**Investigating Southern New Jersey GARB Church Leader’s Spiritual Formation and Transformational Leadership Practices**

**Dr. Sean Taladay**

Chair, Dissertation Committee

**Dr. David Ward**

Member, Dissertation Committee

**Dr. Curtis McClane**

Member, Dissertation Committee

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor

of Philosophy

Omega Graduate School

Graduation Date

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Erik M. Christensen

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Dissertation Committee:

Sean Taladay, Chair

David Ward

Curtis McClane

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

Good leadership is strongly connected with ethics and morality (Davidson & Hughes, 2020; Faddis, 2020). Transformational leaders inspire followers through personal moral and ethical beliefs and behavior (Trnka et al., 2020). As a result, followers’ moral and ethical values are enhanced, ultimately strengthening the organization (Usman, 2020). The spirituality of leaders and the transformation of their inner lives are essential to developing leaders’ morality, ultimately impacting their external behavior, which is the lived-out expression of ethics (Allen & Fry, 2022). Spiritual formation and strengthening leadership practices appear connected (Allen & Fry, 2022).

Though abundant research on transformational leadership is available, quantitative research investigating the relationship between leaders’ spiritual health and transformational leadership practices is lacking (Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021). Allen and Fry (2022) indicate that the literature is deficient in addressing the relationship between the spiritual and a leader’s moral development. Researching church leaders’ spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices is needed to strengthen leaders, members of churches, and influence society morally and ethically. 

**Background of the Problem**

The Problem to be researched is whether there is a relationship between a Church Leader’s spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices. Leadership research should be considered equally important as medical research due to the potential leaders can have to improve the world and save lives (Spoelstra et al., 2021). Transformational leadership (TL) is one such leadership model that should be researched further, particularly regarding the spiritual formation of transformational leaders. A leader’s spiritual formation regarding beliefs such as honesty, integrity, and truthfulness is essential to understand, as these characteristics are valued highly by followers (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). Leaders who exhibit healthy spirituality do so by leading with virtues such as kindness, patience, and love (Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021). Those who follow transformational leaders consider the values and beliefs of their leader (Usman, 2020).   
 The Transformational Leadership model (TL), originated by Burns, was developed further by Bass, who highlighted four main leadership categories: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). TLs develop a vision to clarify new directions for organizations while also encouraging employees to grow personally by thinking in new ways and accepting the challenge of beneficial change (Yue et al., 2019). Relationships between TLs and employees are essential as a foundational TL function is to inspire followers through building trust with them (Ewell, 2018). Followers begin to imitate their leader once trust and confidence are established, and therefore, relationships between TLs and their followers become highly significant.   
 Spirituality, as a dimension reflecting emotional characteristics such as love and trust, is also found in the literature. Moore (2021) defines spirituality by incorporating multiple aspects of human life, including the relationship with a higher power which leads to or influences change within an individual while also shaping their actions towards people and surroundings. What someone believes ultimately shapes their values, subsequently influencing how they think about and generally view life (Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020). Secular writers recognize the need for leaders to lead ethically, though they do not include faith formation in the ethical development of leaders (Krispin, 2020). As such, ethics and morally based values, such as forgiveness, and personal values such as honesty, are essential to the foundation of TL (Groves & LaRocca, 2011).   
 Religion shapes beliefs significantly, and as a result, religious beliefs greatly influence a leader’s style (Gaitho, 2019), recognizable in various leadership theories. The influence of core beliefs through a leader can be seen clearly within the spiritual leadership theory, equivocating spiritual values with core beliefs, values, and the behaviors leaders exhibit toward followers (Jufrizen et al., 2019). Authentic leadership theory also emphasizes the centrality of a leader’s moral values to their conduct (Kozminski et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Servant and Spiritual Leadership models are shaped either directly from a theological context or, in the case of TL, while not as clear, is still evident (Spoelstra et al., 2021). Leman (2021) goes so far as to suggest that spiritual, transformational, and transactional leadership theories have been provably derived from the biblical narrative.   
 While abundant research exists on TL, further research needs to investigate the relationship between the spiritual formation of a leader and TL practices (Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021). Groves & LaRocca (2011) affirm that the literature is deficient in investigating the ethical values and moral foundation of TL. Though some academic articles have touched upon the spiritual beliefs of leaders and their impact on their decision-making, there is a clear evasion within the literature in addressing the role religion and a leader’s spiritual beliefs have upon leadership (Gaitho, 2019). Therefore, this research seeks to add to the knowledge of the literature by investigating the relationship between Church Leader’s spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be researched is whether there is a relationship between Church Leader’s spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices. Leadership research should be considered equally important to medical research due to the potential leaders can improve the world and save lives (Spoelstra et al., 2021). Church leaders often work with volunteers, increasing the need for a high level of quality leadership to take place for ministry to occur successfully (Butler & Senses-Ozyurt, 2020). A leader’s spiritual formation regarding beliefs such as honesty, integrity, and truthfulness is essential to emphasize as followers highly value these characteristics (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). Leaders who exhibit healthy spirituality do so by leading with virtues such as patience, joy, and love (Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021, p. 103). Those who follow transformational leaders consider the values and beliefs of their leader (Usman, 2020).

While there has been abundant research on TL, further research needs to investigate the relationship between the spiritual formation of a leader and TL practices (Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021). Groves & LaRocca (2011) affirm that the literature is deficient in investigating the ethical values and moral foundation of TL. Though some academic articles have touched upon the spiritual beliefs of leaders and their impact on their decision-making, there is a clear evasion within the literature in addressing the role religion and or a leader’s spiritual beliefs have upon leadership (Gaitho, 2019). Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the relationship between Church Leader’s spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study will be to investigate the relationship between church leader’s spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices. A quantitative approach using correlation testing will examine the relationship between church leaders’ spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices. Spiritual transformation will be assessed using the Spiritual Transformation Inventory (STI) survey developed by Dr. Hall. Transformational Leadership behavior will be assessed using Kouzes and Posner’s survey, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Church leaders in Southern New Jersey representing a Protestant denomination named the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC) will be surveyed to assess the relationship between spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices.

**Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the gap in research of spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices. Identifying the relationship between church leaders’ spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices will empower current church leaders to equip:

1. The next generation of church leaders to form biblical, Christ-centered spiritual beliefs.
2. The next generation of church leaders to develop transformational leadership practices.

**Research Question & Hypothesis**

**Research Question**

What is the relationship between a church leader’s self-assessed spiritual formation and self-assessed TL practices among the General Assembly of Regular Baptist Convention Churches (GARBC) in Southern New Jersey?

**Hypotheses**

**H0:** No statistically significant relationship exists between spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices among SBC & GARBC church leaders in South New Jersey.

**Ha:** A statistically significant relationship exists between the spiritual formation

and transformational leadership practices among SBC & GARBC church leaders in South New Jersey.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will be composed of two theories. Transformational Leadership and Spirituality theory will be combined to frame the research. Transformational leadership practices and spirituality continue to be topics of consideration regarding the formation of leader’s spiritual formation and practices (Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021).

Definition of Terms

*Authentic Leadership* begins with the internal virtues and moral character of a leader, resulting in the development of followers authentically, including both positive psychological and ethical environmental factors (Ewah et al., 2020; GumUsay, 2019; Hoch et al., 2018).

*Biblical Leadership* involves a biblical influenceonleaders, shaping their Christian ethics and ongoing daily practices, with the centrality of love impacting their service for others (Zigan et al., 2021). The Christian leader seeks to lead with the consistency of moral beliefs and ethical practices, integrity lived out before fellow believers and unbelievers alike (Crisp, 2018), and to guide fellow believers, the Church, toward a spiritual and ethical maturity (Zscheile, 2013). A Christian leader strives to lead with consistent moral beliefs and ethical practices, demonstrating integrity to both believers and non-believers (Crisp, 2018). Additionally, the leader endeavors to guide fellow believers and the Church toward spiritual and ethical maturity (Zscheile, 2013).

*Christian Spirituality* is centered on a believer’s relationship to God, the Holy Spirit (Peng & Keller, 2019). The life lived in relationship to the Holy Spirit has not only cognitive factors but is a relationship overseeing every area of life, including the emotional (Meneely, 2015; Peng & Keller, 2019).

*Ethical Leadership,* defined by Trevino in his ethical leadership theory, emphasizes the need for ethics within the individual leader and considers essential a leader’s personal moral characteristics, including integrity, fairness, and trustworthiness (Hoch et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2019).

*Relational Spirituality* focuses on the centrality of a relationship with a higher being or ultimate truth as being sacred and the resulting management of that relationship (Chapman et al., 2021; Hall, 2015).

*Servant Leadership,* defined initially by Robert Greenleaf, emphasizes leadership from a serving follower perspective, with key attributes being consciousness, stewardship, persuasion, and the commitment to individuals’ growth (Ayogu et al., 2022).

*Spirituality* includes a search for meaning and growth toward a mature self by transcending beyond the material and relating in some manner to a Higher Being (Kok & van den Heuvel, 2019; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020). Spirituality involves the formation of beliefs, morals, and ethical behavior through personal or life experiences (Otaye-Ebede et al., 2020). Carson (1984) emphasizes that spirituality is more than simply the rationality of the mind or human response to experiences.

*Spiritual Leadership* focuses on the human spirit, emphasizing ideals such as having a more significant life purpose beyond organizational goals, quality of work relationships, satisfaction in life and work, and experiencing full potential (Ball, 2021; Lyons & Munro, 2022). *Spiritual formation,* defined in an overall sense, involves a person's change in thinking, emotions, relationships, beliefs, or outlook on the world, thus changing the person and actions related toward other people (Rakhmonova G. Sh., 2021). From a Christian perspective, spiritual formation involves human transformation connected to a personal relationship with the God of the Bible and transcending the private relationship with God revealed into every area of human life (Neimandt, 2019).

*Transformational Leadership* (TL), according to Kouzes & Posner, involves five leader practices, which are: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart (Sparks, 2021). TL, according to Bass (1985) involves four leadership categories: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

*Workplace Spirituality* emphasizes the inner life of employees (Adnan et al., 2020) encouraging a holistic approach to the deeper needs of individuals to go beyond their own needs and serve others (Reddy, 2018).  
 **Assumptions**  
 Several assumptions are made in this study. First, the honesty of church leaders filling out the self-assessed instruments. Clear communication regarding the privacy of information will be given to each leader, ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the surveys completed. Secondly, defining authentic and ethical leadership in contrast to the normative usage of the terms is clarified in the definition section. Authenticity and ethical beliefs and behavior are normative descriptions of many leaders. The Authentic leadership and Ethical leadership models have clear definitions highlighted in the research. Lastly, attention to defining spirituality correctly throughout the research has been done. Spirituality, at times, can be assumed to be defined from a purely secular perspective or linked incorrectly with religion. Throughout the research, definitions are given to clarify the meaning of spirituality.

**Scope & Delimitations**

Research will be conducted to investigate if there is a relationship between church leaders’ spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices. Quantitative research using self-assessed surveys will be used to determine if a relationship exists. The study will be delimited to the South New Jersey area among Church leaders in the General Assembly of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC). The population was selected due to the researcher living in the area and familiarity with the church denomination. The population is considered appropriate to investigate the research question. The number of participants will be delimited to 35 using two web-based surveys.

**Limitations**

The research conducted is limited based on the study design and sampling technique. Quantitative research using correlation statistical methods cannot determine cause and effect but rather determines if a relationship exists between the two variables (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). Generalizability is limited due to the use of convenience sampling. The population will be limited to church leaders from the GARBC in Southern New Jersey.

Chapter Summary

Research is needed to evaluate the relationship between church leaders’ spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices to encourage next-generation leaders in the church and society. Transformational leadership involves leaders’ development of morals and ethics (Groves & LaRocca, 2011; Vale, 2019). Developing leaders’ ethics and morals through a biblical theological context can transform the inner person and behaviors toward others (Greenway, 2022; Moore, 2021). The literature lacks quantitative research investigating transformational leaders’ moral and ethical belief formation (Groves & LaRocca, 2011; Taladay & Panesar-Aguilar, 2021). The quantitative correlation study will investigate the relationship between church leaders’ spiritual formation and transformational leadership practices.

The next chapter restates the problem and purpose statements while providing relevant information for the literature search strategy. The theoretical framework discussing the two research theories provides pertinent information establishing the research direction. A review of the current literature regarding spirituality, spiritual formation, transformational leadership, and connected leadership models provides the rationale behind the need for the research. A succinct summary finalizes the chapter.

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