participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). However, it is possible that the researcher’s familiarity with the settings, and the roles, and culture of the participants made him susceptible to misleading internal impressions or statements made by the participants. These issues were addressed through data analysis and procedures designed to enhance trustworthiness.
Validity Issues

The conceptualization of and methods related to establishing validity for qualitative research is different from quantitative research. In qualitative research, attempts are made to address validity threats after research has started; relying on the data collected to rule out invalid conclusions. For quantitative research, aspects of research design and the use of controls are considered prior to data collection (Maxwell, 2005). The terms used to describe the standards for validation are also different. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use confirmability, dependability, transferability, authenticity and credibility, as terms equivalent to objectivity, reliability, external validity, and internal validity.

Although the conceptualization of and methods used for establishing validity are different, establishing the credibility of qualitative research is important (Creswell, 2000). In this study, several strategies were used to establish the credibility of this study. I used three strategies to test the credibility of my conclusions, rich and thick description, member checking, and intensive involvement (Maxwell, 2005). The development of a rich, thick description enables the reader to both peruse the details emerging from the participants and settings, and evaluate the transferability of the information provided. My description of the participants, settings, situations, events, and language will give the readers of this study an opportunity to determine the usefulness of the findings. Member checking gives the participants an opportunity to review and subsequently strengthen the credibility of the interpretations and findings. In this study, the participants had opportunity to review and critique my preliminary analysis. Finally, intensive involvement in the research setting facilitates the development of trust and helps the researcher to make determinations about what is relevant to the focus and purpose of the study. By building on my past experience of working with executive church leaders, I was able to develop a
stronger rapport with the participants and gain a deeper understanding of the culture (Creswell, 2007).
Chapter 4
Organizational and Individual Backgrounds

This chapter presents an overview of the denomination, biographical information about each of the participants, and a narrative of the individual experiences the executive leaders of the denomination have identified as developmental. These sections reconstruct the contexts and settings in which these jurisdictional bishops lead, provide personal information about their professional experience, and clarify the significant events that have influenced their development as executive leaders. The actual name of the denomination has been replaced with a pseudonym.

Church Overview

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Christ is a protestant Pentecostal denomination, which emerged from the deep-south to establish churches across the United States and internationally. The denomination’s growth reflects its collective ability and desire to respond to the socio-environmental conditions of its members, while maintaining its adherence to the tenets of its doctrinal positions and culturally reflective worship practices.

The denomination has played a prominent role as a leader in both civic and religious matters. It supported the migration of African Americans from the south, to all parts of the United States after slavery, offering itself as a haven and source of hope for those looking to re-establish themselves in other locales. The denomination also offered its pulpits to civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King preached his last sermon in the pulpit of the church named after the denomination’s founder, the day before his assassination in Memphis, Tennessee.
**Ecclesiastical structure.** The church is organized according to an ecclesiastical structure which includes the (a) General Assembly, (b) General Board, (c) Board of Bishops, (d) General Council, (e) Women’s Department, (f) Jurisdictional Assemblies, and Local churches (see Figure 3).

![Ecclesiastical Structure Diagram](image)

*Figure 3. Ecclesiastical structure.*

For the purpose of clarifying the organizational environment in which the jurisdictional bishops operate and directly influence, a brief description of three of the above entities is provided. These three organizational entities for which the bishops have a major influence are: the general assembly, the general board, and the board of bishops. This discussion will be followed by a more in-depth explanation of the scope the jurisdiction, the role, qualifications, selection process, and the responsibilities of the jurisdictional bishop.
The general assembly, which is considered the legislative and judicial authority, is composed of members of the general board, jurisdictional bishops, jurisdictional supervisors of women’s work, pastors of local churches and ordained elders, two district missionaries, and one layperson from each jurisdiction, and foreign delegates selected during the general assembly session. The general assembly maintains the power to define and uphold the doctrines and creeds of the church. The members of the general assembly meet at least once a year during the church’s national convention, and may meet for special sessions. Officers of the general assembly include (session) chairman, general secretary, financial secretary, treasurers, parliamentarian, chaplain, and sergeant of arms.

The general board consists of 12 jurisdictional bishops who are elected by the general assembly. The general board is led by a “Presiding” bishop, who has been selected from the general board, and elected by the general assembly. The presiding bishop is considered the chief executive officer of the church. He, with the approval of the general board and “subject to the will of the general assembly,” will have the authority to select a first and second assistant presiding bishop from members of the general board, and perform the executive duties required by the office. The duties include the appointment of departmental and national officers, the appointment of ecclesiastical and foreign jurisdictional bishops, supervision and direction of all church departments, and the implementation of the decisions made by the general board and general assembly. Furthermore, the general board maintains the authority to complete all executive functions according to the constitution and by-laws of the church. Members of the general board are elected for 4-year terms, and may maintain their offices until a successor has been elected. Members of the general board typically maintain their offices until death.
Finally, organized as a separate entity, the board of bishops consists of all of the denominations bishops. This body facilitates and helps to resolve issues which have been referred to it by the general board. The board of bishops is also responsible for reporting its findings on such matters back to the general board. Officers in the board of bishops include a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, and other officers that the board deems necessary.

**Jurisdictional scope.** In order to fully understand the context in which the participants in this study operate, and the essence of their roles which qualify them as executive leaders, further description of the scope of a jurisdiction and the role of jurisdictional bishop is required. The following discussion clarifies these imperative points.

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Christ currently has over 100 jurisdictions across the United States with several other jurisdictions in international locations. Each of the continental jurisdictions is composed of districts and local churches. The number of districts and churches within a jurisdiction varies; however, the number churches within a jurisdiction is typically in the double digits. Similar to the general assembly, jurisdictional assemblies include the jurisdictional bishop, who presides over the assembly, supervisor of women’s department, all local pastors, ordained elders, district missionaries, jurisdictional department heads, and a lay person from each district. Jurisdictional functions are primarily carried out by the jurisdictional bishop with the support of the aforementioned leaders.

**Jurisdictional leadership and responsibilities.** The jurisdictional bishop is selected by the presiding bishop of the denomination. The candidates are normally nominated and asked to present themselves to and their agendas to their respective jurisdictions prior to selection. Even though a candidate maybe favored by a majority of the jurisdictional assembly, the presiding
bishop has the authority to select the candidate of his choice. Candidates have typically held a jurisdictional office such as district superintendent, or administrative assistant prior to their nomination.

The office of jurisdictional bishop requires that the candidate meet specific qualifications and perform specific duties while in office. A candidate for bishop must be an ordained elder of the church, meet biblical, moral and ethical standards. The candidate must also be in compliance with the by-laws and procedures of the denomination. As the presiding prelate, the jurisdictional bishop has the right to select and ordain elders, department heads and other jurisdictional officers. The bishop may also remove jurisdictional officers, unless the removal is contrary to the constitution. It is expected that the bishop will represent the church with regard to the initiatives and objectives of the denomination, and supervise all churches and departments within the jurisdiction. Hall (2004) adds that the bishop who “superintends his office well” (p. 92) should live, teach and interpret Pentecostal tradition and scripture, and protect the apostolic faith. Should the bishop die or become incapacitated due to mental or physical illness, the presiding bishop, with the consent of the general board, may appoint a qualified successor.

In addition to the jurisdictional bishop, a jurisdiction’s affairs are managed through district superintendents. Hall (2004) states, “The superintendent is the bishop’s middleman and is responsible to provide leadership, interpersonal relations, boost morale, promote productivity and harmony in two directions: local churches and jurisdictions.” (p. 96). The district superintendents are appointees of the bishop, and have several duties. Among their responsibilities: the district superintendent attends to the spiritual and organizational matters of the local churches, presides over district meetings, and mediates disputes among the local pastor and congregation. Key functions also include communication of local, state, district, and
denomination wide responsibilities and mandates, collection of financial reports, and
management of the affairs associated with church construction and purchase.

**Relevant denominational and jurisdictional issues.** A discussion of the denominations
history, polity, jurisdiction and its leaders would not be complete without an explanation of the
types of issues which affect the denomination. Specific issues related to the church’s handling of
socio-cultural trends, the bounds of executive authority, and what Hall (2004) describes as the
“general superintendency” of the denomination have been, and will continue to be, important
factors which create leadership challenges for its executive leaders. Within the past 40 years the
church has had to address and establish its position on abortion, stem cell research, gay rights,
women’s ordination, and the limits of executive authority. It has been the bishops who have led
the church’s effort to respond to these issues based on their interpretation of biblical mandates.
Resolution to these issues has not come without struggle.

Currently, and in the future, the bishops will contend with elements of the
superintendency which threaten the long term stability of the church. These elements include the
episcopacy (i.e., leadership structure), as well as the denomination’s property, and financial
resources. According to Hall (2004), the church and its leaders must continue to build on its
legacy of theologically grounded leadership, making the effort to constantly seek unity of
strategy and mission, while developing a succession of leaders who are willing to uphold the
denomination’s theological positions. Leadership will have to address policies and practices
associated with the management of church property, specifically those that elucidate property
ownership and control. Finally, the bishops must work to encourage their constituents to
financially support the denomination’s strategic initiatives, while assuring the legitimacy and
mutual benefit of their contributions.
**Conclusion.** Executive leadership on the part of the bishops has not only impacted the denomination but society as well. Jurisdictional bishops in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Christ have maintained a position of prominence as both community and church leaders, and the denomination’s history and major events suggest that its jurisdictional leaders will continue to shape its future. The denomination’s organization structure also suggests that the role of bishop is more than ministerial competence; it is role which requires conceptual complexity, behavioral complexity, strategic decision making, and visionary leadership (Zaccaro, 2001). Managing multiple numbers of churches, coping with the polity and people issues which come with high level leadership, selecting and developing effective middle and lower level leaders, as well as communicating denominational and jurisdictional messages are responsibilities central to the role. Additionally, the cultural and organizational issues specific to the denomination will continue to require executive leaders who have the faith and ability to lead the denomination through present and future challenges. It is with these needs and circumstances in mind that research, which explores the jurisdictional bishop’s developmental experiences, proceeds.

**Biographical Information and Significant Developmental Events**

The following section includes a brief profile of the participants, including a description of the location where they preside, and their ministry related experience. This section also describes certain experiences reported by the participants during their respective interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to mask the identity of the participants.

**Bishop Charles Duke.** Bishop Charles Duke is the presiding prelate of a jurisdiction in an upper Midwestern region of the United States. As a member of the denomination’s general board, he is one of 12 bishops who serve as the preeminent decision makers of the denomination.
He is the senior pastor of one of the largest churches in the region, and has approximately 80 churches in his region.

As a developmental experience, mentoring came through relationships with several prominent individuals within the denomination. Prior to being named a bishop, he maintained relationships with a now deceased presiding bishop, and other jurisdictional bishops. These relationships have influenced the administrative direction of his jurisdiction. According to Bishop Duke, the current presiding bishop has specifically helped him by sharing “knowledge about leadership, program implementation, and the tools necessary to enhance and empower communities, organizations, and jurisdictions.”

Observation of his (pastor) grandfather, and his mother who a Supervisor of Women, provided a view of their approach to dealing with barriers and social issues. Speaking of his grandfather he said, “he had to deal with socio-economic, racial, and theological, cultural, and familial barriers . . . so I observed his astute wisdom and his ability to articulate and speak into situations.” In reference to his mother, he noted her “sensitivity to social issues . . . her spirituality, her level of commitment to God, and her faith.

Bishop Duke also benefited from holding administrative offices within the jurisdiction. Prior to becoming bishop, he held the office of district superintendent and scribe. While holding these offices he was granted a higher level of responsibility, and was trusted to manage key aspects of the jurisdiction. Additionally, the advanced age and infirmities of the previous jurisdictional bishop, with whom he worked closely, meant that even more responsibilities would fall to him. As he states, “I managed much of the things in the jurisdiction.”

He feels that holding these offices exposed him to other leaders in the jurisdiction, and eventually influenced their decision to select him as bishop. The offices also gave him an
opportunity to learn several lessons, and observe more facets of the denomination than would be
normally afforded to a local church pastor. For example he learned to appreciate the weight of
responsibility which comes with jurisdictional leadership and the importance of bringing leaders
together.

As a Pastor, you have people, and there’s this . . . level of respect that kind of comes as
our spiritual leader, our father, our visionary—but when you manage pastors, it’s a whole
different world. You deal with their egos, you deal with their visions, you deal with their
understandings—they don’t like to be seen as individuals who don’t know, don’t
comprehend, don’t apprehend—so you have to learn how to unite them together and
build a team.

The bishop spoke of having to deal with resistance to his appointment as a bishop, and
what seemed to be a personal bias against him. Soon after being named bishop, there was
resistance to his authority and unwillingness on the part of others to address some organizational
issues. Characterizing what he felt to be the sentiment of some followers towards him he said,

I wanted him as bishop, but I didn’t want him to lead us. I don’t want him to change my
comfort zone. I don’t want him to expose the methodology of what I’m doing that may be
unfruitful, ungodly, illegal, or not the best practice.

During this experience he realized the importance of doing his best to get “buy-in,” but also
understanding that “sometimes what you have to learn is that some people are not going to like
you, participate and work with you, even if you turn flips or whatever.”

Finally, the challenge of promoting change within the jurisdiction offered opportunities
for him to learn and use techniques intended to inspire people, and implement jurisdictional
projects. His experiences helped him to understand and accept that the pace of change is slow.
For example, when he first became bishop, he worked through the challenge of succeeding the
previous bishop. Given the apprehension on the part of some due to his appointment at a
relatively young age, Bishop Duke understood importance of the transition from the previous
administration to his. A poor transition—which in the minds of the older generation demeans the
accomplishments of the previous bishop, could further alienate him as the next leader and create more reluctance on the part of other leaders. He dealt with the transition by mentioning him and honoring the previous bishop in public settings. “I would put him in the high seat. I would celebrate him. I would say to them how people should treat the leader.”

**Bishop Lawrence Hudson.** Bishop Lawrence Hudson is the jurisdictional bishop for a Central Midwestern region of the United States. Prior to being named to this office, he has pastored churches in Texas and Missouri. He holds a doctoral degree in Religion and Society, a Master of Divinity degree, and is pursuing a second doctoral degree. Other work experience includes military service as a chaplain, and associate professor.

One specific experience and one broad category of experiences reflect the meaningful episodes which have impacted the bishop’s leadership approach. During our interview, Bishop Hudson described one particular experience which helped prepare him for executive leadership, and the many tough circumstances he dealt with prior to, and while being bishop. These experiences have helped him to appreciate the potential impact of executive level ministry, and the interpersonal and spiritual nuances which emerge while solving problems.

Through Bishop Hudson’s previous experience as a chaplain in the United States Air Force, he developed a practical and philosophical framework for executive level church leadership. The operational climate, including the absence of pre-imposed operational structures, and his internal acknowledgement of the status of his calling, helped him to clarify his role as an executive leader. Even though he operated within a secular institution (the military), he was able to exercise his authority as an officer (Captain) to develop broad-based, community oriented religious programs. Interaction with military, political, and civic leaders helped him gain confidence communicating with others in authority. The bishop felt that these issues forced him
to enhance his leadership skills, and helped him to gain a perspective regarding the potential of
individual executive leadership.

The specific assignment Bishop Hudson referred to was on an Air Force base, located on
an island off the coast of Portugal. Two major issues became apparent to him. “The morale of
that base was at an all-time low;” and “People [felt] isolated from the continent. . . . It [wasn’t] a
place where you could catch a train or plane.” Telephone service was limited, and the military
population was disliked by local residents. Disarray and hostility existed among the Chaplin unit.
It was during this time when he started to appreciate how his position as an executive leader
could give him more access, and influence as he addressed the need of the military and local
community. While there he met the Queen of Portugal, and interfaced with leaders of educational
and governmental institutions. Reflecting on the reality of his access he said, “I was a Captain. I
[wasp] the primary advisor to the Colonel who’s on that base, and he [didn’t] make any decisions
without consulting me.”

Although he understood and functioned according to his job description, he felt free to
act with purpose.

First thing that came to my mind was “you can treat this minimally or maximally in terms
of what you want to do.” . . . Practically speaking, nobody was over me. . . . And so long
as I didn’t break the rules, I could have just gone through the routine.

However he took advantage of the absence of a pre-imposed operational structure, and his
autonomy became a fortunate circumstance.

Then I also had the opportunity to see this as a magnificent opportunity. I’m in charge.
I’ve got the bars on my shoulder. [I can use] all of my creativity and sensitivity. . . . I can
focus my resources exclusively on seeing something magnificent happen for the
Kingdom of God.

During his time as a chaplain he learned how to develop a team, assess the needs of the
military and local community, and form alliances with those communities. He also learned to
“define [his] role . . . drawing on the significance of his calling.” These lessons have caused him to reflect his current role as an executive leader, and on how God has equipped and placed him in a specific area, at a specific time. As he leads, he is conscious of his theological and doctrinal positions, and his “existential place in the universe.”

Many lessons related to the handling of inter-personal conflicts and administrative challenges were learned while working through tough circumstances. Bishop Hudson described several situations which occurred prior to, and during his tenure as the jurisdictional bishop. He specifically mentioned a conflict arising from his appointment as a Senior Pastor at a small church in Texas, his management of a situation involving a negligent pastor, his handling of a financial matter involving a local church, and his feelings about an incident where his leadership was rejected. The conflict arising from his appointment, his handling of a negligent pastor, and the lessons learned are described below.

Following the directives of the jurisdictional bishop, he presented himself as the new Pastor of a small congregation in Texas. He was greeted at the front door by the deacons of the church who informed him that “the church mother said nobody from outside goes into the pulpit!” The church mother was the wife of the former pastor who had served the church for 40 years but was now incapacitated. Bishop Hudson explained the fact that he had been sent by the overseeing bishop. He also explained that he did know anyone in town, to which they again replied “Momma said nobody from the outside goes into the pulpit.” Reflecting on the conflict, the bishop stated,

In that case there was a clear power struggle, and I had a choice to either continue the confrontation, which technically I had the authority to do. Technically, I had the leadership, superior assignment there, but to me that was missing the point.

The point was to work together to develop a solution to the issue.
Ultimately, he selected an approach which he still employs. He chooses to seek peace by creating a sense of kinship, and by identifying spiritual commonalities. Reporting what was said during the conflict,

We all love the Lord, we’re all trying to fight together. The devil is so busy, and we have to come against him. I don’t need to go into the pulpit. Y’all got a table up there. I can talk from the communion table.

The novel and complex nature of a problem involving a pastor, who had literally moved into the church he was attempting to lead, encouraged the bishop to continually count on spiritual guidance for resolutions. New to the role of bishop, he quickly gained an understanding of the substantial effect his decisions related to personnel matters could have on his tenure as bishop. In this case he had to address the issues of financial negligence and extremely poor stewardship, with a pastor close to retirement age. The situation was further complicated by the abrasiveness of the pastor’s wife and his impressions of how the rest of the diocese leaders would perceive his leadership. “The eyes of the world were upon us so to speak.”

Even though he was the person with the authority to address the issue, he pictured and pictures himself as being in a “spiritually dynamic partnership, where God is the leader.” Eventually, the bishop did receive an answer to the problem, and worked out an agreement where the pastor could become a member of his staff. Summarizing the spiritual impact of this experience, he said,

That was an episode that I think has a continual guiding influence even when you have to make the hard decisions. There’s a way you can do it . . . if you use a certain kind of ethical, spiritual, biblical kind of criteria that will give you a certain sense of confidence.

Bishop Matthew Blunt. Bishop Matthew Blunt has been pastoring for more than 50 years. He is the presiding prelate for a jurisdiction in the lower Midwestern region of the United States. Over the years he has maintained strong relationships with local leaders of churches in
Church of the Nazarene, Assemblies of God, and Methodist denominations. The length of his tenure, and his reputation as being a wise and Godly man, make him one of the most respected pastors in the town where he resides.

Bishop Blunt’s development as an executive leader has been influenced by both administrative and internal conflicts. The administrative conflict stemming from his handling of a pastoral misconduct issue, and the internal conflict, emerges from changes in his views of what is important in ministry. He has also been influenced by his observation of local church decline in his jurisdiction and his reflection of lessons imparted to him by influential individuals. As a result of these experiences, Bishop Blunt’s leadership now reflects a willingness to act based on principle. The experiences have also contributed to the emphasis he places on leader development, and proper ministerial conduct.

In our discussion of what he considered developmental experiences, the bishop described an incident that caused him great anguish but strengthened his resolve as an executive leader. The incident was a serious misconduct issue involving a pastor in his jurisdiction. He wanted to have the pastor removed from his position, but conflict occurred when he perceived a lack of support on the part of the denomination’s administrative leadership. He also felt that there was a conflict of interest on the part of a certain individual involved in the investigation of the matter, because this individual was related to the accused. As a result he was personally affected by the stress of the situation, stating, “For about a year I couldn’t sleep at night. I woke up with it, and I fought through that.”

This event occurred just after taking over as the jurisdictional bishop, and it challenged his natural urge to accommodate people. “But in my earlier experience I found this, that I had one weakness, I tried to please everybody.” This issue caused him to question himself and his
leadership. “And I began to examine myself. Where do you intend to take this jurisdiction? What are your goals? What are your objectives? What do you want to do? What do you want to accomplish?” Wrestling with these questions and the circumstances involved made him to realize that as the executive leader, he needed to confront tough issues. “But I learned this as an older Elder, be a man. Stand up and face the issues.”

The second conflict involved his feelings about how to balance the denomination’s traditional perceptions of righteous living with the social realities of our time. These feelings began to surface as he considered the issues of allowing his children to play sports, and dress codes in the church. As a young minister he remembered the denomination’s traditional perceptions about how a Christian should act and dress. In the denomination’s interpretation of the Bible, children could not be allowed to participate in what was considered “worldly” activities.

As a bishop, he originally saw it as his duty to uphold these traditional perceptions. In reference to the issue of women wearing pants in the church, he said “Pants became an issue. I clamped down on that. In fact, I made statements at the old church [building] that you either come straight, live right, or hit the door.” The bishop has now become, and permits his leaders to be more flexible when it comes to matters like these. After he rejected his son’s request for his consent to play sports, he was encouraged to have a change of heart. “But the Lord dealt with me. Him not playing is not going to get him saved or not.” His understanding of the biblical priorities of a minister, now influence his reasoning. “In the book of Acts it says: the Lord added to the church, daily such as should be saved. . . . They had that mind. [They had] that inclination to bring them in and then teach them how to live saved.”
Having been born and raised in the city where he pastors and leads his jurisdiction, the bishop’s observation of declining churches inspires him to be more focused on developing effective leaders. Referring to both churches in his denomination and others, he spoke of the physical, numerical, and spiritual decline of churches in his area. In his estimation one reason for the decline is due to the death or poor leadership of the pastors, and the difficulty of finding replacements. He cited the inability of the older pastor to deliver constructive message to a younger audience. “And what was happening . . . was that the older pastors were more or less just preaching and sounding good, but the young people weren’t getting any principals.” As a third reason, the bishop suggested that there has been shift away from evangelism as a primary objective for the church. “Once the church loses its sense of evangelism, it’s going to die. I’ve seen churches die out because they dwindled down to old churches.”

Recognizing his opportunity to address at least one of these issues, the Bishop has purposely initiated an effort to develop young leaders.

When I became bishop in about the third year, I began to call young pastors and talk to them. And I wanted the older men to begin to mentor these younger men because I told them this—whether you like it or not, some of these younger men are going to replace you.

His strong feelings about the decline of the churches and the need for leaders, now compels him to identify leaders earlier, take a more active role in the ordination and development process, give younger ministers appropriate opportunities.

Bishop Blunt’s attentiveness to wisdom offered by several key individuals and has impressed upon him the idea that a minister’s conduct and approach to ministry does matter. “One thing I’ve learned is this: that if the preacher loses your respect, he’s lost your influence.” Two men in particular help shape his understanding of ministerial conduct. They presented an example of how to carry he should carry himself as a minister. The first man was the bishop who
ordained him and first appointed him as a pastor, and the second was his father-in-law, who was an evangelist and a pastor. Remembering their words, “Two things that will kill a preacher, that’s women and money. . . . People are going to listen to him but they’re not going to pay any attention to him”—Pastor, and “Son when you endear yourself to the people, they’ll love you”—Father-In-Law. Their advice now helps him to prepare other leaders for the challenge of the pastorate. Again remembering his pastor’s words, “You give God a life and the sky is the limit.” “When I ordain them [new ministers] and have an ordination service, I tell them all that now.”

**Bishop Thomas January.** Bishop Thomas January is the jurisdictional bishop for in a central Midwestern jurisdiction. He has pastored for a total over 30 years, and has served as a district superintendent and first administrative assistant. The region in which he presides has 30 churches. He is a graduate of a historically black university and holds a bachelor degree in Religion and Philosophy from this institution. He also holds a Master of Divinity degree.

Four types of experiences emerged as developmental for Bishop January. His matriculation in a “liberal” seminary, his involvement with mentoring relationships, and the circumstances associated with starting a church, and becoming a bishop are significant factors in his development. Summarily, these experiences taught him to appreciate his own attributes, and gave him early exposure to the functional and interpersonal demands of leadership.

Bishop January attended what he described as a “very liberal” seminary. This was a contrast from the conservative denomination he grew up in, and now helps to lead. The experience broadened his knowledge of how other traditions understand God, but it also confirmed his desire to serve his denomination.

So here I am now ready to just leave [the denomination] because I felt like it was restrictive to me. I jump into the most liberal place I could find, [and] that kicks me right back in [the denomination]. I wouldn’t be a bishop today, if had I not gone to St. Timothy School of Theology.
The experience included an incident which has had a lasting impact. A preaching professor challenged him to embrace his unique attributes, and not allow himself to be a clone of the other students. Recalling this event, and the professor’s statement,

Thomas, what you gave me was good. Thoughtful, articulate. . . . I can get that from any other student in the class . . . but that wasn’t you. You’re walking the word. You breathe the word. You talk the work. That’s what I was hoping you would give to this class.

During his time at the seminary he adopted a learning and self-evaluation approach promoted by the school called, “Action Reflection.” Functionally, it meant that “When you do something, then you reflect on what you’ve done, [and ask] How does that prepare you for your next action?” To the bishop, the value of this approach and his overall experience at the school is expressed in its practical influence on his ministry. “Your actions have to be reflected on. What are the benefits of what I’m doing?” He feels that his exposure to liberal thought now allows him to discern what is useful in his context, without fear of being labeled as a liberal or conservative. “So I’m not taking a liberal stand. I’m not taking a conservative stand. I’m taking a practical stand as to what I believe. So that’s how I lead.”

At an early age the bishop was exposed to the inner working of the denomination at the jurisdictional level. “At six years old, I started traveling with my pastor who was a bishop.” His relationship with the bishop resembled a paternal one. His father and mother separated when he was 2, and he was the youngest of 15 children. Organizational structures and cultural nuances became evident as he traveled with the bishop in the summers, and watched him interface with other leaders. “All of the district meetings, all the jurisdictional functions from maybe the time that I was 6 even to today had been shaped and formed by the organization . . . and because of the personal interest of [the bishop].” These encounters shaped his aspirations and gave him a head start in ministry. “So by the time I was 16, I was a minister; by the time I was 18, I was an
ordained elder; by the time I was 26, I was a pastor.” The manner in which he copes with opposition is also a reflection of the way he dealt with conflict and negativity among subordinate leaders. He now chooses to avoid public confrontations and tries to “win the heart of the pew and pulpit.”

The experience of starting a church with a close relative helped him to understand the impact of executive decisions, the difference between visionary aspirations and operational realities, and the necessity of sometimes having to sever ties. During his first pastoral assignment he planted a church with his sister. While working together, several issues related to the function and vision of the church emerged, and they had different ideas about how to resolve them. “She was in [focused on] evangelism, and I had a vision and she had a vision, and ultimately we weren’t going in the same direction.”

In his mind the future growth and progress of the church hinged on their ability to imagine the future, and understand the current operational realities of the church.

I think that she had a higher level of sense of spiritual things, and I gained from that. . . . But as I moved further in ministry, I realized [that] you can’t just be spiritual [we had] too many other issues that were going on, and some of them were simple issues like how are we going to pay the light bill?

Contention between the two of them brought them to where they both realized that a hard decision needed to be made. “It brought us to a point where we said, now we have both benefitted from each other, and she had to go her way, and I had to go my way, because to hang on to something simply for the reason, you’re my sister or I’m your brother, ultimately might interfere with where ministry goes.

As a result of his experience, Bishop January now understands the necessity of making tough decisions, even if those decisions involve the dissolution of close relationships. Having
gone through this experience, Bishop January is now aware of the ramifications of allowing personal relationship to interfere with the vision God has given him.

The process of becoming bishop, which began several years prior to his selection, has taught him lessons about patience, handling disappointments, and setting the example as a leader. As a first time candidate for bishop, he received the endorsement of 90% of the jurisdiction’s leaders, but another man was appointed. He was 45 years old at the time. Being passed over caused him to reflect on why he wasn’t selected, what he could do in the future to change the outcome, and what could have happened if he was selected. His analysis led him to believe that part of the reason had to do with the relationships which had been established between the appointee and the other leaders, but in his mind the most significant reason was because the timing wasn’t right.

Soon after the appointment was made, the jurisdiction split, with those who supported his candidacy still endorsing him as their bishop. He declined their offer. “I said, and that’s all that someone would want, is to come in here and see us fighting amongst ourselves.” Subsequently, he became the First Administrative Assistant to the second bishop who was selected. Years later the death of the first appointed bishop prompted a new round of elections, and resulted in both a reunification of the two jurisdictions and his appointment as bishop. This time he received 100% of the vote.

During Bishop January’s process of becoming bishop, he realized the importance of setting an example while in leadership. For example, in handling disappointments, he now expects those who follow to act with patience.

So now, when I tell a pastor, I can’t give you that, I don’t expect them to fly off the handle and start a big ruckus because if anybody should have caused a ruckus, it should have been the man with 90%. 
He expects loyalty. Referring to the bishop he worked for, “I worked as his First Administrative Assistant, and I worked hard. . . . Never tried to promote myself or my vision.” He also believes this experience ultimately made it easier for him to lead. “I was able to come into a situation that was ready for leadership and ready for guidance . . . that was ready to move forward, not with a fight, the ground work had been done by my history.”

**Bishop Charles Butler.** Bishop Charles Butler was born in Kentucky but raised in Chicago, Illinois, and has been the bishop of a central Midwestern jurisdiction in since 1997. This jurisdiction has 90 churches. He has been a senior pastor for over 50 years and attended Moody Bible Institute and holds a Master of Theology degree. Prior to becoming the presiding prelate, he held the offices of district superintendent and administrative assistant and is a member of the denomination’s Board of Bishops judiciary committee.

A personal awareness of his own leadership capabilities and orientation came through Bishop Butler’s developmental experiences. Three types of experiences have shaped his personal approach to leadership: his interactions with others, the positions of responsibility he held, and his role in the development of new ministry projects. Through these experiences, a foundation for virtue driven leadership was established.

Through his relationships with several individuals who were a part of his childhood, and a mentor in ministry, Bishop Butler learned life lessons and was given the opportunity to develop his own leadership style. His father and a boss created a structured environment for him to grow, and challenged him to carefully consider his career path. The Presiding Bishop of the denomination, at the time when he began to minister, permitted and encouraged him to use the skills he learned.
His father, who was a minister, demanded adherence to the virtues of hard work and truthfulness, and set a standard for the quality of his work. “First of all, we had to be truthful . . . We couldn’t half do things.” The owner of a fish market where he worked would let him run the store and talked to him about career choices, but he credits his jurisdictional bishop with having the most influence on his leadership. Saying of the bishop,

I think those years really prepared me for this next level . . . Had I not been with [him], I would not be where I am today . . . and I don’t just mean the position, [but] in the inner strengths that are needed to sit here.

Encouragement in the form of important assignments, and the privilege of accompanying the bishop on trips, helped to build his confidence as a leader. Recalling a specific instance,

I remember we went to [see] one of my friends who was being installed as a bishop down in Florida. We were sitting there eating and there was [the jurisdictional bishop], and the presiding bishop—all of them were sitting there. He comes to the table and gets me [saying] come on over here . . . and sat me right between them.

Bishop Butler’s reflections on these relationships have made him aware of his own distinct leadership approach,

What [the jurisdictional bishop] planted in me has come out like it has. I don’t sound like him. I don’t act like him . . . but I sure try to hold on the things that he imparted to me that was good for me.

He also feels that the opportunities created through these relationships have enhanced his ability to manage and organize. They have also helped him to demonstrate and communicate the importance of virtue based leadership.

A pattern suggesting a propensity to lead emerged as Bishop Butler held several positions of responsibility over the years. From the time of his early childhood to just before he was elected as bishop, he enjoyed being in the service of others. Describing his early experiences he said,
Even in my elementary school I would be selected for leadership roles. I was captain of the patrols. Going into high school and beyond, I had leadership positions. In my senior year, I was president of my high school class. These are things that helped to formulate whatever it was in me that I didn’t know.

Other jobs also helped solidify his positive feelings. As previously mentioned, he managed a fish market in his boss’s absence. He was a medic in the military, and held the position of Sunday School Superintendent and District Superintendent in the jurisdiction.

All of the positions presented facets of self-discovery, as they related to aspects of leadership. He found that he loved the idea of being an instrument of healing. Discussing his reaction to his performance of a medical procedure he said, “and the doctor commended me for the suture and stitches that I had put in [the patients] arm. [And I thought] Wow! This is me!”

During this time he also realized the depth of his love for people. “We were responsible for about 1,200 men getting medical treatment. . . . My love for people seemed to have been developed there.”

The bishop noted his involvement in two major projects, his lead role in establishing a Christian school, and his involvement in a building project. Through his participation in these major projects, he began to understand the type of initiative it takes to lead. He also became more aware of the importance of aligning himself, and the jurisdiction with evidence of God’s leading.

Although he is not a trained educator, he felt led to research the requirements for starting a school. “I knew the Lord laid it on my heart.” He spent several months reviewing the Illinois school code, and eventually accepted students. The schools effectiveness became apparent, as only 1% to 2% of the students were not college bound. “God blessed this work.” The building project was not as successful. Although this was collaboration between three ministers, he and the project struggled. “That thing almost took my spiritual life, beside the things that you had to
do in qualifying with the government, there was fighting among ourselves.” He eventually navigated his way out of the project, but in this experience he learned a valuable lesson. “Some things God doesn’t really want you to be involved in . . . the Lord had to really deal with me [with regards to] how leaders of the church should or shouldn’t be involved in entrepreneurship.” The importance of timing, and the leading of God, also emerged as lessons that he learned and now applies. “Timing has been a thing that I’m constantly learning. . . . He [God] taught me that there is wisdom in waiting.”

**Bishop Dr. Franklin Smothers.** Bishop Dr. Franklin Smothers is the presiding prelate of an Eastern Midwest jurisdiction with approximately 30 churches. In total he holds 13 degrees, including an Associate’s degree in Electrical Engineering, a Master’s degree in Ministry and Counseling Psychology, and Doctorate of Ministry. Bishop Smothers has pastored for more than 35 years. Prior to his selection as bishop, he held the office of administrative assistant. He also founded two churches, and developed radio and television ministries.

Four types of experiences reflect his growth as an executive leader. Through his relationships, observations of other leaders, the positions he’s held before becoming bishop, and the opposition he’s faced as a minister, Bishop Smothers has learned to process the needs and concerns of others. He has also learned to identify the requirements and processes involved in facilitating change within his jurisdiction.

Bishop Smothers credits his relationships with the previous jurisdictional prelate, and senior clergy who counseled him as a young minister with helping him to construct a framework for conducting ministry at any level. Bishop Smothers worked for 15 years with the previous jurisdictional bishop, as his administrative assistant. Working with the bishop gave him view of the depth responsibility placed on a jurisdictional bishop.
[I] learned what that level of leadership was all about, the demands of it, the preparation for it, the social preparation, psychological disposition, the responsiveness to the needs of pastors who looked to you as an up look to provide some guidance, some information, some training, preparation . . . those kinds of things.

Several senior ministers, who watched him grow as a teenaged minister, would share their personal experiences.

They would give me their value of wisdom; they were even honest enough to tell me where they failed and the problems that they had, and how they had to overcome to get to where they were, [trying] to keep me from making those tragic mistakes.

They would also challenge him to prepare himself spiritually and professionally. “And they would ask . . . Bible questions, questions about biblical characters, things in the Bible about signs and symbols and relevance until you became a student of the word of God.”

Bishop Smothers spoke of how he observed people as a young man, and now as an adult. His observations of the behaviors of others left him with strong impressions about what to do, and what not to do as a leader. Speaking of his vantage point as he observed others he said. “I was able then to draw great strength [and] information and of course there were some things that I thought may have been inappropriate. Good people, but not the best approach.” Two of the people mentioned in our discussion of his observations were his father, and his jurisdictional bishop. Both were men whom he had great respect for, and helped form his approach to leadership.

From his observation of other leaders he perceived a need for more personal development, balance with regard to ministry and life, and a more humble and service oriented approach to dealing with laypersons and pastors. Weighing the effectual and ineffectual actions of others has led him to modify the way he interacts with those he leads. He is more focused on listening to the concerns of others, making interpersonal connections, and discerning the difference between spiritual and functional requirements. Following the lead of his father, who
he knew to be a patient and focused man, he’s made it a practice to hear and respond. Speaking of his father and how he would react, “And I was able to incorporate that into my leadership style — ‘I thought about that, I heard you.’” Hearing the concerns, however, doesn’t necessarily mean acquiescence.

A lot of times I will say that’s a good idea, that’s a wonderful idea. Thank you for thinking of that, for your help and assistance. I appreciate you having that kind of commitment to the ministry, but I know that if it doesn’t add value, if it’s self-serving, if it is not going to benefit the body of Christ . . . I’m just not going to do that.

Sometimes the conversations result in a more refined plan of action.

Or I may say, rework this. See if you can come up with a better approach, a different approach. I think that if you did it this way, it might work. But I can’t do it that way. That’s not going to work. Then I tell them why it won’t work. And generally they accept it.

He feels that a stronger interpersonal connection helps a leader to know the capabilities of those who work with him.

The second thing I can think of as a leader is the ability to connect to people because one would never know what gifts and talents they have. . . . It’s very difficult to know and have your hands on the pulse if you’re sitting behind the desk and never get among the people.

Finally, having observed some of the pressures put on layperson’s and ministers as they abided by the traditions of the church, Bishop Smothers remains mindful of the standards for Christian living, but promotes balance. Referring to his experience of abiding by the denominations standards:

They wanted to make sure you were saved, so they legislated salvation. But that’s how we were entreated and it was during the time [when] it was our culture it was before we come to a greater awareness and be able to relax some things.

As a pastor and now as an executive leader he advises people to understand the point and purpose of biblical principles and “live a balanced life.”
Prior to becoming the jurisdictional prelate, Bishop Smothers held several positions of leadership within the local and national church. In addition to being a senior pastor, he was Sunday school superintendent at age 14, president of the young people’s ministry, junior pastor at 15, and assistant pastor at 18. As an adult he was an administrative assistant to the jurisdictional bishop for 15 years. He also credits time spent as an evangelist, and in the military with having prepared him for this executive leadership role.

While in those positions he learned to be sensitive to the needs of people, and to look and listen for divine guidance. A few incidents in particular made him aware of these lessons. When he first became pastor, he noted the insensitivity of those in authority over him as they made financial demands which put a strain of his burgeoning ministry. “When I become pastor, the first thing that happened was they came throughout the state collecting financial reports, when no one [had] assisted me in developing the ministry.” The bishop also said, “And they made demands of me which I did not fight against it—it’s just that they didn’t understand what I was trying to do in formulating a winning strategy for a young local church that I birthed through preaching evangelistically.”

As the Pastor of a local church, he recalled feeling isolated from the jurisdiction because of the limited contact with the jurisdictional leadership and the impact it had on the congregation. Speaking of the jurisdictional bishop and the district superintendent, “For many years he never visited my church. I had a superintendent that unless it was a district function . . . he never darkened the door, and it affected the congregation.”

The last two incidents reflect his view of being called into a specific type of service, with a unique set of abilities. He recalls hearing God’s voice on Christmas morning when he was 8 years old, and telling his parents “The Lord said to me, today you’ve gained a preacher and
you’ve lost a son.” He also recalls when he discovered and negotiated the purchase of a church building when he was 14 years old. “The Lord gave it to me [and] I just started talking. I talked them down from $85k to $15,200.” Later the congregation and his pastor, with the help of another member bought and occupied the church.

As he has held on to the impressions left on him through these experiences he has made attitudinal and administrative adjustments.

I promised that once I became a leader at any level where I had people under my tutelage that I would approach them differently and be more sensitive to them, bring some kind of stability to them that makes a response greater and better and more sustainable.

Acting in accordance with this promise he has adjusted the financial reporting structure, and has offered workshops focused on best practices. He also makes an effort to visit the 30 churches in his jurisdiction.

The final developmental experience came through the opposition he faced, as he rose through the ranks of the jurisdiction. In the early stages of his ministry, and to a certain extent now, he has experienced discrimination against him because of his age, educational, and work backgrounds. Describing the context of his early ministry,

There was a situation . . . where I was the only one of the ministers from my city, everyone else worked on public jobs. Three of the pastors in our city worked in foundries/factories. Another one owned a service station and on the side he did contracting work. I was the only pastor at the time in the city that was full time. I started as a full time pastor. They could never connect with that.

At the jurisdictional meetings he felt their animosity towards him, even as he fully participated in the jurisdictional programs, and met all of the pastoral requirements. “They wouldn’t even let me dismiss service. And you know that from the pulpit they were throwing out innuendoes. In the meetings, when they [went] into closed sessions you can hear it coming out
the door.” When asked about the source of the animosity, and whether or not it was education or age related, he responded,

> It was a combination of both. It was an age thing starting off. It got to be an education thing, and the more I progressed, the more empowered they felt to speak against it, until their nieces, nephews, or sons and daughters got to that point. Then all of a sudden it was wonderful, and they would have dinners for education, etc.”

**Bishop Curtis Lender.** Bishop Curtis Lender has been the jurisdictional prelate of an upper Midwestern region of the United States since 2008. In 1982, he was named as the senior pastor of the church he currently leads. Prior to his appointment as bishop, he served the denomination as a vice chairman of the General Council of Pastors & Elders, and as a district superintendent. He holds an Associate degree in Applied Science, a Bachelor of Arts degree and a received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1994.

Similar to some of the other bishops, Bishop Lender’s developmental experiences have come through relationships, resistance, and from holding the office of bishop. Through his relationships, he observed leader behavior, and grew as a leader. Encountering resistance before and after his appointment prepared him for the reality of leader criticism, and holding the office of bishop meant a change of perspective with regard to the struggles of the jurisdiction, and the role of the bishop. These experiences have resulted in lessons about how to reach people and influence the direction of the jurisdiction.

Three people have had a lasting impact on Bishop Lender’s leadership: his mother, a theology professor from Marquette University, and his Pastor. All of them offered him encouragement and support as his ministry took shape. His mother shaped his spiritual life, and his professor was voice of wisdom who, “helped to shape [his] whole social agenda, and make a spiritual impact.” However, it was his pastor who left the deepest impression on him.
His pastor was the jurisdictional prelate, and pastor of one of the oldest churches in Wisconsin. Lender was favored by the bishop. “He took me under his tutelage, and I served there with him from 1969 up to the time he appointed me a local church in 1982.” He traveled with the bishop, as he performed his jurisdictional duties. This experience gave him the opportunity to observe the way the bishop engaged people even when the encounter wasn’t pleasant. “So from being with him and being around him, [I] watched how he pastored, and watched how he taught people. He knew how to engage people. He knew how to be very direct without being offensive.”

Through his relationship with the bishop, he learned to love scripture and how to connect with people. From watching the bishop’s leadership style, he also learned how to delegate authority.

He was able to delegate, and he had an eye for persons who he believed could do it. Give it to them, stroke them, and let them go. So I’ve learned that, why do the work of 10 men, when you can get 10 men to do the work?

One of the most important experiences came through his opportunity to teach new members class. The bishop made him ‘Chairman’ of the class and he served in that capacity for 10 years. Bishop Lender said of this experience,

I was teaching that class and actually, I think I learned more from teaching the students than maybe the students learned . . . it was a two way experience of not only just teaching the scripture, but knowing how to communicate that teaching to people who were just coming in to the church, coming into the knowledge of Christ and how each of them are different.

Bishop Lender acknowledges that the direction of his ministry started to take shape as a New Member’s class Sunday school teacher and pastor. However, being bishop provided a different view of the organization, and its needs. “But honestly, some of those things that we’re doing now, I didn’t necessarily see it before becoming Bishop.” As bishop, he was able to see the
jurisdiction’s administrative struggles, and its need for change. Considering the effects of financial struggles within the jurisdiction, the bishop said “Looking at some of the past administrations, [I saw] that the financial strain on the jurisdiction did not allow it to grow.

Being bishop also shaped his views about the level of responsibility required for the position. “Well, when you’re a jurisdictional bishop, you’re a leader of leaders on both the male and the female side.” His perceptions about the value of successes within the jurisdiction have changed.

Every time you have a success, it gives you a certain amount of pocket change. Every time you have a failure, you have to spend some of that pocket change. But the more successes you have the more change you got for the next venture. And they’ll look at it and say, okay.

As a result of his change of perspective while holding the office of bishop, he has made operational and other mindset changes.

One of the bishops at our church said when we were at our institute for new bishops, he said, a bishop is really a resource person. And I said, that’s it, because, if a bishop can provide resources to pastors and to the people, then that’s going to make their involvement in ministry much more appreciated.

He has also attempted to meet the needs of pastors by reformatting the jurisdictions administrative functions, and has reformatted the way jurisdiction meetings are convened.

Bishop Lender’s believes that his past encounters with oppositional forces outside and inside the church have made him more resolute and wiser. He has learned to modify his responses to resistance based on the issues and persons involved. “You’ve got to know that when you’re a leader, people will take things out on you just because you’re the leader.” The bishop described two experiences which have contributed to his development. In the first experience, his effort to re-zone the church property, he found himself at odds with his alderman, neighbors, and the mayor.
The mayor had originally supported the re-zoning, but changed his mind after pressure from business owners. News cameras captured the mayor’s new position, and the bishop was greatly disappointed by the response, but trusted that the final outcome would not be up to the Mayor. Recalling the incident and the question asked to the mayor:

Pastor Lender said they’re going to build a church on this land, what do you say? “Well it just ain’t going to happen. It’s going to take more than prayer.” And when he said that, my heart dropped in my stomach like, because I said, he’s not mocking me, he’s mocking God.

A few months later the mayor resigned, after admitting to an illicit relationship. The next mayor supported the project, and with his support the project was completed.

Resistance inside the church came when he became a candidate for bishop. His mentor, and the jurisdictional bishop at the time, supported his candidacy. However, he felt that the older men in the jurisdiction did not support him because of his age. Reflecting on the possible outcome of his being appointed back then he said, “If I had become bishop back then, those older preachers would have fought me . . . because I would have been 42 years old, and they were in their late 50’s and early 60’s.”

During this first campaign another candidate was appointed, although he suspects that he was the most popular choice. “Depending on who you talk to . . . [they would] tell you I got the votes but they [the Presiding Bishop] appointed him because he was an older man.” He was instead appointed as the first administrative assistant by the presiding bishop, which seemed to be a consolation prize.

The experience of dealing with resistance has generated a few lessons which influence his interactions with people who oppose or don’t support his leadership. Those lessons and outcomes include the development of “thick skin,” acting with controlled responses, and being faithful and persistent in his calling despite the opposition. He feels that at this level of
leadership, the leader shouldn’t be too sensitive. “You’ve got to know to have thick skin and broad shoulders enough to say OK, but not make it personal.” Responses to attacks should not be reactionary. Sometimes they shouldn’t be responded to at all, but in any case the responses shouldn’t be vindictive. Remembering the words of his mentor he said “So if you react to everything people do to you, then you’re validating what they did. But sometimes you’ve got to either ignore it or become proactive in the way you deal with it.”

**Bishop Martin Bryant Ph.D.** Bishop Martin Bryant is the jurisdictional bishop with for a Western-Midwest region of the United States. He has been the jurisdictional bishop since 2003. He was appointed the senior pastor of the church he currently leads in 1987, and has been pastoring for 30 years. Bishop Bryant has held the office of administrative assistant prior to becoming Bishop. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, a Master of Science in Special Education, and a Ph.D. in Education.

Bishop Bryant’s developmental experiences have come through a difficult pastoral assignment, his role as bishop, discrimination, observation, and the formal training he received. The assignments have increased his awareness of the importance of good administration. The outcomes of situations which occurred while he has been bishop have helped him understand the necessity of making tough decisions, and the opportunity to watch other leaders, and use his formal training have helped him to empathize with those he leads.

The hardships of Bishop Bryant’s first assignment as a pastor had the effect of orienting his approach to leadership, and driving home the struggles of a local church pastor. Bishop Bryant recalled being commissioned for a pastoral assignment 150 miles away from his home, with the instructions to “just go preach,” from the jurisdictional bishop. Upon arriving at the location, he discovered that the church had many more needs than just a speaker for Sunday
mornings. The operational conditions of the church were poor, and the church had limited financial resources. Remembering some of the early experiences at the church, the bishop talked about how he came to know that the church was not insulated.

I was sitting in church and I noticed something move by out of my peripheral vision, and I looked around and I didn’t see anything. I looked again and I saw it going by, it was something outside. I was watching a horse run by.

He also discovered that the foundation of the church had been eaten by termites, it had no water fountain, no telephone, and the $20,000 property insurance was soon to be cancelled. He eventually called to the jurisdictional bishop to get some financial support, to which he replied “Well son, your own your own; we don’t have it.” Acting in accordance to what he saw and felt, his immediate response was to build the infrastructure of that local church. “When I left the church [five years later], it was valued at over $100,000.”

The experience taught him that good administration facilitates ministry. “You can’t preach when everybody is shivering in the cold.” He is now more sensitive to the plight of pastors who lead resource poor congregations within his jurisdiction. The bishop introduces the availability of resources during the jurisdictional meetings, offers workshops to help the pastor’s increase their exposure, and has modified the financial reporting responsibilities for the local churches with the hopes that they will direct the resources toward outreach efforts. This experience has also inspired to write and publish several books on church administration.

As a developmental experience, being bishop has helped him to grow as an executive leader by forcing him to get used to making tough decisions. As alluded to in the previous experience, Bishop Bryant leads a jurisdiction with limited resources. These conditions put a strain on the local church, and jurisdiction as they attempt to carry out ministry programs. In his role as bishop, he has had to address these concerns. This jurisdiction also presents challenges
stemming from stagnant perceptions of how ministry should be done. When it comes to missions work in the jurisdiction, it has mostly been inward focused. Additionally, outreach tools, social media and the internet have been criticized and undervalued, and some congregations fail to appreciate the necessity of an actively involved pastor.

After seeing what seemed to be a lack of progress on the part of some local churches and their leaders, Bishop Bryant questioned himself as to why this was so.

I had to ask that question; why would someone who pastors never have more than 10 members in 35 years? Is he not called to preach? But when I heard the man preach, he’s a good preacher, had a sound word. The answer was [that] they were maintenance oriented. They know how to maintain what they had. They weren’t outreach oriented, they weren’t expansive. They didn’t have an expansion mentality.

Bishop Bryant now understands that his role requires him to make decisions for the good of the denomination, jurisdiction and local congregation, despite the personal hardships. Remembering his feelings about an issue for which he consulted the jurisdiction’s leaders, conducted voting, and gained consensus for, only to hear grumbling after it was done, he said, “It was a challenge to go beyond how the enemy was trying to make me feel, and deal with what people needed . . . and do what needed to be done rather than what they wanted to be done.” He recognizes the need to demonstrate what change looks like, and to as much as possible give people a say in issues which will affect them. “And so my whole leadership style and my whole purpose is to empower them. And I found that is something that I’m going to have to demonstrate what that means rather than just say, go help somebody.” He also recognizes that the sacrifices associated with the decisions must start with him.

I did revival [an evangelistic church worship service convened over a number of days] last week and I told the superintendent, bring your jurisdiction together. I don’t want any honorarium, just give me one meal a day and pay my driver. . . . Give him $100.00 . . . and all the money stays in the district.
Bishop Bryant mentioned discriminatory two incidents which occurred within the context of institutions of higher education. Both have impacted his interactions with people, and thusly his leadership. The first incident occurred when he was a participant at a faculty introduction ceremony, and an indelicate remark was made by the president of the university. “And the president comes and says, now we have Dr. Martin Bryant; he’s our first black professor. Ladies and Gentlemen, we’ve got a black one, I mean we’ve really got us a black one.” The second incident occurred during the pursuit of his Ph.D. He had been warned by other students about the chairman of the department, and his track record of thwarting the progress of African-American students. Recalling what they said to him, “Bryant, you’re never going to graduate out of here because they don’t believe blacks have enough sense to graduate at the Ph.D. level. His fears weren’t realized as the chairman of the department suddenly died when he was about to start working on his dissertation.

Through these incidents he learned how to process the ignorance of others, and depend on God to work through obstacles. Speaking of the university president, and the palpable embarrassment of others who were in the room, “I let that roll off my shoulder; I felt sorry for him. . . . And they kept apologizing to me and that sort of thing and so that’s helped me be forgiving and releasing people with ignorant agendas.” Speaking of the outcome of his graduate school experience he said, “So I’ve learned to depend on God as I moved through those difficult moments, knowing how real He is, and how active He can be on your behalf.” Remembering these lessons have helped him deal with the interpersonal challenges he faces as an executive leader.

Bishop Bryant’s formal training as an educator and his experience training special education teachers has helped him to assess learning needs and deliver instruction to individuals
within his jurisdiction. As a result of his experience working the “multicultural exceptional child,” he had an opportunity to learn how to appreciate and assess the culture and values of people within social groups, as well as their different ways of learning.

Now in his encounters with the people in his jurisdiction he attempts to apply his special training, and use assessments in a church setting. Speaking of the church setting in particular: “I’ve come to appreciate that I have to assess not only intellectual abilities, but their cultural background? What’s their home background been like? How were they raised?” The informal and formal assessments provide information about why an individual might act in certain ways or require personalized responses. “So you don’t get surprised when they fight, have disagreements and [do] things that are disruptive.”

Finally, his use of the formal training he’s received and its usefulness among the church body has influenced his choice to make the pastors in the jurisdiction aware of how the process of assessment can be useful to them.

So I try to help Pastors in the Jurisdiction through my former training, help them to assess where people are and to not be so dogmatic in one arena only, but get a feel for where the people are and learn that and then try to teach them different ways of responding to the family needs.

Lessons learned through observation of his pastor, who was a jurisdictional bishop, have been incorporated into Bishop Bryant’s leadership style. While with the bishop, he watched as the bishop interacted with members of his congregation, and jurisdiction leaders. He noticed subtle differences in how the bishop communicated with different groups and individuals. “I began to recognize some differences as he dealt with us as members, and as he dealt with men in the jurisdiction.” “He wasn’t one for applauding you a lot and congratulating you, but he wasn’t one for beating you up when you did something wrong either.”
Noting the differences in the bishop’s approach also helped him to realize the differences between the roles of a pastor and bishop. “A pastor is more nurturing and working with people in terms of their emotional needs, etc. but as a bishop, I have to be more of an administrator.” Additionally, after observing the subtle differences in his mentor’s communication, and process of evaluation, Bishop Bryant now uses a similar approach. “I incorporated that into my leadership style—to listen, observe, and evaluate where people are.”
Chapter 5

Findings

This study grounded in the leadership development through experience research, set out to answer one main research question: What meaning do the executive denomination leaders (of a single predominantly African American denomination) ascribe to their leadership development experiences? Using a phenomenological approach (i.e., Moustakas, 1994, transcendental phenomenology) several jurisdictional bishops were individually interviewed to capture the essence of their interaction with the phenomenon leadership development through experience. Additionally, several procedural sub-questions were used to advance the research process and help clarify the essence of their experiences:

1. What statements describe these experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the contexts of and thoughts about their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experience?

This chapter thematically presents the findings that thoroughly describe the bishops’ interaction with the leadership development through experience phenomenon. Following a brief discussion of the analytical approach and validation strategies, I will discuss the individual themes and summarize my analysis.

Similar to the process involved in identifying the individual significant developmental events described in chapter 4, analysis of the data collected through eight individual interviews proceeded according to four major processes; bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). It was also aided by the use of the qualitative analysis software, Atlas ti v6.2. First, in order to become aware of my own views of
the leadership development experiences of executive church leaders, I clarified my thoughts, values, and understandings related to the subject (bracketing). Secondly, I reviewed all interview transcripts to identify and list the significant statements that reflect the bishop’s encounter with the phenomenon. The significant non-repetitive statements were clustered together as themes. The statements were used to develop a textural description (phenomenological reduction). Thirdly, I developed a structural description, describing how the bishops experienced the respective leadership development experience (imaginative variation). Fourthly, the above descriptions were used to develop a composite description of the essence (i.e., what? and how?) these jurisdictional bishops understand their leadership development experiences (synthesis).

The qualitative software facilitated the analytical process by providing space to store the individual transcripts, delineate and track significant statements, and record my thoughts about these statements. It was also helpful for the construction and visualization of individual and collective thematic networks and sub-themes.

Three strategies were used to confirm the credibility of my conclusions included, rich and thick description, member checking, and intensive involvement (Maxwell, 2005). The rich, thick description of the bishops experience, offers the reader an opportunity to scrutinize the details related to participants and settings, and to evaluate the transferability of the findings. Through member checking the participants had an opportunity to review and enhance the credibility of these findings. Finally, through my previous experience working with executive church leaders and my familiarity with the research setting, I was able to establish trust, develop a strong rapport, obtain trustworthy information, and refine my findings.

The following section clarifies the meaning that eight jurisdictional bishops of a single African American denomination ascribe to their leadership development experiences. Through
my analysis of the data collected through interviews, I have determined that the collective understanding of their experiences can be described through six major themes (i.e., Transformation through Ministerial Challenges, Dealing with Conflict, Experiential Relationships, Pre-Bishop Roles of Responsibility, Use of Formal Training, and Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop). Table 1 shows the themes and subthemes along with some of the quotes associated with them.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation through ministerial challenges</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial endeavors</td>
<td>“We revised the whole pastoral care program and began to interface with all of the elements. Not only the military community, the American community, the international community, and native community.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“When the Lord placed the call upon me to do a work, it was in the pastoral work and I shared it with my dad and we went out and my wife and I started the church.”</td>
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<td>Working through obstacles &amp; ambiguity</td>
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<td>“I began to draw on the significance of my calling. That brought into play my theology, my doctrinal position, understanding my tradition and existential place in the universe.”</td>
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<td>“So I had to find a way to assess the environment—spiritually and professionally, and then identify how do I fit in?”</td>
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<td>Exercise of faith</td>
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<td>“I cannot do that with His guidance. He’s got to plan for what’s going to happen here. He’s the shot caller, but He’s not going to do it, but by my submission and compliance. So I call it a partnership. It’s a faith walk.”</td>
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<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation through ministerial challenges (continued)</td>
<td>Making tough decisions</td>
<td>“If God puts something in your heart to do, you stay the course. You don’t allow your critics to stare you down.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I had to go my way because to hang on to something simply for the reason, you’re my sister or I’m your brother, [meant literally in this case] ultimately might interfere with where ministry goes. So we had to part ways. Later on, I understood it. I would not be where I am today, had I not made a hard decision.”</td>
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<td>“I had to be more prudent in my decision making because I could make something that would ease the moment, but it might damage me for the rest of my life.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Initiating change</td>
<td>“[For] every success you have, you need to be working toward using that for your next venture to help you get that through. Every time you have a success, it gives you a certain amount of pocket change. The more success you have, the more change you have for the next venture.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>”And when you get buy-in from those who are saying yes, let’s give it a try, and then when they try and they see the success of it, it’s a done deal.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with conflict</td>
<td>Resistance to operational &amp; leadership changes</td>
<td>“They were maintenance oriented. They weren’t outreach oriented. They didn’t have an expansion mentality. They didn’t like change or innovation and so I had to provide some models for them.”</td>
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<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with conflict (continued)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Some of those who’ve had a history of just being resistant to leadership all of sudden are saying, you’ve done a great job. Older men. Old enough to be your father. And you’ve seen some of the hell they raised with other leaders.”</td>
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<td>Dislike</td>
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<td>“And sometimes people use terms [in demeaning ways] for instance, they can say young, and young sometimes would imply a novice, inexperienced. ‘So, we have a young Bishop.’ But they don’t mean it in a complimentary way. They mean it in a demeaning way—as an inexperienced, novice guy who doesn’t know what he’s doing, and we’ll teach him a few things.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“Now after having pastored 25 years, I thought I had all the hurt I could experience in terms of what it felt like. But I never had my men—that close, just to say, I don’t want you as my leader anymore.”</td>
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<td>Differences related to administration &amp; tradition</td>
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<td>“It was our culture; it was before we [had] come to a greater awareness and was able to relax some things. . . . Of course in some ways I think we may have gone a bit too far in the opposite direction, but I didn’t die from it.”</td>
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<td>“Back in those early years and being under an old pioneer, they were very strict.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of formal training</td>
<td>Integrating individual knowledge</td>
<td>“But my theological, academic training, I think also contributed those to the integration of some of those concepts at an earlier stage than most.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“They gave me a system of studies . . . They showed me how to segment the scriptures and how to comment . . . I got out of it how to study the Bible.”</td>
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<td>Themes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of formal training (continued)</td>
<td>Framework for approaching problems</td>
<td>“When you do something, then you reflect on what you’ve done. [ask yourself] How does that prepare you for your next action?”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I’m still adjusting to that [the challenge of translating his analytical approach] after some 20 almost 30 years in ministry now. Yet I’ve come to appreciate that I have to assess not only the intellectual abilities, but what’s their cultural background.”</td>
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<td>Means for evaluating boundaries &amp; purpose</td>
<td>“So, with that training, that influence, that African American college experience, those instructors down south, it gave you a whole different view of the world. And so I think the formal and informal together created an urgency, an understanding, and also an enormous will and drive to do what I felt was always in my spirit.”</td>
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<td>“That whole academic setting, I think helped to shape my whole social agenda and as well as having spiritual impact.”</td>
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<td>Experiential relationships</td>
<td>Standard setting &amp; spiritual benchmarks</td>
<td>“[My] first influence would be my mother, who brought me up in the [denomination] and was really the anchor for our family . . . [she] inspired me to give my life to Christ, as well as pursue a positive directions for myself.”</td>
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<td>“We couldn’t half do things. We had to be thorough in what we did.”</td>
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<td>Vicarious experience</td>
<td>“So there you saw a leader overcoming barriers that were in some cases for others would have been insurmountable. But he was able to manage, navigate, create things with challenges. So I learned from him how to overcome challenges.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiential relationships (continued)</td>
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<td>“When I came here, people were saying, ‘where’d you get that? out of the Seminary?’ No, I didn’t get that from the Seminary, I got that as a child watching a wise young man, grow into a wise old man.”</td>
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<td>Wisdom &amp; knowledge</td>
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<td>“And so I was able to watch their dynamics, their religious modus operandi, how they really just carried out what they did. So I saw a side of that on a regular basis, by working very closely with the Midwest regional bishops.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I enjoyed you last night boy. [you] sounded like on old man, but let me tell you this . . . preach what you know. Stick to what you know.’ It made me study.”</td>
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<td>Opportunity</td>
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<td>“In my early years of pastorate, I’d been pasturing about 8 or 9 years, he [the jurisdictional bishop] made me a District Superintendent.”</td>
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<td>“The way he set me up, made it easy.”</td>
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<td>Mentoring</td>
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<td>“I had been pastoring for maybe three, four, or five years and [the presiding bishop at the time] saw me at one of the meetings . . . and he said ‘I want you to keep up with me. I don’t want you hanging back.’”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>”You can have the vision, but sometimes it takes another person to really open up that vision that’s in you.”</td>
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<td>Pre-Bishop roles of responsibility</td>
<td>Discovery of leadership potential</td>
<td>“It kind of was a path that I didn’t pursue, but leadership was entrusted upon me, and once that happened, then I really transferred some of the skills that I had used.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Bishop roles of responsibility (continued)</td>
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<td>“But my tour of duty in Korea, it really brought out things in me and made me see myself as being in some kind of leadership position, but I didn’t know what.”</td>
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<td>Sharpening leadership &amp; administrative skills</td>
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<td>“I learned how to run that fish market just like him. I mean the business part; balance the cash register; check the stock against the cash. Then I didn’t know what all of that was for. I didn’t see this day where I am then.”</td>
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<td>Exposure to facets of the denomination</td>
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<td>“I was very young when I became Superintendent of Sunday School. I was 13 or 14 . . . I was the Junior Pastor when I was 15. Assistant Pastor when I graduated from High School, going on 18.”</td>
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<td>Emerging perspectives associated with being Bishop</td>
<td>Acknowledgement of personal realities</td>
<td>“[Knowledge] of all of the district meetings, all the jurisdictional functions from maybe the time that I was six even to today had been shaped and formed by the organization . . . So by the time I was fifteen or sixteen, by the time I was sixteen, I was a minister . . . By the time I was eighteen, I was an ordained Elder. By the time I was 26, I was a Pastor.”</td>
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<td>“I saw this before I became bishop. I saw the absence of leadership, and what it did. I saw a state meeting where you could throw a rock and not hit anybody. I saw people complaining about going to a meeting . . . Then I begin to learn that innovation and change has to be gradual and slow. But at the same time, there are certain things that cannot be compromised, and you cannot bend or break.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I said to myself, I cannot—under my watch, allow the work of the Lord to diminish. And I began to start seeing moments that I began to understand why I’m here.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerging perspectives associated with being Bishop (continued)</td>
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<td>“And I said, I know what it is, I’m smart enough to be bishop. I’m popular enough to be bishop. I think I it could handle if I was bishop. But if they would have made me bishop, [at that point] those older men . . . they would’ve have killed me.”</td>
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<td>New views of the organization &amp; position</td>
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<td>“You don’t realize the significance of a bishop until you become a bishop, because pastors that celebrate their bishop pattern themselves after that, and the duplicate the same things. So everything you do, your thoughts, attitude, mentality, conduct, finances, family issues, struggles . . . where you live, how you act, how you dress, becomes a pattern and you have no clue of that.”</td>
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<td>Exercise of responsible leadership</td>
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<td>“Now you are dealing not just with the pastor, and the parishioner, but you’re also dealing with men who have had responsibility, stature, who have ruled over men, and that causes it to be a little more complex.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I want to leave something back here for someone else to go by.”</td>
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<td>“It began to fix in my mind, what can we do to build a future church? I’m concerned. I know my time, I’m not going to live forever, but what’s going to happen to the future church if we don’t begin to mentor these people?”</td>
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The bishops understand their leadership development experiences to have come through their individual circumstances, their processing of conflict, relationships, and roles, as well as their integration of the formal training, and perspectives gained prior to, and after becoming bishop. The themes and subthemes were constructed from their reflections of the episodes,
opportunities, and occurrences they considered developmental. These themes are briefly explained, and a visual representation of the six themes follows below (Figure 4).

![Development Experiences Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.** Development experiences.

*Transformation Through Ministerial Challenges* refers to the contexts in which development takes place. *Dealing With Conflict,* reflects the bishops’ interaction with a consequence of leadership. *Use of Formal Training* describes how certain bishops perceived the impact of their training on their leadership. The theme *Experiential Relationships* illustrates the effects of their relationships with other leaders, and personally influential people. *Pre-Bishop Roles and Responsibilities* refers to the duties and functions which encouraged the bishops’ discovery, and use of their knowledge and skills. *Emerging Perspectives Associated With Being Bishop* reflects the development which takes place as a result of their rise to executive
leadership. As these themes are further introduced and discussed, I will describe and explain the prevalence and infrequency of aspects of the themes, and describe the patterns I found.

(figure continues)
Figure 5. Major themes and sub-themes.
Transformation Through Ministerial Challenges

The bishop’s personal reflections on the contexts in which their development took place, led to a focus on the issues which compelled them to adjust their leadership approaches, and respond to the challenges presented. Prior to and during their tenure as executive leaders, they experience changes in their attitude toward leadership, the necessities of their role, and the priorities they pursue. Their encounter with, and hopeful resolution to difficult issues became opportunities to develop creative responses, internally evaluate failures, and enhance individual aspects of their leadership.

For most of those interviewed the types of circumstances encountered involved poorly defined roles, limited resources and infrastructure. At times they also involved deeply embedded religious and cultural traditions. These conditions appeared before and after they became bishop. Furthermore, during their interactions with other ministry leaders, laity, and those outside the church, they learned to cope with competing perspectives of how a vision should be implemented, and their personal anguish over decisions made.

Coping with the challenges associated with ministry requires their perseverance in thought and action. The statements made by some of the bishops reflect a dogged belief in the value of what they are attempting to accomplish. They have faith that God will miraculously provide resources, change the mentality of opposition, and continuously supply individual encouragement. Their faith undergirds their efforts to withstand factors emerging as troublesome challenges to their leadership. However, their faith is not necessarily commensurate to the circumstances presented at that moment. It is a process of internally questioning its individual degree (i.e., their own level of faith) during a respective instance, and acting based on both spiritual signs and facts. The process also includes their remembrance of the divine resolution of
past situations. These situations eventually become factors for initiating and sustaining momentum.

The following subthemes reflect the contexts, attitudes, and processes related to their experience with ministry related challenges, Entrepreneurial Endeavors, Working Through Obstacles and Ambiguity, Exercise of Faith, Making Tough Decisions, and Initiating Change.

**Entrepreneurial endeavors.** The experience of building an entity or ideal from its infancy is common among these participants. Church plants, stagnant and declining ministries, new para-church or educational ministries represent the kinds of experiences which create opportunities for the leaders to learn how to address and resolve operational and interpersonal issues. Generally, these experiences require resourcefulness, the ability to follow through on a vision, and the ability to work through and with others. The individual experiences the loneliness of leadership, and at times becomes the target of others frustration. They can also experience the thrill of constructing a working, and self-sufficient entity which resembles their version of ministerial calling. The experience of developing an enterprise draws out their abilities and role, and compels their consideration of capital, and the needs of their partners.

We revised the whole pastoral care program and began to interface with all of the elements. Not only the military community, the American community, the international community, and native community . . . and the importance of knowing what your role is was very important, because there were no documents or scripts that gave the particulars.—Bishop Hudson

Addressing the challenge of limited resources and knowledge also means taking the lead in order to acquire that which is needed. The following statement refers to one bishop’s encounter with the lack of resources.

And I tried to call back to bishop and say, “bishop, I need $200 for something,” and he said “well son you’re on your own, we don’t have it.” We couldn’t even get $200 bucks, so I learned how to raise money.”—Bishop Bryant
**Working through obstacles and ambiguity.** The bishops work through obstacles inside and outside the denomination. The obstacles come in the form of ill-defined boundaries, unwritten rules and cultural traditions. Opposition from individuals motivated by political aspirations also presents as a roadblock. Navigating the barriers means establishing their own boundaries, and understanding the culture and political landscape of the environment in which they operate. The bishops must rely on their own sense of who they are, remembering the formative lessons learned during past experiences. In the following situations discussed, the specific job duties and career path were unclear.

I began to draw on the significance of my calling. That brought into play my theology, my doctrinal position, understanding my tradition and existential place in the universe.—Bishop Hudson

For at least one participant, the absence of boundaries became a chance to exercise his knowledge and authority.

I [saw] this as a magnificent opportunity. I’m in charge. I’ve got the bars on my shoulder. All my creativity, all my sensitivity. . . . I can focus all my resources on seeing something magnificent happen for the Kingdom of God.—Bishop Hudson

For another the lack of structure left him wondering how he might develop as a young minister.

As a young pastor . . . There was no place for me to deposit my gift, my background. There was nothing for me to do because the way leadership was structured, it left many young people out of the loop.—Bishop Smothers

**Exercise of faith.** Pursuing ministry objectives is following an uncharted path without knowing the material benefit. It is the pursuit of notions imparted and confirmed first through spiritual means and secondarily through partially revealed outcomes. The exercise of faith is sometimes without previous knowledge or interest in the subject being pursued. Eventually, the impressions received become actionable knowledge. Referring to the idea of establishing a
school, Bishop Butler said, “The Lord just gave it to me. Never seen it before, but the Lord just gave it to me.”

The leaders constantly attempt to become comfortable with surrendering, and subjugating their thoughts about how they might proceed, and what the outcome should be. They learn to appreciate this element of submission, which may require the suspension of their personal feelings about a matter. The exercise of faith is an emboldening experience that has the effect of focusing the pursuit regardless of circumstances.

If God puts something in your heart to do, you stay the course. You don’t allow your critics to stare you down.—Bishop Lender

However, their misperception of an endorsed pursuit sometimes compels them to act prematurely.

One of my biggest weaknesses is, trying to schedule God on my time.—Bishop Butler

**Making tough decisions.** At the jurisdictional level of leadership the bishop’s authority is superseded only by the 12 member general board of bishops, and the collective authority of delegates in the denomination. Subsequently, the responsibility of making a final decision typically falls within their purview. However, it is the experience of making tough decisions during difficult circumstances, and regardless of authority level, which have influenced the way they lead.

The experience of making tough decisions is sometimes a precursor to alienation from a member, a church, lay leaders or pastor. Types of decisions include the closing of a ministry, removal of an individual from a role or position, and the assignment of limited resources to an indicated group, at the perceived detriment of another group. Making these types of decisions temporarily and sometimes permanently pushes the leader away, and forces their isolation.
Isolation based on a decision made becomes an unfortunate and hurtful consequence, for which the leader must brace.

Processing the isolation means wrestling with others’ perceptions about his person, particularly questions about his spirituality. Dealing with the decision making process also means accepting the weight of the responsibility, and acknowledging the long-term implications of the decision for the organization, and himself, and accepting the element of finality in the decision.

I had to be more prudent in my decision making because I could make something that would ease the moment, but it might damage me for the rest of my life.—Bishop January

I had to go my way because to hang on to something simply for the reason, you’re my sister or I’m your brother, [meant literally in this case] ultimately might interfere with where ministry goes. So we had to part ways. Later on, I understood it. I would not be where I am today, had I not made a hard decision.—Bishop January

**Initiating change.** The experience of initiating change as it relates to the process of dealing with ministry challenges means remaining patient while considering the notion that change is initiated and completed the context of God’s timing.

My mother taught me . . . Some things you have to let go and let God do it. These problems were not created overnight. You’re not going to solve them overnight.—Bishop Duke

Initiating change also means understanding how an issue involving change must travel through the web of tradition and religious culture, motive questioning, personal preferences and personalities. Pace, timing, and strength of relationships are weights on one side of a scale, and organizational decline, age, and society’s influence are on the other. Change is promoted with an appreciation for the level of readiness, and an awareness of the oppositional and influential voices. Efforts to promote change, also involves the delivery of consistent, thoughtful, and purposeful messages linked to Bible based images of change.
You can’t say today, it’s going to be water, and then say ‘Oh the Lord told last night it’s going to be juice.—Bishop Duke

Buy-in, feedback, and contrary views are accepted, but the bishops try to mitigate situations which may slow down momentum toward change; feeling that successes build positive momentum and facilitate change, but failures make change more difficult.

You don’t let other people chair your meetings. You have to chair your own meeting. Because you’ve got to keep the spirit of what you are doing. You’ve got to channel the direction because you have an anticipated outcome.—Bishop Duke

[For] every success you have, you need to be working toward using that for your next venture to help you get that through. Every time you have a success, it gives you a certain amount of pocket change. The more success you have, the more change you have for the next venture.—Bishop Lender

As a result of their experience of dealing with ministerial challenges the bishops learned several lessons which influence the way they lead. Starting and enhancing their own ministries, and working through the challenges of poorly defined boundaries have encouraged self-definition of their roles. It has given them practice in creating objectives, if not organizational objectives, personal ones. Through these contexts, changes in attitude, and processes they learn to work within their own passions and skillsets. Additionally, exercising their faith encourages tenacity, but it also helps them to hold an ideal loosely. An impression of God’s timing, direction, and provision, refreshes their pursuit of new endeavors and helps them recover from failed ones. After making the tough decisions and taking the heat for making them, they are learn to cope with the personal impact their decisions, and the necessity of standing by them, even when the decisions may make them object of unfair criticism. Finally, initiating and enduring the process of change has made them more aware of the importance of timing and the necessity of building momentum for change.
Dealing With Conflict

Conflict is a natural occurrence for those in leadership, but for the bishops the effects of conflict is veiled by the biblically based notions of kindness, forbearance, and forgiveness. Despite their status as religious leaders, in religious organizations, they must deal with conflict. Clashes with leaders of their own rank and above, uncomfortable encounters with lay persons, pastors, and those outside the church are a reality. Interpersonal conflicts arise when changes related to administration become apparent to the uninformed, misinformed or reluctant. Intrapersonal conflicts within the leader himself emerge when the bishop must consider their own position on culture related issues. It is during these types conflicts, both before and after their selection as bishops, where they develop a subtle tolerance for the inevitable external and internal skirmishes.

Managing the effects of conflict and contentious emotions directed toward them is a cycle of reflection, recovery, and the application of faith. When disputes happen, they attempt to understand its emotional and/or spiritual origin. During interpersonal conflict, they internally assess their own emotional status, and that of the disputing individual. Intrapersonal conflicts involve an assessment of their own position on an issue, and their consideration of how they would interpret the crux of the conflict given their understanding of biblical principles.

Reflection on the spiritual implications of the conflict proceeds in light of their belief in the possible influence of negative spiritual forces opposed to the progress of their mission. Recovery means shaking off the sting of a perceived attack, refocusing on a resolution, or continuing to follow through on the details of a plan. The recovery effort is sometimes intruded upon by bitter feelings. Finally, it is the exercise of faith which helps them to contextualize the struggle.
The conflicts, which are interpersonal and intrapersonal in nature, have been categorized into subthemes. The subthemes Resistance to Operational and Leadership Changes, and Dislike, indicate sources of interpersonal conflicts the bishops have learned to deal with, and the subtheme Differences Related to Administration and Tradition indicate the intrapersonal conflicts.

**Resistance to operational and leadership changes.** The bishops discussed two types of changes which initiate interpersonal conflict, operational and leadership changes. Dealing with conflict rising from operational and leadership changes is drawing the ire of people who like things the way they are and may not be able to see the jurisdiction from an executive leadership perspective. It is experiencing pushback for attempting to address jurisdictional problems and issues within the local church, but clashing with factions who represent either side. Especially for leadership changes, it means working within the authority of the position, but having to deal with the implications of a poorly received pastoral placement or officer appointment.

Operational and leadership changes specifically mentioned by the bishops which caused conflict involved the placement of a new pastor, a request to add forms of new media in order to increase exposure and bolster outreach, and the relocation of a jurisdictional meeting place because of the level of disrepair and high cost. Speaking in regard to a pastor appointment, Bishop Bryant said,

I appointed a young man to [a church] who said that they didn’t want him because they were used to running the church themselves. It had five members. They even wrote me a letter a copied [the presiding bishop]. I had a meeting with them ‘why don’t you want him here?’ Well we don’t think he’s mature enough. The man [was] 50 years old. When I installed him, the church mother ran out of the building crying.

Speaking about a congregation’s reluctance to change Bishop Bryant said,
They were maintenance oriented. They weren’t outreach oriented. They didn’t have an expansion mentality. They didn’t like change or innovation and so I had to provide some models for them.

**Dislike.** The most interesting source of interpersonal conflict, especially given the nature of the organization type, is captured in the subtheme: Dislike. A couple of the bishops discussed resentment aimed at them for reasons either beyond their personal control, or simply because of jealousy. Some of the most critical comments and offenses came during times when they were considered candidates for bishop, and during the first few years after they became bishop. For those interviewed, most of those comments and negative experiences pertained to their age.

And sometimes people use terms [in demeaning ways] for instance, they can say young, and young sometimes would imply a novice, inexperienced. “So, we have a young Bishop.” But they don’t mean it in a complimentary way. They mean it in a demeaning way—as an inexperienced, novice guy who doesn’t know what he’s doing, and we’ll teach him a few things.—Bishop Duke

Bishop Smothers discussing impression of why animosity was directed toward him said,

> It was an age thing starting off—then it got to be an educational thing. The more I progressed [educationally] the more empowered they felt to speak against it, until their nieces, nephews, or sons and daughters got to that point—then all of a sudden it was a wonder and they would have dinners for education, etc.

> Similar to the experience of making tough decisions, enduring the experience of being disliked is, knowing that they will be a target of criticism simply because they are in a position of leadership. It is becoming accustomed to subtle and not so subtle challenges to their authority, and at the same time trying to exercise restraint when responding to those challenges. It is learning to reconcile and reassure oneself that ‘I haven’t done anything wrong.’

> You’ve got to know that when you’re the leader, people will take things out on you just because you are the leader.—Bishop Lender

> One of those guys told me I liked your daddy a lot better that I like you. I told him, ‘that makes two of us,’ but unfortunately he’s not with us anymore.” Personality issues, there’s absolutely nothing that you could really do without compromising your own integrity to satisfy them.—Bishop Hudson
From the perspective of being an executive ministerial leader, and dealing with conflict, it is
appreciating that,

You’re his pastor too.—Bishop Lender

**Differences related to administration and tradition.** The bishops also struggle with
internal conflicts. These conflicts emerge when they hold views different from those reflected by
the culture or administrative policy. Subsequently, their thoughts about how to lead in spite of
their differences weigh on them. It causes them to either reconcile with the tradition, policy or
interpretation of the Bible, or figuratively queue the issue until an answer is revealed. Their
internal conflict reconciliation means trying to understand how and why the rituals, behaviors,
beliefs, and policies were formed, and considering their own understanding of how God wants
them to respond in their current context. An unresolved issue orbits their conscious, especially
when circumstances or the people affected prompt their recall of problematic details. The
prompts then trigger a reminder for them surrender the issue to a higher power.

Generally two kinds of issues were mentioned by the bishops as antecedents to their
struggle. Issues related to biblical interpretation, and administrative actions and policy.

Specifically, the interpretation issues related to the behavioral expression of the church’s
interpretation of biblical conduct, and a situation where one of the bishops felt unsupported by
the administration.

And they were hard on sports . . . children playing sports . . . didn’t want them involved.
So I came up under that teaching. So my son brought me a consent form to sign. [I said]
nope! But the Lord dealt with me [on that].—Bishop Blunt

Referring to the church’s past position on certain non-church related activities, what appears as
his reconciliatory process, Bishop Smothers said,

It was our culture; it was before we [had] come to a greater awareness and was able to
relax some things. . . . Of course in some ways I think we may have gone a bit too far in
the opposite direction, but I didn’t die from it. I never told the young people they couldn’t
go bowling, or skating and do those kinds of things, and I was blessed to have a healthy
congregation because I recognized that some of the things that I was taught, were taught
in earnest, but may not have been the full measure.

Bishop Blunt’s internal struggle to deal with a matter related to the misconduct of one of the
ministers in his jurisdiction, and the feeling of being unsupported is reflected in following quote,

   For about a year, I couldn’t sleep at night. I woke up with it. . . . And I had a very
   uncomfortable taste in my mouth, and I had to come back and check myself. I said Lord,
   what am I doing that I need to stop doing? What is it that I’m not doing, that I ought to be
doing?

   As one bishop put it “absorbing force, redirecting power is really a more productive use
of energy.” The experience of dealing with conflict is developmental in that the participants have
learned to redirect hostile and destructive energy. Resistance to change, rejection, and criticism
directed toward them is passed on, and translated by their faith. They try to understand the reality
of ignorance, and the normal condition of reluctance. Tactically, challenges to their leadership
are dealt with through consensus building and cooperation, confrontations draw situational and
controlled responses. The intrapersonal conflicts are also resolved through the exercise of their
faith. They seek and hope to stand by what they feel is righteous.

   While they acknowledge that their intention is not to become hardened or insensitive,
over time dealing with conflict has had the effect of making them more resolute. This researcher
also believes that this is an experience which could be further probed, as the tone of their self-
reported responses seemed extremely positive and optimistic. In some ways, their description of
the strategies they use to cope with interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict sounds hopeful and
revisionary.
Use of Formal Training

Most of the responses to questions designed to understand the bishop’s leadership development experiences pertained to their interaction with people, or the incidents which occurred before or after they became bishop. Although, this is consistent with the nature of the responses given in the previous studies of leadership development through experience, this fact did surprise me given the educational backgrounds of those interviewed. However, after some prompting a few did elaborate on how their formal training has contributed to their development. The theme Use of Formal Training refers to the personal value of their formal training. The bishops reflected on how the instruction given in a formal context was more than pedantic exercise. Formal training was, and is, a foundation and framework used to view and resolve interpersonal and organizational issues.

The bishops’ formal education and training came through various institutions, religious and otherwise. A couple of bishops also mentioned their continued pursuit of education through workshops and seminars. One mentioned the importance of the leadership training he received as an officer in the United States Air Force. As described in their profiles most of them have an advanced or basic degree. These degrees were obtained through Bible school, seminary or secular institutions. However, it is not only the content delivered which has influenced their leadership. They have been influenced by the combination of the content and context in which the formal lessons were learned.

And so I think the formal and informal together created an urgency an understanding, and also an enormous will and drive to do what I felt was always in my spirit.—Bishop Duke

The following sub-themes describe how the overall experience of receiving formal training comes into play, Integrating Individual Knowledge, Framework for Approaching Problems, and Means for Evaluating Boundaries and Purpose.
Integrating individual knowledge. This sub-theme illustrates the process of accessing the knowledge gained through the bishop’s respective educational experiences and applying it in ministry. The bishops integrate this formal knowledge with their impressions of the nature of their calling, and the needs of those who they serve.

They gave me a system of studies. . . . They showed me how to segment the scriptures and how to comment . . . I got out of it how to study the Bible.—Bishop Butler

[Becoming a clinical psychologist] added value to what I was doing because I could better understand human behavior.—Bishop Smothers

Their individual knowledge adds to their confidence as they attempt to handle new challenges. It creates a sense of balance, informs their judgment, and provides clues about how and why people act in certain ways. Knowledge of doctrine, theology, behavioral science and organizational dynamics also allows helps them to see their jurisdictions from a more informed perspective. Finally, their knowledge allows them to teach other leaders within the jurisdiction and denomination.

Framework for approaching problems. Similar to the use of individual knowledge, using a framework for approaching problems means using their knowledge to develop a strategy for addressing people needs and ministry objectives. However, applying a formal framework can be difficult. In some situations formally derived frameworks can challenge the sensibilities of those who must have “proof” of the leader’s submission to the direction of God. The framework must be perceived as spiritually originated, compatible with church culture, or at the very least endorsed by someone followers trust. Given these implications, they must consider the expedience of applying and announcing the use of a formal framework. The explanation and implementation of the formal framework must be veiled or couched in language which doesn’t distract the individuals involved, and at other times the details may not discussed at all.
Depending on their educational backgrounds and experiences while in school, the bishops respectively use the analytical techniques associated with that body of knowledge. For example, one of the participants described his use of knowledge related to culture, personality, and intellectual ability. He has used the knowledge to prepare himself and the church to deal with the issues associated with broken families. While he does acknowledge that his first attempts to directly apply what he learned through his formal education in a church setting has been difficult, he has learned to translate and modify the techniques involved to fit his context.

I’m still adjusting to that [the challenge of translating his analytical approach] after some 20 almost 30 years in ministry now. Yet I’ve come to appreciate that I have to assess not only the intellectual abilities, but what’s their cultural background.—Bishop Bryant

Applying a framework learned in a formal setting also meant using a framework for understanding the implications of his actions and the actions of others. The seminary that Bishop January attended called this approach “action reflection.”

When you do something, then you reflect on what you’ve done. [ask yourself] How does that prepare you for your next action?—Bishop January

**Means for evaluating boundaries.** Time spent in academic settings has had the effect of shaping the bishops thoughts about the kinds of ministries they pursue, and how they serve. As a result of their experience, they are more aware of their spiritual and personal boundaries, and purpose. Their experience in those settings didn’t necessarily convince them of their calling, but for a couple of bishops it helped them to form ideas about their ministry direction.

I think what happened is that between the lean in Psychology, the lean in business administration, and the quest and search for identity [He questioned] what is it that the Lord is saying for me to do?—Bishop Duke

That whole academic setting I think help to shape my whole social agenda, and had a spiritual impact.—Bishop Lender
As a developmental experience, their time in those settings served as a preview for their current individual ministry passions. Their respective focuses related to Christian Education, social work, and administration and leadership development within the church, are reflections of the bishops formal educational experiences.

Past interactions with instructors, and challenges to their doctrinal positions forced at least of the bishop’s to view their beliefs from perspectives they had not considered previously. They are now able to clarify the boundaries of their theological and doctrinal positions, and make decisions based on their convictions. The following statement made by Bishop January reflects his experience in seminary and the impact it had on him.

So here I am, now ready to just get out of the [denomination], because I felt like it was too restrictive for me. I went there [seminary] on my way out of the door [of the denomination]. [I] get to the most liberal place I could find, and they kick me right back into the denomination.—Bishop January

The bishops’ use of formal training is developmental in that they can approach and analyze a situation with the insight gained through their education. Although the approach is individualized and based on the specific knowledge they acquired over time, their use of that individualized knowledge is a common experience. The successful application of knowledge builds confidence; theirs and that of those who follow. Use of the lessons learned during their formal training affirms their ministerial boundaries and helps them to set a course for their jurisdictions. It gives them criteria for knowing if an initiative is accomplishing its purpose.

Experiential Relationships

Perhaps the richest theme associated with the bishops common experience with the phenomenon of leadership development through experience is experiential relationships. All of the bishops recalled long and short-term encounters with individuals who have strongly
influenced their approach and thoughts about leadership. Among the various types of relationships, all of them spoke of their relationships with other jurisdictional bishops prior to their appointment. The opportunities to observe the executive leader’s behaviors, listen to the wisdom offered, and serve, came as they watched the leaders conduct meetings, ate and traveled together. Prominent relationships with their pastors and family members were also described. The lessons learned during their encounters with all of the individuals mentioned, are manifest in their current behaviors, and in the expectations they have for those they lead.

The theme experiential relationships, is a reflection of the ways in which the bishops have been influenced by individuals significant to them. It clarifies the types of knowledge and opportunities that came as a result of these relationships. For the bishops, experiential relationships, is the establishment of personal standards associated with faith and values. It is contending with circumstances which don’t directly involve them, but create opportunities for lessons learned through those they are close to. Through their relationships they are made aware of the cultural nuances which exist within their tradition. They receive knowledge which can only be passed on by those who have experience working these settings. It is being encouraged, and sometimes coerced into experiences which stretch them, and receiving information intended to prepare them for the demands of leadership. The sub-themes, Standard Setting and Spiritual Benchmarks, Vicarious Experiences, Wisdom and Knowledge, Opportunity, and Mentoring, further elaborate on this theme.

**Standard setting and spiritual benchmarks.** The experience of standard setting and spiritual benchmarks is the experience of interacting with individuals who modeled and demanded integrity. It is being encouraged at a young age to give their best effort regardless of the task. Through conversations, object lessons as well as stern discipline, the values of their
mentors are transferred. Furthermore, during their interactions, they witness examples of faithfulness despite personal hardships.

For the participants, being subject to the wishes and actions of their parents, pastors, mentors, and jurisdictional leaders meant gleaning from them their idea of what is acceptable behavior. Most of the bishops had someone in their lives that lived out their faith and encouraged them to do the same.

Her spirituality [his mother], her level of commitment to God, her faith . . . her unfeigned faith, and then my father’s tenacity. His stress of education and readiness . . . and his whole demeanor, created an assurance . . . you can do it.—Bishop Duke

[My] first influence would be my mother, who brought me up in the [denomination] and was really the anchor for our family . . . [she] inspired me to give my life to Christ, as well as pursue a positive directions for myself.—Bishop Lender

**Vicarious experience.** Seeing the personal struggles of those they admire provides a type of lesson learned, at the expense of someone else. Vicarious experience is living through the struggles of those they are close to, and attempting to understand how and why they dealt with those struggles in such a manner. It is watching them cope with the scrutiny, and conflict which come with this level of leadership. It is also watching them deal with health concerns, areas of weakness, and the blind spots their mentors didn’t see for themselves. The experience induced thoughts about how they would handle a situation, and why that thought would have or would not have been the right one given the eventual outcome.

My pastor was a Bishop, and I began to recognize some difference as he dealt with us as members, and as he dealt with men in the jurisdiction. I noticed things like patience. He would let men talk, sometimes I thought, too long.—Bishop Lender

Referring to his mentor and bishop after he had been selected at a young age, Bishop January said,
So several times I saw them [the older men] trying to provoke him in to things, and I was saying “oh, he’ll be there on Friday and he’s really going to set the record straight,” he gets there and preaches something that had nothing to do with what’s going on. . . . And it’s only later that I’m understanding what he’s doing. He’s saying, I can ruin my whole bishopry [time in the office of bishop], trying to straighten out some personal issue that somebody else has going on. So all of that is filtering in to me.

For the bishops, their personal or professional relationships with a jurisdictional bishop prior to their appointment were a forewarning about the pressures of executive leadership. For the mentors, it was a time where their mentee could hear the conversations, and witness intimate details about administrative, social and health problems.

**Wisdom and knowledge.** Wisdom and knowledge, as a subtheme within the major theme experiential relationships, illustrates how the bishops learn the subtleties of leadership as it relates to the culture and tradition of the denomination. For the bishops it is being informed of the traditions, operational procedures, ministry conduct and approach. It is learning from the impressions of those close to them what is required in ministry, and what not to do as a pastor and executive leader.

Similar to the theme standard setting and spiritual benchmarks, development takes place through conversation and observation.

And so I was able to watch their dynamics, their religious modus operandi, how they really just carried out what they did. So I saw a side of that on a regular basis, by working very closely with the Midwest regional bishops.—Bishop Duke

All of the district meetings, all of the jurisdictional functions from maybe the time I was six . . . had be shaped and formed [not only by] the denomination, but by the personal interest of [the bishop].—Bishop January

Receiving the instruction of older ministers, and exemplary lay leaders is an expansion of patience and maturity. It is growth that takes place while the pupil takes a position of humility, and accepts the experience for what it is intended to be. The lessons shared are an admonishment
to not stray from principles, and a recommendation to prepare for the tasks required. Recalling a conversation he had with an older minister, after he delivered a sermon,

“I enjoyed you last night boy. [you] sounded like an old man, but let me tell you this . . . preach what you know. Stick to what you know.” It made me study.—Bishop Smothers

**Opportunity.** The bishops spoke positively about the occasions where they were challenged and encouraged to stretch themselves. Their opportunities to utilize their knowledge and abilities came as a result of their relationships with leaders who gave them a platform for development. In some cases, the mentor/leader stepped aside and allowed the protégé to complete a task they would normally do. In other cases the leader would create tasks or simply encourage the pupil’s natural assertiveness with some guidance.

I had a wise pastor. He knew and recognized, even as a child, that I was go getter, and the Lord . . . and he got criticized.—Bishop Smothers

The types of opportunities given were roles normally included as a function of ministry (e.g., preaching, teaching, leading committees and funerals), but it was the context in which the duties were performed that had the effect of sharpening their readiness for leadership. Although none of the bishops mentioned instances where they failed to perform, they did discuss the intensity of those experiences.

Accepting the opportunities meant being thrust into assignments which would draw the scrutiny of others. Sometimes those not chosen became by default, judges of their performance even though they had no official role in the developmental process. Especially as ministers, those not chosen felt empowered to critique on the basis of their own spiritual experience. Accepting the opportunities also meant enduring an instance of testing by those who gave it, and overcoming the anxiety about what the opportunity means, and why it was given. One of the bishops spoke of how he was asked to preside over the funeral of a prominent pastor’s mother. It
was his first one, and many jurisdiction leaders and other ministers were in the audience. He later asked, why him?

He said Son, I thought you were going to fail like [another pastor], that’s why I had all these other men here to back you up. I thought you were going to fail.—Bishop Blunt

**Mentoring.** The statements below reflect the nature of the relationships that many of the bishops had with someone in a higher position. In addition to getting an early start, the mentors chose to offer advice and feedback to their mentees as they reached informal milestones.

[The presiding bishop] is a dear friend of mine and one that I value and has been engaged and involved in our ministry from conception.—Bishop Duke

He took me under his tutelage and I served there with him from 1969 up to the time he appointed me at a local church in 1982. Traveled with him, kept me close to him, [and] got me involved in the national church and [led to] my involvement as the secretary for the jurisdiction.—Bishop Lender

Similar to the subtheme of opportunity, the bishops were fortunate to be selected, and even favored by these leaders with status, but an additional benefit came as a result of the leader’s advocacy for their success. Purposefully, and sometime inadvertently, the mentors put them in positions which would provide the exposure and the recognition needed to rise to a higher level.

I had been pastoring for maybe three, four, or five years and [the presiding bishop at the time] saw me at one of the meetings . . . and he said ‘I want you to keep up with me. I don’t want you hanging back.—Bishop Butler

He wanted me to be bishop. [the jurisdictional bishop at the time] He walked up to me one Sunday on Official day . . . and about 15 minutes before the service starts . . . and said in my ear “I want you to preach today.”—Bishop Lender

The experience of being mentored meant having someone to encourage them to take risks and explore the extent of their abilities. It is the transference of aspects of the mentor’s leadership style and behaviors; a lesson offering knowledge of individual best practices and
approaches. It is having access to their respective tools of leadership, and eventually having the option of refashioning those tools for personal use.

Development as it is captured in the theme experiential relationships comes in the form of a deeper awareness and demonstration of the behaviors expected by someone who holds executive office in the denomination. They understand the importance of setting the tone for behavior; as followers view them as the embodiment of spiritual and practical leadership. The executive leader’s behavior suggests to followers how they should approach and respond to spiritual cues, and how to they implement the details of a vision.

After seeing the personal struggles of those they have been close to, they are more prepared to deal with their own personal struggles. They can consider applying the techniques used by their mentors, and benchmark themselves against the level of courage and strength they displayed. Foreknowledge of the responsibilities of executive office, administrative procedures, and cultural aspects of the denomination passed along through their relationships, also gives the bishops a realistic view of executive church leadership. It helps them now as they consider how planned initiatives may be perceived by those who follow, and the likelihood of the initiative’s success.

Pre-Bishop Roles and Responsibilities

During the years before they became bishop, these future executive leaders experienced the initial discovery of individual characteristics and organizational issues which impact their current leadership efforts. It was during times when they managed the inherent responsibilities of the position or role that they began to get a glimpse of their own potential. Their roles not only had the effect of sharpening their leadership and administrative skills, but some of the positions
they held within the denomination provided a view of operational issues they now attempt to resolve.

As developmental roles, some of the participants described jobs or roles they performed at an early age (newspaper delivery, store clerk, superintendent of Sunday school, minister). All of them mentioned their experience as jurisdictional officers later in their careers. The latter positions included administrative assistant, superintendent, and secretary. While holding these offices, the bishops were able to see the impact of the absence of leadership, the insensitivity of some who held jurisdictional office, and the pressure many churches were under as a result of financial constraints.

Because of what I was seeing in some places when I was not the jurisdictional bishop, made me think about what I would do if I were there.—Bishop Lender

The supporting subthemes are Discovery of Leadership Potential, Sharpening Leadership and Administrative Skills, and Exposure to Facets of the Denomination. These themes capture the essence of their leadership development prior to becoming bishops.

**Discovery of leadership potential.** The subtheme discovery of leadership potential summarizes the bishops’ realization that they are good at something related to ministry, prior to their becoming bishops. The bishops discover that they can impact the lives of others (e.g., church members, people outside of church, and leaders) and feel a sense of accomplishment—sometimes even in failure. It is also the realization that at some point in their lives, they can influence the direction of the denomination. For example, referring to his decision to become a candidate for bishop, Bishop Butler said,

At the time the brothers needed somebody, and I really felt I could do something to help corral the falling off and the dropping out.
The discovery of leadership potential takes place in diverse settings, and varies in terms of the age at which the discovery is made. Several of the bishops described experiences which occurred during their adolescent years, and others spoke of confirming incidents which took place as young adults. As adolescents they had a natural inclination for leading groups of people, or for listening to the conversations of older men. As young adults or adults, the discovery was made during difficult assignments, secular jobs, or at points in their lives where they felt they had reached a cross-road.

Going through the experience of discovery is finding out that some aspect of their leadership style or persona appeals to others. Roles involving teaching, counseling, speaking, and administration are exciting and fruitful. It is transferring communication and administrative skills, ideas, and lessons learned to different situations, while working with people at different levels within the church. It is being comfortable, or at least encouraged by spiritual cues and successes—to keep leading.

It kind of was a path that I didn’t pursue, but [leadership] was entrusted upon me, and once that happened, then I really transferred some of the skills that I had used.—Bishop Duke

But my tour of duty in Korea, it really brought out things in me and made me see myself as being in some kind of leadership position, but I didn’t know what.—Bishop Butler

**Sharpening leadership and administrative skills.** This subtheme focuses on the experience of improving aspects of leadership and administration while holding jobs and participating in various assignments, mostly inside the church prior to becoming bishop. Work or ministry related opportunities offered by mentors, bosses, or their spiritual leaders, gave the bishops a context in which they could exercise their newly discovered abilities. Much like the subtheme discovery of leadership potential, the bishops became aware of the tools needed to
lead, but they also received the opportunity to use them. Also similar to the previous theme, these opportunities present themselves at various stages of their development.

I was very young when I became Superintendent of Sunday School. I was 13 or 14. . . . I was the Junior Pastor when I was 15. Assistant Pastor when I graduated from High School, going on 18.—Bishop Smothers

The experience of sharpening leadership and administrative skills occurs while they are communicating, organizing, planning, and working with people, and some degree of responsibility for success, failure, or maintenance. The experience involves learning and knowing when to use the knowledge and information obtained through mentors, trainers, informal and formal education. Sharpening comes not only as a result of the use of knowledge obtained, but it also comes through feedback. Feedback can come in the form of public verbal recognition or from the personal acknowledgements of those who participated in, or witnessed their efforts at the local church, and or the jurisdictional levels. It is normally in the context church work where they receive an informal evaluation of their performance, and what they should focus on to improve.

Exposure to facets of the denomination. During their tenure in positions such as pastor, superintendent, and administrative assistant, or in the role as jurisdictional board or committee members, the bishops were able to see organizational conditions which required attention. This exposure gave them an opportunity to consider and sometimes engage the issues before they became bishops. The types of issues mentioned included, financial hardships at the local and jurisdictional levels, limited support or participation from other leaders and lay persons, and untenable administrative policies.

Describing a condition which inspired him to learn how to develop and execute organizational strategy, Bishop Duke said,
I saw this before I became bishop. I saw the absence of leadership, and what it did. I saw a state meeting where you could throw a rock and not hit anybody. I saw people complaining about going to a meeting. . . . Then I begin to learn that innovation and change has to be gradual and slow. But at the same time, there are certain things that cannot be compromised, and you cannot bend or break.

Exposure to organizational issues is a sensitizing, inspiring, and instructional experience, and the experiences which have personally affected their ministries are particularly meaningful. In these instances they are forced to, at the very least internally clarify their positions on a matter. It is during these times when they resolve to address a matter differently when they obtain a position of authority.

I promised that once I became a leader at any level, where I had people under my tutelage, that I would approach them differently and be more sensitive to them.—Bishop Smothers

The experience of holding jobs and offices prior to becoming bishop has the effect of bolstering the confidence of these executive leaders as they interact with and lead people inside and outside the denomination. Ultimately, they view the discovery of traits, and skills as a divine divulgement. This revelation is also accompanied by an internal sense of individual and organizational mission, which is clarified through their early exposure to the denominations issues. Internal acknowledgement of their abilities and sense of mission also encourages them to take on the challenges which exist at the executive level.

**Emerging Perspectives Associated With Being Bishop**

The theme Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop reflects the development experiences associated with the process of selection, and the new outlook on executive leadership gained after becoming bishop. The intensity of the selection process forces the participants to think of the position, and their own intentions and qualifications for executive
leadership, in a different way. For example, a few of the participants acknowledged that after having initially being involved in the selection process, they would’ve have been content with not being bishop. At that time, they thought that being bishop would be great, but were satisfied fulfilling whatever role to which they were called. Furthermore, after having become bishop they have a more refined understanding of the position’s potential impact. Understanding the depth of organizational issues, their own perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses, and the perceptions that others have of them while they are holding an executive office, now compels them to choose jurisdictional priorities and objectives carefully.

Well when you’re a Jurisdictional Bishop, [in the denomination] you’re a leader of leaders on both the male and female side, and whatever you do has the potential to set a model for others. Seeing it up close is good [the role of Bishop] but being in it is another level.—Bishop Lender

Acknowledgement of personal realities. This subtheme summarizes the bishop’s internal assessment of their qualifications for the position of bishop. This internal assessment occurs as they encounter the selection procedures and submit to the external scrutiny of their backgrounds. Pursuing or accepting a nomination to be the jurisdiction’s presiding prelate initiates a period of personal evaluation. It causes them to question several aspects of their person, and how these aspects may be perceived by those involved in the selection process. The experience is an introspective peek at their overall worthiness; with the understanding that in a spiritual sense they can never be completely qualified.

Similar to the subtheme discovery of leadership potential, the experience of acknowledging personal realities is enlightening. As candidates, they reflect on their own
disposition for executive leadership. They are forced to evaluate their own level of self-confidence, patience, discipline, and overall spirituality.

When they were meeting to select a Bishop there were five of us running and they gave us five minutes to make a presentation before they voted. I remember coming to the core of elders [voting pastors] saying this “I come with three tools . . . honesty, integrity, and truth” that [statement] began to steer me in the way that I was going to go.—Bishop Blunt

As they begin to get a deeper understanding of the political nature of the process, they also reflect on the strength of their own network. Referring to his process, his limited pedigree, and the maneuvers of the other candidates involved, Bishop Bryant said,

The other two were [denomination] born and bred—4th and 5th generation, daddy, and granddaddies were bishops. He came to me [one of the candidates] and said: come join the fellowship. I said no. He said: well you know it’s going to come down to just me or you, so I’m trying to buy your vote.

Becoming aware of their personal realities is emotive. Some of the bishops spoke of the effects of their initial rejection as candidates, and the subsequent period of introspection. As they considered the prospect of another attempt at executive office, they ruminated on issues related to the fairness of the process. Feelings of rejection due to age, background, or limited network affected how they viewed the position, and their motivation to participate as candidates again.

And I said, I know what it is, I’m smart enough to be bishop. I’m popular enough to be bishop. I think I could handle it if I was bishop. But if they would have made me bishop, [at that point] those older men . . . they would’ve have killed me.—Bishop January

Ultimately, their thoughts about what they could have done or what they could do to improve their candidacy gave way to a feeling of contentment, but the experience impressed upon them the reality of political and personal power. In their current role as bishops they must still think about how to accomplish an objective given the nature networks.

**New views of the organization and position.** The experience of seeing a different side of the denomination, and role of bishop, after having been in it, is described in this theme.
Through this experience the bishops are convinced of the need to make an effort to build consensus, and to consider the perspectives of the denomination, the jurisdiction, and the local church. Their new position enables them to see how all components of the denomination are affected by their decisions. The bishops also become acquainted with the kinds of expectations their followers have for executive leadership. Overall perceptions may be negative or positive, but the bishops learn that they are responsible for maintaining a trustworthy image and good relationships.

The experience of seeing new views of the organization and position is not only a shifting of actual responsibilities, but it is a shift in mindset and approach. Thought and communications processes are now affected by the weight of the concerns and desires of many different entities. In addition to the concerns of the church they lead as senior pastors, they must process the concerns of multiple districts, and those of the entire denomination.

So you have to learn how to unite them together and build a team, from a corporate or even an athletic perspective you are building a successful team that has to been focused on a particular goal or mission.—Bishop Duke

The bishops also feel the burden of managing perceptions of their leadership after becoming a bishop. Their rise to executive leadership sometimes affects others’ attitudes toward their leadership, or their relationships with others. The underlying perceptions can be positive or negative; nevertheless, the bishops become aware of how those perceptions hinder or help their efforts to lead.

You don’t realize the significance of a bishop until you become a bishop, because pastors that celebrate their bishop pattern themselves after that, and the duplicate the same things. So everything you do, your thoughts, attitude, mentality, conduct, finances, family issues, struggles . . . where you live, how you act, how you dress, becomes a pattern and you have no clue of that.—Bishop Duke
Bishop Hudson also noted the need to be sensitive to the honor, and dignity of other leaders after becoming bishop.

Now you are dealing not just with the pastor, and the parishioner, but you’re also dealing with men who have had responsibility, stature, who have ruled over men, and that causes it to be a little more complex.

**Exercise responsible leadership.** The final subtheme, exercise responsible leadership, illustrates the bishops’ acceptance of the tasks, hardships, and responsibilities associated with executive leadership. Although no specific points in their careers were mentioned as times when they completely understood the breadth and depth of their roles, the bishops did discuss some situations when they knew that they had to exercise executive authority. Selecting pastors, executing changes in outreach strategies, working through conflicts, developing others, and redesigning financial and administrative systems, were mentioned as functions requiring responsible leadership.

Being in the position of bishop has the effect of forcing their participation in the events and situations which occur in their jurisdictions—their level of success or failure notwithstanding. They are drawn into their roles by virtue of the expectations of those who willingly follow, and contend with them. While in this role they learn to contextualize the challenges, placing all issues within a divine realm, and seeing themselves as stewards, and instruments used in the process of resolution.

Those virtues of patience, love, longsuffering, humility, gentleness, those fruit of the spirit and the others, are critical in being a jurisdictional bishop, because at the end of the day, the people want to look up to their leader, and you have to give them something to look up to. They have to see a reflection of divinity in what you’re doing.—Bishop Duke

For the bishops, the experience of exercising responsible leadership also means seeing themselves as legacy defenders and builders.

I want to leave something back here for someone else to go by.—Bishop Blunt
Aspects of the task of defending and building the denomination’s legacy, includes dealing with interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges, and administrative responsibilities. It means making the hard decisions, rearranging financial priorities, and being the focal point of discussion linking them to the successes of failures of the jurisdiction and denomination. However, awareness of these conditions is only fully appreciated after becoming an executive leader.

The experience of going through the process of becoming bishops, and the perspectives gained while in the role, is a maturing process which makes them aware of their personal attributes, the entirety of facets in the denomination, and the need to live up to the trust placed in those who hold the office of bishop. The bishops learn to access their strengths, including their natural abilities and networks. They learn to anticipate how a decision might affect aspects of the denomination, and perceive how the constituents may view them and the denomination before and after a decision is made. Finally, they learn to embrace their opportunity to lead at this level, being careful to contextualize difficulties, lessons learned, and organizational objectives.

Summary

The themes Transformation through Ministerial Challenges, Dealing with Conflict, Use of Formal Training Experiential relationships, Pre-bishop roles and responsibilities, Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop and their respective subthemes collectively reflect the essence of the bishops’ development experiences. However, certain themes were more prevalent than others. Among the bishops, all of them spoke of difficult circumstances, conflicts, and their influential relationships with others. This is consistent with the findings of similar studies (e.g., Yip & Wilson, 2010). In their comprehensive study, developmental relationships,
and adverse situations were cited as categories of developmental experiences. Challenging assignments, course work and training, and personal experiences rounded out their list of developmental categories. The themes Use of Formal Training, Pre-bishop Roles and Responsibilities, and Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop, did vary in terms of the frequency and intensity of these experiences. A more specific view of their individual experiences can be found in the narrative portion of chapter 4.
Chapter 6

Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, Implications, and Future Research

At the beginning of this study, I argue that executive leaders of church denominations need and can benefit from leadership development and research designed to understand their developmental needs. Executive church leaders have responsibilities and roles similar to that of corporate executive leaders, in that they also lead multi-unit entities, and must be responsive to the environmental conditions that affect their organization. Among other reasons for research and appropriate development for executive church leaders, I note that today’s executive church denomination leaders must lead while their organizations are experiencing a collective decline in prominence in the United States (Borden, 2003), and that denominations appear to be suffering from a lack of leadership readiness at the executive level (Roozen & Nieman, 2005). While the need for development has been recognized and more leaders are attempting to prepare themselves for executive level leadership, I conclude that the current state of leadership development for executive level denomination leaders reflects the need for more knowledge that specifically contributes to the development of executive church leaders.

This research study that captures the essence of the development experiences of eight African-American bishops addresses this need. For these executive church leaders, their development has come as a result of difficult circumstances prior to and during their tenure as executive leaders, their relationships with influential individuals, and their processing of conflict. Development has also come through their integration of lessons learned during their formal training, an awareness of their personal attributes and abilities, and their processing of organizational issues perceived prior to and during tenure as executive leaders.
In chapter 1, I describe the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, research design, and significance of the study. Given the existing body of knowledge related to the leadership development of executive church leaders, and the promising findings of studies which have focused on the leadership development experience of executive leaders, I proposed a phenomenological study which examines the leadership development experiences of senior executive church leaders in a single religious denomination.

Chapter 2 presents my argument for conducting research which captures the nature of the leadership development experiences of executive church leaders. Although the level of interest in leadership development is high, and the technology and approaches involved are many (Day, 2004), application in religious context is limited. Furthermore, leadership development through experience has been affirmed as a valuable and effective way to build leadership capacity (McCall, 2004). In order to support my argument for research in the line of leadership development experience focused on executive church leaders, I provide an overview of the field of leadership development. The overview of leadership development identifies three key distinctions in terms of the definitions used and the differences between leader development and leadership development, and management development and leadership development. It also explains the purposes, approaches, practices, assumptions, and important transitions which have taken place in the field.

In chapter 3, I describe how a phenomenological approach grounded by qualitative research methods will help to capture the essence of the leadership development experiences of senior executive church leaders. After clarifying the philosophical assumptions which underpin this study, I describe the specific phenomenological approach used and its key features. Pertinent details regarding the settings and the research participants are also noted. Finally, my methods
for collecting and analyzing data are followed by the researcher’s biographical information, and my treatment of validity issues.

Chapter 4 presents the participant’s backgrounds, and describes the denomination. It also presents narratives of situations which have impacted their development as leaders. These jurisdictional bishops each lead a group of local churches organized by region, and have significant educational backgrounds and responsibilities. Most have advanced degrees and have risen to their positions after holding previous jurisdictional offices. However, it is the description of the respective happenings which have helped me to construct thematic descriptions of their respective developmental experiences.

In chapter 5, I present the six major themes, Transformation through Ministerial challenges, Dealing with Conflict, Experiential Relationships, Pre-Bishop Roles and Responsibilities, Use of Formal Training, and Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop. These themes represent the essence of the bishop’s collective encounter with the leadership development through experiences phenomenon. Collectively, these themes summarize the “what” (i.e., textural description) and the “how” (i.e., structural description) of the bishops developmental experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter was developed as an integration of the descriptions, “into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Finally in chapter 6, in addition to the above summarization of the entire study, I present my conclusions as they relate to the main research question. I describe the similarities and differences from the findings presented in my literature review, and I discuss these similarities and differences in light of the six major themes. I suggest and detail a future study which could build on, or extend this current study. The limitations of this study including its methodological
and interpretative limitations are explained, and I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the implications of this study. I specifically reflect on how these implications relate to the body of research associated with leadership development through experience, and the practical development of executive church denomination leaders.

Conclusions

This research was conducted to answer one main research question: What meaning do the executive denomination leaders ascribe to their leadership development experiences? Based upon the findings, several conclusions have been drawn. The specific theme and the associated conclusion, follows below. These conclusions are followed by two general conclusions related to the overall study, and a discussion which could contribute to a theory of leadership development for executive church leaders.

1. **Transformation through Ministerial Challenges.** The bishop’s development comes as a result of their endurance and persistent mental processing of all situations. This is done with their own individual development in mind. In this case, their endurance and persistence is energized by their belief in God’s revealed direction and provision for this specific level of leadership. Over time they learn to appreciate the incomplete nature of the situations and events they must lead through. Their appreciation comes after having consistently witnessing what they perceive to be providentially orchestrated circumstances and outcomes.

2. **Experiential Relationships.** Development comes through their relationships with leaders at various stages of their lives. Significant family members, bosses, and pastors impart lessons and set examples of appropriate behavior. Each one of these bishops also had a relationship with a jurisdictional bishop. Their prior relationships with a jurisdictional bishop provided an opportunity to see the jurisdictional office at work, and have an advocate who could help shape their future.

3. **Use of Formal Training.** The bishops view their development as an opportunity to integrate and act on the lessons learned through their formal training and education. Conceptual frameworks presented during their matriculation at their respective universities or colleges are reshaped or translated to help them address organizational or individual issues.
4. **Dealing with Conflict.** Development is the discovery and acceptance of the fact that conflict will always be a part of leadership. They understand that particularly at the executive level, expectations about how they should lead as both ministers and administrators will be placed on them by their followers and themselves.

5. **Pre-bishop Roles and Responsibilities.** Development is the discovery and acceptance through roles and duties that they have abilities, tendencies, and conceptual perspectives which support their efforts to lead prior to accepting executive office.

6. **Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop.** Development is having different vantage points from which to see and appreciate the internal and external issues which affect the individuals and organization they lead. Furthermore, their development occurs as they gaining an understanding of the limits of their respective authority, their personal capabilities, and their inclinations while they hold executive office.

Although there is no explicit pathway or formal development process to advance to the rank of jurisdictional bishop, they have developed in similar ways. Their paths are similar in that they have endured difficult circumstances, hold to their faith as a means of perseverance, and they have learned to cope with conflict. Each one of the bishops had a strong relationship with a jurisdictional bishop and held offices at the jurisdictional levels; most have been administrative assistants of district superintendents.

Departures from their respective developmental paths include the ages in which they began to discover and appreciate their unique abilities, and the individual effects of their formal training, previous roles and perspectives gained. Two of the bishops had prodigious experiences as adolescents, with one discovering a talent for playing the guitar, and the other being called into ministry at 8 years old. These experiences gave them a head start in ministry. By the time they were in their teens they held offices in their local church and in their jurisdiction.

The leadership development experiences of the participants in this study suggest that a process for the development of executive church denomination leaders can be constructed. Drawing from the six major themes and their subthemes, it appears that certain *experiences* and *temperament* support the development of these types of leaders. The experiences can be
understood as those related to their calling to executive leadership, and those related to administrative and ministerial proficiency. The temperaments displayed during experiences indicate mental toughness with compassion, and openness to development from multiple sources. Put simply, executive church denomination leaders develop as a result of their respective spiritual and non-spiritual events and circumstances which encourage and support their feelings about being drawn to a higher level of leadership, and as a result of their willingness to persist, learn, and integrate lessons learned through their personal interactions, formal education, and paradigm shifts.

**Discussion**

In chapter 2, I presented and explained the findings from several studies which reflect the breadth and depth of research focused on leadership development through experience. I discussed the favorable and substantiated impressions of researchers who conducted research in U.S. and international corporations, and among public service and racially identified executives (e.g., Douglas, 2003; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Yip & Wilson, 2008). In this section, I will discuss my findings in relation to these seminal studies. I will reflect on the similarities and differences between my findings, and those of previous research studies.

In identifying the similarities and differences between my findings and that of previous research, I would generally characterize my findings as elements of the larger categories first presented by McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988), Assignments, Bosses, and Hardships, and later refined by Yip and Wilson (2008) to include Challenging Assignments, Developmental Relationships, Adverse Situations, Coursework and Training. For the purpose of this discussion I
will compare my findings (i.e., Transformation through Ministerial Challenges, Use of Formal Training, Experiential Relationships, Dealing with Conflict, Process & Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop, and Pre-Bishop Roles & Responsibilities) to the broad categories mentioned by Yip and Wilson (2010). They cite Challenging Assignments, Developmental Relationships, Adverse Situations, Course Work and Training, and Personal Experiences as categories of the types of events participants identified as developmental.

*Developmental Relationships* which includes constructive bosses and superiors, as well as difficult people, *Adverse Situations*, events such as crisis, scandal, mistakes, and setbacks, and *Course Work and Training*, which includes organization provided and individually pursued knowledge (Yip & Wilson, 2010) are categories which generally resemble my themes of Experiential Relationships, Transformation through Ministerial Circumstances, and Use of Formal Training. Experiential Relationships account for the mentors and family members who have influenced the bishops’ approach and understanding of leadership. Through these relationships they were given the opportunity to serve and be exposed to different aspects of the denomination. However, the bishops also gleaned from these relationships value oriented lessons and useful behaviors. Transformation through Ministerial Circumstances is similar to adverse situations in that the individual events mentioned by the bishops could be considered moments of crises. The theme also refers to the settings, and mental processes involved in resolving the issues associated with the circumstances. Finally, the theme Use of Formal Training compares favorably to Course Work and Training. The bishops did exercise initiative in pursuing formal education however it is the application of knowledge in their respective contexts which makes this developmental experience unique.
The themes Dealing with Conflict, Emerging Perspectives Associated with Being Bishop, and Pre-Bishop Roles & Responsibilities also standout as findings which reflect unique developmental experiences due in part to the contexts in which they occurred. Conflicts emerging in this context provoke the development of coping mechanisms linked to faith.

Furthermore, while the fact that external conflicts related to resistance to operational and leadership changes, and internal struggles with organizational policy and culture can occur in all types of organizations, the bishops must contend with religiously influenced perceptions of their leadership. In their case when interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict emerges, the conflict is enlivened by follower expectations, and internal perspectives swayed by their biblical interpretations of their role and responsibility.

After having experiencing the process of candidacy, and reflecting on internal and organizational matters, the bishops were able to acquire knowledge not afforded to them at lower level positions. Put simply, they would not have acquired individual knowledge or learned lessons about themselves or their organizations unless they had reached this level of leadership. They would not know how the strength of their networks and their perceptions of their leadership and personal attributes influence their selection as bishops. While they may be aware of the necessity of having networks and the importance of clarifying their skills, this experience is confirmatory or disconfirmatory.

Similarly, the roles and responsibilities assumed prior to becoming bishop convinced them of the existence and necessity of using their respective abilities. During these roles and responsibilities, the bishops discovered aspects of their calling which shaped and projected the direction of their ministries, including their level of service. Use of their abilities and their impressions of providentially guided successes encourages the pursuit higher levels of
leadership. Early exposure to the traditions and operational elements of the denomination encourages their sensitivity to denominational problems, and their expansion or modification of previously successful initiatives.

Overall, these findings add to the bodies of knowledge associated with executive leadership, leadership development, and leadership development through experience. The responsibilities and function of the jurisdictional bishops are consistent with Zaccaro’s (2001) framework for executive leadership. These roles involve conceptual complexity, behavioral complexity, strategic decision making and visionary leadership. Furthermore, the findings reflect informal criteria for executive leadership in a religious context.

The findings also characterize the development experiences of executive leaders who are rarely selected as research participants. The bishop’s experiences are not only distinguished from their corporate counterparts in terms of the context in which most of the experiences emerged, but also in terms of the specific types of experiences they’ve had as ministers. Although the overall experiences do resemble the findings of research focused on leadership development through experiences, certain subthemes (e.g., Exercise of Faith, Standard Setting and Spiritual Benchmarks, Exposure to Facets of the Denomination, New Views of the Organization and Position) are indicative of their spiritual nature. They also clarify the specific insight gained through their association with this denomination, and membership in this particular group of executive leaders.

Limitations

The limitations of this study generally resemble those normally inherent in qualitative research. The issues related to the possibility of researcher bias, reactivity, and the credibility of
the conclusions (Maxwell, 2005) have been considered and addressed. In order to mitigate researcher bias and reactivity, I identified my potential biases and considered how I might influence the participant’s responses to my interview questions. Subsequently, an interview protocol was created and used with the intention of eliminating leading questions.

Credibility issues have been managed with the use of three validity strategies, intensive engagement, rich description, and member checking (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, my interactions and observations of jurisdictional bishops in the selected denomination, and others have helped me to understand specific situations and processes referred to during data collection and analysis. Secondly, a detailed description of the participants and setting was developed and facilitated transferability (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thirdly, several participants were selected to review the credibility of my findings (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005).

Finally, two other potential limitations may be present as a result of the participants self-reporting of their experiences. In retrospect, the researcher acknowledges the extremely positive responses given by the participants when describing conflicts, and difficult circumstances. The research could probably have probed more deeply to understand the negative feelings, and the developmental lessons that emerged during their unpleasant experiences. The backgrounds of the participants in this study may also influence the findings. The majority of the participants have advanced degrees. Subsequently, their responses and my understanding of their responses have been shaped by this common experience. This study may be limited in that it has minimally considered the experiences and views of individuals who don’t have graduate degrees.
Implications

The findings emerging from this study have several implications relevant to the field and practice of Human Resource Development (HRD), and to those interested in the leadership development of executive church leaders. This study affirms the effectiveness of leadership development through experience. Similar to the outcomes presented in McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988), the findings suggest that executive leaders favor their informal experiences over their formal education. Although the number of participants in this study is substantially less, their recollection of experiences primarily focused on informal experiences.

The practical implications of these findings benefit HRD practitioners, and those interested in the development of executive denomination leadership. These findings make clear that bishops have an appreciation for the cumulative effect of experiences prior to and during their tenure as jurisdictional bishops. Practitioners and executive leaders must build into their development several features which directly reflect the findings of this study. I propose that the future development of executive church leaders includes the following:

1. Entrepreneurial/Ministry building assignments. In a religious context this would include church plants, para-church ministries (e.g., Shelters, Food banks, etc.), and education oriented ministries. Potential executive leaders would have the opportunity to develop a vision for a selected ministry, develop and implement a growth strategy, lead and manage people, and reflect on their challenges and lessons learned.

2. Formalized Job/Ministry track. HRD professionals would work with denomination leaders to determine the developmental aspects of current ministry positions, and incorporate those into a formalized ministry track. The positions would reflect those at local, jurisdictional and denomination wide levels and emphasize the development of individual abilities at these levels. It would feature the participant’s involvement with real issues pertinent to the denomination.

3. Real cases and cohort development. HRD professionals would work with denomination leaders to develop cases studies appropriate for potential executive leaders, and facilitate the development of future leader cohorts. Based on previous instruction designed to help denomination leaders to assess and apply interventions, the potential executive leaders would work together to address issues related to culture, conflict resolution, change, and denominational systems.
4. Mentoring and Advocacy. At the local, jurisdictional, and denominational levels, potential leaders would mentor and be mentored by a leader at the next level. Particularly at the jurisdictional level the mentor would discuss the mentees progress in the aforementioned modules, as well as accountability issues. The mentor would also share knowledge of the denominations traditions, their personal reflections on their own experiences, and the practical application of the ideas emerging from the mentees developmental experiences.

The findings also suggest that the Human Resource Development researcher can and should investigate topics related to the development of individuals in religious organizations. Knowledge of their developmental needs and application of previously effective research approaches in settings other than corporate does meet Mclean and Mclean (2001) definition of HRD.

Human Resource Development is any process or activity that either initially or over the longer-term, has the potential to develop adults’ work based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal of group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or ultimately the whole of humanity.

Future Research

Six broad developmental experiences have been identified by the participants in this study. The experiences reflect a collective understanding of select jurisdictional bishops in a single African American denomination. Further research is needed to find out if these experiences are consistent across race and denomination. A study combining a phenomenological approach, survey data collection and analysis would help to answer the question “Are the developmental experiences of jurisdictional bishops the same across race and denomination?” This study could involve a larger number of participants, with more diverse educational and professional backgrounds, and cultural experiences. A study of this kind could provide knowledge regarding the type and nature of developmental experiences, and possibly
uncover differences related to race. The findings would also be useful for the development of leadership development programs for executive church leaders.
References


Day, D. V. (2010). The difficulties of learning from experience and the need for deliberate practice. *Industrial and Organizational, 3*(1), 41-44.


Appendix A

Letter of Consent

“Understanding the Leadership Development Experiences of Executive Church Denomination Leaders: A Phenomenological Approach”

April 6, 2011

Dear Bishop Smothers,

My name is Elder Torrence E. Sparkman, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am writing this letter to you to respectfully request your participation in my study of leadership development among executive leaders in church denominations. With the support of my Responsible Project Investigator, Dr. K. Peter Kuchinke, I am conducting research to understand what your leadership development experiences mean to you, as these experiences relate to your role as an executive denomination leader. You and several of your colleagues have been selected to participate in this study based on your responsibility as a jurisdictional bishop, and the favorable impression of your leadership by your peers and other observers. The following information is provided in order for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

This research project will commence in two phases. The first phase will involve your consent or refusal, and a visit confirmation. The second phase will involve the process of data collection. The consent procedure (phase one) includes a phone conversation, during which I will a) describe this study, b) further explain your role and the data collection procedures, c) obtain your verbal consent or refusal, and d) confirm the dates when I may visit. If verbal consent is given, I will ask for preliminary information and answer any questions you may have. The data collection procedure (phase two) will involve in-depth interviews with open-ended questions intended to capture the essence of your leadership development experiences—Two interviews are requested with the first being 90 minutes and the second interview approximately 60 minutes. It will proceed with a visit to your location, and the use of a digital audio recorder, interview protocol, and notebook. The second visit may be at your location or over the phone. A second visit over the phone will also involve the use of a digital audio recorder. It is my desire to conduct these interviews during the month of March/April 2011.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I will discuss the data collected from you to further clarify my understanding and share my findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will only be known to the researcher, and the other six participants. Any verbal or written presentation of the research will involve the use of a pseudonym.
There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the capture of knowledge related to the leadership development in a context rarely studied, and a deeper understanding of the kinds of experiences and contexts involved in the development of executive denomination leaders. The findings and results of this study are expected to be disseminated as a publication, and/or academic presentation.

You should be aware that you are free to not participate and can withdraw at any time. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You will receive a copy of the research results after this project is completed.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me by telephone at (217) 979-7964 or by email tsparkm3@illinois.edu or Dr. Kuchinke at (217) 333-0807 or kuchinke@illinois.edu.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be sent to you by mail, or you may keep this document and fax your signed consent to me at (217) 398-2064.

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

____yes ____no I agree to have the interview audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription

__________________________________   ___________________________
Bishop Dr. Franklin Smothers     Date

Respectfully,

Elder. Torrence E. Sparkman, Ph. D. Candidate, MDiv, UIUC, Investigator

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023, or ber-irb@ed.uiuc.edu or the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Understanding the Leadership Development Experiences of Executive Church Denomination Leaders: A Phenomenological Approach

**Main Research Question:** What meaning do the executive denomination leaders ascribe to their leadership development experiences?

And the subquestions:

1. What statements describe these experiences?
2. What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. What are the contexts of and thoughts about their experiences?
4. What is the overall essence of their experience?

1. Tell me about three experiences which have influenced the way you lead as an executive leader?
   a. Describe where you were? and what was happening at the time?
   b. What were the pressures or constraints?
   c. What feelings did you have about the experience as you were going through it?
   d. What does it mean to you now? What changes in the way you lead as a bishop do you associate with the experience

2. What lessons of leadership have you learned as a result of your experiences?

3. Describe some of the moments where you felt you were getting an understanding of the responsibilities and duties required for executive leadership? When? What were your feelings at the time?

4. Describe three developmental opportunities (jobs, positions, interactions, etc.) that you feel have contributed to you development as a bishop?
5. Who could I talk to who could speak to your development as an executive leader?  
   What would they say about your developmental experiences